

# STRAND



January 2024

Photo of NXXTA by Damian Noszkowicz

Y2K Shakespeare • Ukrainian Fashion • Student Style •

**Strand X FEMMESTIVAL Live Music Showcase**

Operation Tiger • Camilla Watson • Bubble Tea





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# Editor's LETTER

For some people, the Christmas holidays means sleigh bells ringing, carolers singing, and of course, John Lewis adverts. For others, it means the Semester 1 exam period.

However your festive season went, we're so glad to have you back for our second print edition of 2023-24. We have so much in store for you in this issue, from vox pops about how you can strut into the new year in style on a student budget, to the best spots in London to grab a great bubble tea.

On top of all that, one of the most exciting aspects of this issue is that it's a special edition. We've launched this one especially to celebrate our first Strand Magazine live music showcase of 2024, held in collaboration with FEMMFESTIVAL and KCLSU Arts and Culture Festival, who have helped us get our show on the road. At the stapled centre of these hallowed 115gsm pages, you'll find three exclusive interviews with the incredible artists on our 25th January showcase lineup.

Given that we're launching this print issue at the showcase, it's possible you're holding this in your hands at the event itself. Maybe you'd like to put it down to dance, but you're trying to find a surface to put it on where someone won't have stamped a beer ring on it by the end of the night. To which we say: leave it open on one of its pages. They'll be so captivated by the articles we have on offer that they'll be sure to read it instead of using it as a coaster.

All in all, whatever you do with this edition of the Strand Magazine, we hope you enjoy it; just as we hope you enjoy our showcase at the Star of Kings. We certainly enjoyed putting it all together — which is, for the record, how our Christmas break went.

**With love,**

*Talia Andrea*

**Talia Andrea - Editor in Chief**



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# 'LADY DISDAIN' REVIEW



The latest effervescent play from the King's Shakespeare Company, 'Lady Disdain', is a modern retelling of Shakespeare's comedy 'Much Ado About Nothing', set in the noughties and written by Eliza Cameron. I arrived on the play's opening night at the Greenwood Theatre, which contained small groups of students huddled together in a mass of scarves and coats, ready to escape the realities of exam season into a Shakespearean Y2K dreamworld.



## Photos by Elizabeth Grace

The story follows a group of footballers arriving back home to the town's pub, where they are reunited with the barmaids they developed friendships with prior to their departure. Things begin to entangle and intensify when Claudio develops interest in Hero: his mates are not keen to see him look towards marriage and begin to plot against their union. Amidst the chaos, Beatrice and Benedick begin a tumultuous and competitive insult-hurling battle which develops more into love than hatred. The play traces themes of female friendship, violent misogyny, and gossip culture in a deliciously gripping tale, moulding Shakespeare to fit an era known for its girl power with grit.

From the beginning, it was hard not to sing along to the soundtrack, curated with music from the Spice Girls, Britney Spears and The Pussycat Dolls. A show set in the noughties could not be possible without the renowned fashion of its time: characters wore purple Juicy Couture, red tights, leopard print, and unapologetically hot pink football t-shirts. Overflowing with cheesy pop icons and flirty and fun fashion, the play clearly sent the audience into a fit of nostalgia from the open.

In true modern British fashion, the entire play is set in the typical soap opera backdrop of a pub, referencing Eastenders, to elicit drama yet keep the action light and charming.

The setting was utilised excellently, particularly in scenes where Beatrice and Benedick humorously spy on conversations, hiding under tiny barstools and crawling underneath boxes.

References to lad culture, and how it can mature into more insidious forms of intense misogyny and violent behaviour, are played scarily well by Jack Aldridge as Claudio. Beginning as a bumblingly awkward and seemingly harmless man, his character develops into a villainous and disturbing figure who clashes with the female characters. Ava Robinson performs the character of Beatrice with fervour and strength, often making parallels and references to Kat Stratford of '10 Things I Hate About You' – another 90s retelling of a Shakespeare play. Alongside her, the himbo of the play Benedick, played by Bede Hodgkinson, transforms into the surprisingly likeable heartthrob of the story.

After the show, I chatted with the assiduous Eliza Cameron, whose hard work and fervency for the play was evident. It was clear just how much she wanted people to go and see a Shakespeare play, and that a modern retelling was a substantial way to encourage them to do so.

With its glittery and glam exterior, the second half of the performance begins to inspire deep discomfort within audience members as the true horrors of gossip and drama come into play. Bright-eyed and brilliant, Cameron and the members of the King's Shakespeare Company are definitely ones to watch.





# COURAGE AND CREATIVITY: AN ACCOUNT OF THE UKRAINIAN FASHION WEEK SHOW

Over a year and a half since the start of the Ukraine War, the British Fashion Council, supported by USAID, continued to honour Ukrainian designers at London Fashion Week, this season with a combined closing show of pieces from Kseniaschnaider, Elenareva and Nadya Dzyak. Hidden inside the maze that is Oxford Street's Selfridges, lavishly dressed guests and invitees waited patiently inside before ascending the iron-clad stairs leading to the runway. Anticipation could be felt deeply as the fashion community looked both inward and onward for this event; the cameras of paparazzi flashed across the entrance, capturing every movement of celebrity attendees, drawing all eyes closer to fashion week's finale across their respective social media. As lights beamed with patriotic blue and yellow, an opening statement reminded all viewers of the resilience of the designers of the show, continuing to create in the face of danger and distress. This was reinforced with a letter and bracelet given to all attendees, an early indication of the attention to detail that each of the designers was set to display.

KSENIASCHNAIDER opened the show. With some inspiration taken from AI, much of the



BY HOLLY ANDERSON

collection focused on traditional Ukrainian costumes, notably with their inclusion of Cossack jeans, a trademark staple of the brand. The designers, married couple Ksenia and Anton Schnaider, also focused on sustainable fabrics and textures for their Spring-Summer24 collection, particularly in their use of denim. Collaborating with ISKO, a sustainable denim initiative, they created eye-catching velvet denim pieces: my favourite of these was the scarlet red velvet denim jacket and midi skirt look, paired with patchwork denim ankle boots. The aged look given to most of the denim pieces in the collection was a result of a second





collaboration with Lebiu Design, an Italian brand, whose NanoCork technology created the recycled finish for each piece. Lastly, AdidasXOriginals joined with Kseniaschnaider for “imaginatively unconventional garments, footwear, and accessories,” featuring ‘AdiColor’ patchwork designs, such as the blue and yellow patchwork dress, another patriotic homage to the Ukrainian flag. Decadently embellished with ruched fabric, frayed edges and voluminous cuts, the collection inspired much excitement for future pieces from the brand.

Elenareva came second with a collection centred on two key principles: the complexity of femininity, primarily focused on the concept of ‘Mother Goddess’, and Trypillian culture, a Neolithic-Chalcolithic archaeological culture based in Southeast Europe. The Trypillian culture, existing seven thousand years ago in the territory that is now modern Ukraine, represents important symbols that characterise Elenareva as a brand, such as the worship of female energy and peace. I deeply enjoyed this distinctive homage to Ukrainian heritage and ancestry that I had not seen previously explored in a contemporary setting. Staying true to their signature looks, much of the collection featured corsets, palazzo pants, transparent chiffon, and silk tailoring, with a neutral, earthy colour scheme. Like Kseniaschnaider, the designer also featured elements of traditional Ukrainian dress, markedly in the repeated use of the Plakhta skirt: the two-piece matching blush pink corset and plakhta, paired with blush pink kitten heels, caught my eye. Made in collaboration with textile print designer Lina Nechipolina, traditional Trypillian patterns were seen throughout the pieces, such as their silk skirt: a softer reimagination of the plakhta, aligned with their feminine inspiration.

Closing the show was Nadya Dzyak, who took great inspiration from the native artist Polino Raiko, a Ukrainian painter known for her house-museum which was flooded and lost due to the blowing-up of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power plant.



Nadya Dzyak stated that it is vital particularly for Ukrainian designers to “cherish [their] artistic heritage with all [their] love, even if it has been washed away by water,” highlighting the integral nature of patriotism and strength within their collection. The particular pleating technique used throughout their designs originated in Kharkiv, further honouring Ukraine. The use of vibrant, pastel colours emulated their optimism for the future of the war-torn country, particularly in their use of colourful denim, processed in a specialised production facility in Odessa. This was notably seen in their purple denim trousers, paired with a yellow tulle top.

The show ended with vast applause for the three designers as they walked down the runway, all wrapping themselves with the Ukrainian flag, emulating the optimistic stride onward that each of the designers is taking in such times of terror. The show was incredibly moving and illustrated exceptional talent throughout, inspiring optimism and courage in all those watching; the opportunity that the BFC has been providing over recent seasons has become deeply significant in the current political climate, highlighting support for Ukrainian individuals and celeb Ukrainian culture, presenting a united front on an internationally renowned stage. I’m endlessly grateful to have been invited.





# Strutting Forward Into

# A New Year

# Of Student

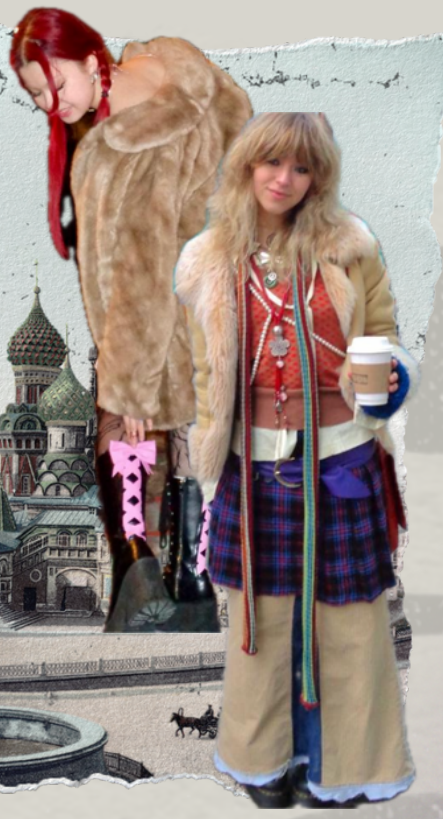
necessity? With the help of talented photographer Bella Howard and the models I spoke to, I embarked on a journey of trying to make sense of student fashion and where it could lead us into the new year.

Since my departure from the valleys of South Wales into the incoherence of London, trying to acclimatise myself has been a whirlwind. To combat this recent dilemma, I began to organise a meet-up of those like-minded students of King's College London who hold a special interest regarding fashion, in conjunction with approaching other students on the streets of Shoreditch. Fashion has always remained a common ground of interest with friends at home; we would organise photoshoots in our bedrooms wearing our best clothes, scribbling on coloured eyeliner, and playing around with the tacky posters on our walls for the best backdrops. The creative process it entails is invigorating and fruitful, yet I was keen to gain insight into the mechanics of fashion. I was particularly worried before the shoot that people would show up in tiny tops and skirts with no coat, and I would be responsible for their onset of hypothermia. Luckily, those who attended remained bundled up in style.

# Fashion

BY ROXY-MOON DAHAL HODSON





Hannah Tang is an undergraduate student studying English Literature. Raving about small vintage boutiques as the place to be, as well as shouting out websites such as Vinted, she believes searching for items online, as well as in-store, is the way to cultivate a personal style. They stated how their style is aided by TikTok, friends, and @nicolejolly on Instagram. The polarity of the black fishnet tights and chunky boots interspersed with an asymmetrical blush skirt is highlighted via her combination of darker pieces, such as cyber sigil and gothic looks, with lighter. When taking photos in a shadowy tunnel, sprayed with graffiti, on Leake Street, Hannah seemed to be in her element, starting slightly nervous but eventually showing her confidence, moving dynamically as each shot was taken.

Bella Howard is a photographer and a business and French first-year student. Whilst snapping pictures of others, it was clear that she should be in front of the camera as well as behind. In-store shopping is her go-to for finding a piece she knows she can work with; the sensory experience of feeling the tactile nature of fabric and stitching makes looking for valuable clothing, which can seem disconnected online, gratifying. Bella has explored a plethora of styles in order to acquire a subjective taste, yet she will never say no to a Stevie Nicks-inspired look.

Speaking of fabrics, a common point of discussion revolved around fur. Fur coats, fur hats, fur boots. It was unclear to me whether it was my personal bias that sunk into my research or whether fur is timeless. Walking through the blizzard of London during the Christmas season, it is a no-brainer, particularly with students who need somewhere to be but want to look good while running errands. Kamran strolled effortlessly by, removed his AirPods, and commented how fashion was not a process for him, but rather a simple 'I like it. I buy it' mentality. Sakshi joked how she was proud of dressing her partner for that day, so it seemed like the perfect time to take a picture. She sourced Rowan Blanchard as one of her icons, as she worried that Sophia Richie was a basic answer. I reassured her it was not.

Hannah Breen, an undergraduate Liberal Arts student, enjoys the in-store experience due to the ability of trying items on for the perfect fit. There is a worry that many do not shop in-store as much due to fast fashion remaining the most accessible and cheaper online. The most affordable and increasingly stylish options seem to derive from resellers, on Depop, and polyester-obsessed websites such as Shein and Pretty Little Thing. However, Hannah has not succumbed to this, arguing that there are a myriad of options online that become overwhelming to burden. They love Pinterest and developing boards with modes of inspiration, detailing the particular use of skirts over jeans, a widely debated style choice that has now found its way back onto our fashion radar, reminiscent of the Disney Channel Red Carpet. An inspiration for her and for many, is Enya Umanzor, an online influencer and co-creator of the podcast Emergency Intercom. Recently doing a brand deal alongside Drew Phillips for Marc Jacobs' Heaven, both of their hold on students is apparent, performing their show recently at Washington State University.

Daria is an undergraduate English Literature student and, similarly to Hannah Breen, believes trying things on as she is a petite size is obligatory for her, as a lot of clothes are not universally sized in many stores. After travelling to Copenhagen, she felt like she was in 'paradise' with their street style consisting of jorts and Adidas Sambas, an effortless look. Not feeling like she belongs within a genre, she focuses on what speaks to her. Baby tees, low-rise jeans, and chunky boots are her go-to's. It seems as though the trend cycle of fashion remains hooked on the noughties and nineties. Another reference she adores is Anne Hathaway in The Princess Diaries with her chunky Doc Martens, alongside the coordinated outfits of Clueless.

Spencer Zhao, a psychology student, has paved her way already into modelling and is currently creating an arts-based project named 'Prospect Visions'. Shopping more online allows Spencer to think about the pieces she is spending her money on. After all, we are on a student budget. Further on, we discussed how branded stores such as Hollister love a low light and loud music combination. This seems to me, a clear manipulation tactic to get you stressed enough to buy something you are not sure about and leave. She stated that her one weakness is a car boot sale and she loves going to raves to examine unique styles people develop in line with their personalities and identities.

There seems to be an immersive element of student fashion. Within the midst of becoming ourselves, exiting teenagehood and developing a sense of who we are within the world, there is a palpable buzz of the new generation and their tastes. The practice I treated like a ritual, of painting my eyes and ripping tights will never remain the mark of youth. The vivacious and eager voices of students seem ready to strut their way into the oncoming new year, in fur and all.

Approaching people on the street alongside Bella clutching a digital camera, hefty bags swung around my shoulder in the bitter air of December, did not seem like something I could pull off. Recent graduates Neve and Cal were a little bit taken aback by my awkward approach, but politely agreed to explain their choice of clothing. Their motto is 'wear whatever you like' and they enjoy shopping in-store, however Aakriti believes that a lot of in-store curated vintage can be extremely overpriced and untrue to their quality.





# STRAND SHOWCASE SPOTLIGHT

IN CONVERSATION WITH FHUR

BY TALIA ANDREA

Another year of course means another Strand Magazine live music showcase, which means another STRAND Showcase Spotlight series. On January 25th, we'll be welcoming an exceptional roster of alternative female artists to our next showcase stage at the Star of Kings in King's Cross, in collaboration with all-female live music promoter FEMMESTIVAL.

FHUR, a maestro of the dark electro-pop genre and all-around production aficionado, is up first on our live show lineup (or should we say, up FHUR-st?). I start our interview by asking her how she first got into music (and narrowly avoid making the pun for a second time).

"I never studied music or production, so I'm fully self-taught. I started playing around with software and stock sounds, and just figured out what I like. Also, when I was a teenager, I started listening to a lot of electronic music.

I would just go to Tumblr and try to find all of the most unknown songs ever. That's how my sound first developed."

However, it sounds like the music scene back in FHUR's hometown wasn't quite as open-minded as the Tumblr-centric cyberspace she took inspiration from. She tells me about the difference between the music scene in Italy, compared to here in London. "I've always felt a bit like myself and my music didn't fit in in Italy. For example, I wrote my single 'We Just Want To Have Fun' in 2019, and I can remember so many times where people walked out on me and my band while we were performing it.

"But just one month after I moved to London in January 2020, I was contacted directly on Instagram to play my first show, and I thought that was really cool. I think London is definitely more open in terms of creativity. There's just a different approach to music and emerging artists here, and I felt like everything started falling into place."

Having seen FHUR live myself before, I find it hard to believe that anyone could come away from one of her performances feeling anything but amazement. Her live setup involves an array of launchpads, keys and dials, like a musical aeroplane cockpit. "I built my current setup because I feel that I need to do something while I'm performing," she admits. "I'm not someone who can just stand with a microphone; it takes a lot of personality to just stand in front of the crowd and express yourself with your body, which I struggle to do. Having my gear around me is first a way of creating a safe space for myself to perform in.

"Then I like to use it to create a version of the song that is a bit different to the recorded track. I'll open up the structure, and I'll twist different knobs and press keys, to create some fun moments. Since I've been performing live more and more recently, when I produce a song now, I often think about how I would perform it live during the process. So I think the two things have started to feed into each other."

Given the complexity of both her sound design and her live setup, I'm even more impressed to consider she's completely self-taught. Was it a challenge to teach herself from scratch?

According to her, the major issue was not so much technical, as it was about keeping alive her creative spark. "One of the things that I remember from when I first started producing my own music is my spirit of exploration and curiosity. I remember being very excited, and not really caring about what it sounds like, just being so happy to have created something. I would spend entire days just experimenting on Logic.

"I think that's something I miss a lot, now that I'm more skilled than I used to be. Nowadays I'm so focused on wanting things to sound good, and sometimes you can get caught up in that and lose the creative process."

That being said, FHUR's creativity seems to be at an all-time high right now. "I've spent a big part of this year working on my new EP. I have two more singles to release before it comes out. One is going to come out in January,



possibly the week of the showcase – it's one of my most favourite songs I've ever written, and I produced it in collaboration with Eliade [Krön], who I made 'Scissors' with last year. The second single, called 'King', will come out in February or March, followed by the EP.

"I've also already been working on my third EP: I have the title, the title track, and the mood. I just need to finish producing the songs. Behind the scenes I'm also working to become a full-time songwriter and producer. I love working with other people because it's a way of exploring alleys I usually wouldn't with my music. I'm hoping to perform at some festivals, too."

Speaking of songwriting, FHUR's vision for her music is to create "moody tracks that let you explore and release feelings, soak in life, and cry on the dancefloor". With FHUR taking the stage right before our second artist, the hair-flicking, whiplashing, run-into-battle Bridget, we can't wait for the emotional rollercoaster we're in for. I ask her how she landed on wanting to make music which people can cry on the dancefloor to. "My music sort of came to me from the way I feel as a person. I don't write about things that I haven't experienced. I like to use my music to share what's going on inside my head with everyone: like pain, or happiness, or love. It becomes an emotion everyone can experience with me. I was always quite a shy person who didn't really open up to others, so writing has been a way to just let out all those things which otherwise would just be in my journal."

FHUR's most recent release is far from a song to cry to, though: with its frenetic blips layered over a thumping electronic bassline, 'Tricep' – made in collaboration with fellow producer Ōkubi – is a song bound to get you up on your feet, your half-pint sloshing over the rim of your glass in your haste to get to the dancefloor. "At the end of 2022, after I'd released 'We Just Want To Have Fun', Ōkubi came to me to say he'd had an idea for a project, and sent me the first verse. Then I made the chorus, and I thought, 'Oh my God, this is the best thing I've done in months. I'm so happy about this'.

"The project kind of stopped last year when I focused a lot on putting together my EP, but at the end of 2022 we decided to finish the track. It's called 'Tricep' because we originally wanted to make something in the style of the band Bicep, so it was just a funny working title at first. We thought about changing the name once it was finished, but it felt kind of weird and cool, and gave the impression of the 'iron fist' dynamic we were trying to talk about in the song. It's about a relationship which is a struggle, but which you keep going back to. So we kept the title."

Despite everything FHUR's had in the works lately, being an artist can sometimes be just as much of a struggle, she admits. "There are definitely a lot of days where I think, 'Why am I doing this?' – but then I just look at my older demos and think about how far I've come.

"It's really a daily choice to be kind to yourself, and surround yourself with people that support you as well. Another big part of our day-to-day lives is social media, and I struggle a lot with comparison; you're always seeing other people's successes and you feel like you're never doing enough. Learning to believe in yourself is really a lifelong journey, and it's a very brave one."

Nevertheless, social media isn't all bad, as she explains. "The good side to social media is that I've seen a lot of artists who have blown up online and have found their audience. For example, there are a lot of women who now teach production on TikTok. When it comes to being a woman in the music industry, from a grassroots point of view, I do think it's changing: I see a lot of female creatives really dominating the scene nowadays."

FHUR is no doubt one of them. We can't wait for her set at our January showcase, especially now we've heard all about how much work goes into her performances behind the scenes. I ask her how she's feeling about opening the show. "I'm really excited. I think it's a great opportunity to perform with FEMMESTIVAL and the Strand Magazine. One of my goals for this year was to choose and attract more opportunities where my music can be properly appreciated, and I think this showcase is perfect, so I'm grateful to be a part of it.

"I'm also not performing live at all in December, so I think it's going to be a great comeback for the new year, and I want to work on the live set to make it even better for when I return to the stage. I'm also looking forward to performing alongside Bridget and NXKXTA, and the Star of Kings is a great venue. I can't wait to promote the release of my new song in that setting."



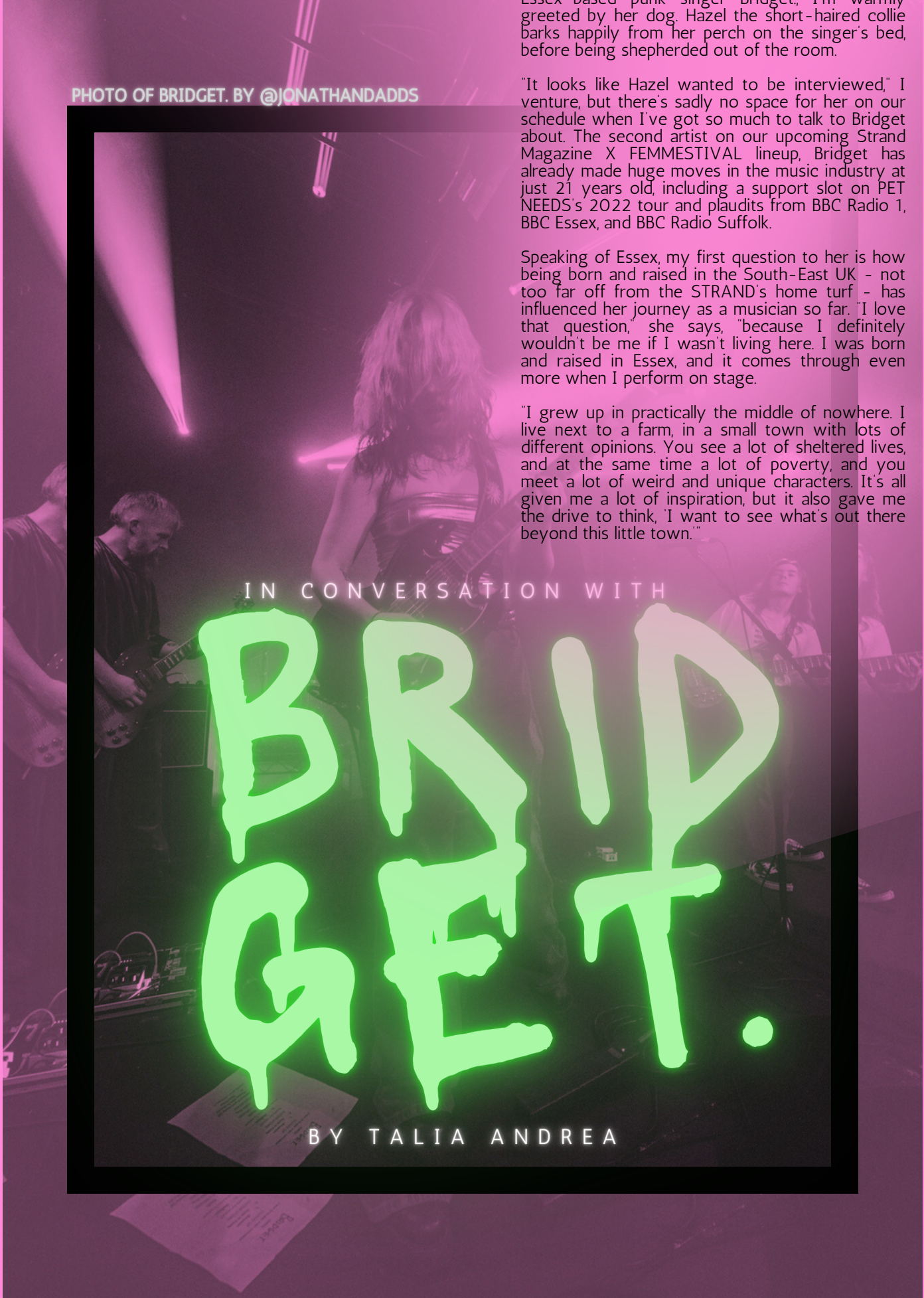


PHOTO OF BRIDGET. BY @JONATHANDADDS

When I first enter the Zoom call I've arranged with Essex-based punk singer Bridget, I'm warmly greeted by her dog, Hazel the short-haired collie barks happily from her perch on the singer's bed, before being shepherd out of the room.

"It looks like Hazel wanted to be interviewed," I venture, but there's sadly no space for her on our schedule when I've got so much to talk to Bridget about. The second artist on our upcoming Strand Magazine X FEMMFESTIVAL lineup, Bridget has already made huge moves in the music industry at just 21 years old, including a support slot on PET NEEDS's 2022 tour and plaudits from BBC Radio 1, BBC Essex, and BBC Radio Suffolk.

Speaking of Essex, my first question to her is how being born and raised in the South-East UK - not too far off from the STRAND's home turf - has influenced her journey as a musician so far. "I love that question," she says, "because I definitely wouldn't be me if I wasn't living here. I was born and raised in Essex, and it comes through even more when I perform on stage.

"I grew up in practically the middle of nowhere. I live next to a farm, in a small town with lots of different opinions. You see a lot of sheltered lives, and at the same time a lot of poverty, and you meet a lot of weird and unique characters. It's all given me a lot of inspiration, but it also gave me the drive to think, 'I want to see what's out there beyond this little town.'"

IN CONVERSATION WITH

# BRIDGET.

BY TALIA ANDREA



Her Deftones t-shirt draws my attention. I ask her who else has inspired her as a musician. "There are some really good local bands who inspire me just because they're something different. Rad Pitt are one of my favourite local bands; they're just crazy. They're very punk and screamy, with a mishmash of time signatures. I also like Cassyette, who some people might be more familiar with. She's from Essex as well, which is cool to see.

The main other ones would be Skunk Anansie, Amyl and The Sniffers, Nirvana, Hole, all of those 90s grunge bands. I also like Hot Wax, who are doing really well this year, and A Void, who are a London/Paris-based band. I like it when people are raw."

As for what else Bridget's been up to, December 1st marked the release of her most recent song, 'Teeth'. It's

a song which kicks steadily into overdrive across its second half, erupting into a euphoric mix of distorted vocals and frenzied guitar. What was the inspiration behind it, I ask? "I woke up one morning and went on Facebook, as you do. Chris, an absolutely brilliant drummer who records all the drums for my tracks, shared something on Facebook about a boy with 526 teeth in his head. And I thought, wow, that's a lot of teeth in there. So I wrote a song about it!"

The lyrics are about having a drive and a 'bite' within you, she adds. A large part of Bridget's rise to success in such a short time has likely owed to having that drive herself - a drive which more and more female artists are starting to express, which she thinks is leading up to a much-needed revolution in the music industry.



"I think the scene is changing now, from below - women are getting fed up and just making their own thing, like this showcase, which is great." But more still needs to be done at the higher rungs of the industry. "I still look at event lineups and wonder, 'where the heck are all the women?' Promoters might choose one band who happened to have a female member, and think that's enough. And that might be the only reason they've picked that band.

"It's not that there aren't female-fronted punk bands or female punk artists out there, it's that they're not being booked, or they're being made to feel like they can't push themselves out as much because they're not what the industry thinks a 'female artist' should look like."

I ask her how she feels about performing on our all-female lineup, which seems to make a change from the norm for her. "I'm excited. The lineup, with FHUR and NXXXTA, sounds like it'll be nice music but with an edge to it. That's cool, because one thing I've sometimes seen with female lineups is that people tend just to put on really lovely acts, as if that's all there is to see from us. But there's also some weird alternative stuff to see as well!"

"It's also nice to work with people who really care about us instead of just looking to put a token woman on their lineup. You're doing an amazing thing."

We're flattered, and also excited to ring in the new year with what Bridget describes will be a "new era" for her and her music. "Ellipsis, question mark." She adds. "Make sure you add that in."

It's also not the only new era ("...?") we'll be celebrating on January 25th - the date is also, coincidentally, Bridget's 22nd birthday! I ask her how she's planning to celebrate it with us. "I'm gonna invite my friends. A lot of musicians will relate to this: some of your closest friends will never actually come to your gigs; it's like an unwritten rule. But this time I'm hoping to get down some of my close friends who are pretty much like my family. I'll make it into a little birthday party!"

PHOTO OF BRIDGET. BY @OLLYBROMIDGE



NXXXTA joins our scheduled Zoom call from a sofa somewhere in Düsseldorf, looking like she's just stepped out of a magazine, even before I've interviewed her. With her ten-year background in the fashion world, and her recent features in a range of other publications - including the Big Issue and Numero Magazine - this comes as no surprise at all.

What I do want to know, though, is how NXXXTA made the move from fashion to music in her career. "My work in fashion often intersected with the music industry," she informs me. "I was always doing creative projects with bands, and all my ex-boyfriends worked in music. So I was always surrounded by it, but I just didn't think it was on the cards for me.

IN CONVERSATION WITH

NXXXTA

BY  
TALIA  
ANDREA

"London, as much as I love it, is just so pricey. Having to travel has given me more opportunities to work with different people. For example, I recently filmed a music video in Bali, which was just with a handful of friends and really spontaneous. It ended up working out really well."

But crossing the pond (well, the North Sea) hasn't always been smooth sailing, she admits. "It's definitely a learning curve. It's very isolating, especially if you're a solo artist, since everything depends on you. If you don't do it, nobody's gonna do it. We have to figure it out somehow."

On the subject of filming, I'm reminded of a previous interview between NXXXTA and Spindle Magazine, where she'd mentioned admiring filmmaker David Lynch for his "thoroughgoing vision" compared to today's "trend-driven approach" to making art. Given her almost 100-thousand Instagram followers, she's no doubt an authority on the latter topic herself - so I ask what she thinks about the current need to churn out social media content as a creative, particularly within the music industry. "For some people social media is an amazing

"I think I was really playing it safe, because I had so many insecurities. I was happy to just push other people and just be in the background myself. But at some point, I realised that that was actually not very healthy for me, and not what I actually wanted deep down. And so the seed was planted."

NXXXTA hasn't only dealt with overlapping industries in her career, either - she's also based between two countries: England and Germany. I ask her what it's been like to live, work and travel between London and Düsseldorf.

"From the age of 5 to 15, I grew up in Germany, and then when I was 15, I came over to England," she tells me for context. "I feel very connected to London, since I've spent my entire adult life there, and it very much inspired everything I'm doing. But now I'm back in Germany, I've also been figuring out how the European music market works. It's nice to be able to cover these different sides of the industry."

opportunity. For others, it's just an extra level of stress. Right now, artists are just under so much pressure that it's not realistic to handle everything, and there's very little support.

"I honestly think we'll see real repercussions from it. So far, it's been glamorised too much and regulated too little. Social media as a concept is good, but at the rate it's going right now, it's a bit like the Wild West. The rules and algorithms could change tomorrow, and we'd just have to deal with that. It's just not healthy, and it's not sustainable."

The other side of the industry which NXXXTA admirably takes a stand against is its exploitation of young people. A recent piece she penned for Come Play With Me Magazine denounced the "fetishisation of youth" in our society, and how people are quick to take advantage of the vulnerability which comes with it. As the team working on the STRAND X FEMMESTIVAL showcase are all in our early 20s (even if we do feel our bones creaking on the regular), I'm eager to hear her further thoughts on the topic. "Personally, I love working with younger people. It pisses me off that the industry is structured in a way that really doesn't protect people enough. As a young person, you're so dependent on the people you're working for; you often idolise them because you've seen them do great work. The problem is they completely use that. "They make you work twice as



much for as little pay as possible, if any. And then also quite often don't give credit to you, or celebrate you. People need to demand a change, and I think the generation below me actually has the guts to do that, so I'm hoping and praying that things will get better - because they really need to."

The Come Play With Me piece isn't the only piece NXXXTA has recently had published, though - readers of the Big Issue will have seen her powerful op-ed on the over-sexualisation of young women. I ask her about the inspiration behind the article, and what she hopes young women and femmes will take from her work - which has no doubt left a big impact on them already.

"I think if my message to young women and femmes was to be distilled to one word, it would definitely be empowerment. By that I also mean taking back your power from everything that's been weighing you down. The biggest lesson for me was that, instead of pretending all the things I went through weren't affecting me, I'd just lay them all out on the table. I wanted to take my power back and use the darkness, the pain, the frustration, as a way to encourage other people to and to connect with others. My goal is to eliminate the whole idea of competition among women, and instead push the collaborative aspect of things. We need to get together as women and stand up against all the bullshit.

My music is just a constant fight for equality, really. It's a fight for empowerment and a safe way to be a woman, no matter what that represents. All of us should be able to exist safely in the world."

That sense of safety isn't only limited to her recorded tracks: it also factors into her approach to live music. "I want my performances to be a safe space, and a liberating experience," she tells me, before elaborating. "I remember when I was younger, I used to always go out and dance with friends. I always felt, though, that you were so objectified as a woman when you were dancing.

"Women, non-binary people and femmes are always put into boxes, and made to appeal to the male gaze. So with my performances, I wanted to explore what it meant to be sexy on my own terms.

I asked myself, if I was to envision the most confident, exciting and wild version of myself as a persona, what would she be like? What would she do? How would she act on stage? And that's really what it is. It's an exploration of being seductive but also cheeky, and also having fun with it. And it's a bit 'out there' in a way that as women we're constantly forced not to be. The stage offers that sense of liberation for me, and my goal is to create that experience for people watching as well. So they feel they can 'let their freak out'. I want them to have a good time and feel safe within that framework."

With that kind of promise for what's to come, we can't wait to have her close our STRAND X FEMMESTIVAL showcase on 25th January - but how does NXXXTA herself feel about it? "I'm really excited," she says, smiling. "It's such a beautiful concept, and I think in general, universities need more events which create spaces for women and non-binary people to express themselves and connect with each other. We need those safe spaces that are curated for us, by us, so I really value events like this."





THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION TIGER

# Resistance is the Word:

BY ANNA MOWERY

April 2024 marks the 40th anniversary of what came to be known as Operation Tiger, when UK Customs and Excise officers raided London's queer bookstore Gay's the Word for the importation and circulation of 'indecent and obscene' materials. Although homosexuality was decriminalized in England and Wales in 1967, it would be decades before the stigma and policing of queerness declined. This ordeal, which lasted for two years, is an often-overlooked example of one of the many haphazard attempts to silence the LGBTQ+ community.

Since Gay's the Word opened its doors in 1979, it has played a significant role in London's LGBTQ+ landscape. The store's founders, members of the gay socialist group 'Gay Icebreakers', intended for this bookstore to be one of the few queer spaces that wasn't age-restricted or revolved around alcohol and nightlife. Gay's the Word is much more than just a bookstore offering a wide selection of queer literature and resources; it is a community space where people can learn about the LGBTQ+ experience, attend events and discussion groups, and ultimately connect with other queer people and allies.

Gay's the Word is the UK's oldest queer bookstore, and has at times been the only bookstore specialising in LGBTQ+ in the country.

In the 70s and 80s, few queer books were printed and sold in the UK. Gay's the Word attempted to fill this gap by making these imported books readily accessible on store shelves. Much of Gay's the Word's inventory had to be imported from America and, therefore, had to pass through UK Customs and Excise. Officers intercepted cases of LGBTQ+ books upon their arrival in the UK and flagged them as 'pornographic' imports. Under the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876, they opened an investigation of Gay's the Word.

On 10 April 1984, UK Customs and Excise Officers raided Gay's the Word and haphazardly seized over 140 books, including titles by Tennessee Williams, Oscar Wilde, Allen Ginsberg, Christopher Isherwood, and the medieval writer Christine de Pizan. They also confiscated a number of non-fiction works such as biographies and health guides that offered advice for people living with AIDS. In total, UK Customs and Excise confiscated about £11,000 of inventory. The owners and staff were charged under the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876 which prohibits the importation of 'indecent or obscene prints, paintings, photographs, books, cards, lithographic or other engravings, or any other indecent or obscene articles.' This ordeal came to be known as 'Operation Tiger.' During the trial, the officer who came up with the title confessed that he named it after his cat, Tiger.



The two year-long trial for Operation Tiger was the largest dispute about 'indecent' materials since the 'Lady Chatterley's Lover Trial' which prosecuted Penguin Random House under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. D.H. Lawrence's scandalous novel was eventually let off the hook thanks to a loophole in the act which asserts that a party cannot be held liable 'if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern.' While *Lady Chatterley* was acquitted for its literary merit, the official case against Gay's the Word dealt more so with the nebulous legislation regarding importation of obscenity, not the obscenity itself.

The evidence brought against Gay's the Word was, at its best, faulty and opinion-based. In preparation for the trial, the legal team representing UK Customs and Excise hired 37 people to read through all the confiscated books and record every instance of 'indecent and obscene' material. The resulting document is a spreadsheet that lists every book confiscated in the raid along with page numbers of specific passages that the readers flagged as inappropriate. While some of the confiscated books included detailed passages describing same-sex relations between characters, other books were taken simply because they had the name of a gay author on the cover. During the trial, the UK Customs officers who testified in court revealed that they had no clear guidelines for determining whether or not something was indecent or obscene. Instead, it was up to the individual officers to determine whether or not an item should be barred from entering the country. The incentive to pull these materials came from the officers themselves, revealing how prejudiced social structures propagate freely according to the internal biases of those in positions of social power. In this case, the UK Customs and Excise officers had power, and the queer community did not.

After two years of legal battles, the charges against Gay's the Word were dropped—and not for a reason that one might expect. The entire case collapsed in 1986, all thanks to a German company importing rubber sex dolls into the UK. Conegate, a company based in West Germany, was charged under the same offenses against the Customs Consolidation Act as Gay's the Word. Using their assets as a large corporation, Conegate took their case to the EU and won, claiming that the law's arbitrary discrimination and restriction of trade violated the Treaty of Rome. And so, the Customs Consolidations Act of 1876 was amended to ensure that items flagged by UK Customs and Excise were genuinely corruptive and likely to deprave the public in some way. Consequently, UK Customs and Excise was forced to drop all charges against Gay's the Word. As Lawyer Geoffrey Robertson put it in his book *The Justice Game*, "gay literature was saved by a rubber doll."

In the 40 years since Operation Tiger, Gay's the Word has continued to fight against censorship by creating a community-centric place where people can access books and other resources about LGBTQ+ issues and identity. In that time, society has become more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community than it was in the 80s, which has much to do with improved accessibility to LGBTQ+ resources. While there has been a great deal of progress for the LGBTQ+ community, we have also seen intense pushback from conservative groups.

For example, just two years after the Operation Tiger trial ended in 1986, Margaret Thatcher's conservative government made another attempt to police queerness by passing Section 28, which prohibited 'promoting homosexuality by teaching or by published material.' The law was repealed in England in 2003 after several decades of protests. In America, Florida Governor Ron Desantes introduced a similar 'don't say gay' bill in 2022, limiting teachers' ability to address matters of sexuality unless it is required by standards or as part of a health class where parents can opt for their children to not attend. It is times like these where queer spaces like Gay's the Word become even more important and, simultaneously, at risk of persecution.

This legislation attempts to ostracise queer people under the guise of promoting the 'public good.' Some of the most publicly debated efforts in recent years have taken the form of book bans. Over 300 schools in the US have pulled books from their library shelves at the request of parents and other community members. The overwhelming majority of these banned books feature queer and POC characters or discuss issues of race and sexuality. It is obvious that these bans have more to do with silencing marginalized groups than preserving the 'public good.' Although there has been no physical raiding of school libraries, the procedure of requesting that books be removed bears an eerie resemblance to the way that books were 'proven' as inappropriate during the trial for Operation Tiger. These book bans are part of larger social and political movements attempting to suppress marginalised groups by policing discussions of gender and sexuality and silencing the voices of queer people.

Queer literature is important, just as queer spaces are important. Gay's the Word has made every effort to make both accessible, and will continue to preserve their rights and identity. In the 40 years since Operation Tiger, the LGBTQ+ community has had to continuously fight for their right to be visible and accepted in society. We can only hope that, as we move forward, we will continue to not only preserve the rights that have already been won, but also to support and uplift the voices of marginalised groups.

If we want to preserve this progress, we must preserve access to information in the form of both literature and non-fiction. Whether this information is found via online repositories, libraries, or bookstores, it is important that these resources are accessible. Jonathan Cutbill, one of Gay's the Word's founders, felt that preserving these books was of the utmost significance. He collected a copy of every book sold by Gay's the Word, including all those taken in the raids. His collection, which he named Haud Nominandum (Latin for 'that which is not to be named'), now belongs to Senate House Library, where it is available for the next generation of readers and researchers to enjoy and learn from.

The Haud Nominandum collection is one of the largest collections of queer books in the UK with over 30,000 pamphlets, calendars, magazines and books. The items in the Haud Nominandum collection at Senate House are not yet fully cataloged. Should you wish to see the books confiscated in the 1984 raids as well as other items in Jonathan Cutbill's collection, the items are available to view by contacting the library.





*Camilla Watson of Old Lisbon*

As of May 2023, it's been ten years since the unveiling of the 'Retratos de Fado' exhibition in the Moorish district – Mouraria – of old Lisbon. This milestone commemorates the artistry of Camilla Watson, a British artist entrenched in Portugal for over a decade. Her dedication to portraying the historic and renowned Fadistas within the neighbourhood, often hailed as the birthplace of Fado, brought a unique vibrance to this culturally rich enclave.

Fado, a musical genre intimately tied to the Portuguese identity, unfolds through the soulful performances of Fadistas accompanied by the traditional twelve-string and acoustic guitars.



*By Helen Berk*

Melancholy, emotion, and passion stretch through a Fadistas vocals. The genre is defined by 'saudades' – a profound longing, a missing, a type of melancholy. Its origins largely lie with widows of sea-farers, labourers, the impoverished, and prostitutes. The genre's history also encompasses the experiences and contributions of Black slaves from Brazil and other ex-colonies of Portugal, coupled with the ancient Moors of Lisbon. These have shaped the vibrant character of Fado as we know it today. Initially, Fado thrived in the improvisational realm of taverns and was later trimmed and polished into refined performances in concert halls.



The contemporary revival of Fado has seen the likes of Mariza and Mirinha carry on this genre's historic legacy. Notably, Fado secured its place in the UNESCO Intangible cultural heritage list in 2011. I was introduced to this music genre through my fieldwork in Lisbon for a research project on identity and architecture.



My exploration pointed me in the direction of a beautifully curated exhibition by Watson, whose portraits wrap around winding streets and back alleys of Mouraria and have a distinct greyscale appearance. It was an honour to be able to interview Watson as part of my fieldwork, where she provided a deeper insight into her art and the intimate connection that Mouraria's families maintain with Fado.

"Every family in Mouraria has connections to Fado in some way or another. Either they've had family who were Fadistas, or they've been Fadistas."

Mouraria has seen and raised many great Fadistas; Amalia Rodrigues, Mariza, and the very first Fado singer Maria Severa are featured in Watson's artwork. Mouraria as a gallery space was a conscious choice made by Watson as she recognises the undeniable and special role it has played in Fado's narrative.

Walking through the hilly and winding Mouraria and seeing the portraits up close was a special experience. Unlike a sterile, and regimented art gallery, these images resonate within the neighbourhood. "The images are very open and friendly, they're accessible, and they tell a story," Watson notes. She also gives thought to the resident's livelihoods, "they would never go into galleries. It just wasn't somewhere that was on their path. To have them around here just made complete sense, really."

Retratos de Fado and Watson's other ethnographical art exhibitions in Alfama are not merely appreciated; they are revered by the residents as vital reflections of their history and livelihood. Coming from London, where the urban landscape is subject to constant change and often very

impersonal, I sometimes found myself in awe at the permanence of these connections on the walls, alleyways, and streets. It was clear to see that the connections between the residents and the neighbourhood, many spanning back generations due to the 'ancient' status of Alfama and Mouraria, is displayed and honoured onto the buildings which have largely remained untouched for some time.

Watson explains the importance of humanising the old district and its residents, especially in light of rapid gentrification and 'AirBnB-ification' that has wrapped around the city recently. "I think it gives [the residents] a sense of importance and a voice and makes them feel appreciated. But not only that, I think it reminds foreigners and tourists of who the area belongs to and gives them an intimate connection which they might not otherwise get."

"It's literal poetry", Watson remarks. The district is adorned with poetic expressions – fado lyrics engraved on numerous plaques, transforming the streets into a lyrical canvas. In the realm of music, where lyrics marry rhythm to create poetry, fado stands as an exemplary embodiment.

The exhibition weaves together other murals and street art pieces of Fado into a tapestry that vividly encapsulates the rich culture and identity of the neighbourhood. It serves as an awe-inspiring testament to the enduring spirit of Fado within the heart of Alfama. The artwork created by Camilla Watson and others can add to the already rich and historic districts of a city and become a part of that history. The exhibitions serve as a celebration of heritage, underscoring the importance of the arts in sustaining and commemorating the essence of civilizations past and present.



# THE ULTIMATE SIP

## LONDON'S TOP 5 BUBBLE TEA HAVENS

BY HEBE HANCOCK

In recent years, bubble tea (also known as boba) has taken the world by storm, finding its way into the hearts of many Londoners.

Two individuals, both originating from Taiwan's Taichung City, claim to be the innovators behind bubble tea in the late 1980s. Teahouse owner Tu Tsong claims that he was inspired by white tapioca balls sold at the local market. However, tea company worker Lin Hsiu Hui asserted that she created the first bubble tea in 1988 when she poured tapioca balls into her tea during a staff meeting. Regardless of who invented bubble tea, it is unsurprising that many of London's bubble tea shops are branches of Taiwan-based chains, although the drink has evolved in other countries.

The beverage is usually made with Assam or jasmine tea, with the addition of tapioca pearls, although nowadays drinkers can choose from a variety of teas, coffees, or juices. Popular renditions include taro tea, brown sugar tea, and matcha green tea. Moreover, in addition to the traditional tapioca boba, you can also add a variety of toppings, foams, or popping fruit pearls.

Whether you're a seasoned sipper or a bubble tea newbie, this guide is your passport to uncovering both popular spots and hidden gems serving up the best boba delights.

### 5. THE ALLEY

Boba hotspot The Alley is known for its handmade boba, which workers playfully call "deerioca," in reference to the shop's deer icon. The shop's rapid expansion speaks for itself. A must-try is the delicious Brown Sugar Deerioca Crème Brûlée Milk: the milk is rich and velvety, it has just the right amount of syrup, sports perfectly cooked tapioca pearls and the little crème brûlée bits top off this wonderful beverage.

Location: 5 Locations – Flagship Store 272 High Holborn, WC1V 7EY



### 4. LUCKY TEA

Another bubble tea shop located on Newport Street (or "bubble tea alley," as I like to call it), Lucky Tea has a diverse selection of drinks and toppings to choose from. The shop stands out for its thicker drinks such as their smoothies and slushies. It is one of my favourites precisely because of the passionfruit Yakult, watermelon milk foam smoothie and matcha slushie with adzuki beans, but the shop is certainly most popular for its fantastic grape slushie.

Must Try: Grape Slushie Made with Fresh Grape Pieces, Cheese Milk Foam and Crystal Boba

Location: 35 Newport Street WC2H 7PQ



### 3. HEYTEA

HEYTEA has very recently emerged in London. The Chinatown store is its first one outside of Asia, and the shop has been met with rave reviews and huge queues. In particular, HEYTEA is known for its cheese brew beverages, which have become a phenomenon across China in recent years. While it may sound odd, the flavours combine to taste similar to a cheesecake.

Must Try: Very Grape Cheese, or Mango Pomelo Sago

Location: Unit 2 Ground Floor of Wingate House, 93-107 Shaftesbury Avenue W1D 5DA

### 2. GONG CHA

"Gong Cha" is the Chinese phrase for the act of offering the best tea to the Emperor. It evokes an image of teas and beverages of the highest and finest quality, which are fit for royalty. The shop has been brewing up bubble tea magic since 2006, perfecting its recipes and techniques to bring you that perfect cup every single time. Gong Cha's menu is delightfully colourful and filled with playful milk tea combinations. My personal favourite? The yoghurt popping pearls.

Must Try: Milk Foam Matcha Strawberry Milk Tea

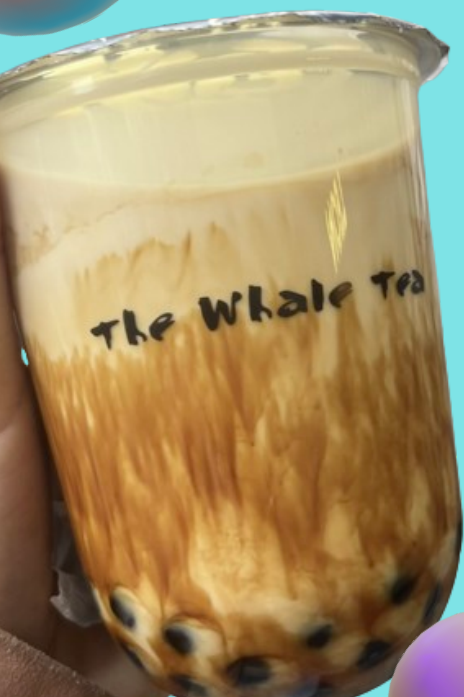
Location: 3 Garrick St, London WC2E 9BF

### 1. WHALE TEA

For me, Whale Tea takes the TOP-spot. From Nanjing, China, WHALE TEA is named after the whale because of the animal's symbolism of strength and sustainability—two things that the shop also stands for. The workers pride themselves on matching the amazing taste of bubble tea along with dazzling and eye-catching visuals. This is precisely why I love Whale Tea; your drink will both look and taste phenomenal. I would firmly say that the store's brown sugar boba is the best in London: it's silky smooth and impossibly rich.

Must Try: The Flaming Whale—Classic Sugar Boba with Fresh Cheese Cream on Top

Location: 7 Locations Across London—Flagship Store 45 Wardour Street, W1D 6PZ







# time as preserver

by trisha gupta

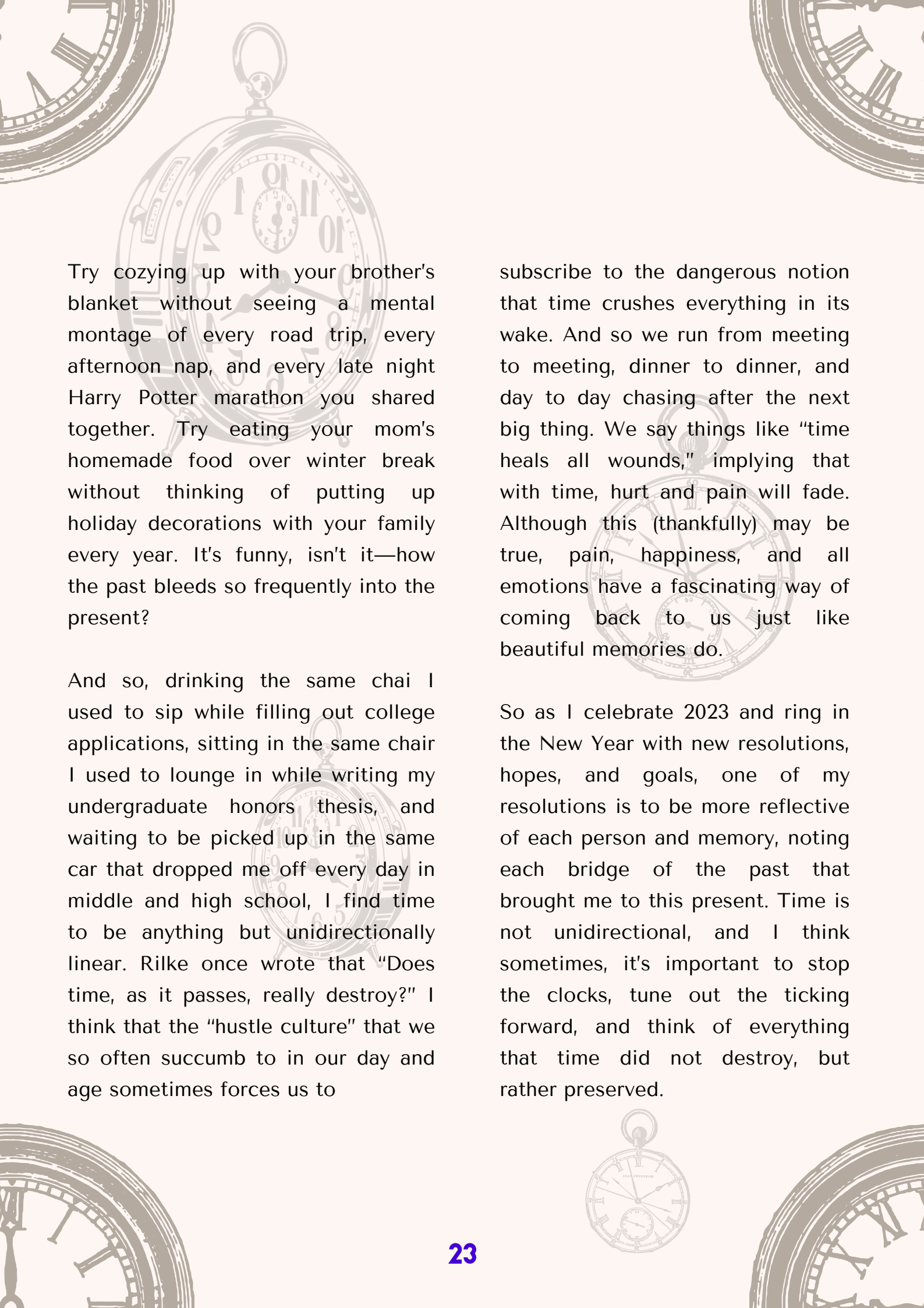
My car wouldn't turn on this morning, and there was something so utterly childlike about crawling into my mom's Toyota van with my backpack slung over my shoulder waiting to be dropped off. It took me straight back to my high school winter mornings, when my brother and I would warm our hands with mugs of chocolate milk while watching the TV screen eagerly hoping for a snow day.

As I write this, I'm sitting in my Pennsylvania hometown café at 7 a.m. EST time devouring a pesto chicken panini for my stomach, which is still on 12 p.m. GMT time. That's the funny thing about time, I think—we as humans try so hard to force it into something unidirectionally linear, when it really isn't.

If you sit in perfect silence and tune into the noises of your surroundings, it's so difficult nowadays not to hear the faint tick tick of a wall clock or someone's wrist watch. Seconds go by, minutes fade away, and hours pass by every day of our lives this way; with the faint tick tick of time clicking away inside of us as we check off to-do items on our lists, cross off days on calendars waiting for the next vacation and look forward to time off work. We force time into the straight lines we used to draw with rulers in middle school geometry and forget that memories, nostalgia, and flashbacks also exist.

Try touching your undergraduate class tote bag without being transported back to the mornings when you and your roommate would snooze all her morning alarms.





Try cozying up with your brother's blanket without seeing a mental montage of every road trip, every afternoon nap, and every late night Harry Potter marathon you shared together. Try eating your mom's homemade food over winter break without thinking of putting up holiday decorations with your family every year. It's funny, isn't it—how the past bleeds so frequently into the present?

And so, drinking the same chai I used to sip while filling out college applications, sitting in the same chair I used to lounge in while writing my undergraduate honors thesis, and waiting to be picked up in the same car that dropped me off every day in middle and high school, I find time to be anything but unidirectionally linear. Rilke once wrote that "Does time, as it passes, really destroy?" I think that the "hustle culture" that we so often succumb to in our day and age sometimes forces us to

subscribe to the dangerous notion that time crushes everything in its wake. And so we run from meeting to meeting, dinner to dinner, and day to day chasing after the next big thing. We say things like "time heals all wounds," implying that with time, hurt and pain will fade. Although this (thankfully) may be true, pain, happiness, and all emotions have a fascinating way of coming back to us just like beautiful memories do.

So as I celebrate 2023 and ring in the New Year with new resolutions, hopes, and goals, one of my resolutions is to be more reflective of each person and memory, noting each bridge of the past that brought me to this present. Time is not unidirectional, and I think sometimes, it's important to stop the clocks, tune out the ticking forward, and think of everything that time did not destroy, but rather preserved.





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# SETLIST

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