

FREE

Hockey Brunch



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FOR "FRESH FRUIT FOR ROTTING VEG-
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REAR COVER BY @WTYKY

We believe that hockey writing relies too heavily on the familiar.

Is a team contending or rebuilding?

Is a player's skill found in the aggregate or the eye test?

Who made the NHL even though they're short?

Who needs to "step up?"

The dreaded game recap...

This kind of writing does little to describe the communities where hockey takes root - the diverse people who gather around the game, the unexpected encounters and experiences that ensue, and the traditions and rituals that form away from the bright lights of the arena.

Every city has its stories and every team has its subcultures. When something seems weird, that's usually a good sign that somebody feels passionately about it.

HOCKEY BRUNCH is a zine about the unexpected cultures that form around hockey, home to the authentic, the creative, and the bizarre. Non-fiction, fiction, investigative journalism, satire, humor, diary entries, poetry, stream-of-consciousness, photography, painting, illustration, Photoshops both good and bad, a description of something weird encountered on the way to the game: anything goes.

Thanks for picking up our first issue.

Conrad

2019

A brief history of the organ and my childhood dreams

BY LUKE PERISTY

1: An Odd Child

With the benefit of hindsight and experience, I can now see the ways in which my parents orchestrated my childhood with a soft power of which I was unaware for many years. Ours was a staunchly middle-class family, and the activities chosen for me were in keeping with this. Swimming and piano lessons were a constant, curling a winter sport activity and baseball or soccer a summer sport activity. However, years later I would puzzle over the fact that, unlike many of my friends, I never played organized ice hockey at any level. This was no accident. My parents, wary of the cost in terms of equipment, time, travel, and sleep, simply declined to tell me that playing hockey was something that children could do, hoping that I would not ask to participate in children's leagues if I didn't know about them. This tack worked such that by the time I was aware of the existence of house league hockey, my skating ability was so far removed from those of my peers that I didn't want to play anyway. The lesson I have taken from this in adulthood is that cultivating a child's ignorance

(through homeschooling and other forms of social isolation) is equally important to cultivating their knowledge (again through homeschooling), and will frequently pay literal dividends much sooner.

The implicit understanding that ice hockey wasn't really for me had a peculiar effect on my self-image, goals, and dreams. I was not a hockey player, so I cannot remember ever having a childhood fantasy of scoring a Cup-winning goal in overtime of Game Seven. I never thought I would be drafted or playing wing. I never dreamed of winning a gold medal at the World Junior Hockey Championships. (Only the most important hockey tournaments are played over Christmas). Yet through a synthesis of music lessons, recordings of various Bach works played by Karl Richter, and the 54-key Casio keyboard my parents bought so I could continue my piano lessons while we were living with my grandparents, one desire slowly crystalized in my heart: I wanted to be a hockey organist.



The organ console at Chicago Stadium

2: I Went to an Organ Recital and a Hockey Game Broke Out

The idea of organ music at a hockey game doesn't seem strange at all unless you think about it for any time whatsoever. Organ music is traditionally associated with various Christian liturgical forms. Culturally speaking, the organ hasn't been a "cool" instrument for centuries, and there are no children dragging their parents to a music store so they can bang out "Smoke on the Water" on a diapason. Even most rock organists are converted keyboard players. Practically speaking, the organ, with its multiple keyboards (called manuals), foot pedals, hundreds of pipes, dozens of stops, and tremendous need for air to sound the pipes, is likely one of the most impractical instruments ever invented. Finally, and perhaps most damningly, a lot of people don't even like how the organ sounds. And yet we know that hockey games have organs and organists because hockey is the sport with organ music. There's even a scene in *Slap Shot* about it. How did this come to be? The answer lies in Chicago with the construction of the Chicago Stadium, an impresario who wanted his arena music as loud as possible, and a nine-fingered organist.

When Chicago Stadium was built in 1929, its theatre organ was dubbed the “stadium wonder” because it was capable of being played at a volume no other instrument in the world could match. The Barton organ built into Chicago Stadium was shipped piece-by-piece from Wisconsin to Illinois in twenty-four box cars. It required over one hundred mechanics to install and the console had six manuals, 32 pedals, and over 850 switches which could produce the equivalent sound of two-and-a-half thousand brass instruments playing simultaneously. Chicago Stadium impresario Paddy Harmon selected Barton to be the official organ supplier of Chicago Stadium after being impressed when another, smaller Barton organ couldn’t be drowned out by the noise of a passing train. It was not constructed as an instrument of art, religion, or culture; it was an instrument of spectacle.

Even by the standards of the day, the Chicago Stadium organ was considered a bit much. When Chicago hosted the 1932 Democratic and Republican

conventions, speakers were cautioned not to orate while the organ was playing in order to save their voices. The organ also proved to be a poor pairing with boxing matches, with one Chicago Tribune writer complaining that the organ “drowns out remarks from the gallery and detracts from the reality of the occasion”, apparently preferring that the boxing crowd be allowed to heckle the fighters without having to compete with the organ.

Thus, the Chicago Stadium organ may never have had the effect on hockey culture that it did were it not for organist Al Melgard. Initially a talented radio and theatre organist, Melgard was forced to let go from his radio position and became an organ demonstrator on behalf of Barton when his left index finger was severed in a shop accident. Demonstrating the Chicago Stadium organ was a fateful circumstance for both Melgard and hockey as he quickly became known for both the quality of his playing and his song selection. One of Melgard’s more controversial choices was to play “Three Blind Mice” as the

“The idea of organ music at a hockey game doesn’t seem strange until you think about it for any time whatsoever.”

notoriety that he was instructed by the NHL to cease and desist. Naturally, within months Melgard proved to be so popular that Chicago Stadium president Sid Strotz offered him the position of stadium organist for as long as he wanted it, and “as long as he wanted it” ended up being until 1974.

3: Norm Kramer and the Organ Wars

The Chicago Stadium organ started an arms race of sorts with the Detroit Red Wings, Toronto Maple Leafs, New York Rangers, Montreal Canadiens, and Boston Bruins all acquiring organs and house organists by the end of the 1960s. However, the reputation and perceived power of the hockey organist peaked following the NHL’s expansion to St. Louis with Norm Kramer. Kramer, who liked to perform in a silver jacket as befitting any rock star, was arguably more popular than most players, and possibly the first and only organist to be too good at their job. Originally paid \$35 a game, Kramer decided to play hardball with Scotty Bowman and Blues owner Sidney Salomon Jr. after a sportswriter (whose identity has been lost to history) estimated that Kramer’s organ playing was worth an extra “half a goal” per game for the team. Kramer asked Salomon for a raise from \$35 a game to \$10,000 for a full year, arguing that his half a goal over 39 home games made him roughly equivalent to a 20-goal scorer. Kramer wasn’t alone in this assessment of his abilities.

When the All-Star Game came to St. Louis in 1970, Chicago Black Hawks owner, Bill Wirtz, argued that the Western Conference would have an unfair scoring advantage if Kramer was allowed to play for the entire All-Star Game. (It can’t really be overstated that we are talking about an All-Star Game here.) Wirtz demanded that Al Melgard, “the senior organist in the senior division”, play at least half of the All-Star Game or else he would “never come back to St. Louis again.” (The division of organist duties at the 1970 All-Star Game is unknown, but I can tell you that the Eastern Conference won 4-1.) Kramer also credited himself with being responsible for the Atlanta Flames’ first home points of the 1972 season, pointing out that the team had been winless at home until he played the organ immediately leading to a tie and a win in the next two home games. Alas, despite Kramer’s sterling jacket and reputation, he parted ways with the Blues in 1973 over his salary demands, making him an unrestricted free agent organist more than two decades before players were attained the rights to unrestricted free agent status.

II

I moved to Canada from Germany in 2015, to study and to live with a high school sweetheart. It didn't take long for the situation to sour. It's hard to admit that you're in an abusive relationship, especially when you're young, far from home, and trying to protect the person you love. Most of all, being a victim of abuse feels embarrassing and isolating. You're made to feel responsible. It's hard to open up about. It feels like maybe if you just figured out the right thing to do or the right way to act it could all be fixed.

Luckily for me, there was a topic I could address that wasn't a source of conflict or rage: my partner loved hockey. I didn't grow up with the sport and enjoyed listening to him talk about it. An invitation to listen to a hockey podcast in bed was often a peace offering after an angry outburst, a sign that I could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

As I learned more about the sport and formed my own opinions, the power dynamic shifted. My partner was no longer the only one with knowledge in the conversation. The threat of an even playing field angered him. My interest, knowledge and opinions were disregarded, dismissed and belittled. This made the sport yet another risky discussion topic in our house. It was crushing. I had grown to truly enjoy hockey and wanted to exchange ideas and opinions with others who cared for the sport, especially when the team we were rooting for started looking better and better.

It hurts to be belittled in public spaces but it's something that you begin to expect as a woman. You grow a thicker skin, you tell your friends, and you can tell yourself that the person humiliating you is an asshole. It hurts more when this power dynamic is replicated at home, when the person belittling you is someone you love and whose opinion you value. especially white straight men who reminded me of my partner.

I had always been social and outgoing. I love people. But around this time, they began to terrify me. A rapid, unexpected movement, a slight change in tone or a raised voice immediately set off alarm bells in my head. I was always treading on eggshells, always afraid to trigger a fit of rage. I wasn't entirely aware of this shift in my personality. It was a survival strategy I would recognize later.

III

The excitement and interest in hockey led me to come out of my shell. I found a female friend who also liked the sport and we began going out to pubs to watch games. After a while, the group grew and shifted. More people joined us, I made new friends and chatted with strangers watching the games. I began spending time with people who cared for the sport but also valued my opinion and my passion. They didn't require me to make myself small in order for them to display their power. I finally got a taste of more equal relationships, not just with women and queer folks who I was used to feeling more at ease around during this time period, but also with straight white men.

I became aware of how afraid of men I had become since moving to Canada and how I was now in a situation where I could experience a more positive interaction based on the love of sport. An environment in which women were listened to, our opinions respected, a space made for us. Such an environment isn't something I take for granted, especially in sports fandom. I was extremely lucky to have found my way into this group of people when I was at my most vulnerable.

IV

Hockey became an escape from an abusive home, a coping mechanism. Any pub with decent-sized TVs and reasonably priced beers could be a home. For a few hours, I could be loud and passionate and have fun, take up space and talk shit without fear. These regular haunts became another, safer, home away from home. They gave me a taste of what my life could be like. A taste of healthy relationships with men. A taste of interaction with others that wasn't dangerous or sexualised or uncomfortable.

Hockey caused my group of friends to grow and diversify. Hockey Twitter provided me with a digital space my partner wasn't a part of where I could connect with likeminded fans. People were compassionate. It wasn't about university or heartache or my mental health unless I wanted it to be. It was a blank slate, an opportunity to make new friends, a way to grow roots in the local community. Healing isn't linear and leaving an abusive home is hard. There was no clean cut; the breakup dragged on. But if I had to place a marker at the point when ties would begin to sever and my life turned around, I would place it right here.

V

The 2016/2017 hockey season was the beginning of a completely different life for me.

I moved out that summer and had a safe home for the first time since I had moved to Canada. My connections within the community grew. I made more friends, dated, opened up, learned to feel okay again. The next hockey season was shit. I laughed it off. Friends and I went out to watch games and talked about our lives. The fantasy league I became a part of turned into a year-round group chat where everyone is kind and caring towards each other.

They were the first of my friends to meet my new partner.

When we first met we talked about hockey.



'I want an owner'

I want the next owner of the Ottawa Senators to have been poor. I want an owner whose bank account had to dip into overdraft protection when they bought those tickets. An owner whose kid cried when they couldn't afford the jersey. I want an owner who is an actual fan. An owner who got stuck in that parking lot for over an hour at minus forty. Who had to sit next to a Leafs fan or a Habs fan or a Pens fan while the team laid an egg. An owner who threw a hamburger on the ice. I want an owner with morals. An owner who does tweet at predators like Bill O'Reilly and Donald Trump - but only to call them pieces of shit. I want a gay owner and I want a trans owner and I want the next owner of the Ottawa Senators to be a woman. I want the person responsible for enhancing the game day experience to be someone who has sat in the crowd and heard vile, homophobic, misogynistic insults hurled at players and then went home and couldn't just shrug it off. I want an owner who is capable of telling the truth. An owner who doesn't insult our intelligence. I want an owner who is GRATEFUL. I want a person of colour for an owner. I want an owner who got looked at sideways for wearing a turban to the games but never stopped going. And I want to know why this isn't possible. I want to know why we started accepting that an owner is always a crook. Always a taker and never a giver. Always above us and never among us. Always a liar. Always accounting and never accountable.

- Rob Poirier

Inspired by Zoe Leonard's 'I want a president'

Gaze upon my garden,
Inside which I grow many fucks.
Solicitudes, care-fors,
Sympathies and such.
Many passers-by stray by my field,
And blithely admire,
All the shades, colours and sizes,
And they'll languorously inquire:
'Do you care for that contest what,
Tests a beast and a shitbird's luck?'
I sociably return their stare:
'No, I do not give a fuck.'

Just then the shitbird wandered up,
Sporting a tuxedo and two rings,
'I am Lord of crafty slashes,
I ensure fingers no longer fing!
I am worthy of your idolizations,
And I lay claim to your patch,
Now, reap in entirety these fucks,
I shall take the whole batch!'
I quaked with anger and rage:
'Not one favour is to be plucked!',
My indignation boiling o'er hot:
'I will not give a fuck!'

Arriving just then to my plot,
A dwarf with a peacock in his ear,
He shuddered with seismic release,
When he spied the shitbird near.
'Be gone you tiny cur!', I frothed,
'Before your slime takes root!
How dare you plant in the desert,
Now Vegas has followed suit!'
'We are what we eat,' he shrugged,
Now, won't you join me in lunch?',
He brought forth a snack of butts,
Upon which hungrily he munched.

Now sated, weighted and lazy,
Both the dwarf and the shitbird,
he,
Greased their hair and parted lips,
So as to proselytize me.
Every pitch and ware they plied,
Was an ode to the shitbird's feats,
Admiring their padded crotches,
Corpulent with padded stat sheets.
Merry rounds of exultation,
Were sung with endless glee,
Pausing only to pad stats s'more,
And to rig the lottery.

It was plain what would continue,
With likely no finish to see,
I rigorously gathered up my fucks,
Knowing what would come to be.
The motley pair seemed satisfied,
And cared no longer for this plight,
They boarded a stolen chariot,
And began fading out of sight.
With a cackle o'er his shoulder,
Said the dwarf: "T'is preordained",
'Forget not to witness the shitbird,
Hold aloft Stanley's Cup again!'

- Matt

ON ATH EISM AND HOC KEY

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I Don't Believe In God, But I Believe In The Ottawa Senators

I was raised in a middle-class, liberal home. My parents are university educated. My family has zero athletic ability. Most of them don't care whatsoever about sports. I played hockey for two years between the ages of eight and ten (to the chagrin of my parents).

And wow, was I awful.

But here's the thing: I absolutely adore hockey. I watch 70+ games a season. I read all the news articles, all the blogs. And despite the crippling existential angst of being a Sens fan, I keep coming back for more.

So, it begs the question: how does a nerdy kid devote such love to a sport that - let's face it - is pretty backwards?

I've circled around the question a few times, and I think I've finally got it.

I love hockey because I am an atheist. I don't believe in God, so I watch hockey.

I'm not the first to draw a parallel between religion and sports, but it occurs to me that my faith in the Ottawa Senators is a stand-in for my lack of spiritual beliefs.

Look, I'm not trying to ascribe any moral values to my favourite hockey team.

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or that his team represents a set of ethics to live by. Gary Bettman is not a paragon of virtue. But I do think the fervor of devoted fans is not unlike evangelical faith.

People become fans of a team through a combination of cultural factors. Obviously, location plays a big role in shaping allegiances (it did for me). Likewise, many parents raise their children to love the same team they were raised to love. Others have aesthetic reasons for adopting a team - they like the logo or colours.

How different is this from devotion to a religion? I am an atheist because of the influence of my parents. I went to a public school where many friends and mentors were also atheists. It was the same for the kids who went to the Catholic school across the way - just a different set of beliefs.

And yeah, I'm a little ashamed to admit it, but aesthetic factors played a role in defining my teenage atheist identity. Many of the punk bands that shaped me were outspoken heathens.

Believe me, it's easy to adopt a nihilistic, faithless attitude when you come of age as a Sens fan.

But the connection between faith and hockey goes beyond how allegiances are shaped. Have you ever asked what the goal of your sports fandom is? Beyond entertainment, most hockey fans want to see their team win the Stanley Cup. This is the sporting equivalent of nirvana; of transcendence. It's a symbol that a fan's faith is justified - that the hours of devotion, the years of strife, the questionable trades made by general managers, it's all paid off.

And like religion, there isn't much we can do to control this outcome. Sure, you can donate to your church. You can buy season tickets. This might help the visibility and sustainability of your ideology. But it doesn't win you Stanley Cups - and it doesn't bring you closer to God. The acts of deities, the acts of shitty general managers - these are out of our control. We can only hope for a desired outcome.

We can only hope that when we die, our faith was well placed and we ascend to a higher plane.

And sorry Leafs fans, if there is a Hell, you are destined for it.

Most diehards will blindly follow their team, accepting and even justifying poor decisions made by those in control. Sure, there are always dissenters and skeptics, but the majority will continue to be fans of a team regardless of its direction or likelihood of success. Many will bend over backwards to defend their team and denounce the quality of rivals - shit talking is another act shared by fans and proselytizers.

There's a certain irony that hockey can act as both a replacement for religion and a means of unifying factions of different creeds and cultural backgrounds. It's a given that not all hockey fans are atheists, but doubters and disciples alike will unite under one banner in the hopes that their hockey team will prevail.

So yeah, I don't believe in God. But I need to believe in something, so I believe in the Ottawa Senators.

BEN ADLER

HOCKEY BRUNCH FALL 2019



IT'S TIME ^{FOR} THE
DRAGLAM SALT

"Power Play"

WAHTIKI