

SNACK



SLOWDIVE
KATHERINE PRIDDY
YUMIKO ONO
SHEKU BAYOH INQUIRY



BILL RYDER-JONES

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SNACK


MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Hello and welcome to SNACK issue 59,

Congratulations, you've made it to February 2024. Lucky you!

The best thing about 2024 so far, for me, has been the deluge of new brilliant Scottish grassroots music that has been sent our way. It's always a welcome treat at this time of the year, when the floodgates open once again after the early winter fallow, but this year especially has surprised and delighted in its early variety and quality. We've expanded our SNACK Bits section to fit as much of it in as we can. To those who think good music is confined to or stopped in a certain era: listen again, pay attention. Anyways, I've had fun listening to it all and it all gives me hope that we're in for a particularly fruitful year.

Anyways, what's in this month's mag? Well, we're a little heavy on the male side for our interviews and contributors this month – that's well worth stating here. We've had a commitment to gender balance since before we signed our Keychange pledge in May 2021 and we'll need to keep a careful eye on this – feel free to dig us up if it becomes a recurring issue. My email address is editor@snackpublishing.com if you want to contact me, for whatever reason.

Anyold, I hope your February is a good one.

Kenny Lavelle
Editor

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WHAT'S ON **GUIDE**

GRAY DAY

Òran Mór, Glasgow
25th February

Whether you've been a stalwart Gray fan for years, with a well-thumbed copy of *Lanark* sitting on your bedside cabinet at all times, or it's the recent A-list-filled film adaptation of *Poor Things* that has piqued your interest, come along to this annual day-long celebration of Alasdair Gray's life and work. A family friendly celebration from The Alasdair Gray Archive, featuring readings, stalls, workshops, lunch, a treasure hunt, and more!

grayday.info



RETURN TO MONO

Sub Club, Glasgow
9th February

Slam has announced the line-ups of its first few monthly residencies of 2024. On 9th February the line-up features Adriana Lopez, Slam, and KAAI.

snackmag.co.uk

These live nights are just one way Slam are fulfilling their mission to nurture underground techno – check out their weekly Slam Radio podcast for techno on the go.

ra.co/promoters/18695

MACROBERT ARTS CENTRE

Stirling and Plean
1st till 29th February

If you've not yet been to Plean, please do – a year-long partnership between MacRobert Arts Centre, Stirling Council, and the people of Plean means there is an adorable wee cinema in Balfour Community Centre. Well worth the trip out – the space has 20 comfy cinema seats, tasty snacks, and lovely staff, plus tiered ticket pricing and an excellent selection of films to watch. Also, on 3rd February, in Stirling, you have two chances to see the spectacular *Ragnarok*: a blend of imaginative puppetry, set pieces, and live camera work make up the performance of this show, which explores views on global crises and the temptation of nihilism. See their website for full listings of films, live performances, exhibitions, and more.

macrobertartscentre.org



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*Andy Zaltzman (The Bugle,
The News Quiz – BBC Radio 4)*



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T IN THE DEPOT – PHREAKING GENDER

Leith Depot, Edinburgh
22nd February

An evening of mixed performance featuring film, poetry, drag, comedy, and music from transgender artists Nicole O'Reilly, Luke 'Luca' Cockayne, L4nterns, Zoe Harding, and SYR. *Phreaking Gender* takes as its starting point the necessity and rebellion of DIY transition – they ask you to 'prepare to be body slammed into another dimension'. Yes, SYR!

wegottickets.com/event/606963



PRIDE FLAG PORTRAITS

Kafe Kweer, Edinburgh
3rd till 24th February

This exhibition is run by local artist Eleanor Buffam, an artist for whom identity and connection are central to her artworks. This show is a series of portraits of people in the queer community, portrayed on the Pride flag of their choice, and is part of the artist's exploration of large-scale cyanotypes. Kafe Kweer is a venue to check out any time of the year – an award-winning sober queer space featuring monthly exhibitions, affordable food, and more.

[instagram.com/kafekweer](https://www.instagram.com/kafekweer)

LOWER BRASS DAYS

24th & 25th February
Edinburgh and Elgin

These free music community events for school-aged people, from St. Mary's Music School, include masterclasses, ensemble work, concerts, and taster sessions from industry leaders and world-renowned performers. All part of their work making music accessible to all.

stmarysmusicschool.co.uk

MANIPULATE

Various Locations, Edinburgh
1st February till 11th February

Manipulate Festival, Edinburgh's international festival of animated film, puppetry, and visual theatre, returns for its 17th edition in February, marking the start of the 40th year of Manipulate Arts (formerly Puppet Animation Scotland). The festival will celebrate international and homegrown work that tells stories primarily through imagery, rather than text, or breathes life into the inanimate, with the aim of crossing borders and welcoming audiences of all backgrounds into the fold.

Highlights include the Scottish premiere of *The House* from Denmark's Sofie Krog Theatre, a European puppetry classic having racked up hundreds of performances over the last decade across the continent. Ruxy Cantir's critically-acclaimed *Pickled Republic & Pickle Party* sees Ruxy welcome audiences into the pickle jar for an existential lament and chaotic search for meaning in a surreal cabaret with puppetry, mask, and pickled vegetables.

manipulatearts.co.uk

GLASGOW FILM FESTIVAL

Glasgow Film Theatre, Glasgow
28th February till 10th March

Kirsten Stewart's pairing with Katy O'Brian has sent the internet all aflutter, and for good reason – see their film, *Love Lies Bleeding*, in the opening gala of this film festival. Viggo Mortensen himself will be in Glasgow as part of the Q&A with Solly McLeod, following the 3rd of March screening of *The Dead Don't Hurt*. I repeat, Viggo Mortensen will be in Glasgow! As always, the film fest programme is a rich choccie box with a flavour and texture combo for everyone – comedies like *Coup!*, documentaries like *Billy Connolly: Big Banana Feet*, fact fused with fiction in *Asog*, and plenty more besides.

glasgowfilm.org/glasgow-film-festival



LAVENDER MENACE BOOKSHOP

Lavender Menace Queer Books Archive,
Edinburgh
17th till 21st February

On the 17th, join Mae Diansangu and Shane Strachan for an afternoon of readings and discussion on how to reimagine archives. For four Sundays, running from the 18th February, there's an informal book discussion centering queer joy in literature, led by Anna Broomfield.

On the 21st, buckle up for some poetry and conversations on overlapping themes from K Patrick and Éadaoin Lynch, plus a look at Patrick's incredible debut novel *Mrs S*.

lavendermenace.org.uk



LIGHTHOUSE: EDINBURGH'S RADICAL BOOKSHOP

Lighthouse Bookshop and Various Locations,
Edinburgh
5th February till 10th April

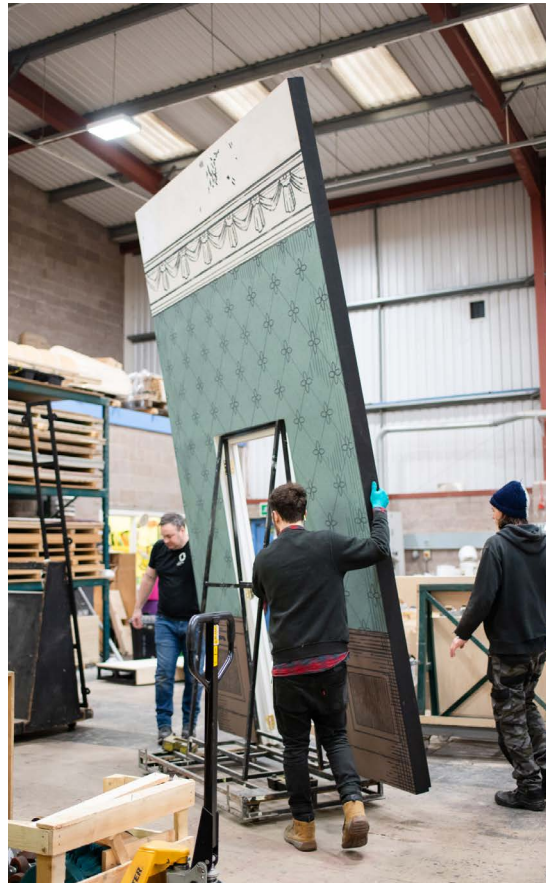
Rosa Campbell has spent an envious amount of time in the archives with V. R. 'Bunny' Lang's original writings – join Campbell for an evening discussing the collection of Lang's poetry she has edited, most of which has never been seen or published before. On the 21st of February, coorie in wi Len Pennie and friends to celebrate the very best of Scots poetry and feminist spoken word, in a night inspired by Pennie's new collection *POYUMS!* There will be an evening of Palestinian solidarity alongside the launch of the pamphlet *Israel: The Making of a Racist State* by Neill Rogall. See more events on their website.

lighthousebookshop.com

MARX IN LONDON!

What would the life of Karl Marx look like if you tumbled all of his mundane stresses and problems into one day? Scottish Opera's new grand farce, the UK premiere of Jonathan Dove's *Marx in London!*, has an answer. Rather than concentrating on his politics, this creative new production finds Marx 'in London' where, exiled, he spent most of his adult life, beset on all sides by day-to-day troubles: physical, financial, emotional, and vocational. Poor Marx: Prussian spies, Italian agitators, and extremely uncomfortable carbuncles on his bottom!

Speaking to Director Stephen Barlow he says it has similar beats, in a way, to TV sitcom classic, *Frasier* – its comedy punctuated with little moments of melancholy and pathos. 'You're thinking *oh, this bit is actually quite painful or quite sad, they play it really truthfully, and then the next moment you're laughing again.*' He also mentions there's a homage or two to the comedy of *The Marx Brothers* [no relation]. It all sounds brilliantly lively and a perfect antidote to any late winter gloom.





Barlow describes the atmosphere as 'crazy, madcap, quite slapstick at times'. 'It's also very witty', he says, 'but it's also quite poignant, especially the way the female characters are drawn – his long suffering wife in particular is drawn wonderfully.'

'The music's very accessible too – it's tuneful and memorable. The orchestration is great, producing lots of funny, unusual sounds.' It sounds like it's gonna be a lot of fun.

Visually, the staging is very colourful and quite silly. The audience will know it's a comedy as soon as they walk into the theatre, before a note is played or a note is sung – it's got a Monty Python vibe. 'Animation will add texture and create atmosphere in a witty, or very dramatic way.' Speaking to the Director, he isn't much up for giving much away on exactly what that entails for fear of spoilers – we'll just have to wait and see.

Marx in London! will be at Glasgow's Theatre Royal on 13th, 15th & 17th February then 22nd & 24th February 2024 at Festival Theatre Edinburgh

scottishopera.org.uk

BILL RYDER-JONES



Easily one of the most talented guitarists and songwriters of the modern era, there's a compelling narrative around Bill Ryder-Jones: it's integral to his work, but it's also far from the full story. SNACK knows the angles every other interview covers with him, so we sidestepped them to discuss good guys, melodies, complex fanbases, and lots more.

A new year is challenging enough but you're also on the brink of releasing your latest album, *Iechyd Da*. How are you doing?

I'm good, yeah. I'm overwhelmed – Christmas can be a thing, can't it, and New Year, and I don't know about you but I am fucking skint. I'm releasing an album, which means I can't work, which no one thinks about, as my job is producing, but I can't do that as I'm releasing an album, and I have to be here, there and everywhere. I don't save money because I'm a dickhead, but other than that, mate...

In fairness, the reviews have been great: people are saying things about the record that I'm proud of, they're getting it. It's a strange thing to be in the middle of, but it's good.

Did the balance of emotions – joy and sadness, fear and optimism – come naturally on the record, or was it something you worked to balance?

It just happens. Ultimately, I'm a misery arse who loves a laugh. On my own, I get really inside myself and when I'm with others, I like a giggle. Building a record starts off with songs, getting the right light or shade in a song, so you're dealing with that, and making a record is like making a big song. Same as cooking, or any creative [thing] – just get the right balance for you.

It was easier than that: it was obvious from the start that it needed more uplifting bits than *Yawn*, and that was well easy to do – all it needed was two uplifting bits!

Were there points you stopped and thought: fuck me, that's a great melody?

I'll be honest with you mate, I'm a pretty big fan of my melody writing. Quite often, the songs that make the albums are the ones where I go 'fuck, that's a good melody'. There's a lot of things on this record, musically, that I'm proud of, and no one asks, so thanks. If someone somehow filmed the best goal you ever scored in five-a-sides, you'd watch it back all the fucking time.

You say you haven't been this proud of a record since *A Bad Wind Blows in My Heart*, and by song titles alone, there are a few links. Is there a direct line between the albums for you?

Yeah, that was a conscious decision. With *West Kirby* [County Primary], I never felt it was a great record. Good songs on it, and it's of a time when I was listening to a lot of music that sounded like that, but it never felt like I nailed the record. With *Yawn*, I nailed the record, but as soon as we played it live, I thought: these songs don't make me happy, these aren't healing songs; they're just the worst version of what was happening to me. I was conscious I didn't want to make another record like *Yawn*. It was hard to play, but great to write.

In your own words, *Iechyd Da* is your 'most produced record'. Have you any thoughts on how you'll bring the album to life on tour?

You've got to be aware it can't be exactly the same. There'll be versions; there'll be songs we won't do. We have an SPD [sample pad] thing for 'This Can't Go On', I don't want to play in a small venue and have people hear kids on backing tracks but we use it on that track: it has a cool intro. I want all those Mellotrons and strings to be in it live – that's the one, everyone loves it, no one is going to complain.

***Iechyd Da* was released on 12th January on Domino Recordings**

Bill Ryder-Jones plays Room 2, Glasgow, on 12th March



SLOWDIVE

As crucial progenitors of the shoegaze scene, Slowdive have been producing wonderfully lush sounds since 1989, albeit with a lumping near-20-year hiatus in the middle. With two stunning albums since their reunion in 2014, the English four-piece are back at the top of their game, returning to Scotland's central belt in February to further hammer home their fuzzy greatness. We spoke to the group's bassist, Nick Chaplin, about media narratives and the ceiling of a certain Glaswegian ballroom.

Now the dust has settled on your latest album, *Everything Is Alive*, how do you feel about it?

We were a bit apprehensive about it, all of us for different reasons, when it came out. It's normal that you live with a record for so long, the writing and recording, mixing and mastering, and then eventually it's out in the world and it's quite a strange feeling to let it go, if you like. Part of our apprehension was that there was so much goodwill around the band when we came back in 2014, and around the record that followed, that we didn't know if it would still be the case.

We are proud of [Slowdive, 2017] and we do like it, but it was probably treated very nicely by everyone because they were like 'oh it's such a great story, we really hope they don't make a shit record' – and it wasn't a shit record, but it was definitely treated very nicely by the press.

Now people aren't as interested as they were in the story of the band cos everyone knows it, so we thought it might be a slightly more difficult sell, especially seeing as there'd been six years between records. Which is quite a long time. It's funny cos at every stage since 2014 things have happened to us and surprised us. Like, we were surprised at how many people were interested when we came back. The album could've gone in several different directions, and in the end it was a little more like a trad Slowdive record than we'd originally envisaged, which we feared might lead some people to suggest we'd run out of ideas or something. In the end it's just a relief to get the thing out and feel like we're in a band again.

The idea of things 'happening to you' is interesting, as if it's not fully in your control. Slowdive's relationship to the media has always been layered and complex. Have things changed since the 90s?

It's vastly different to how it was. The relationship we have with any media now is extremely positive. No disrespect to your profession, but it doesn't feel that the media has the same level of power or control over a band's destiny now as they did in the 90s. The media and PR stuff we do now is all very interesting and full of great people. There used to be bigger agendas, like Slowdive having been the coolest thing ever at one point, and then suddenly the genre was seen as being boring or pointless, or not exciting.

You know, you were actively picked apart and destroyed, and that doesn't seem to happen now.

Maybe I'm speaking from a position of privilege as an established act and it happens to younger bands, but it seems healthier than before. When we started we got lots of support but suddenly things turned and it was devastating. You can look back and say it was important to our growth as a group, and our story, but it didn't feel that way at the time. I'm glad it's not like that. It wasn't healthy.

There's certainly a lot of differences. There's a move towards 'positive music journalism'. It was such a strange dynamic to have existed.

Being able to critique something is essential, otherwise you're just a mouthpiece for the artist or the record label, but the issue a lot of us had was that off the record a lot of these journalists would talk to us at parties and say 'look, I actually really liked that record but i just thought it was time to move onto something else so we slagged it.' And it's ridiculous. But none of us bear any grudges and that's just the way it was.

Are you looking forward to your gigs in Edinburgh and Glasgow?

Absolutely. We've not been back to Edinburgh in a long time, certainly since the reunion. It's the Barras in Glasgow this time, which is bucket list for us. We've gotten close to Mogwai over the years and that's their home patch, so it'll be nice to catch up with them.

Make sure to have a wee look up at the ceiling of the Barrowlands. It's beautiful.

Difficult for us. Always looking at the shoes, aren't we?

Slowdive are playing the Barrowland Ballroom, Glasgow on the 23rd of February and Liquid Rooms, Edinburgh on 24th February. *Everything Is Alive* was released via Dead Oceans in September 2023



KATHERINE PRIDDY

Viewing Celtic Connections as a springboard for the full 12 months is a great way to plough through the initial days of a new year, and emerging to new music is always a thrill. This is why we're back with Katherine Priddy so quickly after chatting about her Celtic Connections performance: to get the full story about her second album, *The Pendulum Swing*.

New album lead track 'First House on the Left' also contains the album's title. Is this a track that captures the whole album for you?

Yes, to an extent. It's really tricky picking the first song to release from the album, as obviously they all have different sounds and flavours, but as the title is taken from a line in the song it felt right that this should come first.

The cliché says that artists have their whole life to write a debut album and then a short period to write a second. Has this been true for you?

Yeah, I've definitely felt that with this to an extent, although there's a few songs that were written some time ago that didn't make it onto the first record. On the whole, though, I didn't have that luxury of honing the songs for years and years during live performances. Plus, there's the added pressure of having a previous album to compare it to, which I definitely found a little unsettling every now and then.

Do you feel there's more of a theme or thread running through *The Pendulum Swing* than with your first album, *The Eternal Rocks Beneath*?

For *The Pendulum Swing*, the theme became quite apparent early on. It wasn't intentional – I didn't set out to write an album about home and family and that feeling of nostalgia, it's just something that's been dwelling on me a lot over the past couple of years and has emerged in my songwriting. I was locked down in my parents' home during COVID, then in a house share where I was really unhappy, then back again...there's been a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and touring and heartache, and working out where I want to be and where I feel like I belong. So I think it seemed only natural that a lot of the songs I wrote in this period were around those themes.

Your song 'Northern Sunrise' has been around for a few years: to you, does it feel like a new album song?

Yes, definitely, in that I wrote it after I'd recorded the first album and always had it in mind for the second album. It's a track that's always gone down well at live shows, so it was really nice to record it and build it up a little in the studio and give it the sound I've wanted it to have. It'll be nice to have it out there in its final form!

The Pendulum Swing is released on February 16th by Cooking Vinyl



YUMIKO ONO

Yumiko Ono's work confronts the idea of 'utopia', presenting us with structures that evade the ideas of typical architecture. Her use of ceramics and paper in uncommon and unique formations means that her buildings exist in the imaginative, artistic realm, rather than a practical one.

Could you explain the thought process behind these materials? Are you trying to create a reversal, almost turning buildings inside out?

I'm not an architect. I love seeing plans, for example, but I see them as pictures and architecture almost as a gigantic sculpture. My central theme is 'utopia', a place which doesn't exist in the real world, but only exists in art. By combining two opposite elements, which is architecture and anti-architectural materials, I can express the fictionality and fragility of the utopia itself. It looks like architecture but it's not at all: it's contrary to architecture.

When I think of utopia I think of a dream place, an ideal. You put it as a place that doesn't exist, which makes it seem almost unachievable. Are you saying that in a pessimistic way?

When you say 'utopia' in the Western way, people compare it with 'dystopia', and it has socialist connotations. In the East, we have a similar type of utopia, but it comes from an old Chinese fable which has nothing to do with socialism but is about an imaginary, beautiful place. I am combining this socialist element visually, but it's based on the understanding that it is only happening in artwork.

How do you grapple with the distinction between practicality and emotion when linking architecture with art?

Well for me, architecture is like the ultimate form of art. Imagine a big church – it has everything going on inside. It's not only a building but it combines paintings, music and religion all in one space. So I believe that architecture is just a very extravagant sort of art form. It is true that it is very practical at the same time, but mine isn't.

You've created art all over the world and often use materials that are specific to the region. Did you pick up anything specific in Edinburgh that helped you with this piece?

First of all, this composition series is the first one I have done on such a large scale. Before this I was slowly enlarging my work, but had no knowledge of building things. In the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop they had amazing staff who knew a lot about wood, and artists who knew how to make structures, so it was really fascinating to learn how to build big things. Something else I started doing here was experimenting with a more free style, instead of using moulds.

So your art has had the same sort of theme – but have you changed the way you approach it?

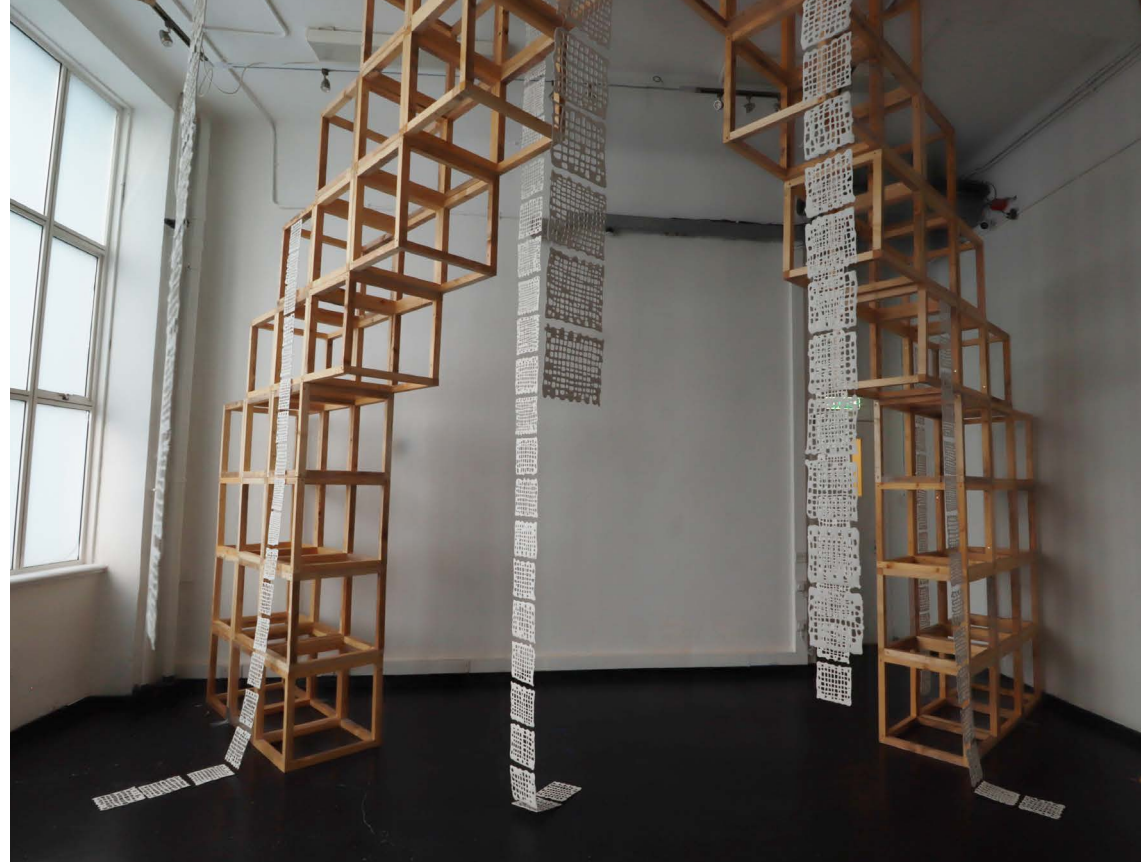
Yeah, I've started to be more tolerant of non-perfection. I think it's quite nice. Recently, my work has not been so 'perfect' but still contains a sense of order – between order and disorder.

Have your goals and motivations changed too?

Yeah, I started as a painter. I came to Scotland twenty years ago as an exchange student, actually as a painter! I always thought I could never do anything in 3D. The biggest difference between painting and installation work is that if it's painting, whatever you create only exists within that painting and you can create whatever comes into your imagination. But if it's a real object, there are so many complexities, right? There's the gravity issue, what kind of materials you use, how you hang it, it's just much more connected to reality and to other people as well. It's not something you can do by yourself.

So how come you prefer sculpture?

I found that painting was too limited for me. Sculpture was exciting. I loved being connected to so many different factors. It's kind of nice to be restricted in a way. You can't let your imagination run wild – you have to have some control. That's more challenging than letting yourself be totally free to create whatever. I just found painting kind of boring in the end.



Seeing as you work in a lot of different places and create art all over the world, what does belonging mean to you?

Belonging was actually my theme eight years ago, because I had been moving from one country to another for quite a few years. Then I actually lost my home when one of my parents passed away, and I had such a huge urge to find a new one. Eventually I realised that I had been moving from place to place to find an ideal as an artist. I didn't feel comfortable living in Japan because it's a very conservative country, and I was an outsider anyway so nobody really treated me as a real Japanese citizen. Then I hit upon this idea: what about just making this ideal place by myself, rather than finding it in the real world?

Do you have any plans moving forward?

I just want to go bigger and bigger and continue enlarging my work. I want to do pseudo architecture on a larger scale, not just with ceramic and paper, but on a real-life scale.

Yumiko's exhibition, *Composition IV*, will be shown at Summerhall as part of FORM: a season of exhibitions by contemporary female sculptors. The exhibition continues till 25th February 2024, Wednesday to Sunday

SHEKU BAYOH: THE INQUIRY



The public inquiry into the death of 31-year-old Sheku Bayoh, who lost his life after an encounter with the police, was convened in May 2022. *Sheku Bayoh: The Inquiry*, a podcast from The Ferret, has been summarising the evidence presented in the hearings. Co-presenters Karin Goodwin and Tomiwa Folorunso took some time to tell us why covering this inquiry is so important.

For people who might not be familiar with the case, can you give me a bit of an overview?

Tomiwa Folorunso: Sheku Bayoh was a Black man from Sierra Leone who was living in Kirkcaldy, in Fife. On 3rd May 2015, after an altercation with the police, he lost his life. He died in hospital that morning. His family, mainly led by his sister Kadi [Johnson], have been campaigning for answers since his death.

Karin Goodwin: In 2021 it was announced that they would have the inquiry the family had been calling for, into not only his death – he was restrained by six officers – but into what happened next and how his death was investigated. I think in this podcast what we are trying to do is just summarise the evidence in a way that is hopefully more humanising [than it's presented in the hearing], and to prompt the question: who is responsible?

Tomiwa: And also, what is justice, and what does that look like? There's so much information that is so dense and it can be really difficult to understand the significance of it. So our job is to just make that information as tangible as possible.

Sheku is sometimes referred to as ‘Scotland’s George Floyd’ and the similarities [in the two cases] are quite striking. Do you think there is a sense in the public mind that this is something that doesn’t happen here?

Karin: What’s interesting is: that’s not our tagline. That’s the family’s tagline. This happened before Black Lives Matter really took off. At the time, I think there was a much lesser awareness of disproportionate violence against Black men. And that doesn’t mean it wasn’t happening here, but yeah, I think the public awareness has probably not been that high. And that was really amplified by the Black Lives Matter protests across the States, which gave the family quite a lot of feeling of strength and hope but also a feeling of, well, what about some of the cases closer to home? I think Scotland does need to be mindful that things like this do happen. And the centuries of structural racism that our culture has inherited are not just going to go away without intentional change.

Tomiwa: I think there is a sense that this doesn’t happen here, and this isn’t our story. George Floyd was not the first Black man to die at the hands of the police in America, or in the world. I think what made that so striking was there were no questions around what had happened and what people saw. I think people are very good at having empathy when something is clear-cut. But if there’s any way that a Black man can *not* be the victim, they will find that way. If the Black man who’s died can be blamed for their death, people will look for that.

Do you think that the emphasis on Sheku being in a mental health crisis feeds into that?

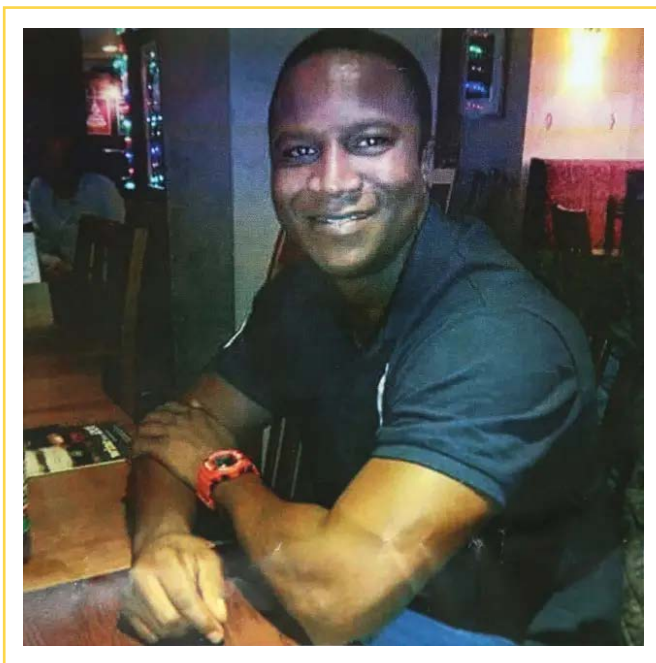
Tomiwa: It’s interesting that you said ‘being in a mental health crisis’ – a lot of people have not said that. They have said that Sheku was on drugs. The media sensationalising his death, what information was shared with the public and what was not – there are reasons behind why people do that.

Karin: The intersection between mental health and being a Black man makes you a disproportionate risk. And it is that intersection that’s really interesting. So what has been really fascinating, for me, is that this inquiry is actually a sort of window into a much wider look at Scottish society. And that’s through mental health; it’s through drug use, and our attitudes to drug use; it’s through our policing; it’s through our justice structures.

What can people do to help?

Tomiwa: Listen to the podcast. Share the podcast. It’s not about listening to us; it’s about just making the story trickle as far as possible. And also: show up. Kadi has sat in that room so many times, alone. If there was a way that at least one other person was sitting in that room with Kadi I know it would make a world of difference to her.

Karin: The unions across Scotland have been really great in mobilising around the campaign. But people get tired and there’s so many [other] things holding people’s attention. Our aim with the podcast is just to help you to reconnect with that and remind you why, actually, this issue hasn’t finished and it’s not gone. This isn’t just about one family getting justice, although that’s so important. It’s also about Scotland getting the type of systems that it needs and deserves.



You sign off the episodes by saying ‘good journalism changes things’. What’s your hope for this?

Karin: All of the hearings and all of the evidence statements have gone online. So there’s this incredibly overwhelming body of stuff. But if there’s recommendations, how do we make sure that those actually are enacted? And I think having the podcast there, that’s like: this is what they said they were going to do differently. This is what they said needed to be done differently. It’s a place where that’s a matter of public record.

Tomiwa: I don’t think there is a better place for the podcast to be hosted than The Ferret. Because there is such a commitment to good journalism, but also to finding the stories and the humanity behind that. There’s no other agenda apart from to give people the information. And that’s really important.

Evidential hearings in the Sheku Bayoh Inquiry are due to resume on Tuesday 6th February 2024

More on the Sheku Bayoh Inquiry, including a timeline of evidence and information on attending the hearings, can be found at shekubayohinquiry.scot

Sheku Bayoh: The Inquiry is an ongoing podcast from The Ferret

theferret.scot



ORZO TOMATO BAKE

Romance time is soon: whether you want to celebrate Valentine's Day with your valentine, galentine, or indeed take some time for yourself, we have an easy to make and tasty dish. No slaving over a hot stove here – get your ingredients together, cook them, and slam it in the oven to finish. More time for relaxing and enjoying your evening.

You can add a wide range of protein to this dish, from beans, to cheese, to tuna or chicken. Add some spinach for extra veggie goodness.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 courgette, sliced
- 400g of tomatoes, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 can of mixed beans (or your chosen protein)
- 2 tablespoons of tomato puree
- 1 teaspoon mixed herbs
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 500 ml vegetable stock
- 500g of orzo
- 150g mozzarella cheese, grated, or use sliced mozzarella

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/
Gas Mark 6.

Add oil to a large pot and warm the pot over a medium heat.

Add the onion, tomatoes, garlic, and salt and cook until the tomatoes break down enough to release their juices.

Next, add the tomato puree and stock to the pot alongside the mixed herbs and mix well.

Add the beans and orzo to the pot, mixing again.

Add the mixture to a baking dish and cook, uncovered, until the orzo is cooked through.

This should be about 15 minutes, depending on your oven.

Remove the orzo bake from the oven and sprinkle the mozzarella cheese on top.

Place under the grill to melt the cheese, or put back into the oven for 5 mins.

Serve with a side salad or garlic bread.



CLUELESS

Could this month's (Not) Gay Movie Club entrant be anything other than Amy Heckerling's beloved time capsule *Clueless*? As if! (I'm so sorry.)

I was an impressionable and *absolutely heterosexual*, thank you very much 13-year-old when I saw *Mean Girls* for the first time and experienced the same sensation I imagine audiences felt when first seeing *The Exorcist*, *Star Wars*, or *E.T.* It was a palpable cinematic moment that captured the serpentine dynamic of teenagers like nothing I'd seen; bitingly funny, instantly quotable, and aspirational. Now, am I rushing to see its new musical adaptation (movie > Broadway musical > movie is a curious journey for Cady and the gang)? No, I'll leave that to the next generation of Plastics and Sexually Active Band Geeks. And besides, there is one teen coming-of-age tale that has appealed to me even more than *Mean Girls* ever could: a film that unites every generation in some way and has aged like a fine, queer-coded wine. You know it's good when it was the only teen flick your English teacher would endorse on the last day of school.

For those who have been living on a different planet for the last 30 years, Cher Horowitz (played gloriously by the beautiful Alicia Silverstone) is a fashionable, amiable, and popular teenager living in Beverly Hills with her rich, widowed father, Mel. She has an ex-stepbrother, Josh, with whom she has palpable chemistry (he lambasts her vanity; she critiques his social justice crusade), and a best friend, Dionne, who is fab and wears great hats. Is Cher a vapid Valley Girl? Yes and no: she is the ultimate silly goose and may lack book smarts, but she has charm, stellar intuition, and can talk herself out of almost any problem. She sets to matchmaking two teachers to guarantee her a better grade, as well as taking new kid Tai (RIP Brittany Murphy) under her wing, sculpting her form from booger to popular girl like herself.

The hilarious script, written by Amy Heckerling herself, is razor-sharp and endlessly quotable. My personal favourites:

"Isn't my house classic? The columns date all the way back to 1972."

"Do you like Billie Holiday?"

'I love him!'"

"I was surfing the crimson wave. I had to haul ass to the ladies."

[while held at gunpoint] "You don't understand, it's an Alaïa!"

And, adapting Jane Austen's *Emma* loosely is a wise move: just like Emma, Cher is savvy, stylish, and satisfied emotionally by the romantic happiness of others. And what's cool about Cher is that, unlike your Regina Georges or Veronica Sawyers, she is *nice*. There is no malice in Cher, despite her Valley Girl persona and archetypal aesthetic. She takes Tai under her wing (even if a makeover experiment is perhaps not the most encouraging motive for a budding friendship). Perhaps there is a Marilyn quality to Silverstone here: the ditzy blonde archetype is subverted by emphasising her virtue and intuition. *Clueless* does have bite: 'You're a virgin that can't drive!' and 'That was way harsh, Tai...', but because Cher has such heart, the film separates itself from *Heathers* and *Mean Girls*. Sure, Cady learns her lesson at the end of the latter, but Cher is the blueprint for the ultimate teen idol: nice girl who dresses well, loves her friends and family, and cares about her grades. Urgh, I sound like your granny discussing a nice girl from church you've never met but should become friends with.

We must dedicate important space to the film's soundtrack, which cements its status as the quintessential 90s time capsule. The *Clueless* soundtrack is a 90s fever dream: we see Supergrass, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Radiohead, and Beastie Boys appear. But let's be real: the second 'Just a Girl' by No Doubt roars into the opening credits, a thunderbolt careers through our bodies and we are transported to a girls-to-the-front paradise. But it's not just the music that draws us in nearly 30 years after its release.

Consider the sustained impression Cher and her friends stamped on the fashion world alone. The film has enjoyed an enduring cultural impact, as seen in music videos, make-up collaborations, and countless appearances/reunions from the cast. I even watched the short-lived, mercifully forgotten TV adaptation in the mid-90s.

But what makes *Clueless* a queer cult classic? *Technically*, we have a gay character, Christian, which *technically* goes against our rule of a film having no explicitly queer characters. However, Cher (Horowitz and mononymous pop queen alike) is a gay icon: glamorous, ditzy yet witty, gorgeous hair, and certified beard to Christian. No matter how relentless her efforts are, Christian does not succumb to her feminine wiles. Dionne and Murray finally deduce, very sensitively, that Christian is undeniably 'a disco-dancing, Oscar-Wilde-reading, Streisand-ticket-holding friend of Dorothy's.' The 90s was a very different time, okay? However, Cher embraces Christian entirely and maintains their friendship. When one considers how cruelly and inaccurately LGBT+ characters have been portrayed in film historically, Christian's compassionate treatment feels like a small but valid milestone for a mainstream Hollywood *teen* movie. And aside from this, the film was built for women and gay men: smart, beautiful, stylish women having fun and gently satirising the world they live in, with access to that PC app that helps you choose your outfits, all to the sound of Gwen Stefani? Sign me up.

What lessons can we learn from Cher and her *Clueless* cohorts? Primarily, the don't-judge-a-book-by-its-cover cliché comes to mind, and also: wear plaid as much as possible. This film is comfort viewing personified – Cher's universe is safe, stylish, and the epitome of joy. Sure, it's a time capsule, but it's a lot rosier than the hellscape of 2024. The world needs more Chers. Maybe not people who drive like her: probably just the kindness and nice clothes parts.

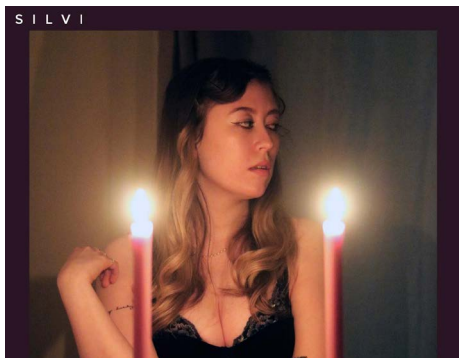
SNACK BITS

Now we're up and running. Celtic Connections is over, Dry January is in the bin, there's a touch more daylight to enjoy, and whether you love, loathe or avoid Valentine's Day, you've got an opinion on it. It's February, and SNACK Bits is coming alive for 2024.

And to ensure we steer clear of the cliché of love this month, we'll start with an evil track. 'Evil' by **Fright Years** has split opinion amongst the SNACK writers, but if the people who aren't fans of it want to make their thoughts heard, they should write this column. They don't, which means the track receives a public endorsement from us.

The Edinburgh act have always had a glacial touch to their tunes, but here there's an added level of menace to the juddering rhythm at the start before we reach the spirited push to the end. Singer Jules Kelly leads the way, shifting us from eerily hushed vocals to that emphatic end, and it's a song that could soundtrack a whole host of shows and emotions.

Silvi is also back with a menacing number, with 'Visions' carrying a dark side. As you'd expect, it's a great showcase for her impressive vocal range, and even though the track moves at a modest pace, there's enough twists to leave you in a sense of dread.



The same vibe and tone is offered by **SALT** on 'Roly Moes'. There's clearly something in the water, or maybe the whisky, that sees so many acts delivering tracks brimming with suspicion. With this track, it veers into something more traditional, especially with the chorus, making for a simple yet intriguing number.

Dragged Up are building to their *High On Ripple* album, due out in April, with 'Missing Person', which should be with you by the time this magazine is out. There's a punkish feel, but in a restrained way, and the spiky yet poppy guitar lines and chorus should be up the street of people old enough to know better, and those who wish they were. It's a cliché, but it has the hallmarks of a song that will go down well live.



'Faceliff' by **Dutch Wine** is another dark number, but with big guitars and a tempo you can swing to. This is quite a captivating tune that should appeal to those who like to rock out, and sets the tone for an EP that will be popping up on the horizon.

Speaking of EPs, but changing musical style, we have **Randan**. The name suggests we're in line for a rollicking good time, and while it takes a bit of time to swing into action, opener 'Whisper' from the *Silence Breaks Through* release offers just that. It's an acoustic collection, but there's plenty of up-tempo moments and the solos or flourishes add something to spice things up. It feels very Scottish in tone, so if you're feeling patriotic, this could be ideal.

Then again, sometimes an EP doesn't scratch the itch: you need something more. If quirky, cool electro appeals (which it should), **Aurora Engine** has a *Secret Knock* you should check out. 'Ice Pop Shop' is the lead single, wrapping itself around you with a mix of drama, theatre and off-kilter hooks. The artist has picked up plenty of airplay: it's the sort of thing that cuts through the airwaves leaving listeners going: who, or what, was that? If you fancy seeing and hearing it all live, The Wee Red Bar on 16th February is the place to be.



Photo credit: Laurence Winram

You probably don't need us to tell you **Arab Strap** are back, and let's leave the editors the task of worrying about how they'll present their album title. As it is, comeback single 'Bliss' is danceable, threatening, and enlightening. That's all you need for a great night out, and we'll join the throng looking forward to the rest of the new material.

Walt Disco are also back, and 'Pearl' is a rather unique number that glides by smoothly. It's got the feel of a song that would be more at home on a beach, but it's Scotland and February. This means it's chilled and slightly blue, even if it's sashaying with all its heart. Hopefully, this song is a taster of a bit more to come from these charming outsiders in the Scottish scene.

One of the best things about bands from Glasgow (and Lanarkshire, let's not claim everyone lives under the one roof) is how much they love sunshine bands from America, and who can blame them? One of the greatest Alasdair Gray lines (and it's from *Lanark*, but it's been referenced a lot recently in relation to *Poor Things*) is 'If a city hasn't been used by an artist, not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively', and while that's kind of true, why wouldn't you want to replicate the sound of joy and hope that comes from not having to wear a parka coat to school in the middle of summer? Give us chiming melodies, sun-kissed lyrics about cars, waves and the giddy smell of sunscreen and ambition, not horizontal rain, grey days and Vicks.

As a quick aside, this column hasn't seen *Poor Things* yet, not because we're outraged about Glasgow not featuring in it, but because steampunk aesthetics are a lot of bollocks, and shouldn't be encouraged. Best to watch that in the house when snide remarks about the style won't place me at risk of a punch to the back of the head.

Anyways, returning to Scottish bands capturing the hope and happiness associated with sunnier climes, **The Plastic Youth** give us 'Frankie', with winsome vocals, pleasant builds and a sense of wonder we hope they never lose.

If social media chat is anything to go by, The Tyde are gearing up to release new material in 2024, which is brilliant news. More surf, more sunshine, fewer cares and worries. The Plastic Youth are in that ballpark (skatepark) and while the chilly start-of-year vibes are making that such an enticing prospect, it'll likely feel as good when that day of sunshine joins us.

Then again, that's in the future, and we're here in the now, so it's good that **Naafi** brings us all indoors and invites us onto the dance floor. 'Magnolia' is a tingly and tinkling number, one for soft lights and sharp moves, with a hint of a pressing tempo that needs to take care of business. The vocals supplement without overwhelming the musical backing, and it's easy to see why so many people are getting excited about it. At just shy of three minutes, this track leaves you wanting more, and all indications are there's plenty more on offer from Naafi.

This is one of the great things about this time of year: it's positively brimming with possibilities and plans.

Leif Coffield keeps us on the dance floor, but the kicks are harder, the temperature is hotter, and the 80s vibe is doubling down. It's exactly what you want from a song called 'Fire It Up', and the slick production makes it a very pleasant listen.



Photo credit: Ailsa Morrison



Photo credit: Alliyah Enyo

We're taking you on a musical journey here, and **neverfine** have an ideal track to transition from the dance floor to the couch or kitchen. 'Colours' is mostly laid back, with a few kicks and bites to ensure you don't nod off. The vocals are lovely without demanding attention, marking this act out as one that is well worth paying attention to.

The neverfine track is the sort of thing Susan Bear used to serve up regularly, but now she's dishing out something far more energetic with a rave-computer style vibe. When you get your second wind, or want to liven up proceedings, 'Shake (Say Yes)' has all the attributes you need to power up and push on.

Hopefully there's a lot more of this to come from this artist as you feel as though there's a lot more to explore here, especially across the galloping final minute.

And talking of the galloping final minute, we're almost at the finishing line. **The Zebecks** fire up the indie dance floor with 'Medicate', complete with fuelled-up verses and singalong chorus. On the surface, it's a blast, and sure to perk up ears when played on the radio or even in a club, but delving into the lyrics sees the band tackle toxic masculinity and male entitlement. It's never a bad time to have a think about this, and whether it's yourself or someone you're close to who displays these traits, dropping this song might start a conversation that makes a change. We all want music to soundtrack our fun times, but it might also be the catalyst for improvement that really makes a difference.

Photo credit: Daniel Blake



And that seems like a good way to wrap things up for this month. February is a short one, so why not try and do something for yourself over its length? If it sticks and becomes a good habit, you'll reap the benefits for years to come. Or whatever: this is just a music column. There's better places to find life advice!

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REVIEW

EMMELINE CLEIN

Book: *Dead Weight*

Content note: discussion of disordered eating

Emmeline Clein's upcoming non-fiction work, *Dead Weight*, confronts a painful, confusing aspect of the human experience that's found, in varying degrees of covert or overt costume – and almost always embodied by unfairly felt shame and exhaustion – in almost every nook and cranny of life. It's found in the doctor's waiting room, at weddings or on school bathroom floors; in films, music, TV, and literature; or in the agonising walks to and from the subway to meet friends for an evening meal, laxatives painfully waiting in hand. We call it *disordered eating*, and have collectively examined its many tired faces from all sorts of chairs – sitting in it personally, hovering behind, or perching somewhere strange and unnameable in between.

It's a notoriously difficult topic to approach due to its emotional, medical, social, political, and pop-culture complexities, but Clein has here managed to distil and dissect a stunning array of unaddressed conversations, talking points and dilemmas about eating disorders into smart, unafraid prose carried by a compassionate understanding of the illnesses at hand. Exploring the sensitivities of disordered eating through stories and statistics, paired with sharp personal insights into past and current depictions of disordered eating across the wider cultural landscape, *Dead Weight* recounts Clein's own experience alongside the tales of other women.

Expertly formed to speak directly to those who need it most, *Dead Weight* was not written for a faceless or theorised audience, but for the rich tapestry of people affected by disordered eating and its many impacts.

A work heavily threaded with compassion and a burning need to explore every tentative angle, *Dead Weight* is a must-read for anyone wanting to contemplate the nuances of disordered eating from a vulnerable and unavoidably human perspective; a body of work you might wish strongly to place into the hands of your younger self years ago. A beautiful book from a rare and highly skilled essayist.

***Dead Weight* will be published by Picador in April 2024**

Ambrose Kelly

AJAY CLOSE

Book: *What Doesn't Kill Us*

It's always a pleasure to be able to recommend the books of Ajay Close. Since reading her debut novel, *Forspoken*, in 1998, there are few writers whose work I look forward to reading more. While you can never second-guess what she will be writing about, the novels often reflect upon relationships between women and men and the sociopolitical pressures and constructs behind them. These include *What We Did in the Dark*, about Scottish writer Catherine Carswell, and *A Petrol Scented Spring*, which looks at the women's suffrage movement, among others.

Her latest novel, *What Doesn't Kill Us*, continues this examination. Set in Yorkshire as the 1970s become the 80s, and greatly influenced by the real-life Yorkshire Ripper investigations, Close transports us to the time and place beautifully, evoking all the sights, sounds, smells, and attitudes of Britain – and that part of Britain in particular – touching not only on prevalent sexism, but also class, race, and sexuality.

It can be read in part as a police procedural thriller, with widespread fear and suspicion on the streets as the notorious 'Butcher' continues to threaten women and the police fail to find him, but this is set against a wider backdrop of misogyny which was not only institutional but endemic, with the threat of violence an everyday occurrence. The story is mostly split between the narratives of police constable Liz Seeley and the charismatic artist Charmaine. Each is struggling with who they are and where they belong, and it is their unlikely friendship that allows readers access to the wider situation, as their other relationships, often with people from very different layers of society, fill in further pieces of the picture. But it is the depiction of the social mores of the time that makes this essential reading. Ajay Close is too good a writer to offer easy answers or neat conclusions. *What Doesn't Kill Us* is an even-handed and in-depth examination of the growth of the Women's Liberation movement and the reasons it was necessary, and while it never shies away from the dark and desperate times, her journalist's desire to see all sides of the story is always in evidence, balancing theory and ideology with real life.

***What Doesn't Kill Us* is published by Saraband Books**

You can read our interview with Ajay Close in the January 2023 issue of SNACK

Alistair Braidwood

ALI MILLAR

Book: Ava Anna Ada

The latest work from Ali Millar, author of memoir *The Last Days, Ava Anna Ada* opens as it continues – flowing from one dreamy, gossamer sentence to another like black liquid, shaping with it a world that feels jarring and coldly dreamlike. Set in an all-too-familiar potential dystopia characterised by desperation, the creeping unknown, and an obsession with image, Millar sets the tone of their novel with the simple yet distressing event of an injured animal – a moment that will carry each character forwards with dread into the uncomfortable haze of a story that forces us to examine how things truly begin to look in the dark, even if we'd rather ignore them.

Told in split prose from multiple voices, *Ava Anna Ada* is a dark and beautiful gem. Opening readers to a story twisted with threads of violence and rage, climate change, sex and lust, and unbridled human impulse, Millar explores a world controlled by anxieties of The Screen and threats of the Deportations Bus arriving from the Sorting Centre, set in a claustrophobic realm called The Spit – a place that seems to hover above time and space, somewhere unpinnable yet freakishly familiar. Shifting from chapters under Ava, Anna, both, and 'We', Millar's debut novel draws us – sometimes peeking through fingers with apprehension and fear – to confront just how much humans hide of themselves, and the terrible repercussions born when truths emerge and thick deception comes to light. Uncomfortable, skillfully written, and ringing clear with gorgeous references to literary giants of the past, *Ava Anna Ada* is a book you will wish to read again and again, thankful to be protected from the story's dire hauntings and warnings by the safety of our present light, open rooms.

***Ava Anna Ada* by Ali Millar is published by White Rabbit Books**

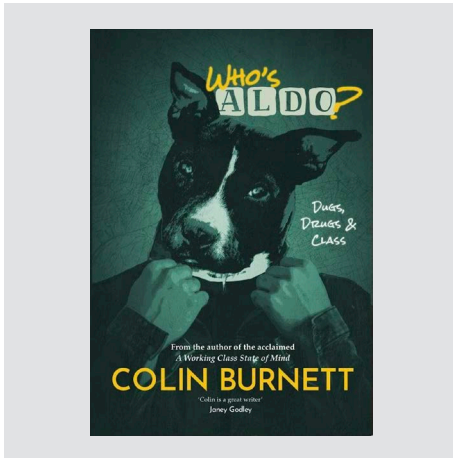
Ambrose Kelly

review@snackmag.co.uk **Page 37**

COLIN BURNETT

Book: *Who's Aldo?: Dugs, Drugs & Class*

Colin Burnett's previous book, the 2021 short story collection *A Working Class State of Mind*, introduced readers not only to the lives and times of Leith residents Aldo, Dougie, and Craig, but to a new and visceral voice in Scottish writing. Comparisons to Irvine Welsh were not just inevitable; they were entirely warranted. Burnett's new novel, *Who's Aldo?: Dugs, Drugs & Class*, sees his writing raised to another level, taking those returning characters and developing them into fully rounded individuals rather than the snapshots we had in the previous publication. The longer form writing allows space for individual characters to reveal their complexity and humanity, both good and bad – and everything in between. This particularly applies to Aldo, who emerges as an often conflicted and confused individual, despite his apparently impenetrable armour of gallus bravado. This is due in no small part to his love for his Staffordshire bull terrier, Bruce, who he often refers to as his son (leading to some comic misunderstandings) but who is, to all intents and purposes, his familiar – the physical manifestation of Aldo's conscience and morality.



Where *Who's Aldo?* really shines is in Burnett's use of language. It's one thing to have an ear for the way people speak, quite another to render it authentically on the page. This is where this writer comes into his own, lending everyone a distinct voice and therefore identity, and that includes characters both old and new. *Who's Aldo?* is a fast-paced, blackly comic read which doesn't shy away from the nasty and brutish sides of life. While it will be interesting to see where Colin Burnett goes next, it feels as if he is not finished with Aldo and his gang yet. What's undeniable is that *Who's Aldo?* confirms Colin Burnett is a writer to take note of – few writers detail working class experiences, both the walk and the talk, with the style and understanding he does.

***Who's Aldo?: Dugs, Drugs & Class* is published by Tippermuir Books**

Alistair Braidwood

KAVEH AKBAR

Book: *Martyr!*

Kaveh Akbar's *Martyr!* is a brilliant piece of writing, focusing on the mental struggle of an orphaned son of Iranian immigrants as he seeks meaning from life. The novel weaves together the protagonist's voice and those of the poets and friends he looks to for help, on a journey that takes him serendipitously to Brooklyn Museum, discussing martyrdom with a terminally ill artist and creating meaning through death.

Cyrus Shams is a young man struggling to come to terms with the cards life has dealt him, having lost his mother early in life when the plane she was travelling in was shot down over Tehran by the US. We see Cyrus at many stages of his struggle throughout: as a drunk, an addict, and finally as a poet attempting sobriety.

With a focus on martyrs, he considers his uncle, as well as his mother, and the roles their lives played, alongside the ways in which they gave up those lives, in particular with the story of his mother. Cyrus resists his own sexuality for much of this novel, perhaps as an aspect of his own martyrdom or perhaps out of guilt for the way he believes his family's lives have played out. We witness much of this through how he treats his friend Zee, with whom he falls into a sexual relationship: Cyrus occasionally attempts to date women but always comes back to Zee.

Dense and yet humorous, Kaveh Akbar's *Martyr!* is a profound contemporary novel that explores in a considered fashion the many layers to this man's mental battle. Sumptuous in its prose, aptly poetic in a novel in which a poet takes centre stage, it will hold you throughout Cyrus' wondrous journey.

***Martyr!* will be published 7th March,
by Picador**

Keira Brown

CAMLANN

Podcast

What happens when you take Arthurian legend and set it in a post-apocalyptic world where queer characters are at the forefront of the action? No takers? Okay, I'll tell you: *Camlann* is what happens. Told through the eyes of charming, funny, relatable characters (and their dug), we follow our would-be heroes through England and Wales as they try to find a haven in a world overrun with monsters of lore.

Dai, Perry, and Morgan have fled the devastation wreaked by monsters in the big cities and manage to reach Wales, but safety is a long way off. Hunting them are the Round Table 'knights', a former university rugby team gone rogue in the chaos.

The brainchild of Ella Watts, known for her co-creation of the BBC Sounds podcast *Doctor Who Redacted*, this series has been marinating for eight years. Written and directed by Watts and produced by Amber Devereux of Tin Can Audio, *Camlann* takes audio fiction to another dimension. The sound design alone is particularly special, knitting together dialogue, effects, and music in such a way that you can see the story playing out. This is no easy feat – often one or more of these areas are forgotten or favoured, with the listener struggling to fully understand what is happening amidst the auditory chaos. There is a fantastic meeting of old and new here too, with the accompanying soundtrack medieval in flavour, sitting comfortably with the crackle of walkie-talkies. The casting earns a gold star too, with wonderful performances from Tobias Weatherburn (*The A List*), Robyn Holdaway (*Sex Education*), Nicole Miners, Angharad Phillips, and Paul Warren.

***Camlann* is released 15th January with
subsequent episodes airing every fortnight**

Listen wherever you get your podcasts

Louise Holland

KILGOUR

Single: Feel The Weight

The soundtrack to your commute just dropped. Kilgour's latest single, 'Feel The Weight', mixes lyrics revolving around the despondency and repetitiveness of modern life with catchy, wobbly guitar riffs and self-described 'grumpy rock' vocals. A string of anthemic choruses lead into a melodic guitar solo in the bridge, accompanied by haunting backing vocals. It feels angsty and frustrated – it's how I feel getting the bus to work every day – and moreover, it's catchy, it's relatable, and it bops.

'Feel The Weight' is out now

Matthew O'Donnell

JULIA HOLTER

Single: Spinning

Holter's second single from upcoming album *Something in the Room She Moves* is a typically expansive and dissonant offering. A snappy percussion sits centre below Holter's swooping vocals and above the throaty, almost primeval bass wind instrumental, yet each thread in this track is wonderfully braided together through Holter's surreal lyricism. The freedom Holter sings of in this track – *expect nothing and seeking all* – is a paean to the love of melodic rule-breaking which has come to define her career.

'Spinning' is out now. *Something in the Room She Moves* is released 22nd

James Taylor



Photo credit: Camille Blake

JOSEPHINE SILLARS

Single: Move Higher

'Move Higher', the much-anticipated new single from Josephine Sillars, takes her to the next level; she's comprehensively beaten a boss and collected all of the XP. This is an anthemic, visceral song that showcases the pop power of Sillars' voice. Taken from her forthcoming EP, *The Loveliest Things Change*, you can almost touch the inspiration of Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* running throughout.

'Move Higher' begins soft and melodious, almost unworldly, before giving us a drum and synth climax worthy of closing a major motion picture. This is a redemption song for a new generation.

'Move Higher' is out now

Louise Holland

KRYPTIK

Single: Roses N Daisies

'Roses N Daisies' finds the Paisley MC and producer in introspective form with a look back at where he's come from, complete with some raw, confessional moments – a story about his brother hits hard exactly where it hurts. Smart, hard lyrics – see an excellent bit of wordplay about Batman and robbing – over a slippy, atmospheric beat from producer Louis Seivwright.

'Roses N Daisies' is out now

Chris Queen

NUOVI FRATELLI WITH NIMBUS SEXTET

Single: Searching (featuring Russell Stewart and lissappear)

Having worked on their last couple of albums together, producers Wayne Dickson and Luigi Pasquini have now built a sun-soaked cover of Roy Ayers' 1976 soul/jazz classic with the incredible musicians of Nimbus Sextet, making for a soaring, soulful piece. Joined on vocals by Russell Stewart and Lissa Chen Robertson of Atom Eyes/Yoko Pwno, this feels like the first, thankful, warm rays of summer.

'Searching' is out 16th February via Nuovi Fratelli Produzioni

Chris Queen

POLLY

Single: Project 46

'Project 46' is the welcome new work from noisy post-punk four piece POLLY, the first since their 2022 album, *SLUMP*. The opening, soothing chimes are immediately interrupted by a wall of sound. Thumping drums and an up-tempo bassline pair together, creating a heavy, driven rhythm, before the symphonic guitar work comes in. It's noisy, grungy, post-punk goodness all round as the overdrive kicks in, taking everything up a notch.

The gentle vocal work offers a brief respite, gliding into the mix and carrying us to the bridge. The whole song starts to swell, reaching a sonic peak – it's hairs-on-the-back-of-your-neck stuff. When I hear this song, I picture a wall of PA speakers in a basement venue, and I feel the sound hitting me.

'Project 46' is out from 9th February

Matthew O'Donnell

KINBOTE

Single: Lowe Sunsmasher

The latest from Glasgow-based electronic music producer Matt Gibb, this takes found sounds of wind chimes and rain hitting a snare drum, combining them with fuzzy bass and a joyously bouncy beat to make a whirling, loping rush of a tune. A glorious – and indecipherable – earworm that I've been singing wrongly for days.

'Lowe Sunsmasher' is out now via Lost Map

Chris Queen



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FRIGHT YEARS

Single: Evil

What if Girl in Red and Pillow Queens stumbled into Dr. Brundle's teleportation pod from *The Fly*? Yes, it's a weird question, but the new Fright Years single goes some way to answering it – with far more successful results. 'Evil' is a gorgeous slow burn, opening with a rocking palm-muted riff before giving way to striking pop vocals, shimmering shoegaze melodies, and a rousing, ethereal chorus. It's delightful.

'Evil' is out now

Chris Sneddon

FEEO

Single: it was then that i

On 'it was then that i', experimental producer and songwriter feeo mixes soft, soothing synths with thoughtful, free-flowing poetry: it's a combination that you could float away on. The melodies are childlike; comforting, even, and the electrical crackles and glitches add a timeless, nostalgic feel while generating an overwhelming sensation of satisfaction. A delightful oddity.

'it was then that i' is out now

Chris Sneddon



Photo credit: Daniela Germade

VANDERLYE

Single: Terrible Comfort

Although we're still a few months away from Rex Manning Day, Vanderlye's nostalgic new single, 'Terrible Comfort', would fit perfectly into Empire Records' alt-90s jukebox. Evoking the 'adult alternative' sensibility of the genre, the track contrasts youthful hopefulness with melancholic maturity by combining dreamy acoustic melodies and soaring synth, with sober lyrics that question: 'How can I believe in love [when] love never believed in me?'.

'Terrible Comfort' is out now

Rachael Currie

THE ZEBECKS

Single: Medicate

Decades of punk, rock, and indie proudly influence The Zebecks' self-described 'teuchter punk' style, but their new single, 'Medicate', finds them settled in somewhere around 2008, sounding like a Scottish Courteeners. But that doesn't mean it sounds dated – it's a firm compliment. 'Medicate' discusses modern themes of toxic masculinity, mental health, and male sexual entitlement while serving up a chorus that's as anthemic as they come.

'Medicate' is out on 9th February

Chris Sneddon



Photo credit: Daniel Blake

GIROBABIES

Single: Landfill Culture

Girobabies are about as underground as bands get, so if you've not been paying attention, it might surprise you to hear they've sold out the Barrowland Ballroom (twice). Their gutter-punk is perfect for a rowdy Barras audience, and one listen to the raging new single, 'Landfill Culture', is proof enough. It's an unstoppable, angry banger that'll have you belting back those relentlessly catchy lyrics: *The toon is deid! Why do we bother? This city is deid! Why do we suffer?*

'Landfill Culture' is out now

Chris Sneddon

BILL RYDER-JONES

Album: Iechyd Da

The media has painted Bill Ryder-Jones as a troubled artist, but as he told SNACK, he's a misery arse who loves a laugh. This duality of the man and his music is peppered throughout this stunning record, and if *Iechyd Da* isn't the best album of his career so far, it can only be behind by millimetres.

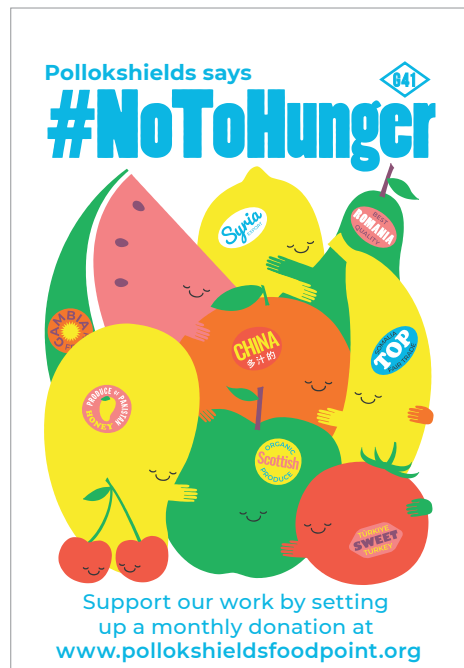
'It's Today Again' showcases his elevated craft, blending simple yet impactful lyrics, sweeping strings, and a kids' choir. Emotional moments, like 'A Bad Wind Blows In My Heart Part 3,' tug at the heartstrings, while 'We Don't Need Them' echoes The Polyphonic Spree's fragile strength. 'If Tomorrow Starts Without Me' is beautiful and 'This Can't Go On' could be overpowering in the wrong hands, but here it's damn near perfection.

The album references his earlier work but signifies a rejuvenated songwriter, emboldened by his production work, drawing inspiration and motivation from a broad source of artists. Tracks like 'Christinha' and 'How Beautiful I Am' immerse listeners in lines of love, regret, and optimism. *Iechyd Da* is a musical emotional blanket, offering solace in both good and bad times.

Bill Ryder-Jones has delivered everything and more, making this album a must-listen, and it's easy to see why so many people are already proclaiming it to be the album of the year. It's in the running.

***Iechyd Da* was released on 12th January on Domino Recordings**

Andrew Reilly



CHARLIE BUTLER

Album: Wild Fictions

Lanarkshire-based Charlie Butler is an incredibly prolific artist (having already released more than twenty productions since 2020) and this short yet stubbornly authoritative new album, *Wild Fictions*, confirms his position as the only player in his lane. This quartet of tracks is a winding and gripping journey into the dark, an unfaltering two-step to hell.

The biblical undertones of this album are suggested in the opening track, 'Twelve Apostles', a lengthy but rewarding introduction – the stark opening beat steadily thickens itself with layer upon layer of atonal, droning, but strangely moving melodic. It's as if each fold of the refrain represents a single apostle joining its brothers as the track builds momentum over its nine-minute duration, culminating in a bleak, dissonant synth choir of overwhelming power.

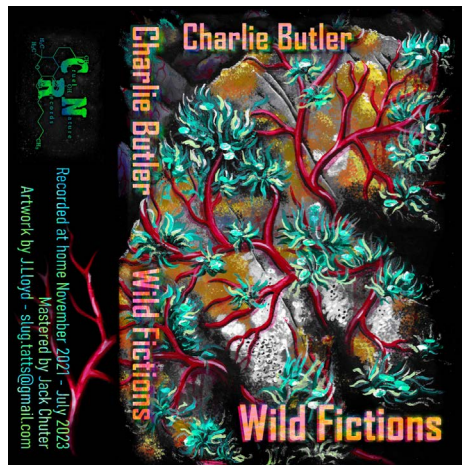
It's a track that underscores the flavour of the entire album – perky synths and guitar motifs loop and multiply themselves, wrapped in the booming moans of some otherworldly, infernal bagpipe chanter. It leaves the listener feeling edgy, yet quietly thrilled, the hypnotic arrangements repeating ad infinitum until they somehow combine into a genuinely moving crescendo. There is a melancholy and metallic density to these tracks, like watching some hulking battleship slowly slip beneath waves of dark chordal ambience. 'Dark Fractions', in which strings jangle and tremble above the ever-repeating refrains towards an unnervingly massive destination, tips the listener not towards anticlimax but genuine surprise. It's an abstract, brutalist work which leads the listener towards disaster but never quite reaches it, ending not with bangs but with curiously tame whimpers.

While at times the repetition, both within and beyond each track, can begin to jar, it nevertheless achieves a genuine human response, a weird, bleak feeling of listening to a soundtrack for the end times. This is an album for the capitalist apocalypse: the steady march towards disaster is woven with the cries of the machine.

Wild Fictions is out now

Limited edition cassettes are available from [Charlie Butler's Bandcamp page](#), with 40 copies available worldwide

James Taylor



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GILLIAN FLEETWOOD

Album: *Together With Yourself At Sea Level*

Rejuvenation and revitalisation are common goals for people, but on *Together With Yourself At Sea Level*, Gillian Fleetwood, a gaggle of talented musicians, and a 200-year-old harp create a compelling companion to an artefact you'd more readily associate with Zelda than Arbroath.

The story behind the album is compelling: its creator overcoming health challenges while the Erard Grecian harp housed at Arbroath's Hospitalfield House takes centre stage in proceedings.

It's a beguiling record, with the effortless flow casting a spell; often soothing and wondrous, but always active enough to ensure you never drop your guard. It's far from a solo piece, though – it's an ensemble cast, with the violin, cello, drums, trombones, and some instruments that this writer cannot pronounce, let alone spell!

The body of performers evoke empathy while retaining clarity, allowing songs to swirl around you, creating a sense of change, yet leading you to calmness. There are some lyrics, which is ideal as Gillian is a singer of great talent and emotion; but musically, expect to travel far and wide while in the comfort of your chair.

'For The Bathtubs + Freya's' is enchanting, but the love and affection shines throughout, making for a joyous collection.

***Together With Yourself At Sea Level* is out now**

Andrew Reilly

KATHERINE PRIDDY

Album: *The Pendulum Swing*

The Pendulum Swing is a record of everyday dreams; of family; of romantic love lost, spurned, and yet to come.

The album shows maturity and growth, both musically and with respect to Katherine's storytelling. Debut album *The Eternal Rocks Beneath* featured fantastic tales, drawing on Greek mythology, Emily Brontë, and inspiration you'd expect from an English Literature graduate. This time, the stories are just as enthralling, but they're closer to home. It's to Katherine's credit that the tales remain as universal, and they should strike chords in homes across the land.

And pleasing chords and notes are struck throughout the record, with a broader feel than the debut. The folk feel is accompanied by country vibes, with many magical moments littered throughout. The percussion on live favourite 'Northern Sunrise', the mariachi feel to 'Does She Hold You Like I Did' and steel guitar on 'These Words of Mine' share the workload with the expected clever words and lilting melodies.

No matter your story, situation, or setting, at least one song will burrow deep into your heart, and that's all we need from songwriters. You've many great artists to choose from, but your time will be well rewarded by investing in Katherine Priddy.

***The Pendulum Swing* is released on 16th February on Cooking Vinyl**

Andrew Reilly

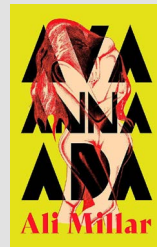
TEN BOOKS FOR 2024

2023 was another impressive year for Scottish writing, with many of the best books reviewed and discussed in SNACK throughout (check back). We also like to look forward to what's coming in the year ahead and, with that in mind, here are ten titles which will be published in 2024, all of which promise great things. And for a slightly more in-depth look at the books featured here, see the SNACK website.

ALI MILLAR – AVA ANNA ADA

Perhaps the most eagerly awaited debut novel of the year is Ali Millar's *Ava Anna Ada*, due in no small part to the success of Millar's critically acclaimed memoir *The Last Days* (published by Ebury Press). *Ava Anna Ada* introduces readers to Ava and Anna, the palindromic pair whose lives intertwine against the backdrop of a brutally hot summer, and that heat seeps into the writing itself. And who is Ada? You'll have to find that out for yourself.

Ava Anna Ada is published with White Rabbit Books, 18th January



GATHERING: WOMEN OF COLOUR ON NATURE – EDITED BY DURRE SHAHWAR & NASIA SARWAR-SKUSE

Nature writing has continued to grow in popularity over recent years, and perhaps particularly post-pandemic. *Gathering* promises new voices commenting and providing perspective on the world around us, giving a more rounded and diverse picture of the natural world and our interactions with it than was previously the case.

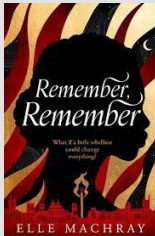
Gathering: Women of Colour on Nature is published with 404 Ink, 15th February



ELLE MACHRAY – REMEMBER REMEMBER

In recent years historical fiction has been among the most interesting and inventive genres of writing, and Elle Machray's *Remember Remember* looks set to continue this trend. The consequences of the British Empire continue to cast significant shadows over life in the United Kingdom, and around the world. *Remember Remember* creates an alternative history to try and better understand our lives today.

***Remember Remember* is published by Harper Collins, 29th February**

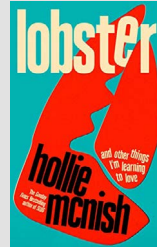


HOLLIE MCNISH – LOBSTER: AND OTHER THINGS I'M LEARNING TO LOVE

Readers often get evangelical about books (I know I do) and in the last couple of years the one the most people have raved about and recommended to me has been Hollie McNish's *Slug* (published by Fleet).

Lobster is a companion collection to *Slug*, and looks set to capture further hearts and minds, as few writers present the world to us with the honesty and insight of Hollie McNish.

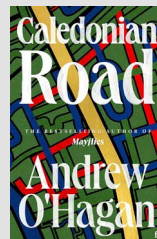
***Lobster* is published with Little, Brown Book Group, 14th March**



ANDREW O'HAGAN – CALEDONIAN ROAD

Long considered one of the very best writers around, Andrew O'Hagan's previous novel *Mayflies* (published by Faber & Faber) reached a new readership, in no small part due to the superb BBC TV adaptation. His latest, *Caledonian Road*, promises a 'state-of-the-nation' novel, examined through the fall of one man. A new Andrew O'Hagan novel is always worthy of note, but this sounds like a book for our times.

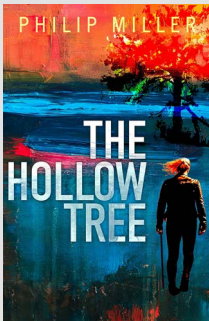
***Caledonian Road* is published with Faber & Faber, 2nd April**



PHILIP MILLER – *THE HOLLOW TREE*

Philip Miller's novel *The Goldenacre* (published by Polygon) was one of SNACK's 2022 books of the year, bringing a stylish and artful twist to Scottish crime fiction, and a new protagonist in journalist Shona Sandison. The eagerly awaited *The Hollow Tree* is the next in the series (with a third promised) which is exciting news not only for those who love their crime fiction, but readers in general, as this is writing of the highest quality.

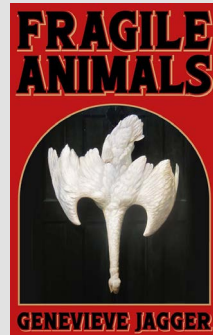
***The Hollow Tree* is published with Polygon Books, 4th April**



GENEVIEVE JAGGER – *FRAGILE ANIMALS*

If the single-sentence sell is 'lapsed Catholic has an affair with a vampire' then it's no wonder Genevieve Jagger's debut novel, *Fragile Animals*, is one of the forthcoming books which has caught our attention. Promising to 'bridge the gaps between contemporary gothic fiction, queer fiction and magical realism', *Fragile Animals* could be the novel we're all talking about come the end of the year.

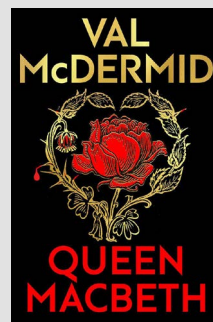
***Fragile Animals* is published by 404 Ink, 25th April**



VAL MCDERMID – *QUEEN MACBETH*

Polygon's Darkland Tales have proved to be among the most exciting series of books of recent years, with previous publications from Denise Mina, Jenni Fagan, Alan Warner, and David Greig all making a mark. The latest is by Val McDermid, and it is incredibly exciting to consider what she will bring to the story of *Queen Macbeth*. Expect the unexpected.

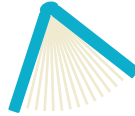
***Queen Macbeth* is published with Polygon Books, 2nd May**



**ANDRES N. ORDORICA –
HOW WE NAMED THE STARS**

Better known as a poet – his collection *At Least This I Know* (published with 404 Ink) is one of the most personal, sensual and moving of recent times – it’s intriguing to anticipate how Andres N. Ordorica’s mastery of language and poetic sensibilities will emerge in the longer form of fiction with the novel *How We Named the Stars*. I anticipate something very special.

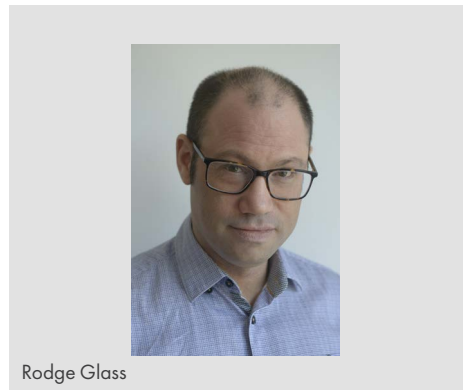
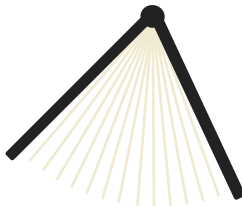
***How We Named the Stars* is published with Saraband Books, 4th July**



RODGE GLASS – JOSHUA IN THE SKY

Rodge Glass has already proved himself one of the most versatile writers around, with notable novels, non-fiction, academic writing, and critically acclaimed biographies of Alasdair Gray and, most recently, Michel Faber. *Joshua in the Sky* is a memoir which touches on life, death, love, family, and remembrance, and can be described as both autobiography and biography.

***Joshua in the Sky* is published with Taproot Press, 5th September**



Rodge Glass

Photo credit: Alan Dimmick



FOREST FIRE

After Wangari Maathai

And I was always that hummingbird spitting furiously
Laconic in my responsibility, the weight of it all – O,
The weightlessness of flaming amber. My wings
Beat furiously, futile say some. I ran relentless from the
Stream to the inferno.

And I was always those animals watching their home
Burn so sure there was nothing that could be done, seeing
The birdself with her tiring wings try the best she could
Crumpling into laughter, unfeeling.

And I was always that tree, reaching my branches out
To fall into ash. Sap to solid, spruce to echo-excision,
Life into something after itself. Family surrounded me
Incinerating, our crackled cheeks blazing rouge. My
Heart never not breaking truly.

And I was always that forest fire, ripping through roots
Leaving a trail of banging doors and cascading
Cocoon. And I was always that ash, with nothing
Left to say other than I was here. And I was –
Always.

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