

# THE GRIND

December 2022 / January 2023

YOUR CITY, YOUR PAPER

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Re-Elected Tory  
Gets Extraordinary  
Powers

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& More!

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DECEMBER 2022 / JANUARY 2023

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# IN BRIEF

## NO TIMELINE AND NO CREDIBLE PLAN FOR EGLINTON CROSSTOWN LRT COMPLETION

Metrolinx, the provincial agency overseeing the project, is forecasting more cost overruns and doesn't know when the new 25-station line will be finished, according to internal documents first obtained by *CBC Toronto*. The project, which has caused major disruptions along Eglinton Avenue, is a public-private partnership (P3). The public agencies involved are Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario, and the private companies include SNC-Lavalin, Ellis Don, Aecon, and ACS Infrastructure Canada. City councillors Josh Matlow and Mike Colle called for a public inquiry.

## PREMIER FORD PUSHING THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM "TO COLLAPSE," ACCORDING TO THE PROVINCE'S FIVE BIGGEST HEALTHCARE UNIONS

After several years of neglect, underfunding, and failure to improve staffing levels, the health system is now buckling under the weight of severe staff shortages, overcrowding, lack of surge capacity and the spread of COVID-19, a big and early surge in the flu and other respiratory illnesses," reads a statement from the unions in November. "Ford is using the crisis to drive his costly privatization agenda," they warn, adding that "two-tier health delivery will make staffing shortages, wait times and patient outcomes even worse by competing for scarce staff and pulling them out of the public system.

## NOT BRINGING COPS BACK INTO SCHOOLS

Recent instances of school violence in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) have prompted calls to bring back the controversial School Resource Officer (SRO) program. TDSB trustees terminated the program in 2017 after community pressure led the TDSB to conduct an equity-based survey of more than 15,000 students across 45 schools with SROs. The survey revealed that hundreds of students felt intimidated, threatened, and targeted by police in schools. Many students and communities currently experiencing school violence pointed to an underfunded school system and overcrowded classrooms as the root problems. Pouring money into policing, they say, is not the answer and would once again endanger students. TDSB trustees have ruled out reviving the SRO program for now. Read more in *The Toronto Star* op-ed "We cannot police our way out of school violence," and in *The Local* article "How York Memorial Students Got Blamed for the TDSB's Mistakes."

# LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

## IN DEFENSE OF THE HIGH RISE

As an urban planning student, I was encouraged to see *The Grind's* focus on the recent election as well as many urban planning issues.

One point of contention from Stephanie Leguichard's piece: I love mid-rise housing, but discussing missing middle, the author says that highrise apartments are "eyesores that relegate many residents to shoebox condos."

1. "Eyesore" elevates the viewers' aesthetic preferences above the actual residents. "Shoebox condos" is another common complaint. Yet these are functional spaces for city living that many are happy with.

2. The costs of developing land are so high that it is difficult to get any affordable units without substantial height. Even with rezoning, it would take decades for single-family home neighbourhoods to transition to midrises. If we're going to alleviate the housing crisis and stop sprawl soon, when land comes up for sale and it's near amenities it should be built tall.

*Leslie Beedell, by email*

When we launched the first issue of *The Grind* in October, we were amazed by the outpouring of support. Here's what some readers said on Twitter:

Read the inaugural issue of @TheGrindTO while drinking coffee this morning and I forgot the pleasure of print media. Please check it out if you're in Toronto, available for free at the TTC, etc. And support them if you can!

*Shama Rangwala, @fritzechat*

I'm so glad to see this emerging!

*Robyn Maynard, @policingblack*

This is amazing. Alt weeklies are a vital part of the media landscape - please support it you can!

*Sara Mojtehdzadeh, @SaraMojtehdz*

u know yer a journalist when u pay \$5 for hot chocolate so u can read the new free magazine (@TheGrindTO) which looks awesome so far.

*Soraya Roberts, @sorayaroberts*

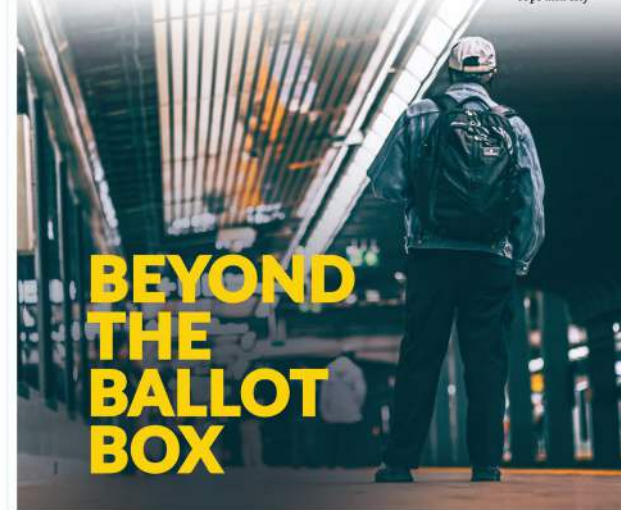
Have something to say? Send us a letter of under 150 words to [info@thegrindmag.ca](mailto:info@thegrindmag.ca) and we may print it in the next issue. Letters are edited for clarity and brevity.

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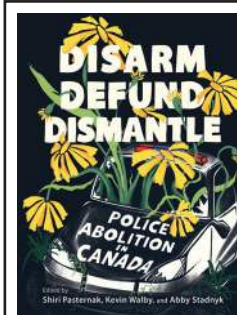
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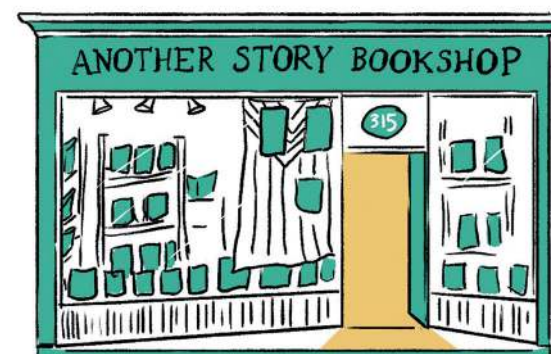
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# THE ATTACK IS STRONG, BUT TORONTONIANS RESIST



Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Photo by Laura Proctor.

**TORONTONIANS** have four more years of Premier Doug Ford and Mayor John Tory to contend with, and that won't be easy.

The two secretly agreed to the terms of recently-passed “strong mayor” legislation. This affords Tory even more sway over city council by giving him the ability to veto bylaws and pass other bylaws with the support of only one third of council. He can also write the city's budget, which council used to prepare.

As Ryan Kelpin writes on page 6, our municipal government is now one of the most anti-democratic just about anywhere.

For his part, Ford has also broken his promise to leave the Greenbelt — around 2,000,000 acres of protected greenspace, farmland, forests, wetlands and watersheds in Southern Ontario — untouched. He has opened up huge swathes of an area designed to restrict urban sprawl and promote climate resilience to real estate developers, many of whom are donors to Ford's PC party.

With sprawl and McMansions on the horizon, people are pissed and have been organizing rallies to protect the Greenbelt and similar habitats across the province.

We also can't forget Ford's attack on workers in November, when he tried using the notwithstanding clause to take away education workers' right to negotiate wages and to go on strike.

But the unions and workers stood strong, and after risking millions of dollars in fines for striking anyway, got the government to back down.

Yet, if legacy media is to be believed, civic engagement in Toronto is at an all-time low.

On one hand, they say, volunteerism, interest in local politics, and voter turnout indicators are all down. In this year's provincial election there was a record low turnout of only 43 per cent. That means, in a province of over 14 million people, 1.9 million voters handed the Conservatives majority power at Queen's Park. Similarly, in our recent municipal election, Tory won a third term as mayor with only 29 per cent of eligible voters showing up.

Torontonians, we're told, simply don't care about politics. But we don't believe that.

It's true that after nearly three years of navigating social distancing, isolation, work from home, virtual classrooms, overcrowded emergency rooms, death, grief, and more, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is wearing us thin.

Add to that how everyday people — those on the grind — have been systematically pushed out of civic spaces for years by the likes of Ford and Tory.

And still, legacy media continues endorsing these corporate lapdogs. Tory skipped most debates during the election campaign, and still the *Toronto Star* and other outlets endorsed him.

Media consensus, reduced representation, voter suppression, and strong mayor powers: it's not hard to see how Toronto became a place of low voter turnout, uninspired electoral opposition, and daily struggle.

But we reject the idea that people are disengaged. Voting is just one piece of civic engagement, offering limited options and with serious barriers to involvement. But, of course, elections have serious repercussions.

So what do we do now, almost four years out from the next municipal and provincial elections, in a place that is getting more expensive all the time, where the shelter system is broken, the Greenbelt is under attack, and emboldened police forces continue to criminalize people living in poverty?

Just look around at the people and groups pushing for better. You'll find some of them in these pages — Issue #2 of *The Grind*. Through community organizing, protest, art, music, the fight for a better city is well underway.

At the exact moment that we are facing intense suppression, we're seeing more resistance than in a long time. From education workers to transit workers to experimental musicians, people in this city are resisting in beautiful and wonderful ways.

## BECOME A MONTHLY SUPPORTER OF **THE GRIND**

Thank you to everyone who supported the launch of *The Grind*, Toronto's new alt magazine! We raised over \$30,000 this fall, which pretty much covered the costs of start-up.

However, all the editors have been working as volunteers, and we've had to take out loans to publish this second issue. That's not sustainable.

We know we can't rely only on ads to fund the publication.

Readers support is what is going to keep us going long-term, through the ups and downs of indie publishing.

You can sign up to be a monthly donor at  
<https://www.patreon.com/thegrindto>

# Tory Unlocks Local Tyrant Powers

**TORONTO HAS REACHED THE PRECIPICE OF BEING AN ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY. MAJORITY RULE IS OUT**

Ryan Kelpin

**WITH** Doug Ford's Ontario government passing the "Strong Mayors" legislation, city council has been completely sidelined from decision-making processes.

The mayor now has veto power to propose bylaws, change existing bylaws and alter regulations that have to do with vague policy categories of housing, infrastructure and transit. Mayor John Tory is now able to enact laws with just one-third of the city's elected councillors on his side.

The municipality of Toronto is now subject to formalized minority rule, removing even the pretense of being a semi-functional liberal democratic form of government.

The bill was written in secret by Tory and Ford, a fact Tory didn't tell us, the public, during the municipal election.

Tory now tells us to trust him.

Why would we?

When they were passing the legislation at Queen's Park, the Ford government refused to engage with the democratic implications.

Then, Toronto City Council, on its first day in session in November, voted 13-to-12

against discussing the implications of the changes.

Out of the 13 councillors who voted to shut down discussion, they almost exclusively represent suburban ridings, and seven were previously heralded by Ford as "fiscally conservative councillors" for supporting his government when it cut council in half in 2018.

Folks, we're seeing the culmination of 30 years of the province's anti-democratic attacks on Toronto and its local right to self-government and decision-making processes. And let's be honest, there wasn't enough deliberation and participation in this democracy to begin with.

Now all pretenses are removed, and Toronto and Ottawa have become the only formal governments in "Western democracies" that operate without the principle of "majority rule" in one of their legislative branches.

Real estate developers and landlords must be happy. Corporate interests won't even have to pretend to solicit public support to achieve their goals and secure profits. They've got their guy in power.

We need to make it politically infeasible for Tory to even imagine using his new powers without serious consequences.



Toronto Mayor John Tory. Photo by Bruce Reeve.



Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Photo by Ian Willms.

# Education workers win fight against Ford for the right to strike (and get better wages along the way)

**AFTER FORD'S ATTACK ON PUBLIC WORKERS IN 2019 LIMITING RAISES TO ONE PER CENT, EDUCATION WORKERS' MASSIVE MOBILIZATION BREAKS THROUGH, AND WE ALMOST SAW A GENERAL STRIKE**

Doug Nesbitt

**ON** Friday, November 4, and Monday, November 7, over 50,000 education workers went on strike across Ontario in a battle reminiscent of the hard times imposed by Premier Mike Harris in the late 1990s.

Their popular and damning campaign slogan was based on the average wage of Ontario's non-teacher education workers: "\$39,000 is not enough."

What was a dispute over the cost-of-living crisis plaguing Ontario's working majority quickly escalated into a battle over basic democratic rights. In what can only be described as dictatorial, Premier Doug Ford and his Minister of Education Stephen Lecce responded to a legal strike threat by the union with the quick passage of the extraordinary Bill 28.

Bill 28 banned the looming strike and imposed a terrible contract. In a move never seen before in Canadian labour relations, Ford pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause, a loophole in the Canadian Constitution allowing provincial governments to suspend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Furthermore, any violation of Bill 28 was backed up by \$4,000/day fines for every individual striker. Ten days on strike would see the average annual wage of education workers, members of the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), robbed by Ford's fines.

However, the November 4 strike shook Ford and his government. The strike elicited majority support among Ontarians. One sur-

vey showed 48 per cent of those polled supported sympathy strikes by other unions against Bill 28.

Rumours of a general strike spread, and preparations were being made. Every single one of the unions that endorsed Ford's re-election in June, including the large construction union LiUNA, demanded Ford repeal Bill 28.

Watching the storm unfold around him, Ford held a press conference on Monday, November 7, half an hour before labour leaders had their own presser planned. He offered to scrap Bill 28 if the workers called off their strike. Within a few hours, the union leaders agreed to Ford's offer. The controversial deal saw bargaining resume.

When another strike deadline was called, a deal was reached at the last minute on November 20. An abnormally-long 11-day contract ratification voting period followed. On December 5, the union announced 73 per cent ratification with about 41,000 of 55,000 union members voting.

Education workers inflicted the first serious defeat on Ford since he came to office in June 2018.

Their 3.59 per cent annual wage increases are still below the current rate of in-

flation (around seven per cent), and so can be seen as a wage cut in real value. There were also no gains on getting more people hired to help chronically under-staffed schools.

The wage settlement is in line with increases being won up and down the Windsor-Quebec corridor. In warehouses, food processing, and manufacturing, a rash of inflation wage strikes have generated a year-long strike wave that, while small, has flown under the radar. Until now.

It took months of diligent and coordinated work within the education worker ranks by dedicated union activists to make November's dispute what it was. And they were limited by the prevalence of online learning, which undermined the impact of strike action as teachers could keep teaching. Real escalation would have required sympathy strikes from teachers.

However, other unions have been in a bad state in the Ford era. When his government brought forward Bill 124 in 2019 to cap public sector wage increases at 1 per cent annually, there was no defiance by the unions, only a legal challenge through the courts (which was recently successful but is likely being appealed to a higher court). These legal challenges do not build membership muscle for more disruptive tactics. As such, public sector unions were not sufficiently organized to execute timely sympathy strikes in support of the education workers.

The cost-of-living crisis is going nowhere. Governments like Doug Ford's are doubling down on handouts to corporations while tax burden onto the working majority. And the wealthiest get a free ride. But the labour movement has shown its potential.



Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Photo by Laura Proctor.

## SHOULD WORKERS HAVE CONTINUED

# YES, THE MOMENT COULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH MORE

Martin Schoots-McAlpine

**WHEN** the Ford government pushed through back-to-work legislation and invoked the notwithstanding clause to end a strike by Ontario education workers, shows of solidarity by other unions quickly escalated what would have otherwise been a normal round of bargaining. Polls suggested that upwards of 50 per cent of the province supported actions by other unions, and that a large majority blamed the provincial government for the strike. Preparations began for a general strike.

Then, while union locals were preparing to wildcat, leaders of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) announced that as a show of good faith they would end their pickets after having received a written promise — without a timeline — from Ford to repeal Bill 28. Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) members then returned to work without a contract. The right to strike had been restored, so long as workers chose not to use it.

## WHAT HAPPENED?

For context, we should look at the so-called “labour peace” that has prevailed in Ontario for the last 80 years. The “labour peace” has its basis in the Rand Formula which was imposed on the labour movement by justice Ivan Rand in the aftermath of the 1945 Ford Motor Company strike in Windsor.

To combat what Rand saw as the radicalization of the working class, he created a framework in which unions agreed to go through a series of formal stages, including a period of mediation, before strikes were al-

lowed. Strikes were to be used only when contract negotiations broke down; other grievances were given their own processes through which they could be resolved. In turn, unions won recognition, and firms agreed to collect dues and remit them directly to the unions. This arrangement has served as a template for labour relations frameworks across Canada.

By regularizing strikes to only occur between contracts, the formula downplayed their impact, allowing firms to plan production around the threat of strikes.

Dues collection in this manner has also had a conservatizing effect on the labour movement, by creating a structural separation between, on one hand, elected upper-level labour leaders and hired union staff, and on the other, the membership. The labour bureaucracy depends on the labour relations framework and guaranteed dues for their livelihoods. This framework tends to create antagonisms between the labour bureaucracy and rank-and-file workers.

But by invoking the notwithstanding clause to shut down a strike before it even started, the Ford government threatened the existing “labour peace” and by extension the labour bureaucracy. Whereas management can usually count on union leaders to behave predictably within the confines of the the labour relations framework, Ford put them in a position where they had to side with their members who were pushing for militant action. That’s when plans for a general strike began.

Fearing this broadening of the struggle, Ford backed down on Bill 28. Labour leaders

took the out. Labour peace was restored.

And yet, what we “won” was a promise to repeal a single piece of legislation, and a return to the status quo. And then, when negotiations between the OSBCU and the government broke down again, the OSBCU leadership brought a deal to its membership that even it was unsatisfied with. The deal contained modest wage increases (yet behind the pace of inflation), but did not address staffing levels or the myriad other workplace issues that the OSBCU had struck over.

At a time when the Ford government is engaged in an all-out-assault against Ontario workers, with the cost-of-living crisis out of control, we as workers had an opportunity to really change the direction of this province for the better.

This moment of unprecedented mobilization and outrage could have been so much more. The unions could have demanded an end to Bill 124, mandating one per cent caps on public sector contracts (which has since been struck down in court but is likely being appealed). They could have fought for a repeal of Bill 23, which allows for development on the Greenbelt and will likely exacerbate the housing crisis. They could have fought for substantial funding increases to healthcare and education, both of which Ford is letting fall apart. There could have been demands to go after price fixing and profiteering. Workers across the province were willing to fight.

What a wasted opportunity.

*A longer version of this article was originally published by Canadian Dimension and is available at [canadiandimension.com](http://canadiandimension.com).*



Education workers rally in November. Photo by Kevin Taghabon.



## ESCALATING TO A GENERAL STRIKE?

# NO, IT WAS ONE VICTORY IN AN ONGOING STRUGGLE

Herman Rosenfeld

**WHEN** Ford rammed Bill 28 through by using the notwithstanding clause — which would have imposed a contract on workers, illegalized unions' constitutional right to strike and applied draconian fines on those who did — the union stood firm.

After the OSBCU closed down most of the main school boards in a “political protest” which doubled as a contract strike, Ford withdrew the bill and was forced to go back to the bargaining table. CUPE maintained its right to strike if an agreement was not reached.

But the victory was and is temporary, conditional and only one moment in an ongoing political and economic struggle — and most workers, union members, officials and critics from the left recognized it as such.

Yet, Martin Schoots-McAlpine argues that getting Ford to back down on this battle didn't matter much because the promise of a general strike that could have turned into a larger political movement was ended unilaterally and prematurely.

While moments of struggle provide openings to advance a movement forward, every struggle and every moment aren't

necessarily similar.

The CUPE local understood that using the notwithstanding clause to ram Bill 28 through was a way for Ford's government to grow anti-union sentiment while capitalizing on parents' COVID-induced exhaustion and anxiety.

But the government overplayed its hand. Workers across the province condemned the use of the notwithstanding clause and identified with the workers, blaming Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce for the disruption of their kids' education. Many also defended the right to strike and called on the government to end the repression and bargain with CUPE.

The bottom line is that the target at hand was not neoliberalism or the entire capitalist system. It was the attack on CUPE's right to strike, the government's refusal to bargain, the effort to win over the support of the larger working class in communities and the use of the notwithstanding clause to push all of it through.

But in order to resist Ford's larger austerity agenda, rightfully identified by the author, this battle would have to be understood, won and, ultimately, built upon.

Calling for general strike plans to go ahead anyway avoids the necessary education, orga-

nization and strategizing that activists in and around the union movement must bring to either force or help leaders create opportunities to make it happen. Schoots-McAlpine leaves no place for it to happen. And denouncing all union leaders as “bureaucrats” and implying that the workers were chomping at the bit to organize a general strike is not truthful.

The main issue was not to change the Ford government's larger political agenda all in one go, but to defend the right of the CUPE workers to bargain, build support amongst the larger working class for their demands and opposition to the government and force Ford to back off. Workers mobilized and won.

But the struggle continues. The education necessary to eventually organize more widespread, radical and concerted actions still needs to be done within unions, locals and communities in the education, health care and other sectors.

Slamming unions for failing to call a general strike that not enough people were ready to show up for anyway is not what the current moment called for.

*A longer version of this article was originally published by Canadian Dimension and is available at [canadiandimension.com](http://canadiandimension.com).*



Education workers rally in November. Photo by Laura Proctor

# Fighting Wage Theft

Simran Kaur Dhunna, Parmbir Gill

**WAGE** theft, which is when employers steal from their employees, like by not paying wages owed, is rampant.

And it rarely gets addressed. The Naujawan [Youth] Support Network (NSN), based in Brampton, is changing that. The group was founded in June 2021 by workers fighting against their exploitation at the hands of employers, landlords, immigration consultants, and the government.

They discovered early on that the forces exploiting them were too diverse, entrenched, and powerful to challenge alone or through established legal or political channels. So they turned to one another, drawing on the rich tradition of sovereignty and resistance from their homeland, and chose to walk the path of struggle.

NSN's guiding philosophy comes from the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred text and eternal Guru of the Sikh religion to which most NSN members belong: "ਆਪਣੇ ਹੱਥੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਕਾਜੁ ਸਵਾਰੀਐ," meaning "with our own hands, let us resolve our own affairs."

With their own hands, NSN members have won back over \$250,000 in stolen wages.

Here, three members reflect on the struggle against wage theft. Their reflections have been translated from Panjabi into English.



Simranjeet speaks to a crowd about her experience of wage theft during a protest in July 2022. Photo by NAMBARDAR.

## SIMRANJEET KAUR

Simranjeet joined NSN after having \$6,331.81 in wages stolen while working as a dispatcher for a trucking company in Brampton. The campaign to recover her wages is slated to begin soon.

**Joining the struggle:** Everyone knows that we are all forced out of necessity to leave our families, whether it's due to unemployment or not seeing a future for ourselves back home. When we migrate to Canada, we work with integrity and break our bodies in the process. But when our earnings are withheld, you can't really explain to someone how much that hurts. We break down from all angles — mentally, emotionally, physically. I think my conscience was still alive; that's why I felt it appropriate to come forward for my rights.

**Lessons:** From this struggle, I have learned about what my rights are, like how it is actually legal to be paid in cash and how employers cannot legally threaten your immigration [status] when you demand your wages. It is also true that we have to fight for our rights ourselves; we cannot fight by resting on the shoulders of another person.

**Challenges:** My cousin and I were suffering greatly when our wages were stolen — we didn't even have the money to pay for rent or groceries. We didn't want to stress out our families back home by telling them what we faced, because they believed that no one could exploit others like this in Canada. From all this, we have learned that wherever we work, if employers exploit us we should tell them that we know our rights very well.

**Futures:** I believe that in the coming period everyone will know NSN's name, and people in other regions will organize with us. Wherever someone experiences exploitation, NSN will stand with them.

**Qualities to cultivate:** It's important that we have ਅਣਖ (self-respect) because it allows us to challenge the wrongs we face. We should also have honest hearts because we fight on the basis of truth. We should have patience because sometimes we may need to fight for a prolonged period of time. There may be many barriers but we have to stay on the battlefield and face them. Victory always belongs to right and truth in the end.

**Sources of strength:** ਮੈਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੇ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਇਤਹਿਾਸ ਵਚਿ ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਝ ਸਾਖਿਣ ਨੂੰ ਮਲਿਆ। ਜਵਿ ਕੀ ਮੈ ਇੱਕ ਗੱਲ ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾ ਚੇਤੇ ਰੱਖਦੀ ਜੋ ਕੀ ਸੰਤ ਜਰਨੈਲ ਸਾਖਿ ਭਡਿਰਾਂਵਾਲਿਆ ਨੇ ਕਹੀ ਸੀ ਕੀ, ਮੈ ਸਰੀਰ ਦੇ ਮਰਨ ਨੂੰ ਮੌਤ ਨਹੀ ਗਣਿਦਾ। ਜਮੀਰ ਦੇ ਮਰਨ ਨੂੰ ਮੌਤ ਗਣਿਦਾ ਹਾਂ।

I was born and raised in Panjab, where from the beginning we have learned to fight for our rights through struggle and to defend others' rights. After our Gurus, I found a lot of motivation from our [Sikh] nation's leaders and their struggle to fight for everyone's rights — namely Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. I always remember one of his remarks: "I don't fear for a physical death, but when my conscience dies, that is a real death."

ਮੈਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੇ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਇਤਹਿਾਸ ਵਚਿ ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਝ ਸਾਖਿਣ ਨੂੰ ਮਲਿਆ। ਜਵਿ ਕੀ ਮੈ ਇੱਕ ਗੱਲ ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾ ਚੇਤੇ ਰੱਖਦੀ ਜੋ ਕੀ ਸੰਤ ਜਰਨੈਲ ਸਾਖਿ ਭਡਿਰਾਂਵਾਲਿਆ ਨੇ ਕਹੀ ਸੀ ਕੀ, ਮੈ ਸਰੀਰ ਦੇ ਮਰਨ ਨੂੰ ਮੌਤ ਨਹੀ ਗਣਿਦਾ। ਜਮੀਰ ਦੇ ਮਰਨ ਨੂੰ ਮੌਤ ਗਣਿਦਾ ਹਾਂ।



Satinder holds up a placard during a protest against her former employer, Chat Hut. "Chor" means thief in Panjabi. Photo by Simran Kaur Dhunna.

## SATINDER KAUR GREWAL

Satinder worked at a restaurant called Chat Hut in 2020. The employer paid Satinder less than the minimum wage, did not pay her overtime, did not give her proper breaks, and broke its promise to support her application for permanent residence. On December 4, 2021, Satinder led a powerful protest in front of the Brampton restaurant. The pressure created by the campaign led the employer to agree to pay Satinder \$16,495 in stolen wages.

**Joining the struggle:** Everyone knows that wage theft is bound to happen here. Whenever we talk to our friends, someone says "my employer didn't pay me" or "he kept my wages." One day I was randomly checking my social media and came across NSN's videos. I liked the videos and thought to myself, "How can people take time out of their busy schedules to stand with someone else, especially in Canada where everyone is hustling?" My heart found a lot of comfort seeing this, so I contacted NSN. I initially thought that perhaps nothing will come of it and that I'll join the group as a volunteer. At least what happened to me shouldn't happen to someone else. But when we spoke about my case and started the campaign, I learned how I could fight back. When we fought back together, we won.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਸੱਚੇ ਹੋ ਅਤੇ ਸੱਚ ਲਈ ਲੜਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਦੂਸਰੇ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਖੜੇ ਹੋਣਗੇ ਅਤੇ ਨਤੀਜਾ ਚੰਗਾ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ। ਏਕਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਤਾਕਤ ਬਹੁਤ ਮਾਇਨੇ ਰੱਖਦੀ ਹੈ; ਉਹਨਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨਾਂ, ਵਾਪਸ ਲੜਨਾ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਹੈ।

**Lessons:** ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਸੱਚੇ ਹੋ ਅਤੇ ਸੱਚ ਲਈ ਲੜਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਦੂਸਰੇ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਖੜੇ ਹੋਣਗੇ ਅਤੇ ਨਤੀਜਾ ਚੰਗਾ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ। ਏਕਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਤਾਕਤ ਬਹੁਤ ਮਾਇਨੇ ਰੱਖਦੀ ਹੈ; ਉਹਨਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨਾਂ, ਵਾਪਸ ਲੜਨਾ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਹੈ।

If you are ready to fight, then people will stand with you and support you. If you are truthful and fighting for the truth, others stand with you and the result is positive. Unity and strength matter a lot; without them, it's difficult to fight back.

**Challenges:** There are lots of challenges, because during my campaign everyone told me not to fight. People told me they'll deport me or that this is a waste of time. My response to them was that whether or not I get my wages, I will fight so that others who work at Chat Hut now or will work there in the future will learn of how the owners exploit us. In terms of other campaigns, there are challenges like defamation lawsuits, police [who] threaten us at protests, etc. But there's no need to fear these challenges, because they will intimidate us only as much as we let them.

**Futures:** I envision a future where everyone knows about their rights, anyone who is exploited is capable of fighting for themselves, and we have so many members in our movement that if there is a call to action

everyone is ready to show up without question. If everyone unites and fights now, then in the coming period employers will think 100 times over before deciding to steal their workers' wages.

**Qualities to cultivate:** You should have faith in yourself. It shouldn't be that if someone says something to shake you up, that you fall back and leave the struggle. Because if you don't fight for your own rights and raise your voice now, then they will continue subjugating and exploiting us. It's also very important to have patience, to have a proper way of making decisions, to not rush into things. Take everyone's thoughts and advice into consideration, because everyone has different experiences to draw from.

**Sources of strength:** My role model is my mom. I have witnessed her endure so much in her life and tolerate every single thing through thick and thin. She never ran away from anything and has confronted every circumstance she experienced. When I told her about my case, she motivated me to fight even though she knew that deportation was a possibility. She gave me courage by saying that we will face whatever comes and that I should fight because I am saying the truth.

## GURMUKHJEET SINGH

Gurmukhjeet is one of four truck drivers who campaigned against Cargo County to demand tens of thousands of dollars in wages. They protested in front of the employers' home in Brampton on October 2, 2021, and are now defending against a \$17 million defamation lawsuit.

**Joining the struggle:** ਲੋਕ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਹੁਣ ਤਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਪੈਸੇ ਮਰ ਗਏ ਹੁਣ ਕੁਝ ਨੀ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ, ਜਿਆਦਾ ਤੋਂ ਜਿਆਦਾ ਲੇਬਰ ਕੌਰਟ ਵੱਚਿ ਦਾਅਵਾ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹੋ, ਜਿਸ ਦੀ ਬਹੁਤੀ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਣਵਾਈ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਅਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਲੇਬਰ ਕੌਰਟ ਰੁਜ਼ਗਾਰਦਾਤਾ ਨੂੰ ਪੈਸੇ ਦੇਣ ਤੇ ਮਜਬੂਰ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ।

I first got motivated to take action after I saw the protest in front of Buta Singh's home. This happened while I was playing volleyball in the park. Employers hadn't been criticized in this way before in Brampton or Canada. People used to say, "well, now they've stolen their wages, nothing you can do now" or "file a claim in labour court." These methods don't do much; they don't make an employer feel [compelled to pay]. What I liked in our work is that the people who exploit us are exposed to society. Their real faces should be revealed. This was what first motivated me — that if we expose them, more of us will be saved from being exploited and employers will tread carefully. Otherwise there will be no one to stop them, as they're not afraid of the law.

**Challenges:** The biggest challenge in this struggle was the defamation lawsuits. Otherwise, the difficulties were there for us from the beginning, since we didn't get paid our wages. A worker loses hope, thinking the most they can do is file a labour claim and keep waiting. But we expose [these employers].

**Futures:** I want a future where there isn't even a need for such an organization like NSN, a future where we transform society so much that there wouldn't even be a need to say the words "you have stolen wages, and you need to pay them." Rights should be accessible by default, which sounds impossible and difficult today. We dream of our organization getting larger, because wage thieves won't stop and in a capitalist society people pay more attention to making money. There are also some people who move more toward business. If they open a restaurant or a trucking company, those people who were once victims [of exploitation] themselves make victims of others once they become business owners. This is the

ਲੋਕ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਹੁਣ ਤਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਪੈਸੇ ਮਰ ਗਏ ਹੁਣ ਕੁਝ ਨੀ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ, ਜਿਆਦਾ ਤੋਂ ਜਿਆਦਾ ਲੇਬਰ ਕੌਰਟ ਵੱਚਿ ਦਾਅਵਾ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹੋ, ਜਿਸ ਦੀ ਬਹੁਤੀ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਣਵਾਈ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਅਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਲੇਬਰ ਕੌਰਟ ਰੁਜ਼ਗਾਰਦਾਤਾ ਨੂੰ ਪੈਸੇ ਦੇਣ ਤੇ ਮਜਬੂਰ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ।

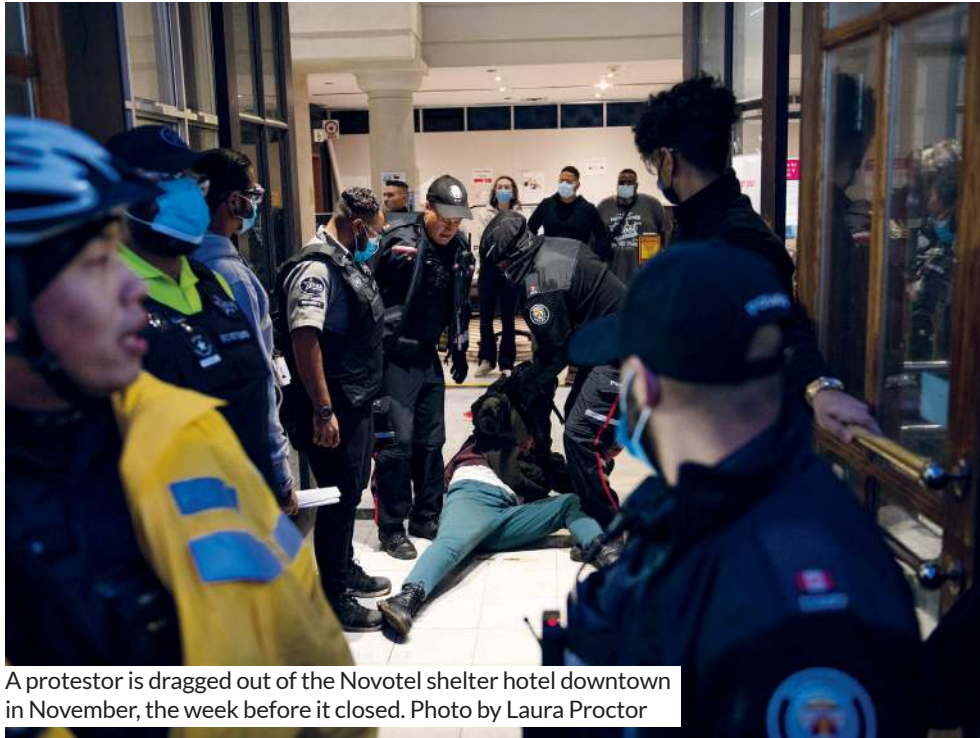
game of profit. I want our organization to be so big that we have the power and reach to directly shape lawmaking and enforcement. [...] We cannot work at the scope of state institutions [like the Ministry of Labour] right now. [...] I want for us to one day change the laws.

**Sources of strength:** First, our struggle started because the farmers' protests entered our hearts [one year ago]. Second, our religion, Sikhi, mandates us to fight for our rights. For me, my greatest role model is Sant Jarnail Singh [Bhindranwale], who said we should never ever let our rights go and that one who violates another's rights is as much a sinner as one who does not fight for their rights. These thoughts are at the forefront of my mind. From the beginning, I have thought that even if someone has had five rupees stolen from them, we are fighting for that five too, no matter the cost.

A longer version of this article was originally published by Briarpatch Magazine and is available at [briarpatchmagazine.com](http://briarpatchmagazine.com).



Gurmukhjeet speaks to the crowd during a protest outside a company owners' home. Photo by Simran Kaur Dhunna.



A protestor is dragged out of the Novotel shelter hotel downtown in November, the week before it closed. Photo by Laura Proctor

## Novotel Shelter Closes, But Not Without A Fight

Rhea Singh

“**WHY** are police [forcing] people from the building after being told they need housing?” asked Dredz, at the time a resident of the Novotel shelter, located beside Union Station downtown.

Dredz and over 25 other people, a mix of residents and advocates, were occupying the shelter’s lobby on November 29. “Don’t give us excuses, we’re here and we are stakeholders, our lives are at stake while you’re making a profit... we’re allowed to be angry because we’ve been neglected.”

The group was demanding an end to forced police evictions of residents.

In November, Novotel shelter staff told residents the shelter would close by December 31, and all residents must leave by December 6. Many residents were forced out before the December 6 deadline. Some were given no plan for where they would be placed. Others were placed in shelters in Scarborough or Jane and Finch, areas far from their communities, employment and support systems.

At the occupation, a list of demands was pasted on the Novotel, calling for individualized consultation for relocation plans, the right for residents to refuse evictions, an end to the two-bag limit (where residents were only allowed to bring two bags of belongings), and financial compensation for belongings that have been disposed of by staff.

Two minutes after the occupation began, two Toronto Police officers arrived, along with

three private Star security, and two community staff members.

Residents and advocates demanded to speak to Lacey Kerr, who works as the Novotel’s site manager, and Patricia Mueller, the executive director of Homes First, the support service for housing sites that operates Novotel’s services. Kerr was present inside and didn’t answer residents’ and advocates’ questions, only stating they must leave.

The police presence grew. After 15 minutes of residents voicing their concerns, including sexual misconduct by staff, around seven advocates and residents were dragged out of the Novotel by police. The remainder exited the building peacefully.

Later that night, around 1 am, Dredz was arrested. He was later released on bail and evicted from the shelter.

On December 6 the Novotel hotel-shelter officially closed, but as Voices from the Novotel posted on Twitter that day, “our fight continues.”

They mention other shelters and also encampments, where people are trying to stay alive this winter. “From Delta, to Bond, to 545 Lakeshore, to St. Stephen’s, to Allen Gardens our fight continues in every part of this city where unhoused folks live and exist while the City of Toronto imposes violence. We will resist.”

*A longer version of this article was originally published by The Hoser and is available at [thehoser.ca](http://thehoser.ca).*

## Cuts Coming to Toronto Low-income Housing Programs

Mitchell Thompson

**BUDGET** projections from Toronto’s Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) anticipate steep funding cuts from the city, even as the same document notes more people in the city are experiencing “chronic homelessness.”

The SSHA budget indicates the city’s emergency shelters, 24-hour respite sites and 24-hour drop-ins are overwhelmed, noting: “Since the beginning of 2020, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness in Toronto’s shelter system has increased by approximately 500 people.”

Toronto’s shelters have been operating above 90 per cent capacity for years – with those who use the system packed close together, providing almost no privacy or even personal space.

Yet, according to SSHA’s budget projections, the agency is set to see its budget fall from \$1,252.5 million in 2022 to \$997.1 million in 2023 – a cut of over \$200 million – even though it does not project a decline in its clients.

According to the budget’s Cost Outlook, this expenditure cut is to be achieved by a “reversal of COVID-19 response expenses of \$288.335 million” which worked to ensure facilities followed public health guidelines, and a “Decrease in 100 per cent funded social housing programs.”

Additionally, the budget forecasts a cut in the system’s capital repair budget — from \$207.669 million to \$184.993 million by 2024.

Asked about this projection, a spokesperson

for the city acknowledged: “Despite continually adding new beds, the shelter system is at or near capacity most nights.”

But the spokesperson further noted:

“Through 2022, the City has continued to experience significant and unprecedented financial impacts both in the form of added costs and revenue losses as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. SSHA is projecting an unfavourable net expenditure variance of \$78.9 million by year-end 2022 primarily attributed to higher than planned expenditures for the COVID-19 response and underachieved revenues due to non-receipt of federal revenue to support the City’s 2022 Refugee Response initiative.”

Community leaders say the planned, apparent cuts will harm the vulnerable.

“These cuts are deeply troubling,” said Trevor Manson, secretary co-chair of the ODSP Action Coalition.

“Last time we checked, the waiting-list for subsidized/RGI [Rent-Geared-to-Income] housing in Toronto was approaching 80,000 names with a wait time of between 10-12 years,” Manson said.

“We’re already in a housing crisis, and these cuts will mean more names on the waiting list, longer wait times, and more people being evicted into homelessness and desperation.”

*A longer version of this article was originally published by PressProgress and is available at [pressprogress.ca](http://pressprogress.ca).*

### BY THE NUMBERS

**9,622** people homeless in October 2022, up from 8,992 in 2021

**187** people turned away from city shelters every night on average in October 2022

**1.25** metres between beds in congregate settings (i.e. large rooms) in some shelters, down from 2 metres, raising heightened concern about increased COVID transmission

**11,000** number of people who, by October, had entered the shelter system. Meanwhile, only 3400 had been permanently housed.

230 Sherbourne, just south of Dundas Street W. in the downtown east. Photo by David Gray-Donald.



## DEVELOPER VS WORKING CLASS IN THE DOWNTOWN EAST

Gaétan Héroux and John Clarke

**FOR** years, anti-poverty activists and community members demanded that the city expropriate the vacant lots at 214-230 Sherbourne St., just south of Dundas Street, and build affordable housing on them.

The city eventually put in a bid in March 2022, but the city's offer was rejected by the private owners in favour of a bid from KingSett Capital. This Bay Street investment company is listed as "Canada's leading private equity real estate investment firm."

Now, the community is preparing for an epic battle with KingSett after the company announced plans to build a 47-storey condominium at the site, located in the heart of one of Toronto's oldest working-class neighbourhoods.

### KINGSETT AND THE CITY

KingSett Capital has had an ongoing relationship with the city and Mayor John Tory.

In 2021, Create TO, a city agency, announced that it was partnering with KingSett and Greenwin to develop 705 Warden Ave., one of 17 sites owned by the city to be developed for social housing. Al-

though the new site will include 575 units, fewer than half of those will be designated "affordable."

The sale of a building at 877 Yonge St. in the summer of 2019, which was purchased by the city a year and a half later, remains mysterious and controversial, with KingSett at the centre of the affair. The building was operated by Davenport Senior Living, a non-profit organization. On July 3 of that summer, the 150 seniors living in the residence were informed that they faced eviction by the end of the year. At that time, the property was listed as being owned by a numbered company, 2692518 Ontario Inc., which had been formed only days earlier by KingSett.

According to media reports at the time, KingSett representatives refused to comment on the situation. In April 2021, the building was sold to the city, which intended to use it as affordable housing. According to the Toronto Sun, the city paid \$94.9 million—four times the market value of the property—and it is likely it was purchased from KingSett.

*Editor's note: A city spokesperson confirmed the property was acquired from 2692518 Ontario Inc. and Kingsettle Real Estate Growth LP No. 7 at nearly four times the 2016 appraised value. They said the proper-*

*ty's final purchase price "was based on independent appraisals obtained by the City prior to completing the transaction." No one from Kingsettle responded to The Grind's requests for comment by publication time*

### THE DOWNTOWN EAST

Redevelopment in the Downtown East and Regent Park has threatened the existing social infrastructure, including services for poor and homeless people such as community health centres, supervised consumption sites, day shelters, hostels, legal clinics and a soup kitchen.

Across from 214-230 Sherbourne is the All Saints' Church, which has been offering services to Toronto's most impoverished residents for more than half a century. Seaton House and the Salvation Army's Maxwell Meighen's shelter, which together at their peak sheltered more than a thousand men a night, are both just a few blocks from the contested property.

If it moves forward, the Kingsettle development will threaten this entire infrastructure and displace more of the working poor and the homeless from the Downtown East.

In 2021, Moss Park, located a few blocks south of the proposed condo project, was the

site of one of the largest encampments in Toronto. Late this fall, some 25 tents were erected in Allan Gardens, a block away from the empty boarded-up Victorian mansion at 230 Sherbourne St., the Dineen house.

The Downtown East has always welcomed the working poor, the unemployed, and the homeless, and it has a history of resistance dating back to the 1880s. In the early 1970s, a fight to save rooming houses from gentrification led to the city buying up a huge number of rooming houses in the area.

In the mid-1980s, the death of Drina Joubert, a homeless woman who froze to death in an abandoned truck behind 230 Sherbourne St., led to the formation of the Housing not Hostel Coalition. There was no subsidized housing for single adults at the time, and the Coalition eventually won the right for single adults to get subsidized housing. Three thousand units of affordable housing for single adults were subsequently built. Sixty-one of these people are living at a housing unit provided by All Saints Church at the corner of Dundas and Sherbourne.

### 230 FIGHT BACK

Recently, a small group of us have come together to form the 230 Fight Back Campaign. The goal is to stop KingSett. The proposed condo tower does absolutely nothing to address the problems that poor people experience everyday, nor is it a solution to the housing needs of those who live in the Downtown East.

The city needs either to expropriate 214-230 Sherbourne or begin to negotiate the purchase of the properties with KingSett.

Admittedly, this is a formidable David and Goliath battle. Those waging it do not have billions of dollars in assets, but plan to create a resistance in the Downtown East which the city and KingSett will not be able to ignore. They will refuse to be pushed out. Building on the long and proud history of resistance of this working class neighbourhood, 230 Fight Back will take up this struggle with every intention of winning it.

*A longer version of this article was originally published by Canadian Dimension and is available at [canadiandimension.com](http://canadiandimension.com).*



## WORKER POWER 101: HOW TO MAKE A WINNING UNION

Gonzalo Riva

DESPITE all the criticisms, unions are around because they're the strongest way to win better pay, better benefits, better conditions and more control over your own life. The best path to victory is to build a union where the voices and interests of everyday workers — the “rank-and-file” members — steer the decisions, actions, and demands of the union.

Now, how to do that? Building power is a story that starts by changing our mind about hidden truths:

Believe you're not alone.

Believe you can change your life for the better.

Believe you have time and potential to learn new skills.

Believe you can come together with almost-strangers in a common cause.

Once you believe these truths, you're set for a worthy process of building power. A union is fundamentally just a group of coworkers, coming together, to make changes at their workplace.

That can look like fast food workers raising their wages and winning a reliable three-month schedule that lets them plan their lives. Or it can look like office workers finally getting off the freelance contract wheel and securing steady hours with benefits and paid vacation time. Or like workers getting more control over their workflow so that an overbearing manager can't harass them constantly about results.

Whatever the issue, you've got support! Check out this guide to get started. You can contact the People's Labour Project at [peopleslabour.ca](http://peopleslabour.ca) for more help.



Photo by Kentaro Toma.

### GET SORTED

#### 1 Start with you

Strong unions take dedication. Be firm about your long-term, collective commitment.

#### 2 Grow the circle

A co-worker or two is enough, but to go far you need crewmates. It's useful to know who shares your union ambitions. A joke or casual conversation can help you test the waters.

#### 3 Figure out first approaches

Who's likely to support the goal? But don't talk about it to supervisors or anyone *you think* might reveal your plans before due time.

#### 4 Have a winning plan

Know the simple legal rules of forming a union where you are, like the percentage of workers who need to sign on before you can file to hold an election (often around 40-45 per cent). You'll also need a practical plan to get around 65 per cent support to have supermajority strength, and ideas for how to win.

#### 5 Have serious conversations

Once you have a plan, it's time to start talking to almost every co-worker to learn their stories and get a sense of what people think about unionizing. Remind everyone: you're still in a quiet phase!

#### 6 Identify leaders

You're looking for *who has followers*; who people listen to. They're important to growing your campaign in the long run

#### 7 Build & grow an Organizing Committee

Form a representative core of all your coworkers. Remember different shifts, work types, and departments. Aim for diversity across ages, languages, identities, cultural backgrounds, personalities. Where are the relationships, bonds, loyalties and possible conflicts?

#### 8 Prepare for the bossfight

In every conversation, let people know — and let them *tell you* — how the bosses have tried or will try to fight, misinform, and roll back campaigns.

#### 9 Evolve from quiet to loud majority

You may start by asking people to meet up or join a private chat group; then sign an open letter; then showing up to the boss' office together. The power of your union will be measured by what you can do together.

### GET SET

#### 10 Determine union options

If you think you'll join a bigger union, start auditioning some. Contact unions and meet with their staff organizers to ask hard questions about the support you can expect. Which unions, you wonder? Sometimes your industry or region will make for some obvious options, and sometimes you'll need to do a bit of research. You can always contact People's Labour Project for help navigating this part. Or you may decide to form your own independent union, which is not as hard as it sounds, but a different challenge.

#### 11 File officially

It's time to go public! This is the most high-stakes part of your campaign so far. You go to your Ministry of Labour with more than enough signatures and you tell them you're a union of workers. Now you have to win that status with a certifying vote, usually a few weeks later.

#### 12 Rally community & assets

Now it won't hurt to call in resources from your networkers to resist the boss' pressure: media coverage, customers or volunteers, or general supporters.

#### 13 Win the vote

The big push to mobilize your people and win by a large margin is crucial. Certifying your union is certainly a moment to celebrate and feel proud.

#### 14 Win at the bargaining table

Once you win union recognition, then you bargain for a contract with better terms, more respect, dignity, and fairness. Anticipate tricks and delays from the employer. A strategy of maximum power at the table is needed to get leverage for a clear win.

#### 15 Defend your contract wins

Bosses are counting on your union getting rusty, inactive, or divided. It's your own power that gives you the ability to enforce your contract and prevent clawbacks, harassment, or other violations.

#### 16 The struggle is real, so make it a life of purpose

Your union can't be a one-time campaign. The knowledge, skills and bonds you build must be directed into becoming a living organization that reflects the will and strength of its members. Shared work feels lighter. We become different creatures, with greater strength, and a wider web of people who will show up for us.

*The People's Labour Project offers free training, coaching, and advice to workers ready to come together, fight the boss, and improve their lives. If this sounds like the next step for you, reach out by filling in a form at [peopleslabour.ca](http://peopleslabour.ca).*

### GET STARTED

### GET SET

# Know Your Navigator

**NAVIGATOR** Ltd. is a Public Relations firm most people could never afford. But for the rich and powerful in Canada, it's the go-to "When You Can't Afford to Lose®," as their motto goes.

The Ottawa Police hired them for reputational rehab when failing to control the so-called Freedom Convoy last winter, Jian Ghomeshi hired them when accused of sexual assault, and Hockey Canada brought the Navigators in when its toxic culture of hazing and sexual abuse came to light.

Navigator doesn't make its client list public. So we don't really know whose interests these people are working in when they appear everywhere in mainstream Canadian media. Sometimes Navigator staff disclose their interests, but usually the media only briefly mentions these people work for Navigator. And we're expected to know what that means.

*The Grind* asked Navigator if they will release their client list. They did not respond by publication time.

So, who is behind Navigator, and what connections do they have? Looking at just five members of the firm and their connections in media and politics, you can see why they're in such high demand.

## JAIME WATT, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

A long-time Conservative strategist, Watt has a weekly column in the *Toronto Star* and "is a regular contributor to all CBC platforms across Canada," according to Navigator. He worked for former Ontario conservative premiers Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. He is now the Chancellor of OCAD, and sits on many organizations' boards. Lesser-known pieces of Watt's resume are that he pled guilty to fraud he committed in the 1980s while trying to save a business, and he was an exec at Pizza Pizza.

## AMANDA GALBRAITH, PRINCIPAL

Before Navigator, Galbraith worked for the federal Conservatives, including a com-

munications role for Stephen Harper when he was Prime Minister. She then worked comms for John Tory before moving to Navigator. While at Navigator, she co-chaired Tory's 2018 re-election campaign. Galbraith "is the host of Free for All Friday, a weekly national radio show on the *iHeartRadio Talk Network*," according to Navigator. "She is also a regular contributor and guest-host on *Newstalk 1010* and her commentary can be found on *BNN*, *TVO*, *CTV*, *CBC*, *CityTV*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star* and the *Toronto Sun*." Not too shabby.

## ADAM VAUGHAN, PRINCIPAL

A newer addition to the Navigator team, Vaughan is a former Toronto city councillor and Liberal MP, where he served as parliamentary secretary to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. His first client at Navigator was scandal-plagued Hockey Canada. Hockey Canada paid Navigator \$1.6 million.

## TASHA KHEIRIDDIN, PRINCIPAL

Kheiriddin has had a long career in the conservative movement at think tanks like the Fraser Institute and advocacy group the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. She has also been a producer for the *CBC* and *CPAC*, and sat on the *National Post* editorial board for a few years. She is a regular guest commentator on *CBC* and *Global* news shows. Kheiriddin co-chaired Jean Charest's failed 2022 bid for leader of the Conservative Party.

## STEFAN BARANSKI, PRINCIPAL

Baranski formerly worked in oil and gas, and as communications director for conservative Alberta Premier Alison Redford back in 2012. He founded news aggregator OntarioNewsWatch.com, "and has been a regular media commentator, appearing weekly on *CBC News Network*, *CTV News* and Toronto's *Newstalk1010* radio," according to Navigator's website.

## MAYOR APPOINTS NEW TTC COMMISSIONERS

With the election over, Mayor John Tory has appointed members to the TTC Board of Commissioners. There are five City Councillors and four citizen members.

The City Councillors are:

Paul Ainslie  
Jon Burnside (Chair)  
Stephen Holyday  
Nick Mantas  
Chris Moise

Holyday was one of only three councillors who previously voted against making the King Street Streetcar Pilot permanent, which prioritized streetcars and banned cars from a section of the street.

Holyday and Jon Burnside also voted against implementing the Fair Pass low-income discount program in 2016.

With members like these, we're not holding our breath for the new Board to substantially improve the TTC on their own, like by designating more lanes on roads exclusively for buses, prioritizing streetcars in traffic, or lowering fares. It's going to take a groundswell of public pressure to see those kinds of changes happen.

Cartoonist Jade Armstrong captures an iconic moment for a TTCriders holiday card: the January 16, 2022 Toronto snowstorm, when transit users had to work together to push buses stuck in snow drifts. The drawing reminds us that despite the challenges facing public transit, Torontonians care about our city and each other. When we come together to push for better transit, we make things move!



Rollie Pemberton, aka Cadence Weapon. Photo by Mat Dunlap.



# MERCH MONEY, MERCH PROBLEMS

Richard Trapunski

**FOR** all but the top few percent of artists, streaming music royalties are not nearly enough to live on. Touring, and the merch sold at each tour stop, is becoming more and more important for survival.

Margins can be extremely slim for working musicians. Even if you've crammed five band members into a single hotel room or eaten nothing but gas station food for days – if you forget your box of records or sweatshirts, you might find yourself in the red. Every bit of money matters. Artists often joke that they're not musicians so much as traveling t-shirt salespeople.

According to Licensing International, global sales of licensed music merchandise reached \$3.46 billion in 2021 (down slightly from a pre-pandemic level of \$3.66 billion in 2019, but up from a previous 2016 high of \$3.1 billion). While a lot of that comes from huge pop superstars, it's just as crucial for working artists trying to scrape by.

Once a secondary revenue-generator, for many artists merch has become one of the prime sources. In 2019, just before touring stopped worldwide, British metal band While She Sleeps printed a t-shirt literally spelling

it out: "One t-shirt is the equivalent to 5000 streams on Spotify. 76 per cent of all music in 2019 is streamed and not bought physically or digitally. Band merchandise is the most direct way of supporting an artist."

But that ever-important revenue source is shrinking thanks to commissions and cuts taken on merchandise by what might seem like an unlikely source: music venues.

"People think, 'Oh, I'm buying merch from the artists, this is helping them,'" says rapper Cadence Weapon, whose real name is Rollie Pemberton. "But they don't realize as much as 35 per cent could be going to the venue."

The Hamilton-based artist has teamed up with the Union of Musicians and Allied Workers (UMAW) to do something about it. Taking a nod from a similar campaign by the UK's Featured Artists Coalition, Pemberton and UMAW have launched a campaign called #MyMerch, designed "to end the practice of venues and festivals taking merch cuts in North America," where the cuts have been steadily rising to 20-35 per cent.

"This is an exploitative practice that interferes with one of the few ways fans can direct-

ly support artists in this challenging economic climate, and it must stop," reads one of the campaign's social media infographics.

Sharing those infographics and the #MyMerch hashtag is one of the calls-to-action for music fans. Artists are invited to share their stories and artist-friendly venues, festivals and promoters are prompted to add their names to a list of "100% Venues" — a Google Sheets database of North American venues who have pledged not to take a cut of artists' merch. The list is meant to serve as a guide for artists and booking agents to know which venues they can play where their merch sales won't be taxed.

Since launching, the campaign has spread far and wide. More than 80 venues have signed on across the continent, while artists including Tegan & Sara, PUP, July Talk, Austra, Dan Mangan and the OBGMs have voiced their support. "With love to venues — I know you guys have had a rough time — but these cuts hurt, they often eliminate our entire profit margin," wrote Tamara Lindeman, the Toronto singer/songwriter behind the Weather Station.

After seeing Lindeman's post, the Tranzac became the first Toronto venue to sign on as a 100 per cent Venue. Since then, the Horseshoe Tavern, Lee's Palace, the Music Gallery and music festival NXNE have also added their names to the list.

"We recognize how much unpaid labour goes into maintaining a career in music, which makes earnings from merch that much more significant," says Matthew Fava, the executive director of the Tranzac, which operates as a community non-profit. "The work artists put into honing their craft and performing should be valued."

Fava admits that music venues are struggling too, including the Tranzac, but doesn't think it's fair— or ultimately viable — to look for short-term gains at the expense of artists, without whom venues would have nothing to program.

"The sustainability and success of the artists make up the first lens through which [we] consider other operational goals," he says. "Our survival is interwoven with theirs."

At the Horseshoe and Lee's Palace, merch sales are all DIY, with the venues offering





Merch on display at a show at The Tranzac. Photo by The Tranzac.

no infrastructure except a space within the venue. Jeff Cohen, owner of two long-running bars, says his venues' no-merch-cuts policy harkens back to the early days of punk and new wave.

"Developing touring artists depended upon merch sales, in cash, to be able to afford gas to put into the van to get to the next gig," he says.

Nowadays, many working artists are operating with the same razor-thin margins, but not because of any Henry Rollins-inspired punk philosophy. It's just the only way they can get by.

A leaked 2021 memo publicly outed Live Nation's official policy to take 30 per cent of artists' merch sales for festivals. Musicians as high-profile as Taylor Swift's producer Jack Antonoff have since called it out, which has put that mega-promoter under even more public and political heat. Its ticketing arm, Ticketmaster, is being increasingly scrutinized by both fans and politicians for monopoly-like tendencies and unfair sales tactics.

Pemberton says Live Nation — which owns a handful of large and mid-sized venues in Toronto including Budweiser Stage, Danforth Music Hall and Velvet Underground — is one of the most notorious merch-taxers in the industry. But some smaller venues — many of the same ones who called for sympathy during the height of the pandemic when all concerts were cancelled

— also engage in the arguably exploitative labour practice. And artists sometimes aren't aware until their van pulls up. They often feel they have to comply or risk being booked there again.

Pemberton — who is the first Atkinson Artist, a collaboration with the Atkinson Foundation focusing on decent work for arts workers — argues that the actions of the biggest promoters set the industry standards. Smaller promoters then feel they have to follow in order to compete. Individually, artists don't have much power to fight it, but together they might be able to change the standard — or at least destabilize it. They can bring it out into the open and let fans decide whether they want to support it.

That's the power of collective action, he says, which is something many arts workers are waking up to. It's how UMAW formed: by campaigning for higher royalties from streaming services and eventually holding headline-grabbing demonstrations at Spotify's offices in New York, Los Angeles, London and Madrid.

"I have a lot of empathy for everyone in the music industry right now. It is a hard time," Pemberton says. "But my issue is, why does [the money] always have to come out of the artist? Why does it have to come out of the worker? Why does it have to come from the person who is essentially the engine for the entire enterprise?"



Tamara Lindeman of The Weather Station. Photo by Brendan Ko.

# Non-binary superstar **Teiya Kasahara** transforms Canadian opera

**A NEW GENERATION OF CANADIAN GENDERQUEER OPERA SINGERS, ACTIVISTS AND SELF-PROCLAIMED “SHIT-DISTURBERS” MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD**

Leah Borts-Kuperman and Maria Sarrouh

**RATTLING** an archaic industry, Toronto-based trans\* opera superstar Teiya Kasahara 笠原 貞野 (they/them) leads a new generation of performers, activists and self-proclaimed “shit-disturbers” making themselves heard—whether the classical music world likes it or not.

Kasahara is the co-founder of Amplified Opera, a Toronto-based collective placing artists at the center of public discourse. Their show *The Queen In Me*, which premiered last June, smashed conventional operatic gender norms in an unexpected take on the misunderstood Queen of the Night from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*.

Canadian Opera Company (COC) co-produced *The Queen In Me* with Kasahara’s company along with Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Gargantua. COC also named Amplified Opera its “Disruptor-in-Residence” in 2020 and is expanding its traditional programming with some innovative works that challenge the canon, which Kasahara describes as a “hopeful thing for the industry.”

“Opera is still a Euro-centric, capitalist, colonial art form,” Kasahara said. “It’s still very much a teaching of old systems and old expectations of voice types and gender presentation, and recreating something that’s from bygone times.”

Centuries-old librettos enforce cisnormativity and make opera roles inextricable from voice type; almost all female protagonists are sopranos and males are tenors.

“A certain gender expression or expectation becomes associated with those voice types, and that begins to limit how one needs to present themselves within the industry both on and off the stage,” they added.

Teiya Kasahara at a workshop presentation of *The Queen In Me* at AMPLIFY in 2019. Photo by Tanja Tiziana.

“The more I tried to fit in with what opera wanted me to be, the more I lost myself,” Kasahara said. “It is so restrictive in how the industry wants you to present yourself.”

Kasahara still wrestles with the decision to take Testosterone (T) to fully express their gender identity, but risks losing their soprano repertoire which they’ve spent their life perfecting.

Here’s our conversation with Kasahara.

## WHY DO YOU DO OPERA?

Kasahara: There’s so much power in this art form, to be able to connect with so many different types of people, and to provoke. To make us think, to also reach into our souls and connect to us on a somatic level, on an emotional level, that we can’t necessarily intellectualize.

Live performance and music, that combination of being able to see something and hear something and literally feel the vibrations through your chest is quite a rare opportunity. Because once that performance is gone, it’s done right? That feeling will never exist that exact same way ever again. And I think that’s what is really powerful.

The more that we put energy into challenging the old part of this art form, and creating something new, creating more new works, highlighting more diverse artists, on all levels of this industry... I think we can and will really see it evolve and adapt and respond. That’s what’s exciting, and I want to be a part of an industry and art form that does that.

## IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FEEL THE OPERA WORLD IS HOLDING PERFORMERS BACK FROM EXPLORING THEIR TRUE GENDER IDENTITY?

Kasahara: Often in the industry we expect the artist, when playing roles, to carry that persona even off the stage, in the dressing room, in the rehearsal hall, in the audition room. That’s very difficult: you come in as yourself, but are expected to play the role that you’re auditioning for, or the voice type that you are representing, so the casting directors don’t have to be imaginative. They can just be like, “Oh, yeah, I can see that person perfectly fitting in that role.”

That’s why we have wigs. That’s why we have costumes. That’s why we have acting training, so people can transform their bodies

and play those characters. And I think that further puts stress on folks who are thinking about medically transitioning, and what that means, by changing a whole voice type. And there is very little evidence and research to show that this would be successful, say for someone who’s wanting to take testosterone and lower their voice. And conversely, if there’s folks who have a baritone or a tenor range, but now identify as women, but can still only play the roles that are associated with the baritone and tenor fachs. It’s very complicated in terms of how they’re perceived within the industry.

## WHY HASN’T OPERA PROGRESSED THE SAME WAY THEATRE, FILM, OR DANCE INDUSTRIES HAVE?

Kasahara: Opera has over 400 years of history, and it’s about replicating the past, these past performances and trying to bring them to life. There’s very much an emphasis on recreation and museum theatre. We do see a lot of new concepts from directors that are trying to bring more contemporary perspectives into these operas. But we often see depictions of the same 20 operas over and over again, because they’re the ones that sell.

We need to acknowledge that there is a very capitalist agenda with opera, that there is a certain donor and patronage that is associated with that, maybe a certain demographic, a certain age, a certain political leaning.

I would say opera is in a very crucial moment right now, where it’s transforming and can transform into something better, if there is enough momentum, if there’s enough to push it past that tipping point.

*Learn more about Kasahara’s show *The Queen In Me* in the short CBC doc *Opera Trans\*formed*.*

*A longer version of this article was originally published by The Hoser and is available at thehoser.ca.*

# 2022 TORONTO ANTHEMS

Drake and The Weeknd both released albums this year, and you probably heard their songs at the supermarket or out for brunch. You may have had to dig a bit more for these alternate Toronto anthems from 2022, but if you did it was worth it. If not, you can listen to all of them right now.

Richard Trapunski

## Alvvays, "Very Online Guy"



Alvvays have a knack for imbuing absolutely timeless sounding indie pop hooks with just enough hints of the modern condition they're writing from. It's there in their enduring 2013 classic Archie, Marry Me, the perfect wedding song for marriage industrial complex skeptics. And it's here in Blue Rev's

"Very Online Guy," a character study of that distinctly 21st century phenomenon: the reply guy. Over chilly synths, Molly Rankin sings sweetly about a man who's "incredibly vigilant" about letting you know exactly what he thinks about any issue, joke or selfie, whether you asked or didn't. We all know him. Maybe you are him.

## Ombiigizi, "Cherry Coke"

Zoon's Daniel Monkman is known for shoegaze songs awash in dreamy distortion and noise, but teaming up with fellow Anishinaabe artist Adam Sturgeon of Status/Non-Status brought out their softer, more reflective side. "Cherry Coke" is informed by Monkman's childhood and their complex relationship with their father, who would buy them Cherry Coke and chips at the Rez store. The lyrics and melodies are minimal, but you can hear the emotion in every mournful refrain of "Cherry Coke / Ontario."

## The Sadies, "Stop and Start"



The Sadies have been such a solid presence in Toronto's rock and roots scenes for decades that it's been all too easy to take them for granted. That changed this year for a sad reason. After the tragic death of driving guitarist Dallas Good, the tributes came pouring in from far and wide,

from local punks to Neil Young. But the Sadies, now led by Dallas's brother Travis Good, made the ultimate obituary: they kept right on playing. From their 2022 album, Colder Streams, "Stop and Start" shows off their distinctive mix of western-psych-garage-country.

**The Sadies carry on their New Year's Eve tradition at the Horseshoe Tavern on December 30 & 31.**

## Luna Li feat. beabadoobee, "Silver Into Rain"

Luna Li levelled up before she ever released her debut album, Duality, so when she did she already carried herself like a full superstar. Hannah Bussiere Kim blew up online with her looping self-jams of harp, violin and guitar, then honed her live chops and her onstage charisma in increasingly bigger tours. "Silver Into Rain" is a good representation of her mix of warmth, quiet musical virtuosity and dreamy, emotional melodies. Find a video of her playing it live, complete with her trademark smiling solos, and you'll get it right away.

## U.S. Girls, "So Typically Now"

American-born Meg Remy might be singing about the United States, but this danceable critique of late capitalism definitely feels informed by her adopted hometown. Over a bouncy synth soundscape that won't leave your head for days, Remy sings about the pandemic-era trend of urbanists who sold their condos and moved to the country, who "sell all my best to buy more, not less." I can't be the only one who thought her "Brooklyn's dead and Kingston's booming" line referred to Ontario, not upstate New York.

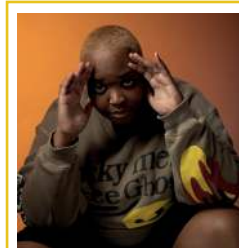
## Fresh Pepper, "Congee Around Me"

There's a huge overlapping circle in the Venn diagram of Toronto's music scene and hospitality industry. Fresh Pepper, a team-up between saxophonist Joseph Shabason and garage-punk turned crooner Andre Ethier, reflects on the camaraderie, excitement, ennui and questionable labour conditions that live within that circle. Congee Around Me adds a dash of lovelorn food metaphor into the laid-back, jazzy stew, with extra smooth vocals from Felicity Williams and Robin Dann of Bernice. It's as nourishing as a good bowl from Congee Queen.

## Akintoye, "Pizzazz"

"Are you okay? Like really? I'm fine! If Imma be sad, Imma do it with pizzazz!" That hook from 22-year-old Toronto rapper Akintoye was a popular sound on TikTok before it was ever an official song. The perfect shorthand for a certain coping mechanism, it became the soundtrack to videos all over the app helping people process their own mental health in a lighthearted way. Popular demand in the comments section convinced AK to record it and drop the full track. Now it has 7 million plays on Spotify.

## DijahSB feat. Terrell Morris, "Green Line"



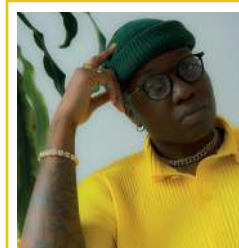
Any song that mentions the TTC is catnip for urbanist music fans, but this track has a moody appeal that hits you whether or not you've sat on the green line for 45 minutes just to get home. It's about that moment of reflection when you stop gazing out the window to close your eyes and

imagine a better life — one that just might take you out of the only city you truly know. If that city has no real solutions to homelessness and replaces culture with condos, you might feel it more. Both DijahSB and their collaborator Terrell Morris fit perfectly in odd-grooved pockets between hip-hop, jazz and house, so it's a collab that works perfectly.

## Badge Époque Ensemble feat. James Baley, "Zodiac"

There's a whole universe contained within Badge Époque Ensemble, the sprawling local jazz-funk supergroup led by Max Turnbull (fka Slim Twig). Behind their lush compositions of guitar, flute, bongos and choir are some of Toronto's most unsung musicians, each connecting the project to a different music scene. Colin Medley's docu-style music video for Clouds of Joy's "Zodiac" focuses on drummer Jay Anderson, the secret ingredient to so many of the city's bands (including Lammping and UWUW, who both also had great releases this year). His story of how Badge evolved doubles as a secret history of the last decade or so of Toronto music.

## Adria Kain, "Only With Time" (A Colors Show)



Adria Kain released a soulful stand-out this year in When Flowers Bloom, but her most resonant performance might have been in this live performance video. Dressed all in white against a clean blue background, Kain sings into a hanging mic, and that's all you need. Her impeccable throwback R&B vocals are a spectacle in themselves. Kain has been slowly bubbling the last few years, but it's a good argument for you to pay attention to her right now.

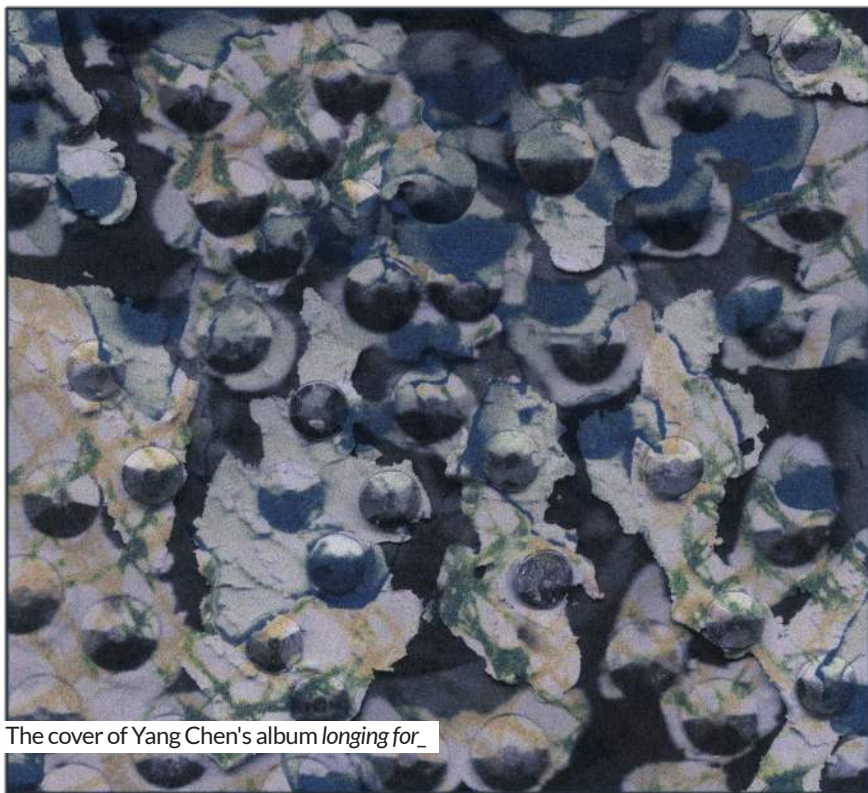
# Yang Chen is cultivating happiness

OVER THE WRETCHED WINTER OF 2020/2021, A PANDEMIC PERIOD MARKED BY LOCKDOWNS AND LONELINESS, TORONTO-BASED PERCUSSIONIST YANG CHEN LONGED FOR COMMUNITY

Laura Stanley



Yang Chen. Photo by Danielle Sum.



The cover of Yang Chen's album *longing for \_*

*longing for \_*

IN December 2020, Chen conceived of a collaborative project that would allow them to reconnect with the friends they so dearly missed. By the new year, Chen decided to quit their job as an administrator at a music school to focus solely on writing a grant proposal that would fund the project. Chen sent what they characterize as “an infosheet” to friends who are musicians, composers, and improvisers that expressed how much they missed them and invited them to collaborate on a piece together. Chen also included an artistic prompt: “What are you longing for?”

Chen received the grant money, and the resulting project is their debut *longing for \_*, a genre-blurring album of percussion-centric works, released in November via People Places Records.

“I think that this project could have only happened like this over the pandemic,” Chen says. “During that time I was also renegotiating with myself and asking, ‘How do I sustain relationships with anybody?’ Sustaining creativity was right alongside sustaining friendships. At that time, these collaborations were like a lifeblood for me.”

Chen has always been drawn to how music facilitates community. In the early 2000s, Chen's family immigrated to Toronto from Nanjing, China. Their family moved around a lot because of Chen's dad's work, and while living in Texas, Chen joined the school's marching band. As a self-described “quintessential marching-band nerd,” Chen loved the structure and the camaraderie it provided. Later, when the family moved back to Toronto, the city may have lacked a marching-band culture, but that passion for percussion still helped Chen form relationships. These days, Chen spends their time gigging with orchestras and ensembles, playing taiko with RAW (Raging Asian Womxn) Taiko Drummers, and is the drummer of folkly R&B/pop band (and “pioneers of soft mosh”) Tiger Balme.

“Playing music really helped me to not feel lonely,” Chen says. “I could connect with other people in a group — or even if I was playing solo, I could connect with the composer in

some way, which I think is a theme that is still central to the music that I make today.”

With *longing for \_*, Chen exemplifies the breadth of their friendships. Over the course of about a year, Chen and eight artists scattered throughout North America and across disciplines exchanged ideas, experimented, and grew as artists. While grant requirements meant the project had some hard deadlines, Chen ensured its timeline put the artists' well-being at the forefront.

“There was a lot of trial-and-error to accommodate growth, but I also wanted to tell people that if what we record on the album is a recorded iteration or version of your piece, that's okay. I really believe in investing in artists,” Chen says. “I really value — especially in this project — people's personal joy and what they are proud of showcasing. If that means they need an extra two weeks to master their electronic track so it sounds exactly like how they want it to sound, then that's okay. That was time that was built into the project. When we're happy, we're happy, and then we put the piece on the record.”

“I wanted to give people the opportunity to work on a project that was by their design and to fulfil their artistic goals,” Chen adds. “I was seeing a lot of musicians and artists burn out during the pandemic, and I just wanted people to find something in the project that could compel them to continue to be artists, because that's what I was looking for myself, too — something to keep driving me.”

Multidisciplinary artist Andrew Noseworthy is one of Chen's collaborators on *longing for \_* and he mixed and mastered the record. Chen gave Noseworthy, who previously had only mixed and mastered a few EPs as well as his own recordings, the opportunity to develop his audio engineering skills. With the grant money, they helped Noseworthy upgrade his home studio set-up and gave him the time and encouragement to learn.

“Something that I really appreciate about Yang is how fluid, multi-faceted, and sensitively they approach everything they are involved with,”

Noseworthy says. “No matter what the situation is, they’re very good at giving people the space to be who they want to be and do what they want to do.”

The process of composing each piece varied with each artist. “It’s hard to talk about this album as a whole because each one of the pieces really exemplifies a very unique relationship that I have with the composer,” Chen explains.

“Silt,” a collaboration with flautist and improviser Sara Constant, was a particularly distinct creative exercise. “Sara is a really dear friend of mine, but she was like, ‘I’m not really a composer.’ I know that she has a background in improvising, so she gave me 15 or 20 little cards with grey watercolour images on them that she had created, and she said, ‘I want you to interpret each one of these cards as a graphic score and record something from that, and we’ll go from there.’ That was the beginning of a process of discovering each other through improvisation.” The other side to *longing for \_* is each track’s short film. From conception, Chen wanted to include a visual component to provide multiple levels of engagement. “I don’t want to call them accom-

paniment because they really are one unit—the video and the audio,” they emphasize. After seeing videos and livestreamed concerts that other contemporary classical artists were releasing, Chen set out to make something different.

To help facilitate a different approach, Chen turned to friend and filmmaker Serville Poblete. Mirroring the creative process of the music pieces, the videos were rooted in experimentation. Poblete ended up producing three of the videos and producers Christy Kim and Michelle Ngo developed the others. In the dizzying Poblete-directed video for “EUPHORIC,” a collaboration between Chen and interdisciplinary artist Yaz Lancaster, a dancer moves gracefully among tulle that hangs from the ceiling until finally they stand free under a warm light as the words that Chen speaks at the beginning of the piece still ring in your ears: “I am worth more than my labour.”

Given that each track is a collaboration with a different artist, it follows that the pieces on *longing for \_* are tonally disparate. “All Good Pieces Have Two Things,” a joint effort be-

Yang Chen. Photo by Evie Maynes, art by Laura Stanley

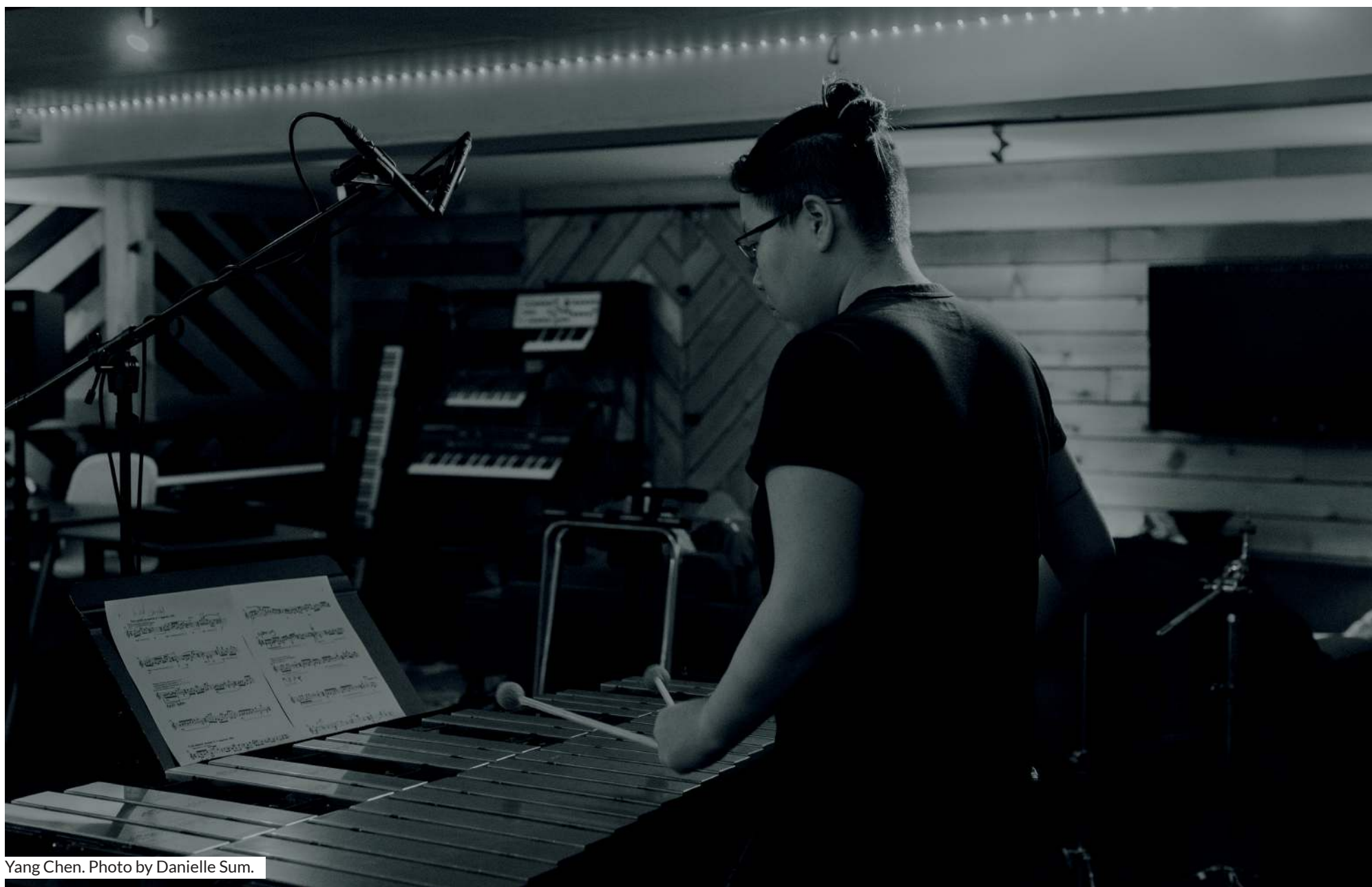


tween Chen and Noseworthy, contains some of the record’s harshest moments, thanks to Noseworthy’s outbursts of distorted electric guitar. “til the dam breaks,” on the other hand, is an R&B track that features Chen playing the steel pan and Sarian Sankoh warmly singing an urgent-sounding melody.

What ties the pieces together, of course, is Chen. Although they admit that any aesthetic cohesiveness of *longing for \_* was unintentional, when each piece is built with the same foundation of love, friendship, and joy, the end products share an inherent connection.

“I realized in the pandemic that I don’t have to do music as a career,” Chen says. “I could go be a baker, an electrician, or a paramedic—but I didn’t go and do any of those things because at the end of the day, music is what makes me happy. I am driven by happiness, and I hope to cultivate that in others, too.”

*A longer version of this article was originally published by New Feeling and is available at [newfeeling.ca](http://newfeeling.ca).*



Yang Chen. Photo by Danielle Sum.



Phèdre. Photo by Colin Medley.

# EVENT LISTINGS

## SHOWS AND EXHIBITIONS WE CAN'T WAIT TO CHECK OUT OVER THE COMING MONTHS

Michael Rancic

### Peach

December 22, Sub Division, \$20-\$40, 19+

London by-way-of Toronto DJ and producer Peach returns home for the holidays for a set at Sub Division. This is sure to be an exciting return for the club DJ, who has been busy touring in support of her new EP, *Fortune One*, out on her brand new label, *Psychic Readings*. Though her sound might be hard to pin down, there's a clarity in the ebullient grooves she brings to dancefloors and sound systems all over the world. Local Pavel Elkin supports. <https://ra.co/events/1613008/>

### Drop The Needle

December 27, Revue Cinema, \$15

This new doc from homegrown filmmaker Rob Freeman centres on the history of Play De Record, a record store which in its original Yonge Street location was wildly influential on the development of Toronto's electronic and hip hop scenes in the '90s. Featuring interviews with Play De founder Eugene Tam, as well as figures like journalist Denise Benson, Maestro Fresh Wes, Kardinal Offishal and Skratch Bastid, *Drop The Needle* is a love letter to a hub, institution and our city. <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/stompbox-drop-the-needle-tickets-471014666547/>

### Nour Hadidi and Friends

January 7, Comedy Bar (Cabaret Theatre), \$20-\$25, masks suggested

Once a month, the folks at Comedy Bar hand the reins over to the incredibly funny Nour Hadidi for a night of great comedians from Toronto and abroad. She's known for her work in *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *The Beaverton*, as well as opening for Hasan Minhaj and Nikki Glaser. Previous "and Friends" have included Natalie Norman (who cohosts *Open Michelle* with Hadidi, an open mic night for women and non-binary performers), Laura Leibow, Nile Seguin, Carol Zoccoli, Brandon Ash-Mohammed & many others. <https://comedybar.ca/shows/nour-hadidi-and-friends?ev=2023-01-07T22%3A00%3A00>

### Ningiukulu Teevee: Chronicles For The Curious

Opens January 14, Art Gallery of Ontario, Exhibit, Free for AGO Members, AGO Annual Pass Holders & Visitors 25 and under

Showcasing the work of Kinngait, Nunavut-based graphic artist and writer Ningiukulu Teevee, whose lithographs on paper have a bold and intricate style in their colouring and line work. Teevee's drawings often call upon Inuit legend and autobiographical details, as well as her sense of play and humour. Previously, Teevee's work has been highlighted in solo exhibitions at the Inuit Gallery of Vancouver, and National Gallery of Canada. Curated by AGO's Indigenous art curator, Wanda Nanibush. <https://ago.ca/exhibitions/ningiukulu-teevee-chronicles-curious/>

### Jennifer Castle

December 21, Great Hall, \$25, 19+

American-born Meg Remy might be singing about the United States, but this danceable critique of late capitalism definitely feels informed by her adopted hometown. Over a bouncy synth soundscape that won't leave your head for days, Remy sings about the pandemic-era trend of urbanists who sold their condos and moved to the country, who "sell all my best to buy more, not less." I can't be the only one who thought her "Brooklyn's dead and Kingston's booming" line referred to Ontario, not upstate New York. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1494150837749682/> <https://www.showclix.com/event/jennifer-castle->

### S.H.I.T.M.A.S. (featuring: S.H.I.T., Public Acid, Poison Ruin, ICD10, Slash Need, Beyond The Pale)

December 30, Velvet Underground, \$25, 19+

This once-annual hardcore punk tradition returns for the first time since before the pandemic started. The showcase's namesakes S.H.I.T. will reopen their big-top of madness for any mosh-deprived misfit, and they've welcomed the huge riffs of North Carolina's Public Acid, plus dungeon post-punks Poison Ruin and crusty pogos ICD10 from Philadelphia. The blistering hardcore from Beyond The Pale, and sexy techno bankrobbers Slash Need serve as local support. <https://www.showclix.com/event/shitmas-2022/>

### Vile Creature

January 9, Baby G, \$15, 19+

Hamilton queer doom metal cult Vile Creature are set to end their east coast trek here in Toronto. The band's latest, *Glory, Glory! Apathy Took Helm!*, arrived right at the outset of COVID-19, preventing them from properly touring in support of the release, so now they're making up for lost time. Co-presented by the folks that run *New Friends Fest*, the show features support from local screamo outfit *boxcutter* and Oakland anti-fascist doom metal duo *Ragana*. <https://www.showclix.com/event/vile-creature-https://www.facebook.com/events/652715759769783>

### Miigis: Underwater Panther (World Premiere)

Opens January 21, Berkeley Street Theatre, \$29-\$49

Created, directed and choreographed by Sarah Laronde, founder of Red Sky Performance, *Miigis: Underwater Panther* blends live music, theatre, dance and film to tell the story of the miigis shell, or white shell, and "prophecy in which the Anishinaabe should move west or perish." Charting a journey from salt to fresh water, this work follows previous critically-acclaimed Red Sky Performance productions *Trace* (2021) and *Backbone* (2018) that also took multidisciplinary approaches to storytelling and movement. <https://www.canadianstage.com/shows-events/season/miigis-2023/>

### Tranzac New Years Eve (Feat. Owen Pallett, LAL, Bernice, Phèdre & more)

December 31, Tranzac (Main Hall), \$25, 19+, masks required

Ring in the new year with this incredibly stacked bill of locals! From Owen Pallett's orchestral pop, to chiquitamagic's synth experimentalism, to LAL's nocturnal downtempo, there's something in here for everyone. Tranzac's keeping those community vibes right throughout the night, with activities set up in the building beyond the main hall, a special lineup of beers from Geary Avenue brewhouse *Blood Brothers*, and masking in place so everyone can focus more on having a good time. <https://www.ticketscene.ca/events/43019/>

### Conceptions of White

Opens January 11, Art Museum at the University of Toronto, Free

This exhibition is set to explore the construction of "whiteness" using select historical objects and artworks. Works include Howardena Pindell's 1980 film *Free, White and 21*, an account of the racism she experienced as she came of age in America; Toronto-based new media artist Jeremy Bailey's *Whitesimple* augmented reality filters; Los Angeles-based conceptual artist Ken Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynchings* series; and more. Organized by the MacKenzie Art Gallery, and curated by John G. Hampton and Lillian O'Brien Davis. <https://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/conceptions-of-white/>

# Crossword puzzle

Solving the puzzle one word at a time.

Copyright: Crosswordsite

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
20				21						22		23		
24								25				26		
27				28	29	30	31		32		33			
			34					35		36				
	37	38							39					
40						41								
42					43		44				45	46	47	
48				49		50			51	52				
53				54			55	56	57					
58			59		60						61			
62					63						64			
65					66						67			

## ACROSS

- 1 Puts on
- 5 Rosy makeup
- 10 Advanced degrees, in short
- 14 Get \_\_\_ on the back
- 15 Number of likes versus replies to a tweet, for example
- 16 Extremely long time
- 17 Small or unimportant
- 18 Friend, in Mexico
- 19 Landlocked body of agua
- 20 "I am not reclusive, I just have a \_\_\_" (quote from 58D)
- 23 Also
- 24 Scarfed down

- 25 Actress Tyler
- 26 Round-bottomed cooking vessel
- 27 Intelligence org.
- 28 Pictures of Mickey, say
- 32 Rant
- 34 "That's too bad"
- 36 "The \_\_\_" (novel by Marguerite Duras)
- 37 Epic fail
- 40 Comparable (with)
- 41 Little pictures that go far
- 42 Jewelry for Lisa Simpson and Veronica Lodge
- 44 Eyelid ailment
- 45 Ideological suffix
- 48 Ambulance inits.
- 49 "When r u getting

- here?"
- 51 Sri \_\_\_
- 53 "Sorry \_\_\_ sorry"
- 54 Gist
- 58 Singer known as "Queen of the New Age"
- 60 Star Trek actor Yelchin
- 61 Sizzle \_\_\_ (short promo video)
- 62 Vex
- 63 Alliterative Mazda sports car
- 64 Carmaker Ferrari
- 65 Taiwanese laptop brand
- 66 Adjusted to, as a thermostat
- 67 Mythical underworld river

## DOWN

- 1 Decree (5)
- 2 Executives (10)
- 3 Biting (9)
- 4 Fiddle (6)
- 5 Old liners (8)
- 6 The Roman Empire's home country(5)
- 7 Large mass of floating ice (4)
- 8 As thumbs are (9)
- 15 Disagreeable (10)
- 16 Psalter (5,4)
- 17 Moon (9)
- 19 Astonishment (8)
- 23 Lea (6)
- 24 Threescore (5)
- 25 Stage whisper (5)
- 27 Depend (4)

Thanks to these great media outlets for letting us republish their articles in this issue!

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# Sudoku

Sudoku is played on a grid of 9 x 9 spaces. Within the rows and columns are 9 "squares" (made up of 3 x 3 spaces). Each row, column and square (9 spaces each) needs to be filled out with the numbers 1-9, without repeating any numbers within the row, column or square. **Copyright: Web Sudoku**

			7		5	8		2
	4		3				9	
8							5	
5		1			6		3	4
		4				1		
9	2		1			5		7
	5							3
	9				7		1	
2		6	4		3			

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Image by Drazen Zigic on Freepik.



**Wearing a mask indoors protects yourself and others from COVID-19**



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