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COVER STORY CHICAGO

A YOUNG RISING STAR ★ MEAZA JOY

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Acclaimed producer, promoter, and entrepreneur Army Granat, a Tony Award-winning impresario and co-founder of Jam Productions, has signed rising blues-rock and soul artist Meaza Joy for management through his company, Grand Slam Productions. Granat will represent the 17-year-old singer-songwriter in pursuing domestic and international opportunities across music, live performance, media, and entertainment.

A powerful new voice in contemporary blues, rock, and soul, **Meaza Joy** has quickly built a loyal following through dynamic live performances, commanding stage presence, and authentic songwriting. Her debut album, *Free To Be Me*, produced by Blues Music Award winning vocalist **Annika Chambers** and acclaimed guitarist **Paul Deslauriers**, is available now on all major streaming platforms and through her official website.

Granat brings more than five decades of entertainment experience to the partnership. As co-founder of **Jam Productions**, he helped build one of North America's largest independent concert-promotion companies, presenting more than 100,000 live events featuring legendary artists like **The Rolling Stones**, **Madonna**, **Frank Sinatra**, **Whitney Houston**, **Sting**, and **Diana Ross**.

His reach extends well beyond the concert stage. Army has produced and developed major touring attractions and cultural events, including the inaugural Farm Aid concert in **Champaign, Illinois**; the grand opening of Chicago's **Millennium Park**; the nationally touring **BODIES: The Exhibition**; and a



touring exhibition presented in partnership with the **National Baseball Hall of Fame**. Through his theatrical division, **Jam Theatricals**, productions under his co-direction have earned ten Tony Awards, cementing his reputation as one of the industry's most respected visionaries. In 2012 he launched **Grand Slam Productions**, followed in 2021 by **MPAG**, expanding his work into large-scale live experiences and international productions.

"I've had the privilege of working with some of the biggest names in entertainment over the last five decades, and I don't make comparisons lightly," said Granat. "What makes Meaza special isn't just her voice, it's her authenticity, and her ability to connect with audiences across generations. The future of blues and soul music depends on artists who can honor the roots of the genre while bringing something fresh and relevant to today's listeners. She has the talent, the work ethic, and the artistic vision to introduce this music to an entirely new audience."

Meaza Joy is a singer, songwriter, model, and actress from the **St. Louis** area who began performing and recording at an early age. She has appeared at the International Blues Challenge in **Memphis**, the National Women in Blues Showcase, and the renowned Chicago Blues Festival, and is a proud member of the Pinetop Perkins Foundation, which supports the preservation and advancement of blues music for future generations.

"I'm thrilled to be working with Army Granat," said Meaza Joy.



"His experience, accomplishments, and passion for live music are truly inspiring. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn from someone who has helped shape the entertainment industry while bringing my music to new audiences around the world."

Granat's management of Meaza Joy marks another chapter in his long history of identifying, developing, and championing exceptional talent across music, theater, and live entertainment.



IN CONCERT

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by Jorge Suarez

TUSK Fleetwood Mac Tribute Band

Returning Having seen my share of tribute bands over the years, it doesn't take long to recognize when a performance rises above simply recreating familiar songs.

Combining That was immediately apparent when TUSK took the stage at the Des Plaines Theatre. Within the first few numbers, it was easy to understand why they have earned a reputation as one of the premier Fleetwood Mac tribute acts touring today.

What struck me most wasn't their effort to look or sound exactly like the original band, and it was the genuine appreciation they brought to every performance.

From the soaring vocal harmonies and tasteful guitar work to the rich keyboard arrangements and steady rhythm section, every note reflected a deep respect for **Fleetwood Mac's** remarkable catalog. Rather than impersonating the legendary musicians, each member captured the heart and emotion that made the band's music resonate with generations of fans.

That authenticity doesn't happen overnight. It comes from years of performing together, refining every musical detail, and developing the chemistry that allows the songs to flow naturally from one to the next.

The connection among the band members was evident throughout the evening, creating a performance that felt polished, confident, and remarkably true to the spirit of Fleetwood Mac, while introducing it to a new generation!

More than a concert, **TUSK** delivered an experience that transported the audience back to one of rock's most memorable eras. Classic albums such as *Rumours*, *Fleetwood Mac*, and *Tusk* came to life once again, reminding longtime fans why these recordings became the soundtrack to so many lives.

It was an evening filled with nostalgia, exceptional musicianship, and a heartfelt tribute to one of the most influential bands in rock history. What stayed with me most was the heart this group puts into every performance. They aren't trying to be copies of Fleetwood Mac, they're paying tribute to the music and the memories that so many of us have carried for years.

You can see the respect they have for the original band in every harmony, every guitar solo, and every quiet moment between the big songs.

A major part of TUSK's success lies in the chemistry shared by its talented musicians, each of whom brings a deep appreciation for Fleetwood Mac's enduring legacy.



Kathy Phillips delivers a captivating portrayal of Stevie Nicks, capturing both the vocal style and charismatic stage presence that fans have admired for decades. **Scott McDonald** takes on the demanding role of **Lindsey Buckingham**, skillfully recreating the intricate guitar work, expressive vocals, and musical intensity that became a defining part of Fleetwood Mac's signature sound. At the keyboards, **Kim Williams** pays tribute to **Christine McVie** with graceful vocals and tasteful musicianship, bringing warmth and emotion to many of the band's most beloved classics.

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SELF TRANSFORMATION

HEALTH & WELLNESS

COLOR ME RELAXED

Visit a bookstore and you will notice a surge in the availability of adult coloring books. We are not talking about x-rated versions, although they are out there, but just common everyday coloring books. Some have themes, like animals, stained glass, or flowers.

Some are targeted to topics like mental health, positive sayings or even religiously focused. If you can think of a topic, there is an adult coloring book to match that interest.

You can get them CDs that have binaural sound while you color (lots of research behind the benefits of that!). If coloring sounds like it could be keeping you from doing something better, read on.

Remember coloring as kids? There were all kinds of coloring books! Some were cartoon characters, some included stories so you could read and color and some were activity-based. There were also those three foot high coloring books that took up the whole kitchen table.

Most of us used crayons to color and if you had the 128 count of crayons, you were one lucky kid! Once in awhile you could enter a contest to name a center color crayon and you were always surprised when you didn't win. Then you were mad when you found out the color name selected was "Macaroni and Cheese". Ugh, what a stupid name. If you were a kid like me, just out of principle you would throw that color away, never to be used. But, hey, that is just diagnostically me.

Research tells us that coloring, as an adult, is not just a return to your childhood. Oh, it is way more than just nostalgia. The results of coloring has real impact on your brain and general mental health. It is actually good for you.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS COLORING CAN DO FOR YOU

Coloring can cause the release of dopamine in the brain triggering a relaxation response as your memories take you back to a time of adult-free work and family pressures; everyday-living worries and stress.

Coloring provides focused time to color and movement that is received by your brain as a form of meditation. For the time you are coloring, you have time away from the busyness that is always in your head.

Coloring is so individual. You are making your own color choices and your senses are creating a reduction in stress. Coloring is a process and unlike much of what we do, the outcome is not as important, and that alone is anxiety-reducing. Coloring is intentional relaxation.

Coloring does not need to be taught. Everyone knows how to do it. There is no starting and ending point. People who find meditation and other relaxation exercises a chore, involving practice and a designed way of moving through a process, only need to pick up a crayon, colored pencil or marker and they are participants in a brain and body healing activity.

You don't need to find a special place or wear loose-clothes. You can even engage your kids and participate with them. A whole family can color, leading to a beautiful quiet time where everyone can have a sense of achievement.

There are so many reasons to color. But I will close this article so you can go get your coloring book and crayons! **Enjoy.**

PART TWO INTERVIEW

WITH ARNY GRANAT

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ARNY GRANAT Q&A CONTINUED

Q: Mike Macharello: We left off in our last exciting issue with these interview question(s): Was going into business just a gamble?

A: Arny Granat: Well, being in the business that I'm in, it's always a gamble. It's a gambling business, that's what I do for a living. To answer your question, I actually don't remember saying that about the **War** concert, and no, I didn't think of it one way or another. It was just a show we did. It had no particular deeper meaning, and it's nothing I can remember when I said, *"Wow, this is an epiphany I'm having here, and this is something I'm destined to do."*

Q: Once again on how you were able to get the City of Chicago to agree to outdoor shows.

A: We had the leverage because we developed all the talent. We built these acts up from small clubs to the point where they became massive stadium acts like **Aerosmith**.

For larger venues, like **Grant Park**, **Soldier Field**, it was the same process as small shows, you just had to go in, make a deal with the venues, and City, provide all the financial guarantees, cross the T's, and dot the I's. Security is probably the most important thing to the City.

Because we owned our own security company, we were highly security-minded. Another note, over the years, if you look back, the press on **JAM Productions** was never really negative. Today is different, everybody has an opinion about **Live Nation**, mostly negative, the fans, the media, whatever. But JAM never had a bad rap. Because our tagline was always: *"Brought to you by your friends at JAM."*

We borrowed *"a little help from our friends,"* from the **Beatles**. We had the talent, so when we needed a venue for 40,000 to 50,000 people, one plus one equaled four.

Fans we built and promoted shows at **World Music Theater (WMT)** in **Tinley Park**. It was groundbreaking. For example, the first **Lollapalooza** festival was at **WMT** and they sold it out. 30,000 people, that was way before it became a permanent downtown City festival. After that, the festival scene literally exploded.

The following year, the organizers called me and said, *"We want to do Lollapalooza again at the World."* I asked, *"Who's on the bill?"* They said, *"We don't know yet."* I said, *"And you want me to put it in the papers?"* They said, *"Yeah."* So we put an ad in the paper that just said: **Lollapalooz**. They trusted me, and it sold out with no lineup announced!

Eventually, a separate company bought the festival and brought it downtown as a massive weekend event, and we didn't participate in that. I wish we would have, but that's how it went.

WINNING 9 TONY AWARDS WITH "JAM THEATRICALS"

Q: Most people know you for promoting rock concerts, but you actually won nine Tony Awards. How did an independent promoter's mindset translate into the subscription driven world of Broadway?

A: Well, I saw the music industry changing before it actually changed. There wasn't a massive corporate **Live Nation** at the time, but a guy named **Bob Sillerman** of **SFX** bought up regional promoters, which turned into **Clear Channel**, which turned into the corporate giant **Live Nation**. Things were shifting financially due to the internet, technology, and consolidation.

Q: Was that when you decided to try your hand at **Broadway** theater?

A: Yeah. The theater thing started because of **Steve Traxler**, who worked at **JAM Productions**. Steve came to me one day and said, *"I think we should start a theater department."* I said, *"What the fuck is that?"*

He explained his idea... **Chicago** was already covered because corporate entities owned the main downtown theaters and were the biggest producers. But there was a massive national network of 27 to 30 secondary and tertiary markets where we could promote touring Broadway shows.

We set up subscription models in cities like **Des Moines**, **Reno**, smaller

markets where people buy a season pass for five or six shows a year. We would bring a Broadway tour in for a day, a week, or two weeks. To get the rights, we would invest a little bit of seed money into the original **New York** Broadway productions. That way, when the show went on the road, the New York agents would talk to us first.

Because we could buy up 10 to 27 markets at once for a tour, we became a prominent buyer for shows like *Cats*, *Rent*, or whatever else was hot at the time. We implemented that strategy, it was wildly successful, and that's how I got into theater.

On Broadway proper, we raised money and invested as producers. We won nine Tony Awards under the **JAM Theatricals** banner before I eventually sold my shares, and Steve later sold JAM Theatricals to the Nederlander organization.

Q: So, how did you know what shows to book?

A: A lot of it was pure gut feeling. People are much more analytical today, but for me, it was intuition. Jerry and my team listened to new music more than I did, I just knew what was hot. I could talk to a few kids and find out what was going to explode.

When American Idol first came out, I remember sitting at a Jewish holiday dinner with my family. I said, "I'm thinking of buying the touring rights for this new show, American Idol." The kids at the table literally jumped to the ceiling. I walked into the next room, called my guys, and said, "Buy that fucking tour!"

Q: What was Lightscape?... And what was your mind-set when you were assessing taking the risk?

A: If I have one strength to top all of my weaknesses, it's having vision for businesses. I just didn't overthink how badly we could lose. My personal motto is: *"It's not how much you make; it's how much you don't lose!"*

When I look at an investment, or when someone comes to me for advice, I map out the worst-case scenario. If a show costs \$1 million to produce, you aren't going to lose the whole million, you're going to sell some tickets. But let's say you stand to lose \$200,000. Can you live with that? What about \$100,000? What about \$50,000? There's a threshold. In our business, I could live with losing \$50,000 or \$100,000 on a gamble. But a million? I wouldn't take that risk if I could avoid it. That was the mindset.

You have to remember, there was no organized "concert industry" when we started. It was just individual local promoters. **Frank Fried** of **Triangle Productions** did **The Beatles** at **Comiskey Park**. There were about 20 to 30 independent guys across the country back then. It was a "boys' network" in those days, women are thankfully heavily involved now, but back then it was different, and every major city had its own local kingpin promoter. It was sort of like the Mafia, but without the violence.

Q: What Cities did you work and book shows in?

We worked **Chicago** and **Minneapolis**. Another guy had **New York**, another had **Boston**, another had **Philadelphia**. Every city had a version of JAM. We heavily respected each other's territories. That's something I'm very proud of.

Q: What other difficulties did you face as promoter?

A: The tough part about a concert is that once the night is over, you win or you lose. It's not like manufacturing widgets. If you buy a inventory of items and don't sell them all today, you can leave them on the shelf and resell them tomorrow. When a concert night ends, that inventory is gone forever. Because of that, there is a vital word you have to learn in life and business. The word is NO.

In my career, I relied on two phrases. The first was: "No problem." That didn't actually mean I had a solution yet; it just meant that at the exact moment a rock star asked me to source a live kangaroo for their dressing room, I'd say "No problem" to keep them happy, and then figure out how the hell to do it later.

Secondly, you have to learn to say "No" when it matters. At the **World Music Theater**, the surrounding residential suburbs would constantly complain about the volume of the rock concerts. We had to go to the bands and say, *"Please, you cannot go over this decibel limit."* They didn't listen most of the time. There were times when because of union overtime, venue curfew fines, and local laws, you had to look a rock-star and their manager in the eye and say, *"If you don't wrap it up, we are pulling the plug on the power, because we only have legal permission to go until this exact minute."*

It's a hard word to say because our entire job is to please people and find solutions. But as I always say: *"It's a hell of a lot easier to ride a horse in the direction it's already heading."*

>> MORE FROM ARNY GRANAT >>

THE MODERN MUSIC LANDSCAPE & THE BUCKET LIST

Q: What was it like when you saw massive changes happening in the music business at that time?

A: I remember when MTV first came along, critics said, *"Oh, this video stuff is going to kill live concerts."* And it did not! I was right about that.

Q: What about the state of the industry today? Ticket prices nowadays are astronomical.

A: The world has changed. They tell you not to look at the expensive corporate seating in the front rows, but look at the balconies in the back, sometimes those seats are completely empty because real fans are priced out.



Q: Do you think there's an opportunity today for a new independent promoter with a bright idea to combat the corporate model? Can someone create a different, more lucrative model that is better and cheaper for the average concert-goer, or are prices just going to keep skyrocketing?

A: I would say it would be incredibly difficult to recreate what we did... though I never say never. There could be a new version of JAM out there, young guys trying to revolutionize things, much like how the **Salt Shed** recently carved out its own space in Chicago. A smaller, independent boutique venue is probably the only real entry level left, but even then, you face massive competition from entrenched corporate venues with high ticket prices and exclusive booking contracts.

If the artists themselves keep demanding and charging millions of dollars to perform, there's no margin left to lower prices. Back in the day, record companies used to financially subsidize tours to sell albums. If we had a developing act at the **Park West**, the record

label would buy up a block of 100 tickets to support it. Great! Today, a record label wouldn't buy a single ticket. You have no tour support, and traditional radio doesn't dictate hits anymore. It's a totally different ball game. Can someone reinvent the wheel? Yeah, maybe with AI, anybody could. I don't personally see how right now, but it could happen.

I do believe live entertainment will always survive. Just remember, Roman Gladiators existed thousands of years ago because humans need live spectacles. When MTV came along, they swore it would kill the live concert, and it didn't.

Q: Is there anything you haven't done yet that remains at the top of your personal bucket list?

A: Yes. I've been wanting to write a book that people have been nagging me to write. I have a title ready. *"I Said This... But I Meant That."* I don't want it to be just about me, I want it to be inspirational to anyone who will read it.

Secondly, I'd love to win a Grammy Award with one of the new independent artists I'm managing.

I've decided to become a talent manager. All my old industry friends who manage massive corporate groups looked at me and said, *"What the fuck are you doing? Management is a young man's game, it's a money pit, and it's brutally hard to break a new act."* And they're completely right! But I'm doing it anyway.

I'm managing some great new talent. One of them is a 17-year-old blues prodigy named **Meaza Joy**. She just played the **Blues Festival**, and she just signed to Blind Pig Records, which is a legendary blues label. She does authentic blues right now, but she'll eventually expand into contemporary music. For right now, it's a brilliant niche. There are no other 17-year-olds doing raw blues, it's all older people. The blues community is thrilled because if she can connect with kids her own

>> **MORE ARMY GRANAT** >>

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>>INTERVIEW>>

WITH ARNY GRANAT

social media, she can introduce an entire generation to a genre they wouldn't otherwise know.

I also manage an authentic alternative country girl-group from **Canada** called **The Heels**, who I believe will pop to stardom any moment now! They have amazing harmonies and people all over the country love them. I manage a mature songwriter named **Sonny Luka**, who has one of the most fantastic voices that I ever heard. And I manage my beautiful wife, **Irene Michaels**, who has released a number of successful tracks and is a total trailblazer on the local Chicago scene and is ready to break out nationally.

Third, I bought the rights and had a script written for a movie called *My Last Skirt*. It's a phenomenal historic story about a woman during the Civil War who disguises herself as a man to fight on the front lines. It's been very hard to secure the independent financing for it.

ARNY'S FINAL WISDOM THE 72-HOUR RULE

Q: Any last words of advice for our readers?

A: I live by the 72-Hour Rule when major problems hit you in life: The First 24 Hours: Don't panic or try to fix it immediately. Just absorb the situation. Accept reality. Okay, this terrible thing happened, I lost a contract, whatever it is. The Second 24 Hours: Spend this time purely analyzing the data. Break down the logistics and figure out what your options are. The Final 24 Hours: You execute a solution to the problem.

But understand that the first solution you propose might not be the perfect one, you may have to pivot and change it. But giving yourself that structured 72-hour window allows you to absorb, analyze, and solve without letting emotion ruin your decision making process.

Q: Do you have any advice specifically for a young kid wanting to break into the music promotion business today?

A: I get asked that all the time by young guys. I tell them straight up: *"Expect it to take 10 years before you get anywhere substantial. You have to work your ass off and learn the mechanics of the business from the ground up."* A lot of younger people today don't get that. They want instant gratification.

When I turned 70, I was down in **Florida** attending a wedding with my wife, Irene. A young guy, about 27 years old, came up to me and asked, *"Are you Arny Granat?"* I looked at him and said, *"If you want something from me, no. But if you just want to talk, yeah, I'm Arny Granat."*

He said, *"You've met so many legends and built an empire. Can you give me one piece of immediate, invaluable wisdom?"*

I told him, *"Sure."* I leaned in close to whisper a secret in his ear, and I said, *"When you're 70, I'll be long gone. But I want you to remember these exact words, because you'll hear them again one day and you'll remember me."* He got all excited and asked, *"What's the wisdom, Arny?"*

I leaned in and whispered: *"Your fly is down."*

That's practical advice! And it genuinely happens when you hit 70. Anybody I tell that story, who is 70 laughs and goes, *"Yeah, you're right."*

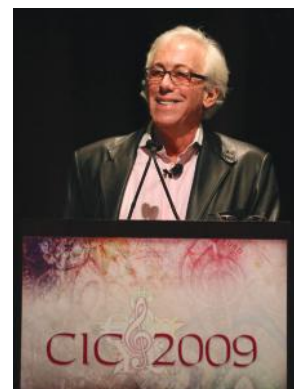
There is no single "one-size-fits-all" answer to success. Like I said, ride the horse in the direction it's already heading, keep moving forward, and if you get stuck on a problem, you better figure out how to get unstuck fast, otherwise, you'll stay stuck, and someone else will sail right past you. We had plenty of people come into Chicago over the decades trying to take JAM out, and eventually,

Live Nation accomplished it on a global scale. I give them credit for what they've built. Do I like it? No. Do I respect it? Yeah. Would I like it to change?

Yeah, because it knocks out the independent local promoters in smaller markets like **Peoria**, who can no longer compete.

But I will say this to close: I am incredibly proud that JAM was able to serve the public in the exact way we thought the public deserved to be served. For us, the fans ALWAYS came first, and we deeply respected that. That's why we accommodated them and treated people right. If a fan had a complaint, they could call our office and get directly through to Jerry or me. You never heard people around town say, *"Oh, those guys at JAM are assholes,"* because that wasn't how we operated.

So, I'd just like to say Thank you, Chicago, to all the fans that supported us!





Ask Char Q & A

Q Dear Char, I'm witnessing injustice in my community. How can I take action to create positive change without burning out or becoming disillusioned?

From: Unjustly in Huntley

A Dear Unjustly in Huntley,

Thank you for writing. I appreciate your investment in your community and in understanding the importance of taking care of yourself. You will be glad to know that you can do both!

This note comes at a time when I ache for a community that I love. Vile, vicious, and racist posters have been put up all over the community on telephone poles and walls. It is horrifying and, without action, may fester into more dangerous levels of communication. So this is the perfect question for me to explore with you, Coincidence? I don't think so!

Open up your cell phone or turn on your TV or radio and you will see or hear that the next big story is about a racial incident, an attack on a minority group, all kinds of bias, or poor systemic distribution of power and necessary resources. As you have already intimated approaching these issues with a "see something, say something" mindset can mean that you will exhaust yourself as you strive to confront inequality and change stubborn mindsets. In your heart you know this effort is necessary, but not at the risk of your health.

You can't change everything. You know this. You can, however, change something. Which issue truly motivates you to seek change and make known your opinion and ideas for solution? Start here. By picking a single issue, you will not dilute your own energy and you will establish yourself with a single issue.

In this way, you stay focused and people will begin to recognize you in relationship to your stated interest. Once people know who you are and what you stand for, you will begin to see that you are gathering supporters of this issue who will also take some of the work onto their shoulders. This is the beginning of stabilizing your health and your personal time while still working to effect change.

Next, make sure that you are well-informed in your area of interest and its history in your community. Read everything you can, attend any meetings on the topic, and interview key people at key places. Begin with accuracy and stay up to date. If your community issue is a reflection of a national issue, make comparisons and identify others you can ask for information and support. Having to clean up from a sloppy piece of false information, especially early in your development, can foil your positive movement and you will begin to feel a negative pull on your health.

Decide what action you are going take. The ideas range in the zillions, but for you, what works best to keep you invested and physically and mentally healthy? Do you want to donate to a cause? Do you want to apply for a board of director's position, jump on a committee or, even begin a task force inviting key stakeholders from your community? Do you want to write letters to the editor, to the mayor, or head of an organization where the injustice is occurring? Can you volunteer and effect change on the injustice by modeling a different way of thinking and doing things? Action means you will be doing and doing means you will expend time and energy. To stay healthy and avoid burn-out, decide ahead of time what makes sense for you; how much time are you willing to dedicate to this concern. Even 1-2 hours a week can mean a lot toward creating change.

Change can also come with being courageous. You read earlier, I wrote above the multi-used phrase: See something . Say something. Even if this is the only thing you do, it will be enough. Confronting injustices with truth and kindness is sometimes the best that you can do. Role-modeling your own character can inspire others to do the same. Expect opposition and guard your health with good friends and a place to talk about your feelings away from the fray. Don't give up, though, keep talking about what needs to change. In addition, if you really want to be heard, don't forget to listen.

Know you. Fatigue, not being able to shut "it" off, anxiety... any of these can be burn-out. Know your tell tale signs of early exhaustion and react with time away. You need a break. Take it or you can't help others. You first. Society next. Even when you feel you are only seeing the "tip of the iceberg" of the issues at hand. If you are growing tired, step away. Your mother would have told you that the problem will be there when you get back. You can't make a difference if you are not well.

When things are going in the right direction, don't forget to celebrate. Get it documented and let others know what you are doing. This alone may cause others to jump in to help and make the change sustainable.

Any way you confront whatever you are seeing, good luck and prayers for you. Make a difference by being you. And....Thanks a million for writing in to Ask Char!

- Dr. Charla Waxman

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COMMENTARY UNCENSORED

by: Screamin' Rachael

Recording Artist, Entrepreneur, Publisher, Music Mogul, House Music Icon, sometimes Controversial, with a dash of Opinionism for good measure.

The opinions offered in this column are "uncensored" and are intended for "open dialog" and "entertainment purposes" only. Use of this column not intended to replace or be a substitute for any professional, financial, legal, advice or any other professional service. The opinions or views expressed in this column are those of the columnist, and not necessarily those of anyone else.

I have spent much of my life opening doors. Sometimes those doors have led into castles. Sometimes they have opened onto the streets of the Bronx or the neighborhoods of Englewood.

They have taken me through Chicago clubs, French cities, underground spaces, glamorous rooms, strange rooms, beautiful rooms and rooms where history was being made before anyone had decided what to call it. Now I am opening another door, although this one is hidden among the pine trees of southern New Jersey.

Come with me...

That invitation has always been at the center of what I do. It is there when I perform, when I make a record and every time I write "Uncensored." I do not want to simply tell you that I went somewhere. I want to take you there. I want you to hear what I heard, meet the people I met and feel the electricity that made me stop and think, "This matters."

That's what happened when I discovered Camp Wonkru.

Camp Wonkru is a three-day camping festival at **Paradise Lakes Campground in Hammonton, New Jersey**, but calling it a festival does not quite capture it. Festivals can be schedules, wristbands and stages.



Camp Wonkru feels more like a temporary world built by people who have decided that creativity is not something you merely watch. It is something you bring with you.

There are tents beneath the trees, music drifting across the campground, workshops, art, campfires, shared meals and people creating their own little universes.

Artists, builders, dreamers and dancers all contribute something. The audience is not standing outside the experience looking in. Everyone becomes part of it.

Its philosophy speaks of participation, curiosity, care, peace, love, unity and respect. It asks people to put away their phones, stop chasing a signal and choose one another. One of its most powerful ideas is beautifully simple: in a world increasingly controlled by algorithms, choose people.

That sentence went straight to my heart. I come from a world before algorithms mattered.

Music traveled from hand to hand. Someone passed you a record.

>>> MORE Uncensored >>>

UNCENSORED

>>> Continued >>>

Someone whispered the address of a party. Someone introduced you to an artist nobody else knew yet. A DJ played something that changed the temperature of the room, and the next day everyone was asking, "What was that?"



There were no invisible machines deciding what we should love. There were people believing in people.

House music was built that way. TRAX Records was built that way. **Space Place** was built that way. None of those things began as internet phenomena. They began because human beings entered a room, recognized something in one another and decided to build a bridge.

That is why Camp Wonkru feels so familiar to me. It reminds me of Space Place, not because a campground in **New Jersey** looks anything like the raw **Chicago** space where artists, musicians and outsiders once gathered, but because the spirit is the same. At Space Place, it did not matter whether you were famous. What mattered was whether you had something inside you that needed to come out. You could experiment, fail, invent, make noise, make art and find your people.

Walking through Camp Wonkru, I felt that same pulse beneath the trees. Different generation. Different landscape. Same heartbeat. We live in a chaotic world that seems to separate people a little more every day. We can communicate with thousands of people in seconds and still feel that nobody truly sees us. We scroll past faces without meeting them. We collect followers without always finding friendship.

Camp Wonkru offers another possibility.

You look someone in the eye. You share food. You dance beside a stranger. You sit near a fire and begin a conversation that could never have been predicted by a program. Camps become neighborhoods. Strangers become friends. For a few days, people remember that community is not something you download. It is something you build.

At the heart of it all, there is heart.

That may sound simple, but simplicity can carry enormous truth.

>>> **MORE Uncensored** >>>



SCHEDULE

MONDAY



PROJECT VIDA

ZUMBA 9AM-10AM

ZUMBA 5PM-6PM

SALSA 6PM-7PM

TUESDAY

SR. GOLDEN
MOVES 9AM-10AM

WEIGHT
TRAINING 5PM-6PM

WEDNESDAY

WEIGHT 9AM-10AM
TRAINING

QI GONG 5PM-6PM

XCO LATIN
DANCE 6PM-7PM

THURSDAY

SR. GOLDEN
MOVES 9AM-10AM

YOGA 6PM-7PM

HIIT 7PM-8PM

FRIDAY

ZUMBA 9AM-10AM

WEIGHT
AEROBICS 5PM-6PM

SALSA 6PM-7PM

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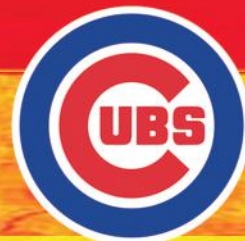
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Every important thing I have ever been part of has begun with heart: a person taking a chance on someone else, an artist finding the courage to be heard, a woman opening a door for another woman, a room full of people deciding to believe in one another.

Queen City Popped and I will be co-hosting the House Stage as the TRAX Takeover. I want that relationship to be understood for what it truly represents. This is not merely two names printed next to each other on a flyer. It is two women believing in each other and building something together.

Women have always been essential to music communities, although history does not always give them the room they deserve. At Camp Wonkru, women are not standing at the edges. They are organizing, performing, creating, volunteering, solving problems, welcoming people and making the entire experience possible.

The bond between Queen City Popped and me reflects the culture I want to see more of: women supporting women without fear, competition or unnecessary division. We are bringing our different histories and energies together to create a House Stage that honors the roots while making room for what comes next.

That's the TRAX Takeover, not a corporate invasion, but a gathering of spirits. It is important that the DJs joining us understand what TRAX represents. Chicago House is not a costume, a marketing phrase or a fashionable decoration. It is a culture created by people. It carries struggle, freedom, sexuality, spirituality, rhythm, joy and survival inside it.

Dr. Leef understands and respects that foundation. His connection to this event is not simply about placing a name beside a stage. It is about supporting a community and recognizing the living roots of House music. I value people who approach TRAX and Chicago House with that kind of respect, because community must always come before commerce.

Last year, I was welcomed with such warmth. I connected with **RTDF Rave Radio**, **Chillsesh**, **Sugar Lip** and so many others who made the experience unforgettable. That welcome is part of why I am returning with an even more ambitious performance this year.

I am coming back ready to turn the House Stage into a living piece of performance art. My relationship with technology has always been misunderstood by people who believe the future and the past must be enemies.

I have always loved tomorrow. I have always been ahead of the curve, and I remain that way today. I was drawn to electronic music because it allowed artists to imagine sounds that had never existed before.

I embraced machines not because I wanted to become less human, but because they offered new ways to express what was human.

This year I am sponsored by **Hercules**, a French company with whom I have a long relationship. I will be using a special Wi-Fi-enabled mobile DJ controller that allows me to leave the booth and move directly into the crowd.

Think about what that means.

The technology does not separate me from the audience. It removes the barrier.

Instead of remaining behind a table while everyone watches from a distance, I can carry the music into the people, sing among them, dance with them and make the performance feel communal. The controller becomes a bridge. It allows the future to serve the oldest purpose of music: bringing human beings together. At the same time, I will be using my Roland TB-303, the machine whose acid sound became one of the defining voices of electronic dance music. The 303 represents the roots. The Hercules controller represents freedom and movement. Live vocals bring the human breath back into the circuitry.

Together, they tell the story of who I am.

I am part of the space age. I've always been. I love invention, experimentation and the thrill of discovering what no one has tried yet. But I also carry the history of Chicago House with me. I do not place that history behind glass. I take it into the future and let it breathe.

The set will include TRAX classics, live vocals, new unreleased music and surprises. I want people to recognize the records that helped build this culture, but I also want them to hear what is arriving next. Chicago House is not a museum exhibit. It is alive, restless and still expanding. One of the most special moments will be the world premiere of "I Love Paris," an unreleased TRAX collaboration with **Jacques X Gregory**.

Paris is not simply a glamorous name to me. France has been part of my artistic life for many years. I have traveled there, worked there, built relationships there and felt a deep connection with the people and culture. France has embraced House music, and it has embraced me in ways that have remained close to my heart.



>>> **MORE Uncensored** >>>

That makes "I Love Paris" more than another new track.

It is another bridge.

It connects Chicago to Paris, TRAX history to a new collaboration, and my memories of France to a performance in the New Jersey woods. Music has always had this magical ability to fold geography. One beat can travel across an ocean. One song can make two distant cities suddenly occupy the same emotional space.



When Jacques X Gregory and I bring "I Love Paris" into the Camp Wonkru atmosphere for the first time, it will feel like opening another door. **Chicago, Paris** and **Hammonton** will meet beneath the trees. That is the journey I keep taking.

From castles to the **Bronx**, from **Englewood** to **France**, from the concrete jungle to the forest, I continue discovering new worlds. But the places themselves are only part of the story. What stays with me are the people who fill those places with imagination.

I remember conversations more than buildings. I remember who believed in whom. I remember the person who opened a door, the artist who dared to be strange, the stranger who became a friend and the moment a room suddenly became a community.

That is what "Uncensored" has always been about. Every month, I invite you into another place because I believe discovery keeps us alive. I am not looking backward. I am still curious. I am still listening. I am still walking into unfamiliar spaces ready to learn something and meet someone who changes the story.

The world may be more digital, more divided and more chaotic than ever, but I refuse to believe that genuine connection has disappeared. I see it every time music turns strangers into a dance floor. I see it when women choose to support one another.



I see it when technology is used to bring a performer closer to the audience instead of pushing them farther apart. I see it when people gather beneath the stars and remember how to be present. Music has always been my excuse for introducing people to one another.

The records matter. The stages matter. The machines matter. The articles matter. But none of them is the destination. They are the bridge.

Every beat, every lyric and every story is another invitation for one human being to connect with another. That is the world I believe in. It is the spirit I found at Space Place, the spirit that helped build TRAX Records and the spirit I found again at Camp Wonkru.

So I am opening another door.

Come with me to **Paradise Lakes Campground**. Come hear the 303 speaking through the pine trees. Come watch the House Stage become the TRAX Takeover. Come meet **Queen City Popped**, **Dr. Leef**, the artists, organizers, builders and dreamers who understand that community cannot be manufactured by an algorithm. Come hear "I Love Paris" begin its life beneath a **New Jersey** sky.

In a world that keeps trying to pull us apart, we can still choose to build bridges.

We can still choose people. At the heart of it all, there is heart. Welcome home!

- Rachael Cain



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FEATURE STORY

LADY BUNNY

THE QUEEN OF COMEDY RETURNS! TO BUTCHER BROADWAY

Chicago has always had a deep, unyielding love affair with drag royalty, and few icons hold a candle to the towering, big-haired, completely unfiltered force of nature that is **Lady Bunny**. Over the past several years (*and decades, truth be told*), the legendary performer has repeatedly graced the Windy City, leaving a trail of tear-streaked, laughing-so-hard-it-hurts audiences in her wake.

Longtime **Chicago** nightlife devotees will fondly remember her iconic, packed-to-the-rafters performance at the historic **Circuit Night Club**, a night etched in local LGBTQ+ history where Bunny proved that her mix of classic stage banter and jaw-dropping comedy could command a room like no other. Now, the **New York** legend came to add another unforgettable chapter to her Chicago legacy... and she promised to come back again for her tawdry Christmas Show!

To close-out July, and sell-out another theater, Lady Bunny brought her sky-high wigs and relentless, no-filter humor to **City Winery** with her brand-new live musical comedy extravaganza, "Bunny Butchers Broadway"... and goes one-sided political too! But that don't make her bad.... *or does it??*



(Lady Bunny backstage with Screamin' Rachael)

Long before she ever donned her first skyscraper wig, Bunny was a self-professed theater queen growing up in **Tennessee**, performing in community and collegiate productions.

"My father worked at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and when the university needed a child in shows like "Oliver", "Gypsy", or even Shakespeare, they'd cast me!" Bunny recalls. *"In "The Winter's Tale", I played **Prince Mamillius**, who died in the first act. I HATED that!"*

Eventually, the world of drag gave her the ultimate freedom to create her own characters, write her own rules, and stay alive well past the first act. That creative liberation is the driving force behind *"Bunny Butchers Broadway"*, a fast-paced, laugh-out-loud blend of musical parody, stand-up, and biting cultural critique.

In her latest tour de force, Bunny takes her proverbial knife (*and very real microphone*) to Broadway's most beloved hits, slicing and dicing classics from "Wicked", "Dreamgirls", "Mamma Mia!", "Beauty and the Beast", and beyond.



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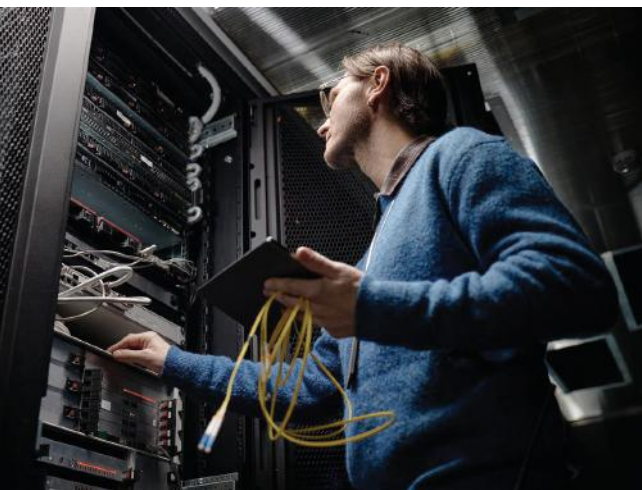
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TECH TRENDS

A NEW Y2K MOMENT

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While Y2K forced organizations to look honestly at decades of accumulated code, the frontier AI moment is forcing the same reckoning. The organizations responding fastest are the ones that have built the capacity to remediate vulnerabilities at machine speed.

You have a password manager, or you don't. You use two-factor authentication on some accounts but not others. You read the breach notification email, change the password and move on. Most of us trust that the systems we depend on (our banks, our health records, our social platforms, our employers) are doing the work in the background.

But they're not. Or rather, they can't anymore. A new generation of artificial intelligence, capable of scanning entire enterprise estates in hours, has fundamentally changed the problem. The vulnerabilities buried inside legacy systems for decades, the technical debt that every large organization carries, are no longer hidden. To anyone with access to the right models, these flaws are thrown into sharp relief. The audit that used to take weeks now takes hours, and the people tasked with defending these systems are no longer the ones finding the vulnerabilities first.

This is what some in the industry describe as a new Y2K moment, though the comparison is less about the threat than the reckoning it forces. Y2K had a known deadline, a known fix, and years of coordinated global response. Engineers went in to patch one thing (the date field) and discovered a catastrophe's worth of brittle, tangled code no one fully understood. The frontier AI moment offers no such certainty.

The defining feature of this moment is a structural mismatch! Offense now moves at machine speed while defense still moves at the speed of human review and scheduled maintenance. The deadline is unclear, the scope expands faster than fixes

can be deployed, and the response is being navigated company by company. The true parallel is that both moments expose the cost of deferred modernization. Y2K forced organizations to look honestly at decades of accumulated code. This time, adversaries are running the audit in real time.

FROM FINDING TO FIXING, THE BOTTLENECK HAS CHANGED

For all the urgency the moment demands, the organizations responding fastest are not the ones with the best threat detection. They are the ones that have built the capacity to remediate vulnerabilities at machine speed.

Detection has stopped being the constraint. A good security team with the right tools can find vulnerabilities in hours. What determines survival is what happens next: the ability to prioritize, patch, and deploy fixes faster than threats accumulate. Remediation capacity is now the bottleneck. When discovery outpaces repair, the backlog of known but unpatched flaws grows faster than teams can close it, and that patch queue itself becomes the attack surface: a published list of openings an adversary can work through while defenders wait for a maintenance window.

Closing that remediation velocity gap is the capability that now separates resilient organizations from exposed ones. That capacity is not something you buy from a single vendor. It requires orchestrating across the stack: linking defense, intelligence, and modernization at scale.

The same forcing function that has made security a board-level concern is reopening conversations about modernization that have stalled for years.

In recent Cognizant research, 73% of Global 2000 leaders identified cybersecurity as a major driver of legacy modernization, the joint-highest rating alongside reducing operating costs. For two decades, the case for enterprise modernization was made in the language of efficiency, cost, and competitive advantage. These arguments were easy to resist. Like patching your roof before a storm hits, the work that prevents catastrophe rarely feels urgent until the danger is right in front of you.

The organizations responding fastest are not the ones with the best threat detection. They are the ones that have built the capacity to remediate vulnerabilities at machine speed.

The frontier AI moment is changing that calculation. The cost of waiting is no longer abstract. It's measurable and increasingly visible in the form of a continuously expanding attack surface that legacy systems cannot defend. What was once a productivity argument is now a survival argument.

Leaders know they are behind. Half of Global 2000 leaders say the current pace of progress in updating defense systems is not yet fast enough.

WHAT MODERNIZATION LOOKS LIKE

In the age of frontier AI, modernization is no longer a program that runs alongside cybersecurity. It is cybersecurity, expressed at the architectural level. Each vulnerability is a symptom; the aging architecture that let it persist is the underlying condition. Patching the symptom without modernizing the architecture leaves the condition in place, which is why remediation at scale and modernization are the same work.

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