

# SLUG MAG

## HOPE ON TTaPP

Steffy Perry McCullough  
& Sequan Kolibas

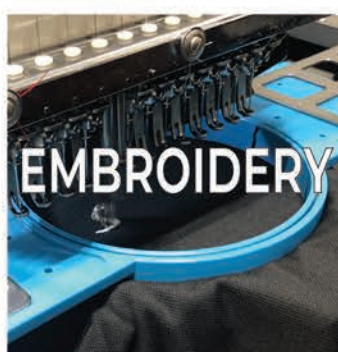
## LOCAL LEADERS

VOLUME 36 // MARCH 2025





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**ABOUT THE COVER:** For our annual Local Leaders issue, the trailblazing spirit of nonprofit Hope on TTaPP's Sequan Kolibas and Steffy Perry McCullough is illuminated by designer Ryan McCardle. Read the full story on page 6 and check out McCardle's work at [ryjaymac.com](http://ryjaymac.com).

## Aubrey Calapp

### Contributor Limelight Graphic Designer



Graphic Designer Aubrey Calapp has been delivering expertly-crafted, creative layouts to the pages of *SLUG*'s print issue since May 2024. Check out her most recent layout on page 22 and see more of her work on Instagram at [@baddesignnerr](https://www.instagram.com/baddesignnerr).

## Peter Eckhardt

### Contributor Limelight Contributing Writer



From book reviews to artist interviews, Peter Eckhardt's powerful prose elevates each community story he's written for *SLUG* over the past year. Read Peter's interview with acupuncturist **Melissa Zappa** on page 18 to see his brilliant writing in action.

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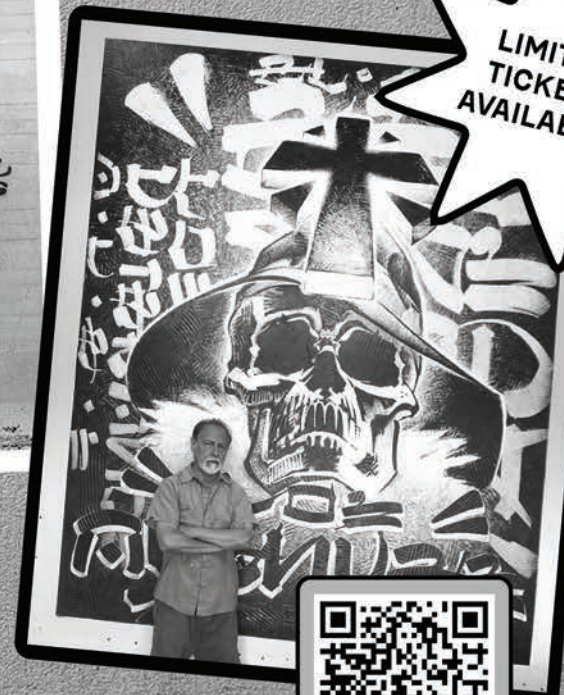
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# THE SILENT REALM

## How Hope on TTaPP Speaks Through Stigma

By Jude Perno • [jude.perno@gmail.com](mailto:jude.perno@gmail.com)

Sequan Kolibas got the call from a treatment center in the morning. An HIV+ resident, diagnosed a month earlier, was struggling to stay afloat beneath the weight of shame. “It’s a life changing experience,” Kolibas says. “You want to hear it from someone who’s been there.”

12 years ago, Kolibas’ life changed when the Utah Health Department informed her of her HIV-positive diagnosis. She was left to navigate appointments, medications, providers and most overwhelming of all, decades of isolating stigma — alone.

There’s a key difference between Kolibas’ story and this woman’s: this time around, Hope on TTaPP (HoT), the nonprofit Kolibas founded, is here to stand beside her. Later, the woman was crying for a different reason — she had never thought she’d meet another person, let alone a woman with HIV. “[A positive diagnosis is] scary and it’s embarrassing ... so to be able to be by their side as almost like their guardian ... it’s very rewarding,” says Kolibas.

For the last five years, Hope on TTaPP — which stands for Testing, Treatment and Peer-led Prevention — has been providing free direct outreach and case management for those affected by HIV and Hepatitis C diagnoses. At the same time, HoT works to provide prevention education and fight stigmatizing misinformation that act as barriers for those seeking medical care. Most of her clients have backgrounds that include experienc-

ing homelessness, injection drug use, exploitation and incarceration. Her goal? Restoring humanity to folks who have historically had it stripped from them, whether due to substance use, incarceration, sexual identity or infection status.

“We’re not looked at as people who are doing the best they can with what we’ve been given,” Kolibas said. “I’m the voice that they don’t have. Being in our addictions, we don’t know how to raise our voice, so being able to be that voice for people who don’t even really know how to speak — there’s a lot of power behind that.”

HoT follows their clients throughout their treatment journey, staying with them from testing and diagnosis to providing transportation to clinics and physical access to life-saving medications. For Kolibas, her clients become family. **Steffy Perry McCullough**, the second half of HoT who handles outreach for northern Utah, echoes the familial bonds that are created. McCullough’s experiences include surviving childhood sex trafficking, incarceration and substance use, but her survival allows her to connect with her clients.

“Being able to talk, laugh, cry and fight together towards something really helps build trust and strengthen that bond,” McCullough says. “They know that I am protective of them and I don’t judge because we are fami-

ly and we are in this together.” HoT’s model is informed by Kolibas’ lived experiences and “disgust” with the lack of care given to drug users. “It takes a lot to engage in our own healthcare because of the mistreatment that we’ve experienced in the medical field,” Kolibas says. “Some never will, and they’ll pass away. We don’t want to be treated less than because we already feel that way — we’re looking for that medical provider to be that safe space.”

That safe space is hard to find in Utah, largely due to stigma. While HoT provides testing and free linkage to treatment, McCullough says the most powerful thing HoT offers goes much deeper. “We get to remind people in those moments of connection that they really truly do matter,” McCullough says. “That is what we fight for. When we do this, we see the flicker of hope come back in our people’s eyes, and hope is a very powerful thing.”

“If we change one person’s life, our job is done,” Kolibas says. Connect with HoT or reach out to seek services at [hopeonttapp.com](http://hopeonttapp.com) and [hopeonttapp@gmail.com](mailto:hopeonttapp@gmail.com).



Steffy Perry McCullough (left) and Sequan Kolibas (right) are the heart and soul of Hope on TTaPP, a peer-led nonprofit providing essential care and support to those historically mistreated by healthcare providers.



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# EL POTRERO MARKET

## PLANTING THE SEEDS OF COMMUNITY

By Angela Garcia • angelagr15@outlook.com  
Photos by Jovvany Villalobos



(From L-R): Omar, Alan, Ángel, Joanna and Sharay Juarez all help run the family business.



Ángel Juarez's dream of opening El Potrero Market began by selling fruit out of a shopping cart.



El Potrero Market's slogan is "Tradición, calidad y sabor en cada rincón," or "Tradition, quality and flavor in every corner." From the moment you step inside, you're hit with the aroma of fresh spices mixed with the comforting smell of freshly baked pan dulce. You hear "El Noa Noa" by **Juan Gabriel** on the speakers as you make your way through the store. Each shelf and counter is filled with fresh produce and meats. On your way out, you take a *La Michoacana Plus* popsicle as a treat. It's like a little piece of Mexico in your backyard.

El Potrero Market was a longtime dream of **Ángel** and **Marcela Juarez**. Ángel came to the United States at 15 years old and immediately got to work, starting by selling fruits out of a shopping cart. Over time, their business grew into not just one, but two successful grocery stores in Midvale and Kearns that are now staples for many Latin American families. El Potrero Market would not be what it is without the leadership of Ángel and his four children, **Omar, Sharay, Joanna and Alan**, all of whom work together to make El Potrero a place where a community can grow.

El Potrero Market distinguishes itself by making you feel like part of a family. "We have customers that are still around from the beginning," Ángel says. "Now their kids have their own families, and they shop with us." From greeting customers to helping struggling families, El Potrero keeps people coming back. Sharay once noticed that a frequent customer needed a new stroller for her child, so she and her mother Marcela surprised her with a brand-new one. To this day, that customer has continued to shop there, and the Juarez family has seen the child grow up, too. "It's a beautiful thing when you have a [family-owned] business and you can help other families," Sharay says.

As the community has grown, so has the variety of products El Potrero provides. El Potrero went from a place that catered to Mexican families to a place that serves immigrants from all over Latin America — now carrying brands from Colombia, El Salvador and more. They even opened up a second location in Kearns in 2015 because so many customers were making long drives up to Midvale just to buy from them. It was that loyalty that inspired them to go for it.

Even in difficult times, El Potrero is no pushover. On February 3, El Potrero was one of the few Mexican-owned businesses to participate in the "Day Without Immigrants" boycott, closing both stores for the day in protest against anti-immigration policies. "We never hesitated in that aspect of standing with our community," Sharay says. "So we took on that initiative." Ángel adds, "I felt like I was part of a good thing because nobody wants their family separated."

The family plans to provide more services in the future. One project they have in mind is bringing workshops to high schoolers to teach them about building a business. "I am so grateful that I now have the ability to employ people from different countries and give them work," Ángel says about El Potrero's 45 employees. The Juarez family is also making plans to open a third location. "My main priority is to help families in need," says Alan, Ángel's son. "[To] help underdeveloped cities get these services, these products to their table."

El Potrero Market is a hub of culture, tradition and community, where customers are valued and everything is done with intention. Ángel's motto is "If you do it with love, you will get good results." He reminds us that "without community, El Potrero would not exist." Check out their Midvale and Kearns locations yourself, or learn more at [elpotrero.com/markets](http://elpotrero.com/markets) and @elpotrero on Instagram.

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# PUNK'S NOT DEAD

An Interview with **Olifer Rock Shop**

By Nadia Valentine • [dianavela413@gmail.com](mailto:dianavela413@gmail.com)  
Photos by Kevin TK Frantz

A rough-edged banner with bold, black-and-white splatter lettering, slapped together with photocopied guitars and skulls, hangs from an unassuming building on State Street. It's a design that screams "punk."

When you meet the person behind the banner, he greets you with a friendly invitation: "Hey, we're selling tacos and horchata at our next punk show. Come check out all the local bands and DIY artists we'll be showcasing." Just like that, you learn that the event is being held at *Olifer Rock Shop*, a hidden local gem in the underground music scene and a safe space for all ages.

Once a print shop, *Olifer Rock Shop* has evolved into more than just a punk merchandise store — it's a thriving hub for local musicians and DIY artists. In addition to hosting punk, grindcore and ska shows, the shop provides a space for independent artists to sell their work — far from the cookie-cutter corporate chain store you'll find in a mall.

**Fernando Rojas**, also known as **Olifer**, was originally born in Mexico City and was raised in California. He moved to Utah in 2007 and later opened the shop on August 5, 2020. Ever since then, *Olifer Rock Shop* has been a staple in the under-

ground community. Now approaching its fifth anniversary, the shop celebrates each year in September.

"Bands come here, and we make them patches so they can sell their merch. They also play live for us — we're always looking for new bands to perform," says **Bianca**, a close friend of Olifer and a friendly face at the front desk who helps run the shop. "We try to keep it all-ages since so many venues around here are 21 and over. I remember what it was like not being able to get into places, so we want to create something that everyone can enjoy."

Olifer and Bianca emphasize the need for younger generations to have a creative outlet for self-expression — music being one of the most powerful ways to vent and connect. "We need more spaces, but you have to make them and you gotta find them, nobody is going to make it happen unless you do," says Bianca. "We're just doing it because it's fucking boring. We pretty much came to this place because there was nothing much going on, so [we thought] 'fuck it.' There's a need within the community, so we might as well fill it. Give the people an outlet."

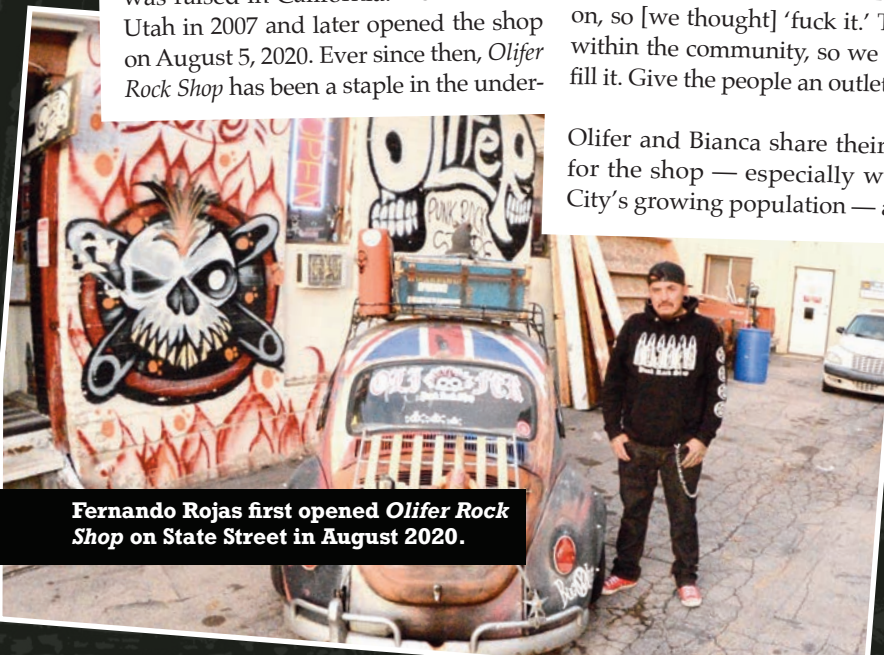
Olifer and Bianca share their future goals for the shop — especially with Salt Lake City's growing population — and acknowl-



**Olifer Rock Shop sells merch for local bands and doubles as an all-ages punk venue.**

edge the need for something new. "We're pretty much at max capacity, so we do need a bigger space. But they're pretty expensive. I'm looking for something big so we can do shows indoors. Hopefully, we can start a venue so we can get bands to play indoors," says Olifer. Expanding would mean more space for up-and-coming bands, more room for artists to showcase their work, and a larger community space.

Olifer and Bianca encourage the younger generation to get involved and support the underground music scene with a straightforward message: "Go support the homies. If you don't tell your friends about your show, then no one's going to show up. Don't be afraid to tell people to go to your shows. Don't be afraid of looking stupid. When you're into something, do it yourself. No one else will." Visit *Olifer Rock Shop* at 3457 State St. and follow them on Instagram at [@olifer\\_rock](https://www.instagram.com/olifer_rock).



**Fernando Rojas first opened Olifer Rock Shop on State Street in August 2020.**

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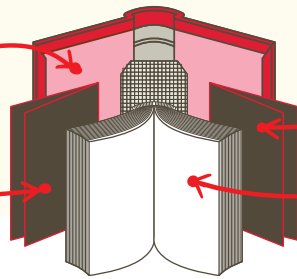
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# Bridging Feminist Theory, Media Ethics



# and Queer Justice in Higher Education

Dr. Leandra Hinojosa Hernández is rewriting the rulebook on media ethics, mentorship and the intersection of queer, feminist and reproductive justice, proving that for scholars like her, the personal is always political and the classroom is just the beginning.

Hernández is an assistant professor at the University of Utah, a scholar in queer, feminist health and media studies and has co-authored and written multiple books.

Hernández's first book analyzed news framing of reproductive violence from 2016-18. Since then, her work has evolved. "One of the famous feminist sayings is that 'the personal is political' and I think for a lot of us who do this kind of work, it is," she says. "We either go into these areas of study because we are survivors of violence ourselves or we have been subjected to some sort of injustice or violence along the way."

Her upcoming book, *Queer Women of Color and Critical Approaches to Feminist Mentorship and Pedagogy*, will be out by late summer and focuses on queer and women of color and feminist approaches to mentorship and higher education. "We look at some of the bright spots of mentorship. We talk about what happens when mentorship goes wrong. The book features work not just by academics who are more advanced, but also by undergraduate and graduate students, too," she says. "It's a really beautiful way to honor not just the mentors who came before us, but also to pay it forward and to think about how we can best support our upcoming generation of practitioners, activists and scholars." It's a two-part project and the first book is titled *Feminist Mentoring in Academia*. Published in 2023, it looks at feminist approaches to mentorship more broadly.

By Leah Call • [leahcall267@gmail.com](mailto:leahcall267@gmail.com)

After studying radio, TV and film as an undergrad, Hernández attended graduate school for journalism and media, where she studied feminist theory, reproductive justice and gendered violence. "Having dealt with various instances of violence when I was younger, as I got older I realized that those were not only connected issues of injustice, but also things that you could study and teach about and try to change [in] higher education," Hernández says.

Hernández recalls a critical moment when she was teaching media ethics. At the time, the University of Utah was seeing student-led Pro-Palestinian protests on campus, as well as other significant issues. Some of her students, who were working at *The Daily Utah Chronicle* campus newspaper, were assigned to cover these stories, including those involving anti-trans speakers.



"Intersectional journalism is everything," she says. "It's how we tell students it's not just about going out there and interacting with communities and telling stories. It's doing it in ways that are equitable, that uplift community voices, that think not just about a singular experience, but how all of our identities are at the table."

In her classes, she teaches her students to explore how historical and contemporary news values have evolved, including the perspectives of philosophers on truth, objectivity and how these ideas apply to modern issues like artificial intelligence. She also teaches how objectivity plays a role in reporting on sensitive topics like gendered violence, crisis and conflict.

She feels that it's especially important right now to focus on creating meaningful conversations and coalitions, particularly in showing up for queer communities, communities of color and migrant communities. Moving forward, she is thinking about how to continue building on this work and tackle new projects that deepen those connections and provide more support for marginalized communities. "In the discipline of communication, we have incredible queer theorists. We have incredible queer — and I use the term broadly, myself included — communities and spaces," Hernández says.

"The personal is political," she emphasizes again. "Whether you're researching gendered violence, teaching about it or working in community spaces where you're trying to combat it. And I think that's also what helps keep me grounded when life gets crazy."

Keep up with Hernández's work and upcoming book release at her online faculty profile on the University of Utah's website.



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# KING of the NATION

By Alton Barnhart • altonboy2009@gmail.com

Well, folks, it's time for me to go. No, I'm not leaving my comfortable corner at *SLUG Magazine* — the crew I work with are absolute legends, and the opportunity has been quite the adventure. However, the current state of the red, white and blue feels even more divided than usual. Tensions are high, eggs are hot commodities and the American Dream is only enjoyed by those who are asleep. So, I think it's best for me to bundle up my jars of knick-knacks and hightail the fuck out of here!

The only question I have: which country would be the best to settle in? Well, I'm no longer allowed in Mexico because of a swashbuckling cruise line excursion fueled by a messy combination of microwaved lamb chops and rattlesnake-preserved tequila. Canada is nice, but I indulged in a 14-season binge of *Degrassi* during the pandemic — might be too melodramatic for me. Japan is cool: great oceanside views, traditional cuisine passed down for millennia, exotic club scene straight out of *Cyberpunk*. The only problem is, if I even attempt to pull out a camera of any kind, I'll be flagged and ridiculed as a "passport bro." On a global scale, every country I'll go to will see me more as a tourist — that dumb American who will commercialize a whole culture if it piques my interest — than a traveler.

I was losing hope... until it dawned on me: Why not make my own nation? Humanity has been doing it since we fought off saber-tooth tigers with sticks and stones — why stop now? A quick flip through the YouTube algorithm brought me to the madlads at *VICE* as they had a chance to talk to the ungoverned, sovereign presidents and dictators of their very-own micronations. Some base their political ideology on a

monarchical divine right theory like the Ruritanian Embassy of Stone Mountain, Georgia, with jeweled crowns and chalices to match. Others strayed into an anarchist view standing under a fluttering smiley face flag, like the Aerican Empire. "Really it's not about tangible benefit, it's a question of belonging," Emperor of the Aerican Empire Eric Lis says. "And if you really get down to it, [belonging] is one of the most powerful things in the world." Sometimes, these small acts of rebellion are not completely separate from the status quo, but instead an attempted poke-and-prod at how countries are developed. It's an open playing field of geopolitics, as one leader must decide how to start building with the tools they're provided. Then, there's the less obvious factors that go into building a nation, like civil society organizations, providing necessities evenly throughout your territory and engaging in foreign policies. However, right now, we're focusing on the basics: land, defense and communication.

Finding terrain untouched by the reaching palms of Utah's government was a hard one to tackle. Every spot downtown, whether a 3x12 alleyway or an abandoned fire escape level, was already spoken for. I set off to conquer sanctioned plots like Antelope Island for its agriculture, only to be chased out by its wildlife (more like a "Buffalo Island," if anything). The great conquest for Bonneville Salt Flats happened mid-Wednesday when I was about to claim the throne, until Utah Highway Patrol pulled me over, suspecting me

of smuggling *Deep Roots Harvest* contraband back across state lines.

That's when I found it! Behind Albion Middle School, hunkered down through the BMX dirt hills and Dimple Dell trail-head used for tracking down Slenderman, I found an oval-shaped land mass of gravel and pine foliage cut off from the mainland by the roaring river currents. This is it! This shall be my new nation...

That is, until I intruded on a group of Brighton High School students mid-pipe rotation. Losing hope, my men (my dog Louis and I) were devastated by the loss. We had to think small. We lacked manpower and were leaking resources after all. That's when we saw it: half a gray-ish black brick, patched with leafy moss. This is our country — the lawless, neo-establishment state of Crancherika (the C is silent). We have a mobile task force in case martial law is in effect, "mobile" because it can fit in a suitcase. Our defenses are highly trained in Defendu and guerilla warfare... or whatever pocket knife I have on hand. And as for the means of communication, it's a tight, interlaced community who wants zero contact from the outside world.

If you absolutely have to reach out, though, you can message me on Instagram at @alton\_barnhart\_.

Illustration: Kit Cactus



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# THE SECRETS OF BRAND PROPAGANDA

By Mary Culbertson • [mlculbertson@outlook.com](mailto:mlculbertson@outlook.com) || Photos by John Taylor

Premium Native

To Aaron Gough, the way marketing agencies go about their business is backwards.

"Advertising about advertising is weird," he says. "I get it. It's a counterintuitive task. But a lot of agencies will promote themselves with content that's like, 'Hey, we're a marketing agency. We'll do marketing for you. We're really good, trust us.'" But when it comes to capturing attention, showing is always better than telling.

So, after founding his own agency, Scavenger Creative, Gough invented a new, foolproof way to get the word out. "I thought, 'What if I just created a brand out of nothing — to show, rather than tell, what we do,'" he says. "So Deth Yoga exists as a living case study of our work."

**Aaron Gough views creativity as a spiritual practice.**

to the popularity of his online following, later obtained a room to use once a week to welcome participants for Deth Yoga.

The next logical step in his business plan might have been to "build it, and they'll come," but Gough didn't have to deplete his energy by buying a studio of his own. He'd already built the valuable part: "brand propaganda," as he calls it. And with it, Deth Yoga attracted the attention of local studio Satori Yoga, where Gough now teaches weekly. "It eventually spread and spread;

classes got bigger and bigger," Gough says.

Just as planned, Scavenger Creative clients began following suit as Deth Yoga's attention bubbled. He describes his two companies as a sort of yin and yang: "They're just inverse realizations of the same concept," he says. "In yoga, I'm applying creativity to a spiritual practice. And in my work, I apply spirituality to

**The Deth Yoga brand has grown rapidly.**

mouths water — effectively dangling the secrets to advertising success in their faces.

Gough spent the majority of his early career in San Francisco working at BBDO, a global heavyweight of an ad agency. He was mentored there by minds that invented famous campaigns — like the M&M's Christmas campaign and Allstate's Mayhem — and given the opportunity to work with companies like Wells Fargo, Mattel and Pepsi on projects like Super Bowl commercials.

After moving to Salt Lake City, Gough took the leap, "creating something out of nothing," as it were. He'd already been teaching regular yoga classes at VASA Fitness, and, thanks

our creative practice. With yoga, I try to do it in a creative, weird, fun, accessible, inclusive way."

And when it comes to branding, Scavenger is trying to put more feeling into marketing. "I believe very strongly that creativity is a spiritual practice," he says. "The world needs less content and more art. People don't want to be sold to, people want to be inspired."

To get clients to understand this, Gough offers coaching packages where he helps them build their creative confidence to yield results. Gough has made such an impact on the brands he's helped that he'll soon be joining the Human Work Project, an education platform and mentorship network, where he'll serve as a creative mentor.

Want more secrets? Read the full story on [SLUGMag.com](http://SLUGMag.com), book a coaching session with Aaron or try one of his yoga classes. Learn more at [scavenger-creative.com](http://scavenger-creative.com) and [@deth.yoga](https://www.instagram.com/deth.yoga) on Instagram.

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# MELISSA ZAPPA

By Peter Eckhardt • [eckhardtwrites@gmail.com](mailto:eckhardtwrites@gmail.com)

With a half sleeve of tattoos and scarlet-dyed hair, Melissa Zappa — founder of *Flow Acupuncture* and the Wellness, Research, and Training Coordinator at *Huntsman Cancer Institute* — does not fit the picture of a typical acupuncturist. For the metalhead and former music journalist, that's kind of the point. "I recognized I was different — I was the tattooed, heavy metal acupuncturist," recalls Zappa. "I wanted the people I was connecting with to not be mainstream."

For Zappa, acupuncture and other forms of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) are Western healthcare's punk rock. With origins in ancient China, TCM includes practices like Qigong (a movement and breathing practice), herbal medicine and acupuncture. TCM emphasizes understanding the body as an interconnected unit, rather than breaking it into pieces.

Zappa's journey as an acupuncturist began with a simple question: "What's the least worst job I can think of?" Years of touring had given Zappa insight into the fragility of the body. "Heavy metal in general does not usually attract people with healthy lifestyles," she says. "Seeing friends struggle with bad habits and addictions [was difficult]. Touring is literally the worst thing you could do to the human body."

With that in mind, Zappa pursued TCM. She enrolled in the Portland-based Oregon College of Oriental Medicine for her Masters in Acupuncture and began offering acupuncture backstage at festivals. "[School was like] learning an entirely new language," Zappa recounts. "You're memorizing for the sake of memorizing. One day, it just starts to click. You kind of can't unsee it."

As for where she wanted to move after graduating, Zappa looked for cities with three qualities: affordable, few acupuncture practices and steady metal shows.



As the founder of *Flow Acupuncture* and the Wellness, Research, and Training Coordinator at *Huntsman Cancer Institute*, Melissa Zappa brings a heavy metal flair to the ancient practice.

Naturally, she landed in Salt Lake City.

10 years ago, both acupuncture and SLC were very different. Little research showing the efficacy of acupuncture was available to medical professionals and Salt Lake's Eastern medicine practitioners were a small group. Zappa founded *Flow Acupuncture* shortly after arriving in 2015, working to curate a welcoming, professional environment. Zappa's networking grew *Flow*, incorporating herbalists and massage therapists as well as other acupuncturists. As TCM in Utah grew, so did *Flow*'s prestige, winning *City Weekly*'s "Best Acupuncture Clinic in Utah" from 2020-2022.

Clinical acceptance of acupuncture also developed. At the University of Utah's *Huntsman Cancer Institute*, Dr. Pamela Hansen started the

acupuncture program as part of its Wellness and Integrative Health Center. The Health Center allows current and former cancer patients to access non-traditional healthcare providers like acupuncturists, dieticians and masseuses. In 2021, Zappa was asked to join their team.

For Zappa, the experience was "eye-opening": "[I was shocked at] how siloed the healthcare system is — you see one doctor for one thing, he says 'I don't know' and you get a referral," she recounts, "*Huntsman* has an awesome wellness center — it's exciting to be a part of facilitating change for a whole person health model."

Part of the growth of acupuncture's acceptance is due to the National Institute of Health's recent focus on whole person health (WPH). WPH examines "what it costs to take care of yourself — having an acupuncturist, nutritionist, physical therapist, mental health professional vs a pill." Collating data across thousands of records, the NIH's ongoing research has found WPH saves consumers money and promotes health over time.

For Zappa, helping to evolve concepts of traditional medicine has been both meaningful and exciting. However, she is "most proud of creating community [at *Flow*]." Aside from acupuncture and other forms of TCM, *Flow* hosts community classes and events. Zappa remembers a recent summer solstice bonfire where people cried, cheered and hugged each other to celebrate the season.

"Taking care of yourself and getting out in your community is how we will survive," says Zappa. "That's what I want *Flow* to be all about." Find @flow\_acupuncture\_slc and @huntsmancancerinstitute on Instagram and keep an eye out for *Flow*'s 10th anniversary party this April.



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# FIGHT THE FUTURE



Photo: Emily Sorensen

By Marzia Thomas • [marziamercurythomas@gmail.com](mailto:marziamercurythomas@gmail.com)

The political hardcore punk outfit Fight The Future is made up of (from L-R) Adrian Rollins (guitar), Dook (bass), Kelly Green (vocals) and Jordan Breen (drums).

They don't call the month "March" for nothing. Get up, go outside and attend protests, mental health support groups and most importantly, live music events. Fight The Future and **P.S. Destroy This** are two badass bands that organize much more than just shows. With a steadfast diligence to remain authentic to their genre's roots, you won't want to miss their compelling cries at *Kilby Court* on Monday, March 17 with a crushing opening set by **Venus Death Trap**. This \$5 show, sponsored by *Riso-Geist*, opens at 7:00 p.m. and music kicks off at 8:00.

I waited at the circular table in the back corner of *Salt Lake Coffee Break* waiting for the members of Fight The Future to order their drinks. Their vocalist (and *SLUG Style* alumnus) **Kelly Green** came back to the table with a hot green tea. The whole band was decked out in their finest flannel, dark-wash jeans and **Dolly Parton** merch. They left an impression of passion, experience and insight that could only be found in committed members of a hardcore punk rock band.

The origin of Fight the Future is a story of friends finding one another. Green and guitarist **Adrian Rollins** toured nationally together with their past band, **The Teen Tragedies**. Years later, Rollins and drummer **Jordan Breen** began spending time together through mutual acquaintances; they would attend full moon gatherings together. The alignment of astrological divination led the three members to desire starting a band. Looking for a bassist, they found **Dook**, the fourth and final member of the gritty collective. Tired of searching for a band name, Rollins began listing off *The X-Files* episode

titles to see if anything would stick. Liking the ring of "Fight The Future," coupled with their ideals of wanting to improve the state of society — the group knew what they wanted to be called. Don't be surprised if they change it to "Fight For The Future" imminently, though.

Each member cites separate inspirations for their sound. Breen is partial to bands like **Green Day**, **AFI**, **NOFX** and **Polar Bear Club** when developing his drumming style. Meanwhile, Green looks to artists that write lyrics with a poetic style, namely **Jawbreaker**, **Tilt**, **Boy Sets Fire** and **Steve Earle**. Dook claimed few specific inspirations, explaining that the music that piques his interest melds together into how he plays — he loves **Iron Maiden**, though. Rollins gets excited to see the local scene thrive in its newfangled and growing youth, feeling as though he gets to pass the torch to the incoming generation of hardcore bands.

With straightforward and strong opinions as the foundation of their lyrics and sound,

Fight The Future continues the long-loved tradition of making punk music for the sake of social change. "It's common sense punk rock ethics: Don't be a dick, treat people well," says Dook. The group is dedicated to keeping their audiences informed, as well as acting as a mouthpiece for the angry proletariat. What some may call "angry" or "negative," Green transforms into hope for a better tomorrow. "I try to put a hopeful spin on things. Like, everything is fucked up but it doesn't have to be," says Green. There is a discontentment rising among Americans that takes its form through burnout, over-productivity and escapism. The members spoke candidly about feeling so tired while also inspired to take action. Rollins had much to say about this part of humanity: "It's our duty, not just as a band but as a class, a working class, to orient our peers to understand that the things that are happening shouldn't spell a defeat."

Check out Fight the Future on Instagram at [@fight.the.future](https://www.instagram.com/fight.the.future) and come see their *Localized* set at *Kilby Court* on March 17.

# P.S.



Photo: Emily Sorensen

The equally fashionable and furious P.S. Destroy This is made up of (from L-R) Allyson Katana (bass, vocals), Teagan Stewart (guitar, vocals) and Sammy Jones (drums).

# DESTROY THIS

By Marzia Thomas • [marziamercurythomas@gmail.com](mailto:marziamercurythomas@gmail.com)

In response to a hustle-bro and tradwife uprising, it's no surprise '90s riot grrrl is making a comeback — but it is a great delight. The sanctuary of sharing music in Salt Lake is rich, both in talent and in the number of people chomping at the bit to share what they have to say, as well as many listeners eager to get in the pit. The punk circles in particular are highly supportive; Salt Lake City is known for holding many local shows with high attendance rates. P.S. Destroy This is one of the many incredible bands behind this incredible exchange of artistic expression. With a strong understanding of why they create, they bring a whole new vitality to the revived genre.

Friends **Allyson Katana** and **Teagan Stewart** had known each other for years when they decided to try their hand at creating music together. While they played bass and guitar respectively, they were looking for a drummer to complete their group. **Sammy Jones** was conveniently looking for a group to drum for. After attending a **MSKING** show, Jones asked the band if the members knew anybody looking for a percussionist. Thus, the trio was introduced and the band began. The group was originally called "Teddy Unchained" — an homage to the Teddy Girl

subculture started by femme rebels in the 1950s. The inspiration for the new name originates from a true crime podcast that Stewart had listened to, telling the story of a murder case in which a husband had killed the couple's shared roommates. In an attempt to frame his wife, he wrote letters to her from jail with incriminating clues. At the end of one letter he wrote "P.S. Destroy This," which resonated heavily with Stewart, who immediately brought the idea to Katana.

Taking notes from **Bikini Kill**, **Sonic Youth**, **Nirvana**, **X-Ray Spex** and **Crass**, P.S. Destroy This carries on the tradition of pushing the envelope and synthesizing exquisitely loud sound. The overall message that the group relays is: we are here and we are not scarce. As a wildly talented and well-known band, P.S. Destroy This is connected with many other punk groups in the scene. While Salt Lake bands are kind and welcoming, they are not immune to the influences of the overarching political theme in our state and country.

The band explains to me that they have felt like the "token femme" or "token queer" band on the bill. Meanwhile, at the shows P.S. Destroy This have organized them-

selves, it's a whole other story. Last October, they put on *Riot Grrrl Halloween* with a bill of four all-femme local bands.

The group has made incredible use of their events as an opportunity to fundraise for local community members and causes they believe in. From benefit shows for Palestine and hurricane relief to equipment for local DIY venue *Your Mom's House*, the group is always willing to lend a hand to their community. They often, at the last minute, will announce to the crowd that any sales from merchandise will be donated to someone in need. The merch in question is usually "junk journals" made by the band themselves, available for purchase. "I always think of P.S. Destroy This as a journal from high school that you desperately want to burn, but it holds all of your memories in it," says Stewart.

P.S. Destroy This will be playing many more shows and they plan to release an album this summer. Find the band on Instagram at [@p.s.destroythis](https://www.instagram.com/p.s.destroythis) and be sure to attend *Localized* at *Kilby Court* on March 17.



# A SEAT AT THE TABLE:

## How Ana Valdemoros Helps Small Businesses Achieve Big Dreams

By Caitlyn Hartung • @hybirdole

For some, Ana Valdemoros is best known as the first Latina sworn into Salt Lake City's Council. For others, she's the owner of *Argentina's Best Empanadas*. But to many, she is the co-founder of *Square Kitchen*, a culinary incubator kitchen born from a city project bid that has since become an engine for small business growth.

"When we competed for it, there were certain things that we had to do and questions we had to answer," Valdemoros recalls. "But because we came from the small business world, we were able to elaborate on the idea of an incubator."

Valdemoros and *Square Kitchen* co-founder **Tham Soekotjo** envisioned more than just a startup space. They saw an opportunity to amplify communities while providing a launchpad for aspiring food entrepreneurs. They understood that starting a business comes with significant hurdles, and wanted to create an environment where small business owners could focus on growth without being overwhelmed by financial challenges.

In 2018, *Square Kitchen* opened its doors in Salt Lake City's Granary District. Valdemoros saw this often overlooked area as an opportunity not only to create a space for small businesses, but also to contribute to the preservation and revitalization of the area.

"We wanted [*Square Kitchen*] to help small businesses, but we also wanted to help the neighborhood," Valdemoros explains. "We wanted to do some sort of historical preservation, so we wanted to be in a neighborhood that nobody's thinking about ... On top of that, we wanted to not gentrify the neighborhood as much as we [could]. So we're going to try and incubate businesses and find them a place to stay in the neighborhood, or at the very least, in the city."

For the past seven years, *Square Kitchen* has helped food businesses grow, preparing them to transition into brick-and-mor-

tar establishments. Among those who got their start in the space are *Forty Three Bakery*, *Han's Kombucha*, *Santo Taco* (originally known as *Fuego Grill*), *Hello! Bulk* and, most recently, *Marcato Kitchen*. "I hope that [*Square Kitchen*] can be a part of [innovation and] can continue to foster the smaller entrepreneurs," Valdemoros says. "The hidden gems."

The incubator's success did not go unnoticed. In 2023, the city of South Salt Lake approached Valdemoros with an opportunity to expand. This led to the opening of *Square Kitchen Eatery*, a second location where five different restaurants share a space designed to simulate the experience of running a standalone restaurant. "It's a way to allow businesses to take that almost final step," she says. "It's incubating them in a restaurant setting, allowing them to know if they're ready to spread their wings and be on their own."

Beyond providing a physical space, Valdemoros plays a role in mentoring business owners, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds. Many of the entrepreneurs she works with face barriers that extend beyond the busi-

ness itself, such as language differences, legal complexities and unfamiliarity with local regulations. To help them succeed, she offers guidance on everything from health department visits to marketing strategies. "We've been here for over 20 years, and having that background and then explaining some of the cultural dynamics that might be different in other countries is super helpful for people," Valdemoros says.

At the heart of her work is a commitment to giving a platform to those who are often overlooked. "There [are] so many things that we can talk about when it comes to immigrants and how they contribute to the fabric of our society, of our nation, but politically speaking, something's got to give. And I think the pressure is on to make a change," says Valdemoros.

Through her work at *Square Kitchen* and her advocacy efforts, Valdemoros continues to create opportunities for those who might otherwise struggle to break into the food industry. Through it all, Ana Valdemoros remains dedicated to building a more inclusive community — one small business at a time. Learn more at [squarekitchenslc.com](https://squarekitchenslc.com) and [argentinastbestslc.com](https://argentinastbestslc.com).



Photo: Nicole Marriner

As a successful restaurant owner herself, Ana Valdemoros has set her sights on helping others achieve their dreams.

## FARM STAND ROOTS & Artisan Pursuits

From its humble beginnings as a single fruit stand to today's thriving Utah neighborhood grocer, Harmons believes its success has grown from the roots up. While that 1932 fruit stand is now 20 thriving locations across Northern and Southern Utah, the business has stayed true to its heart and home, embracing values which result in the kind of high-quality customer experience that only comes from honest, hard work and clever ingenuity.

Today, Harmons is still family-owned and locally operated and is nurtured by networks of personal relationships built from years of community involvement. The stores are stocked with thousands of goods from local farmers, food makers, and other small businesses. These carefully crafted, incredibly delicious products support the local economy and promote sustainability. Harmons believes in family ranches, farms, and small businesses, and many local makers have been discovered and supported by Harmons.

Along with that emphasis on local goods and producers, Harmons believes investing in Utah's future means investing in the people, and their commitment to associates remains strong.

Using local goods and talent, Harmons creates an experience that is unique to the industry. Fresh foods are prepared daily in-store by well-trained chefs, artisans, and experts, using earth-friendly sustainability practices. Virtuosity is found in every department, and Harmons nurtures it by instilling associates with a passion for their craft. They send them around the globe to find inspiration and participate in training they can bring back home to Utah's advancing palates.

For Harmons, neighborhood grocer isn't just a title, it's a promise, because Utah is home, and home is where its heart is.



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David Sant never set out to make a feature-length documentary. At first, it was just an idea for a short film meant to capture a moment — the night students lit the “Y” on Brigham Young University’s mountain in rainbow colors. But the more Sant uncovered, the more he realized this was about more than just one event. “We kept wanting to end the film, but BYU kept doing stupid shit,” says the film’s producer, Taylor Pace.

*A Long Way From Heaven* “outlines the entire history of queer treatment at BYU but centers around the lighting of the school’s ‘Y’ in rainbow colors in 2021,” Sant explains.

Sant was a BYU student in 2020 when protests erupted over the university’s treatment of LGBTQ+ students. The Honor Code Office had removed language banning “homosexual behavior” from its rules, leading many students to believe the policy had changed. But just weeks later, BYU officials clarified that nothing had changed — queer students were still expected to live in the shadows. The announcement sparked protests, with students publicly demanding change for the first time.

Sant knew what it was like to be queer on that campus: the fear. The constant pressure to hide. The rules that made it clear LGBTQ+ students weren’t welcome. “I did not join them and always felt really bad about that. I thought even standing up would get me in trouble and get me kicked out,” says Sant. That’s when the project became personal.

What started as a simple documentary about one event turned into *A Long Way From Heaven*, a film that traces the history of queer students at BYU. Sant and his team kept pushing deeper, uncovering decades of stories. “We found ourselves creeping further and further back in history to contextualize why what is happening now is so important,” says Sant.

Sant recalled how, in early 2020, student activism was finally building momentum — then COVID-19 hit



Photo: Evan Hancock

The lighting of the rainbow “Y” at BYU in 2021 inspired David Sant to make a powerful documentary telling the stories of queer students on campus.

## BYU’S GAYEST LIGHTING RIG AND THE FILM THAT FOLLOWED

By Lexi Hall • [lexieliz05@gmail.com](mailto:lexieliz05@gmail.com)



and everything stopped. “Things were really, really amping up, and COVID instantaneously killed all of it,” he says. “That’s why the rainbow-lit ‘Y’ mattered so much. It was a bold statement in a place that often tries to erase queer identities, something that said ‘You will never get rid of us.’ [It was] so big and so dramatic that it almost makes it worth it,” Sant says.

There’s one person who made it possible — a person Sant doesn’t even know. “I’m the one that made the documentary on the project, and I still don’t know his name,” he says. That’s how carefully this individual protected their identity. “No one has ever come forward to take credit [for the rainbow ‘Y’],” Sant says. “He’s like gay Batman.”

The process was emotionally exhausting. The more Sant learned, the angrier he got. “It was a miserable experience to make this film. It was extremely difficult and made me so angry all of the time.” However, Sant used this to his advantage. “I think the most important lesson that I have learned from this film is that I was culturally taught that anger is a negative emotion that I should not be experiencing, and I have come to the exact opposite viewpoint — that anger is quite literally the most useful tool that marginalized groups have in their arsenal,” says Sant.

Sant wanted the film to reach as many people as possible, so he made sure to screen it at festivals with diverse audiences — LDS church members, non-members, devout believers and harsh critics. The response was the same. “Everyone that has seen this film has loved it and told me that it felt important,” says Sant.

Sant knows that *A Long Way From Heaven* won’t change BYU’s policies overnight. But that’s not the point. He believes in the power of visibility. He believes that telling these stories, putting them on screen and making sure they’re heard is a form of resistance in itself. That’s why he chose to tell this story. Keep up with the project on Instagram at [@rainbowyfilm](https://www.instagram.com/rainbowyfilm) for updates and screenings.

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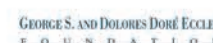


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## The Local Leader of Local Drunks: Sunyin Marci

By Mike Brown • [mgb90210@gmail.com](mailto:mgb90210@gmail.com)

Sunyin Marci is a local leader and local owner of a local bar called *The Jackalope Lounge*, locally located in the semi-beating heart of downtown Salt Lake City. She is also my boss and overseer and is awesome to work for. With several years behind the pine, Sunyin's knowledge and experience makes her a local leader in our cute little bar community whether she likes it or not. But I think she likes it.

Sunyin describes being in a leadership role as being someone to be followed, because other people in our industry look up to her and trust her judgement. Whether it's questions about a fire code or what to do when a girl won't stop shitting and doing blow in your bathroom, Sunyin has good advice on what to do.

Now, a brief history of *The Jackalope*: Sunyin's been the owner for about 15 years and we are still the cheapest bar on the block. That's pretty much our history. I asked her how downtown SLC has changed in regards to the bar world in that time, and there are definitely more bars, which is a good thing. There's more bar hopping these days than there used to be, more places to ghost your friends over a warm pint and more alleyways to puke in.

Sunyin thinks this has made the bar scene a little less competitive (in a good way) than it used to be. There's more of an "us vs. them" mentality against the state and their awesome, ever-changing liquor regulations made up by people who don't drink and who I didn't vote for in the first place. Bars aren't competing for certain crowds or demographics like they used to.

Now, you are probably wondering about the origin of the jackalope



Photo: John Barkiple

Mike Brown's favorite local leader is his boss at *The Jackalope Lounge*, Sunyin Marci.

species. Well, one time the penis of an antelope on the Great Salt Lake's Antelope Island fell into a jackrabbit's vagina, thus creating this magical mix of a beast — much like *Hogle Zoo's* very own liger. They like to eat Skittles and dirt and noodles and carrots and the like.

Jackalopes are notorious for their rapid breeding rituals and are mostly nocturnal, like a lot of drunks I know. The animal is also indigenous to Wyoming and Texas. Jackalopes have an affinity for certain pharmaceuticals, mostly pink ones, and are rarely domesticated. They don't make good pets.

If we ever get a rat infestation, I have permission from Sunyin to promote the bar as a place with cute little jackalopes running around. It probably won't happen soon because I and the other staff members are really, really good at taking out the garbage at the end of the night.

The future of downtown, especially with our new overlord **Ryan Smith**, has yet to be determined. I asked Sunyin what she thought the future of the bar and downtown entails — hopefully more (and better) parking. The city is definitely growing, in some ways good and in some ways bad. The way I see it, overall city expansion mostly means worse traffic but better bars and restaurants. The rest is just gravy.

Hopefully, downtown will stay hopping and busy. Remember to tip your bartenders more these days because this inflation is a real motherfucker. But I remain optimistic, something I've learned from Sunyin. She's always happy, even when she's yelling at us. And like most decent bar owners, Sunyin knows how to cut loose when she's on the right side of the bar. If you see her, don't hesitate to buy her a shot of tequila — just don't feed the jackalopes.



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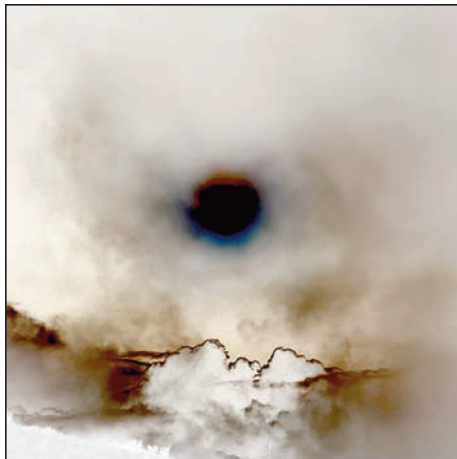
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# LOCAL MUSIC SINGLES ROUNDUP

Friends, Utahns, country-whatevers, lend your ears to the high reigns of this month’s Local Music Singles Roundup! It takes determination and self-discipline to get where you are, so why not treat yourself? Lay down your crown and spearhead your way through a fair share of metal, grunge, R&B and... gorecore?



## BONEGETTER

“Sore”  
Self-Released  
Street: 01.20.25  
Bonegetter = Eyehategod + Clutch

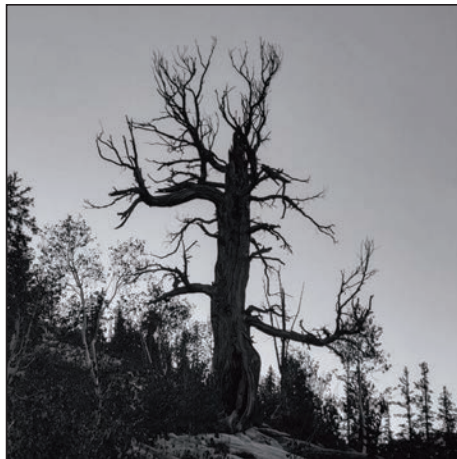
Bonegetter has mastered the ultimate fusion of sludge metal and grunge with their debut in the Salt Lake music scene. “Sore” is the first song from their debut demo *Dead Grass*. This single embodies feelings of angst and triumph, infringing on one’s inner psyche as it stirs up a cascade of emotions through its sound. It begins with a low energy tempo accompanied by soft guitar strumming. The switch is palpable with its ascension to a more progressive rhythm followed by the chorus, which demonstrates a dynamic shift change. Bonegetter’s ability to demonstrate anger and sorrow through the many vocal variations on the song is a talent in itself. “Sore” is the perfect song to throw on for a gloomy Sunday or anytime you’re feeling down. Their harmonic melody has the ability to channel wistful thinking and a somber conscience. Go check it out! —*Litzi Estrada*



## CHAC XOL

“Nopal”  
Self-Released  
Street: 01.06.25  
Chac Xol = Zoé + Faye Webster + Mojave 3

Two years after Salt Lake City’s third-most-streamed track was an **Eslabon Armado** and **Peso Pluma** song and a year after **Bad Bunny**’s stop in Utah was the *Delta Center*’s highest-grossing single-night concert of all time — one of 2025’s most promising local artists is Chac Xol, who recently released his Spanish single “Nopal.” With influences from American and Mexican folk music in the instrumentals, the track’s rich blend evokes the Southwest with a hint of dreamy shoegaze. Tackling complex cultural nuances in the storytelling, Xol confronts fair-skinned and problematic “güeros” who still play into harmful colonial ways of thinking and use anti-Indigenous slurs. Reclaiming the phrase “cara de nopal,” Xol’s resilient and self-referential nopal (cactus) triumphantly features an eagle perched atop — providing a symbol of Mexican pride that does more than celebrate his culture, challenging it to be better. —*Arthur Diaz*

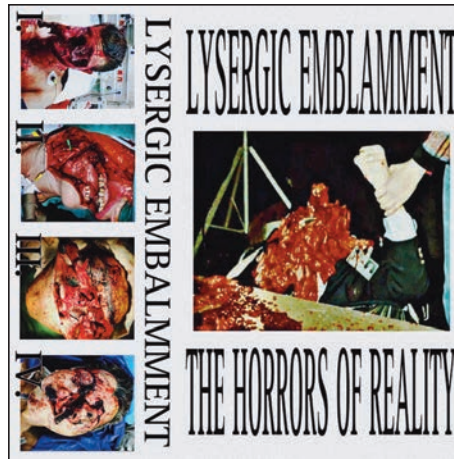


## GRACEMAKER

“Charm”  
Self-Released  
Street: 01.17.25  
Gracemaker = Pissed Jeans + Mannequin Pussy

Gracemaker’s new single “Charm” is a bone rattler that shakes the listener to their core. “To the back of your neck / To the back of your neck,” lead vocalist **Nicholas Bat** yells out to open the track. He is exactly right. “Charm” hits you in the back of your neck, at the top of the spine where the nerves begin. “I know the worry well,” Bat sings. “Ask the scales while they’re tipping / And which side’s gonna take all the weight.” The two sides seem to be isolation and desperation, the dark cloud or the shock collar. With “Charm,” Gracemaker tries to find that steady balance. Along with Bat, Gracemaker consists of **Darren Watts** (bass, vocals), **Matt Wiley** (guitars) and **Chris Garrido** (drums). The band provides that hardcore punch of crushing and crunching guitars that take off on beautiful relentless runs with a rhythm section as solid and forceful as a cinder block to the face. With this track, Gracemaker ratchets up the perfect kind of charm. —*Russ Holsten*

# LOCAL MUSIC SINGLES ROUNDUP



## LYSERGIC EMBALMENT

*The Horrors of Reality*  
Self-Released  
Street: 01.28.25  
Lysergic Embalmment = Necrambulant + GWAR x LiveLeak v Russian Sleep Experiment

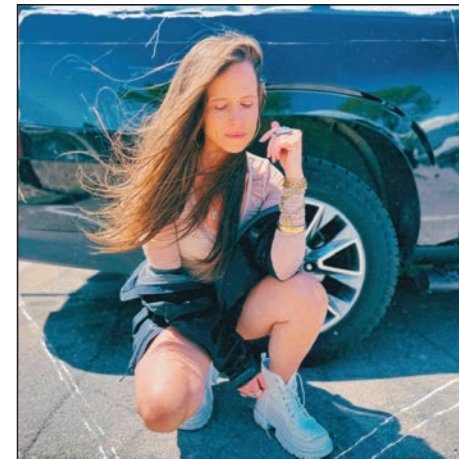
There are very few tracks that have made me physically sick through growling squalls and literal putrefaction. Unfortunately, I now have four. *The Horrors of Reality* breeds that sort of gorecore repetitiveness that could riddle goosebumps to any listening prey. However, to have an almost allergic reaction to the four-song EP was unexpected. First came the neck cramps with the brutal muffles of drum kits and cheese-grated guitar grinds through my car speakers. Then the headaches crept in, like Leatherface himself was trying to pull start a chainsaw on my temples. Next thing you know, it’s a smarting attack to the frontal cortex, exasperating all senses with the ornamental burn consistent with the Red Asphalt drivers education films and Rockstar Games’ *Manhunt*. Grab a barf bucket and a mop! —*Alton Barnhart*



## VAPE PLUG

*Pixie Curb Stomp*  
Self-Released  
Street: 10.16.24  
Vape Plug = Ashbury Yacht Club

What’s not to love in the world of egg punk? Furthermore, what’s not to love about Vape Plug (formerly Ashbury Yacht Club)? From the samples of 1998’s *The Big Lebowski* on the track “Bye Bye” to the unchained guttural screams from lyricist and vocalist **Andrew James Tassell**, this group has a lot to offer fans of unconventional punk and hardcore. Readers may remember that I reviewed their track “Stumble (Hey Th0t)” some months back. These two new tracks on this EP ditch the low-down grooving guitar on that previous single for a blistering and hyper-compressed approach that sounds like a VHS tape of the band performing from the bottom of a well. As always, I look forward to what this group can create with their signature sense of humor and undeniable talent. —*wphughes*



## VIOLET HELM

“Full House”  
Self-Released  
Street: 01.31.25  
Violet Helm = Rihanna + Fergie + Brandy

Written, produced and performed by Violet Helm, the track “Full House” is a pop song with some electronic and dance influences. The hip-hop beat carries throughout the track, highlighting Helm’s smooth vocals. Her melody and rhythm are soulful and bring the track to life. Along with the lyrics, the chorus is catchy and makes for a great song to sing along to in the car. With some early 2000s pop and R&B influence, the single is reminiscent of **Alicia Keys**. “Full House” leans a bit more towards pop, which reminds me of **Ariana Grande**’s vocal performances. The electronic music mixed with the acoustic guitar makes the track more than just pop, elevating it to more hip-hop dance. If you want to dance, check out this song on Bandcamp! —*India Bown*



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**Last Dinosaurs** - 3.7 Soundwell | **Soccer Mommy** - 3.8 The Depot | **Maude Latour** - 3.11 Soundwell  
**Alexandra Kay** - 3.12 The Complex | **flipturn** - 3.13 The Complex | **bbnos** - 3.14 The Complex  
**Evan Honer** - 3.14 Soundwell | **Palace** - 3.22 The Complex | **The Rocket Summer** - 3.24 Soundwell  
**Saint Motel** - 3.28 The Depot | **Jessica Baio** - 3.28 Soundwell | **Yot Club + Vundabar** - 3.29 Soundwell  
**Amyl and the Sniffers** - 3.30 The Complex | **corook** - 3.30 Soundwell | **Caravan Palace** - 3.31 The Depot

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Beeson 3.1  
Glixen 3.3  
Manifold + Swerved By Blondes  
+ Miss Valentine + Ragm 3.4  
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LUCY + The Madeline +  
Honey Stomach + Severin 3.6  
LOLO 3.7  
The Hails + Never Ending Fall 3.8  
Abby Holliday 3.9  
Macseal 3.10  
Emei (Early) 3.11  
Emei (Late) 3.11  
The Hit + Test Tones + Crimcore 3.12  
DWLLRS 3.13  
ALEXSUCKS 3.14  
Lonely Heights Tour Homecoming Show!  
w/ Pdubba-U + Imaginary Friendz  
flyingfish 3.16  
SLUG Localized: Fight The Future +  
RS.Destroy This + Venus Death Trap 3.17  
SENSES 3.18  
Sage Lane + Daniel's Park + Chloe Mae  
Slow Joy 3.19  
Post Sex Nachos 3.20  
Binding Vow + SLWBRN + Allies Always Lie 3.21  
Mopsy + Ivy Avenye + Porq 3.22  
Billy Raffoul 3.23  
Tim Atlas 3.24  
99.9FM KUAA Presents: Pom Poko 3.25  
This Is Lorelei 3.26  
Annie DiRusso 3.27  
The Linda Lindas 3.28  
Arts Fishing Club 3.29  
Anxious 3.30  
Anxious 3.31

## METRO MUSIC HALL

TYR 3.1  
Thrown 3.5  
Reverend Horton Heat 3.6  
Ollie Wride 3.7  
The Emo Night Tour 3.8  
Korpiklaani + Ensiferum 3.11  
Swallow The Sun 3.12  
DELAINE 3.13  
Dune Moss 3.14  
Queers of Comedy 3.15  
Russian Circles 3.18  
Arsenic Addiction 3.20  
Marrio Suzzanne & The Galaxy Band:  
80s Drag Concert 3.21  
Suess Lake City:  
A Cabaret Mega-Show 3.22  
Daily Bread 3.26  
Marrio Suzzanne & The Galaxy Band:  
80s Drag Concert 3.27  
Viva La Diva: Broadway Dival 3.28  
Viva La Diva: Broadway Dival 3.29  
The Browning 4.4  
The Birthday Massacre 4.5  
Warbringer + Allegaeon 4.6  
Marrio Suzzanne & The Galaxy Band:  
80s Drag Concert 4.11  
Folk Hogan Album Release Show! 4.12  
Wicked Temple 4.18  
Paleface Swiss 4.19  
Vision Video 4.23  
Marrio Suzzanne & The Galaxy Band:  
80s Drag Concert 4.25

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*KBP Local Highlight:*  
*Marshall Van Leuven + Elowyn + Goldensuns* 3.1  
The Velvetters 3.2  
Winona Fighter 3.3  
Artikal Sound System 3.4  
Chat Pile 3.5  
Geographer 3.6  
Dubwise: DJUNYA +  
ILLOOM + RHIZAE + SFL1 3.7  
Pink Pony Club: Chappell Roan  
Sapphic Dance Night! 3.8  
Talib Kweli 3.10  
Lime Cordiale 3.11  
Mortigi Tempo + Sylke + Broke City 3.12  
Cole Hartley + Jackson Hartley  
+ Whitney Lusk 3.13  
99.9FM KUAA Presents:  
Rose City Band 3.14  
St. Pat's House Party:  
An Edm + House Night 3.14  
Timecop1983 3.15  
Pixie & The Partygrass Boys 3.17  
Dédric Dean & Friends 3.19  
Agnostic Front 3.20  
Sleaze Freaks: Indie Sleaze Dance Party 3.21  
Kolton Moore and the Clever Few 3.22  
Masta Killa (of Wu-Tang Clan) 3.24  
Stephen Day 3.25  
Fonteyn 3.26  
Rickshaw Billie's Burger Patrol 3.27  
Gusi 3.28  
Traitors 3.29  
Weezer Tribute Night 4.4  
Metalachi 4.5  
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