

Sappy Times

BLEARILY MOSHING SINCE 2009

SUNDAY

(Looking back on Saturday)

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"SACKVILLE, WHAT THE FUCK IS UP?" This is what we're hearing on Bridge Street on Saturday night, from a man with a microphone in his hand. "We're the Underachievers," he says. "You're SappyFest," he says. Then he says, "Let's fucking go."

Two men in this Ben Claytor-curated mainstage show and they blow the whole night wide open. Until then the afternoon had been beautiful & noisy & contemplative; but after that everything was different. Just the fact of them: a pair of Flatbush rappers, reigning in Sackville. Just the bounding of their energy, the angles of their rhymes. They are a breath of fresh air. A breath of motherfucking fresh air. Raps like muffled code, beats like a children's spaceship, a "Gimme Shelter" sample in slo-mo loop. Four times the Underachievers inquire, "Who likes to smoke weed?" It's not

the novelty of the question, it's the persistence of the asking. Sure, this set is bewildering. They're a little bewildered, we're a little bewildered, hip-hop in a place where hip-hop hasn't been, but there's also this overwhelming feeling of relief, of ragged joy, all around me.

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Hours earlier, Grey Kingdom, a total apple of a guy, apologizes to those who came to the Vogue Theatre for a matinee showing of *World War Z*. This isn't a zombie apocalypse. This is plaintive music over very simple guitar, very hidden bass, the lapping launch of Spencer Burton's singing. He wisecracks and stalls and then he has this beautiful voice he takes out. Vibrations travel through the room. In all our chests our compass-needles are spinning.

I spent a lot of Saturday at the Vogue. A stage, green-glowing exit signs, IKEA lamps, some microphones. Buttery popcorn. A place to snooze or be wakeful. When I remember the Vogue, from previous years, I remember it darker. Maybe they repainted it. Maybe my life has just gotten lighter, and it feels that way.

I hear Snowblink. A band of very little ugliness. Folk-music with yawning gaps - mirror pools, crevasses. I love this band most when they are shouting or whispering, shrilling or booming. I love the ringing bells, the rambling electric guitar, the singers' curt yodels of sympathy. Daniela Gesundheit has antlers on her guitar. I can't figure out if she's a deer or a trophy-hunter.

Earlier, the extraordinary annual Universal Dawn, superbly curated by Ian Roy. Jenner Berger narrates a sweaty screwball b-ball saga, all deking punchlines. My friend Jeff



FREE!

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Miller tells true-feeling stories. Lezlie Lowe shares the finest of awful feedback: "You are all over the map, geographically and syntactically." And Andrew Patterson, lackadaisical, reads some Rimbaud. "*J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été.*" His own poems are just as dawnly summer, reminders of the simple thing of poetry: word & word & word. "*With my thighs around my hands,*" "*Flexing an iccube tray,*" "*A song of studied intuition.*" Also, Andrew is funny. "*[Finally] I was sure, I didn't need to speak, or be taught anything.*" He is talking about being stared at by a horse.

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In the evening, grey cloud moves across Sackville. It takes away the storm. It leaves a long mist.

While Chad VanGaalén is singing, sitting among stars, men and women are skipping rope. Double-dutch in cold air. Grins passed like rumours. "You were looking like a city of electric lights," Chad sings, from a speaker. Broaching the skipping ropes seems a little like a WWII coastal assault. Almost everyone is defeated - brutally, immediately. The others must go on without them.

Chad VanGaalén's songs sound like gold spun thin, so fine and thin.

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Alvays are so great that they already seem rich. Tunes loud & clear & sure - a sound like C86 but with roaring secret basslines. Muscular jangle, tumbling drums, languor that isn't lazy.

Kappa Chow have fuzz guitar, tambourine and sax; what more do I really need to say? Their sax skips

rope. Their singer is mosh-mouthed and yowling. They are brainfreeze and a furniture fire, with songs like rose-red axe heads.

Shotgun Jimmie plays a set of cleaned and pressed knock-knock-joke rock. A guitar solo of *lalala's*, a chugga-chugga "Suzy," "Bridge Street Stage" on the Bridge Street Stage. Seeing Shotgun at Sappy is like seeing a sasquatch in its home habitat: smaller than you expect and unexpectedly strong. Short songs, sentimental but unsentimental. This is such an uncommon trick: to say something soft and honest, without holding on too hard.

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My Single Biggest Sunday Tip:

- With all my heart: visit the wonderful, beautiful, hilarious, life-affirming Phone Hospital on Bridge St., if you find it open.

A Question Alex Lukashevsky Asked, In One Of His Songs So Slinky & Stubborn, Like A Boa Constrictor, Like Captain Beefheart Crossed with The Sound of Music, With Backing Vocals Like Birdcalls & Morse Code:

- "Should I let someone else play with my piano / Just because I don't know how?"

Varieties of Whole Pickles Sold at the Restaurant Called Pickles:

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After the Underachievers blow the whole night open, we go see Coach Longlegs at the Legion. This band is the best band. They are genius and borderline incompetent. "All You

Gotta Do Is Try" is about how all you gotta do is try. "Everything's OK" is about how everything's OK. "Go Crazy" is about how go crazy.

Between their hopeful snubnosed punk songs, the drummer stands up and delivers a monologue. "Be yourselves and do whatever you want," he says. He sounds angry and happy at the same time. "People say, 'This is THE night.' But EVERY night is THE night. People say, 'Life is short.' But life ISN'T short. It's long. Which means A) Start being responsible; and B) Start filling your life with amazing things you want to do." Then he sits down and drums and when he is drumming it looks as if he is fighting a thorn-bush.

Anyway, we love and shove and leap, and a Mouthbreather crowdsurfs, and Coach Longlegs have made life feel so simple: this clean field of choice, friendship, resilience.

But then a little later AroarA are on the Vogue's stage and all that clarity has left my heart. This is a rock'n'roll of winding paths, intricate ardours. Muttering guitars, strumming voices, handclaps. Desire like a pearl in a mussel-shell: the thing that's impossible to guess. I squint for cinders. Singing "#14", the spirit is so alive in Ariel Engle's singing, so hot and alive, that she shimmers.

Finally, at Uncle Larry's, it is karaoke time. Impossible Sandy performs a magnificent Biz Markie, rapping like a spurned nobleman. Disco lights flash rainbow over paper clouds. Dancers orbit each other like sympathetic moons. We are a big and generous crowd, unsure of what is real, sure only of what is good.

& in the midnight hour, we cry: *more, more, more.* 