



CAMBRIDGE DAY

THE WEEK OF APRIL 2 – APRIL 9, 2026

FREE

Chapter and verse



Jean Dany Joachim speaking at the City Night Readings event.

Alex Degterev

By ALEX DEGTEREV

Cambridge and Somerville have long been hubs of poetry in the United States, producing or educating some of the country’s best-known poets.

That rich legacy of poetry is present all over the two cities even today. “The area has a very vibrant scene – maybe the most vibrant it’s ever been,” said James Fraser, manager of the Grolier Poetry Bookshop in Harvard Square.

Poetry slams fill the underbelly of the storied Cantab Lounge in Central Square every Wednesday; a more relaxed, conventional scene for readings takes place at Little Crepe Café in Baldwin every Friday evening; while mere blocks away at the Lizard Lounge, Sunday night poetry jams combine an informal open mic event, a low-pressure slam and featured

readings, with the twist of poetry performed in front of musical accompaniment.

Meanwhile, in Somerville “per capita there are more writers/poets than in Manhattan,” said Doug Holder, arts editor at the Somerville Times and founder of the Ibbetson Street Press, an independent publisher dedicated to poetry. Somerville has a Poet Laureate, and Cambridge has had Poet Populists.

Beyond the talent “There are presses that have been publishing poetry books for almost twenty years, pop-up readings around town; Porter Square Books is always a consistent venue,” added Holder. “It’s an ecosystem.” Taken all together the scene in the two cities, along with that in Boston, has made this area one of the best in the U.S. for poetry. It’s a place where the passing of Cam-

bridge poet and musician Charles Coe warrants a memorial tribute hosted at the Boston Public Library and organized in conjunction with the Boston Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture, with featured readers including three-time U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, Massachusetts Poet Laureate Regie Gibson, Poet Laureate of Boston Emmanuel Oppong-Yeboah. Poetry is part of the cadence of the community. [The Coe event will be from 1:30 to 4:30 on April 11.]

Stroll by the Grolier

A few steps off of Massachusetts Avenue near Harvard’s Widener Library is the Grolier Poetry Book Shop, one of the only shops in America to exclusively sell works of poetry.

See POETRY page 11

Wilson’s first 100 days focus on structure



Taylor Coester

Somerville Mayor Jake Wilson promised an open door policy during his campaign.

By SYDNEY WISE

On the campaign trail, Jake Wilson stressed his first priority if elected would be “opening the mayor’s office door.” He followed through, making that his first act after he took the oath of office. And last week, Cambridge Day journalists went past the threshold to discuss his first 100 days in office, coming up April 11.

Wilson said an administrative restructuring has occupied much of his effort since taking office. “We’re building a team,” he said when asked about his biggest accomplishments thus far. He wants to leverage that team to execute future priorities, like data statistics and housing, he said. Other focal points have been strengthening regional collaborations and supporting efforts to create more housing, especially of the affordable sort.

Creating a cabinet

Showing someone the door

has been perhaps his most visible act to date. In February, former Arts Council director Greg Jenkins was fired after almost 25 years of service, which Wilson later announced was part of a departmental reorganization, a reworking of the city’s administration into a cabinet-style architecture, Wilson told Cambridge Day. He now meets weekly with about nine senior administrators, instead of the 27 that formerly attended department head meetings. Each cabinet member represents a department, which are composed of divisions with their own budget lines, overseeing various city offices.

He said the cabinet structure is meant to escalate problems more quickly to him, to make faster decisions across the government.

The arts, libraries, and recreation will be divisions in a department headed by a new

See WILSON, page 3

Grape arbors around Somerville entwine residents with the land’s past



Matt McKeon

Grape vines can grow very thick and should be pruned and rearranged annually.

By RUTH TAM

When Mo Katz-Christy was growing up in the Spring Hill neighborhood of Somerville in the 2010s, they had a neighbor with a beautiful grape arbor on his property. Champagne grapes hung above the door, stretched over the driveway and around the entire house.

“It was magical,” they said. “It felt like infinite grapes.”

Neighbors, including Katz-Christy’s family, asked to harvest the grapes and would come by with shopping bags to pick fruit off the vines. Katz-Christy’s family would use their harvest to make juice, ideally 52 quarts for Shabbat every week of the year.

But as their neighbor aged, the grape arbor fell into neglect, growing over his garage. So, Katz-Christy’s family began

pruning the vines. “It was a testament to our love for that arbor and our desire for it to continue,” they said. Katz-Christy no longer lives next door and that neighbor’s grape arbor is long gone.

“Somerville is all grapes”

Although grapevines are often considered a nuisance by developers or new residents and are uprooted, many still exist in backyards and interstices around

Somerville and Cambridge. Katz-Christy, 29, is now an herbalist who teaches classes about medicinal herbs and local plants, including grapes.

At a recent workshop on pruning grape arbors, Katz-Christy encouraged local residents to turn their “grape eyes” on. “When you start looking, Somerville is all grapes,” they said.

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METRO

Housing a big issue for Connolly-Miller race

BY SYDNEY WISE

The lack of affordable housing across the state will be the focal point of the race between state Rep. Mike Connolly and his challenger, affordable housing advocate Neil Miller.

Connolly has not faced a challenger in any race since he unseated 13-term incumbent Tim Toomey in the 2016 Democratic primary by just under 400 votes. The seat covers central Cambridge and Somerville. Miller has not previously run for office. He has volunteered with A Better Cambridge, an all-volunteer housing advocacy group, for the last six years. In January of 2025, Miller left his job as a data scientist for the federal government. He is a student at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Miller told Cambridge Day “the reason that I’m running is that Massachusetts is a great place to live,” but it could be better. “There’s this gap between, I think, good intentions and the results that people see,” Miller said, citing oft-lamented legislative inertia.

Miller wants to hire in-house at the MBTA and MassDOT instead of paying external consultants; improve public service hiring pathways; and re-evaluate procurement rules to increase vendor competition. On housing, he wants to expand multifamily zoning rules statewide and remove parking mandates for new developments, he said.

Connolly and Miller share many concerns. In his re-election campaign, Connolly said he will prioritize housing affordability, defend against federal action, and “continue working to make state government work for our constituents and for our commu-



Matt Rocha

State Rep. Mike Connolly at a press conference in front of the State House in Boston in 2023.

nity.”

“I’m very grateful for the trust that the people of Cambridge and Somerville have placed in me. We’ve certainly accomplished a lot in recent years and there’s so much more to do,” Connolly said. He cited his record on housing, including his role as co-chair of the Housing for All Legislative Caucus, the passage of the Affordable Homes Act, and establishment of an eviction and foreclosure moratorium during COVID. He’s also pushed for social housing — state-owned mixed-income housing developments — he said.

Connolly was named the vice chair of the House Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs at the start of this term. Such roles come with an additional leadership stipend, which Connolly said is roughly \$7,776 per year, with inflationary adjustments.

Miller was “disappointed” to learn that Connolly received a stipend. He said these enable legislative inertia by making individual representatives dependent on the good favor of the House

leadership. In 2023, 109 of 160 state representatives received a leadership stipend, the Boston Globe reported. Connolly was not among them, with the Globe noting that as one of the House’s more progressive members, he often disagreed with House leadership.

“A big focus of mine will be ending handouts from leadership for committees that don’t do any work,” Miller said. “Legislators should be paid for getting results, not just for their relationship with leadership.”

Connolly said via email “I am honored by the trust the Speaker placed in me to serve as a member of his extended leadership team for the first time this term. At the same time, I am proud of my extensive record of standing up for our community’s progressive values on Beacon Hill.” The House Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs has met five times this session, Connolly said, with discussions including emergency preparedness, budgets and the impact of federal actions, and support for fallen active-duty



Michael F. Fitzgerald

Neil Miller canvassing for A Better Cambridge in 2025.

police and firefighters.

Miller will hold his first campaign event Sunday, when he’ll lead a community walk through the district beginning at 11 a.m.

There will be many such events throughout Cambridge and Somerville this year, an unusually competitive Beacon Hill election cycle. State Sen. Pat Jehlen is retiring, and among those seeking her seat are state representatives Erika Uyterhoeven and Christine Barber, who will leave their seats covering the 27th and 34th Middlesex Districts. State Rep. Marjorie Decker faces a rematch with Evan MacKay in the 25th Middlesex District, which is entirely within Cambridge. State Sen. Will Brownsberger is facing a challenge from Daniel Lander. (Disclosure: Lander’s mother, Lori Lander, is on the Local News Fund Advisory Board at the Cambridge Community Foundation, which has given financial support to Cambridge Day.)

Candidates must file nomination papers by 5 p.m. on April 28. The primary election is September 1.

Community View



Photograph by Kristen Emack

Eid-al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, a month when Muslims fast, worship, donate to charity and gather communally. Eid is a major Muslim holiday and this year families in the community gathered to celebrate together joyfully at The Peabody Elementary School on Rindge Ave on March 20th.

Scan the QR code to submit your photos from around our community.



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A piece of Harvard Square’s history falls into disrepair



The collapsed segment of a historic wall in the Harvard Square alleyway between the former Red House and the IHOP, parallel to Eliot Street.

By TOM MEEK

A historic wall in Harvard Square may be up against it, as business owners and city officials are banging their heads against the problem of how to fix it.

The stone wall was built more than 200 years ago, mostly hidden behind Charlie’s Beer Garden, was erected in the late 1700s and early 1800s to channel the spring-fed Town Creek to the Charles River. The project made Winthrop Square — then a knoll and the heart of Harvard Square — a more stable and level gathering spot by protecting it from a creek winding toward the Charles River.

The wall might also have been intended for a more ambitious project: a wharf on Eliot Street, said Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission. Like the West End in Boston, some parts of Cambridge near the Charles River were previously underwater and later filled in.

The wall partially collapsed in 2020 and was never repaired. Scarce funding and complicated jurisdiction left it crumbling, and rats — lots of rats — moved in. Last year, Denise Jillson, the Harvard Square Business Association’s executive director, asked public health experts in Cambridge and at Harvard University for help analyzing the problem.

“That site is akin to a prairie dog village ... but with rats,” said Richard J. Pollack, Harvard’s senior environmental public health officer.

In March, Jillson issued a release calling on the community and stakeholders to “together to find a solution to the complex challenge of preserving this historical relic that sits on private property.” The release included an illustrated comic about the wall and its history created by Caro Taylor, a Cambridge resident and a junior at the Commonwealth School in Boston who was an intern at the HSBA last summer.

The “Old Stone Wall” runs from Winthrop Street, through Charlie’s Beer Garden, and out

to Eliot Street. The better-preserved section, which divides Charlie’s and the former Red House restaurant (soon to be relaunched as the Cox Hicks Club), is an impressive 8- to 10-foot high structure, still intact. The collapsed section of the wall — adjacent to Eliot Street, tucked behind the IHOP — is not publicly visible except through a small alley. Here the wall is 4 or 5 feet tall.

A combination of factors likely contributed to its deterioration, according to the city and the Harvard Square Business Association: age, erosion, weather, ongoing disturbances from area construction, and rats.

The wall was built with large fieldstones laid in a battered profile that lean inward — a technique used in early retaining walls to release pressure. The rocks were dry-laid to allow water to pass through the wall rather than build up behind it. The stones are local: Roxbury Puddingstone from that neighborhood’s Parker Hill and granite from quarries on the Boston Harbor Islands.

“It’s not the only stone wall in Harvard Square, but it is by far the largest and most significant,” Sullivan said.

The wall is located within the Harvard Square Conservation District, which means work requiring a building permit generally requires review by the historical commission. However, the commission’s jurisdiction applies only to features visible from a public way. Portions of the wall are located behind buildings on private property and cannot be seen from the street, limiting the commission’s authority over those sections.

Given the wall’s historic value, the city appropriated \$200,000 in Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds in 2021 to shore up the Eliot Street section of the wall.

For more on Harvard Square, scan the QR code.



Wilson

From Page 1

Executive Director of Culture and Community, hiring for which will be funded in fiscal year 2027 (FY27) starting July 1. Wilson’s staff is developing a job description for a new arts council director, reporting into the executive director.

He wants arts in the cabinet because “it’s one of the things that makes Somerville special. It’s one of the reasons I wanted to move to Somerville. It’s part of our DNA, right?”

More tactical changes coming to City Hall will include a bigger presence of city staff at city hall. Staff began working remotely during the COVID pandemic: now, Wilson is developing a work-from-home policy with the “goal of getting people, where it makes sense, back in the office.” He said in-person work allows for relationship building that can’t occur digitally.

Wilson worked for Major League Baseball for more than a decade and calls himself a “Moneyball” kind of administrator. Aptly, he’s been driving a data dashboard using SomerStat, Somerville’s data and statistics tool. Wilson wants a dashboard containing key metrics affecting the city — like traffic enforcement stops and fines, sharps collection, and weather alerts — both in his office and on the city’s website. The tool is close to launching, he said.

Internally, the dashboard will act as a “performance measure-

ment tool:” it can be referenced during leadership meetings and used to track departmental progress on key issues. It can also inform policy. Noting the percentage of traffic fines that result in monetary citations instead of warnings — currently around seven percent — could help set enforcement goals, for example. Knowing that number, Somerville “may have to turn that dial the other direction” on fines, Wilson said.

Being neighborly

Building a team isn’t confined to the walls of City Hall. It’s the “year of the neighbor,” Wilson said. “I want to extend that, you know, literally, to our neighboring communities.”

For instance, Somerville is exploring collaborative partnerships with Cambridge on a number of joint priorities, including homelessness and substance abuse, Wilson said. “I don’t want to let the cat out of the bag here too much, because a lot of this is still very early on, but we’re looking at other areas as well,” he continued. Cambridge city spokesman Jeremy Warnick agreed that the focus on substance abuse and homelessness cited by Wilson “would build upon the long-term work that staff from the cities have been collaborating on for quite some time.” The Cambridge Coordinated Access Network, or C-CAN, and the Somerville Homeless Coalition maintain a partnership, for example.

Wilson called Cambridge and

Somerville micro-cities, which necessitates cooperation. While large cities like Boston have increased in-house administrative capacity, it makes sense for smaller cities like Somerville to look to its neighbors to push out policy, he said. And the state can also support local priorities.

Housing is a prime example. Wilson said the Healey-Driscoll administration has a social housing pilot provided for by the Affordable Homes Act, a \$5 billion piece of housing legislation signed by Governor Healey in 2024. Social housing is a form of public housing with market elements. He said Cambridge and Somerville are both interested, “we want to be the guinea pigs on this.” Wilson even has a site in mind: next to the Gilman Square T stop, he said, gesturing out the window of his office. The site has transit, is “centrally located,” and its position down the hill from City Hall means that density wouldn’t cause too many shadows.

The core of his housing policy will be to ease the impact of the gentrification Somerville has experienced, especially in the last two decades. “It was happening before the Green Line came in. The Green Line has sped that up,” he said. “Unfortunately, it’s had some really negative impacts on the community.”

For more on Wilson’s first 100 days, scan the QR code.



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Two Generations of Cambridge

From young to old, crowd opposes ‘Kings’

By ALEX DEGTEREV

Cambridge was among thousands of places nationwide that saw ‘No Kings’ protests and rallies. More than 160 events happened across Massachusetts, second only to California, which hosted more than 320 rallies.

There were at least two protests in Cambridge. At 10 a.m. at the intersection of Mount Auburn Street and Gerry’s Landing Road, more than a dozen senior citizens lined up near the bus stop in front of the center or clustered, wheelchairs and all, on the traffic island at the intersection.

“Some of us can’t go to the other one so we’re doing what we can,” said Judy Young, who was pushing a rolling walker with a handmade sign that read “No Kings! Bridges for/by ‘THE PEOPLE.’”

These were not 1960s-era protestors revisiting their youth. “This is the first time I’ve come out to protest something,” Young said. “There’s nothing I can do about my ethnicity in this climate,” referring to being Asian American, but she said she could take this small action.

Like Young, Polly Malcolm said she had also never protested anything before. “I was taking care of babies,” Malcolm said of her younger days.

Now, Malcolm is going to Burlington every Wednesday to take part in the ongoing protests at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) field office there. Most of these protestors live in Cambridge Homes on Mount Auburn. Since Malcolm moved in just a few weeks ago, she’s organized daily sign-holding at the intersection, no matter



A group of Cantabrigians lead a march toward a No Kings rally on Boston Common.

the weather. “She’s galvanized us,” said Penny Janeway, another protestor.

The group was mostly greeted by cars honking and people waving. A Black man out for a run yelled out “Thank you!” Janeway said that during their daily protests, White men in pickup trucks “usually give us the middle finger,” but on Saturday “four or five have honked and waved.” Malcolm said “putting your body out there is the thing that creates change. We’re all old and this is something we can do.” She added, “I’m full of hope.”

Gathering on the Common

A few hundred people gathered at the Cambridge Common from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. It was organized by Craig Kelley, a former city councilor, and Katinka Hakuta. A few hundred people came including one dressed as a Tyrannosaurus rex. They lined the fence along Massachusetts Avenue waving signs and chanting.

Kelley, who spent nearly 20 years as a contractor for the U.S. Army Reserve, said the protest was inspired by Thomas Paine’s political pamphlet “Common Sense.” What the pamphlet emphasized was “that royalty exists does not lead to a better world,” he said. “[Paine] was right, 250 years later, he’s still right – that’s the message we are spreading today.”

Among those at the Common were Saeed Jones, who brought a



Polly Malcolm (left) and June Young outside Cambridge Homes.

sign whose primary message was, “Listen to Black People.” Jones is a poet who moved to Cambridge two years ago from Columbus, Ohio, to be an artist-in-residence at Harvard Medical School. He said he came to the protest in part to get to know his community better, and because “The violent atmosphere we’re living in has been unacceptable for a long time. Taking it in in isolation or on social media is not enough. It’s healthy and important to be here.”

Also present was Tumaini, a nine-year-old, and her parents. Tumaini said she had come to the No Kings protest because she felt the president “is being like a king – and not letting the people have their say.”

Dana Gardner came from the Lakes Region in New Hampshire to participate in the protest. He said there were protests in his area, but he came to the Common because “I was born in Cambridge, grew up here for five years and then lived here in my 20s. I

wanted to be here.”

Protestors March on

Many of those gathered headed to Boston Common afterward for a rally that organizers claimed drew more than 150,000 people.

Julie Craven, a Cambridge resident who has been involved in the De-ICE Citizens Bank Coalition protests, said she knew many people who, like herself, went only to the main Boston Common protest.

Craven spoke at a brief rally outside a Citizens Bank branch in the heart of the city, a block away from the Boston Common. The rally was organized by groups including the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT-MA) and the De-ICE Citizens Bank Coalition.

Craven led off the rally with a rousing call-to-action. “We are the De-ICE Citizens Bank coalition, a growing number of activists across 13 states, here to demand Citizens stops funding ICE Prisons,” she proclaimed loudly into the microphone. “Join us in ratcheting up the pressure and showing all corporations, there is a cost to doing business with evil.”

After speeches from several union heads and Reservoir Church Pastor Steve Watson, BVOCAL, a street protest chorus which has also taken part in the Citizens Bank protests in Cambridge, performed catchy protest songs.

“If you are among the lenders financing detention centers, we’re not gonna bank here anymore,” sang the group and gathered crowd to the theme of Twisted Sister’s “We’re Not Gonna Take It”.

Then the group posed for photos outside of the bank before marching toward Park Street T-station. The march then snaked its way through the Common, before eventually disbanding at the main stage on the other side of the park.

Speakers at the Boston Common included Sen. Ed Markey and Governor Maura Healy. Also speaking was Milford high school student Marcelo Gomes da Silva, who was detained by ICE in May 2025. He spoke about the fear that immigration enforcement had instilled in many communities across the country.

Connor Walters, a legal assistant who works on immigration law, came to Boston from Lakeville. He said the scale of the crowd had given him hope in collective action. “I have been involved in protests for years, and there has been this mantra, ‘Whose streets? Our streets,’ and it’s only like a hundred people,” he said. “I can’t help but feel like [in these cases] we are trying to convince ourselves.”

“But here,” Walters said, “I’m convinced.”

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BUSINESS & MONEY

Galvin a ‘Changemaker’

BY SANGMIN SONG

The push to make patient data easier to share across health systems has exposed a gap, as most systems still lack a way for patients to control how their information is used.

When a patient walks into an emergency room, their medical history can arrive before they do. For some, that means faster, better care. For others, it can mean being judged before they are treated.

That tension is at the center of the work of Hannah Galvin, chief health information officer at Cambridge Health Alliance. She recently received a national Changemaker Award from the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society for her work on patient data sharing.

“My work is about balancing access to information with patient privacy,” Galvin said. “Right now, we’ve built systems that move information easily, but they don’t always account for how that information affects patients.”

For health systems, sharing data is now a core part of care. Doctors rely on it to see patient medications, allergies and past diagnoses.

“When a patient comes in, we already have a baseline understanding of who they are,” said Jeannette Currie, the alliance’s senior vice president and chief information and digital officer. “That builds confidence in the care they receive, because they don’t have to repeat everything from the beginning.”

That lack of control can have consequences for patients, particularly those with sensitive health histories. Galvin said she saw that firsthand while working with homeless and at-risk youth



Courtesy of Cambridge Health Alliance

Hannah Galvin (right) at the 2026 Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society Global Health Conference where she received a Changemaker Award.

through Bridge Over Troubled Waters in Boston, where some hesitated to seek care because of how their information might be viewed. “They were worried about what was already in their record and how it would be interpreted,” she said. “Some would tell me they didn’t want to go to the emergency room because they thought providers would see their history and make assumptions about them.”

In some cases, that hesitation appeared when patients needed urgent care. Galvin said patients especially with a history of substance use worried their records would lead providers to dismiss their symptoms.

“They would tell me, ‘They’re going to see that and assume I’m just drug-seeking,’” she said. “Even when something else was going on, that history shaped how they expected to be treated.”

Part of the issue is how systems handle data sharing. In most cases, patients can either allow their information to be shared or block it entirely. That leaves those concerned about privacy with a difficult choice: share everything

or risk providers missing important details.

To address that gap, Galvin co-founded Shift Collaborative, a group working to develop standards that give patients a greater say in how their health data is shared. The aim is to allow people to choose which information is shared and with whom, without limiting access to care, reflecting a broader shift in how the industry is approaching data use.

“If the system is all or nothing, then it’s not working for everyone,” said Amit Trivedi, director of communications and partnerships at Shift Collaborative. “The people who may need that data sharing the most are often the least likely to use it.”

Adoption is in its early stages. Much of the work remains behind the scenes, as health IT vendors and policymakers decide how to incorporate these changes into existing systems.

This story is part of a partnership between Cambridge Day and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

Clover seeks a buyer

BY KARYNA CHEUNG

Clover Food Labs, a Cambridge-based fast-casual vegetarian chain, may close all locations and lay off over 180 employees if it can’t find a buyer before June.

According to a March 30 notice filed with the state, all 182 of Clover’s workers, including executives, will be laid off May 29 if a buyer is not secured before that date. Some employees will work for a limited time after the closure, states the notice, filed by Clover’s people operations director Maureen McSweeney.

Companies with over 50 employees are legally required to file a report with the state before a mass layoff or business closing and give workers 60 days’ notice.

The company released a statement saying: “We simply want to comply with all regulations. We are optimistic that Clover will continue to serve our locally sourced farm-to-table fast food in our company’s next chapter.”

Clover has 11 locations across Greater Boston, with five in Cambridge. It began as a food truck run by founder Ayr Muir in 2008. Muir was succeeded as CEO in 2023 by then-chief operating officer Julia Wrin Piper. Wrin Piper was COO of Somerville’s Aeronaut Brewing Company before joining Clover.

The company previously filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, stating that it could no longer pay the leases on multiple locations, The Boston Globe reported in 2023. At the time of the filing, Clover employed roughly 260 workers, according to the Globe. It exited bankruptcy less than six months later, with 13 stores and plans to expand to 60 locations.



Clover

Julia Wrin Piper samples food in the Clover kitchens in 2022, when she was chief operating officer.

Restaurant employees were sent an internal message to “not share any info” with reporters, and said they could not speak with Cambridge Day, citing the message. “We cannot share further information at this time,” the emailed statement reads.

The chain prioritizes locally sourced ingredients and a plant-based approach to reduce its carbon footprint. For vegetarians like Upala Kalim, 34, of Wakefield, Clover provides several options that might not otherwise be available.

“I think it meets my needs,” she said. “It definitely caters to the kind of food I like.”

Brian Forbis, 36, cited Veggie Galaxy in Central Square and Life Alive Organic Cafe as restaurants with large vegetarian menus. Forbis brought Kalim to Clover twice. He enjoys the rosemary fries.

This story is part of a partnership between Cambridge Day and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

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EVENTS AHEAD APRIL 2 – APR

Somerville Theatre, 55 Davis Square.

8 p.m. April 3

Global Arts Live presents Patrick Watson

\$72 to \$155. Montreal-based singer, songwriter, film composer and pianist Patrick Watson creates melodic indie music and has been featured widely in films and on TV, including “Grey’s Anatomy” and “The Good Doctor.”

7:30 p.m. April 10

Boston Sings A Cappella Festival Scholastic Competition

\$52. Scholastic groups from around the country compete for the title of BOSS 2026 Scholastic Champions and the Golden Lobster trophy.

McCarthy’s, 1920 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge.

3 to 10 p.m. April 5

McCarthy’s & Toad One Year Anniversary Party

Free. This special Revival Series lineup features the artists who helped build the sound and spirit of the room from day one. Then Prestige Worldwide takes over for the night bringing music ranging from The Rolling Stones to Coldplay.

Noon April 12

A singer/songwriter showcase

\$20 to \$25. Multi-award-winning singer songwriter Linda Marks has led the Boston/ Northeast Chapter of International Singer Songwriter Association for almost 4 years, building community through music. Joining Marks are singer songwriters from Massachusetts, Kathleen Healy, Thea Hopkins and Deborah Galiga; from Connecticut, Terri Lachance; and Randie O’Neil from Pennsylvania.

4 and 8:30 p.m. April 4

Harvard’s Lowell Lecture Hall, 17 Kirkland St., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

The Harvard Undergraduate Drummers present THUDcraft

\$10. If you enjoy Minecraft and find an affinity for alternative percussion, join this coming-of-age performance where you navigate love, rhythm, perseverance and drums.

5:30 to 7 p.m. April 3

Mount Auburn Cemetery, 580 Mount Auburn St., West Cambridge.

Legends of the Revolution: Poetical Myth Making in the 19th Century

\$7 to \$14. Literary historian Rob Vellella explores how 19th-century writers turned the American Revolution into an enduring national legend.

6 to 9 p.m. April 2

Lou’s, 13 Brattle St., Cambridge.

La Diáspora Combo

Reservations. Led by lead vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Angel Javier Camilo, this intergenerational collective of musicians from Latin America and the United States honors the Latin American tradition of musical storytelling.

The Sinclair, 52 Church St., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

8 p.m. April 7

yung kai performs

\$40.Chinese Canadian musician became an international sensation in 2024 with his track ‘blue,’ which hit no. 2 on the Spotify Global Viral Chart.

8 p.m. April 8

‘Seamonsters’ 35th Anniversary Tour

\$28. English indie rock group The Wedding Present formed in 1985 in Leeds, England, and led by vocalist and guitarist David Gedge, celebrates the 35th anniversary of their album, “Seamonsters.”

12:30 to 1 p.m. April 2

Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy St., near Harvard Square, Cambridge.

Gallery Talk: Hanna Nagel’s “New Women” at Work

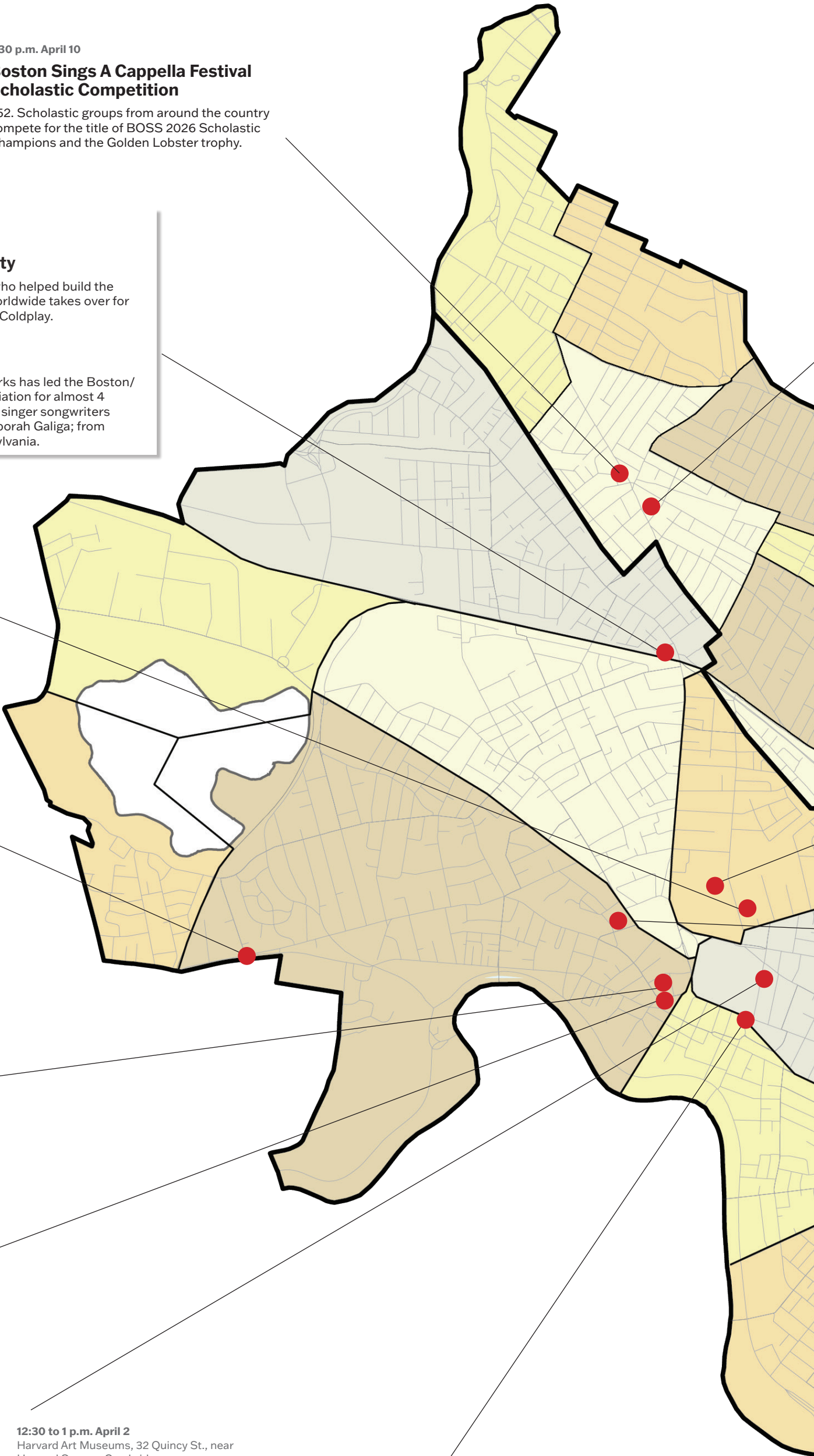
Free. Curator Lynette Roth examines recently acquired works on paper by pioneering German artist Hanna Nagel, active in the 1920s and 1930s. Nagel was among the first generation of female artists to study at German art academies, which didn’t open their doors to women until 1919.

7 p.m. April 6

Harvard Book Store, 1256 Massachusetts Ave., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

Sara Ahmed on “No!: The Art and Activism of Complaining”

Free. The author shares the lessons learned from people knocking at closed doors, teaching us how to collectively resist the glacial weight of institutional power. Author Durba Mitra joins.



■ List your cultural happenings at events@cambridgeday.com.



7:30 p.m. April 5
The Burren, 247 Elm St., Davis Square, Somerville.

Tiger Moan First Sunday Blues Easter Request Night

\$20 to \$25. Amy Kucharik and Tiger Moan invite special guests each month and push the tables aside to make room for dancing. This month features your song requests, and since it's Easter there'll be an Easter egg hunt.

7 p.m. April 9
Arts at the Armory, 191 Highland Ave., Spring Hill, Somerville.

Mo Gilligan - The Mo You Know

\$33 to \$39. The comedian returns to the global stage with his brand-new stand-up show, "The Mo You Know."

Aeronaut Brewing, 14 Tyler St., near Union Square in Ward 2, Somerville.

8 p.m. April 8

On Tap at Aeronaut: The Berklee Music Series

RSVP. Watch up-and-coming talent from the Berklee College of Music perform in the Aeronaut taproom.

2 to 6 p.m. April 11

Spring Grown Up Book Fair

Free. Porter Square Books powers this school-age event updated for adult tastes.

6 p.m. April 9
Museum of Natural History's Geological Lecture Hall, 24 Oxford St., Baldwin neighborhood, Cambridge.

The Archaeology of Boston's Revolutionary Past

Free. Archaeologist Joe Bagley discusses research that is deepening our understanding of Boston's role in the American Revolution, including new findings on the impact of the Siege of Boston and the 1775 Battle of Bunker Hill.

7:30 p.m. April 10
First Church Cambridge, 11 Garden St., Harvard Square.

Concert celebrating Jerry Herman, Meredith Willson, Dolly Parton, Joni Mitchell

\$25 to \$30. Classics performed by Bradford Conner, Jean Danton, Michelle Deluise, Wes Hunter, Caryn May, Brandon Milardo, Cynthia Mork, Carolyn Saxon and Benjamin Sears.

Noon to 3 p.m. April 4
Lamplighter CX, 110 N. First St., North Point, Cambridge.

Easter Egg Hunt

RSVP. Most eggs are filled with candies, but a few special egg-ceptions have 21-plus treats like beer tokens. Bring your own basket.

Cambridge Main Library, 449 Broadway, Mid-Cambridge.

3:30 to 5:30 p.m. April 6

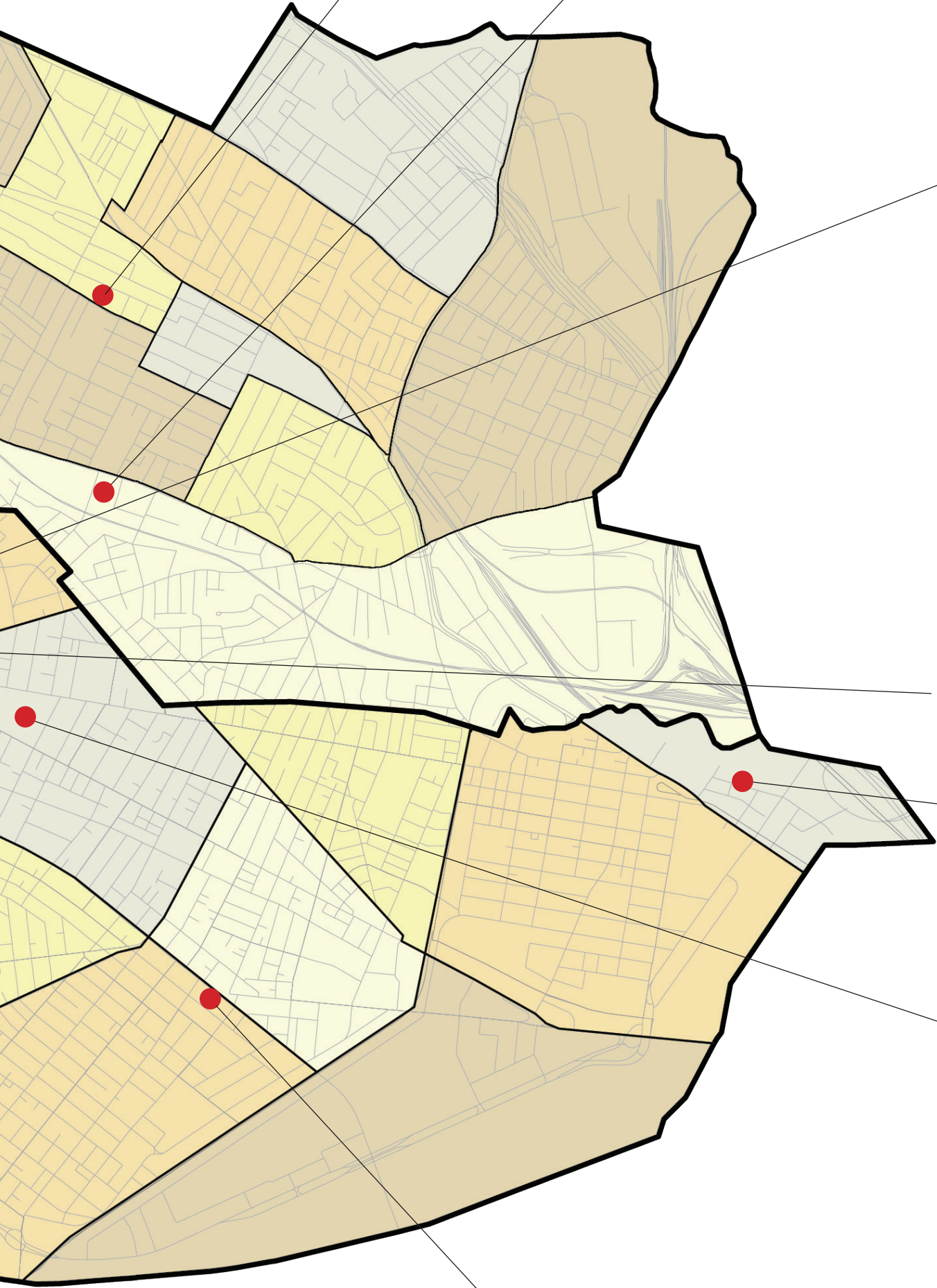
I Can Move Mountains: a Written and Spoken Word Poetry Workshop

Free. Led by poet Anthony Febo, participants explore a variety of ways to fill the blank page with poetry that is reflective of their own lived experience.

2 p.m. April 12
Central Square Theater, 450 Massachusetts Ave., Central Square, Cambridge.

"Breaking the Code," a play about Alan Turing

\$27 to \$103. Turing was hailed by Winston Churchill as having made the single biggest contribution to Allied victory in the war against Nazi Germany for breaking the Enigma code.



FILM & THEATER

LOCAL FOCUS



A scene from “By Hook or By Crook.”

GAYpril means Wicked Queer, right here

By OSCAR GOFF

This week marks the return of **Wicked Queer**, the Boston area’s much-loved LGBTQ+ film festival (one of the longest running such festivals in the world). For the first two weeks of April (“GAYpril,” on the festival’s posters), it takes up residence at the **Brattle Theatre**, as well as across the river at the Coolidge, the MFA, and other venues. This year’s festival kicks off with a pair of indigenous-produced features: the Mi’kmaq-language “**At the Place of Ghosts**,” which screens Friday, and the Michif-language “**Blood Lines**” on Saturday. From there the festival expands abroad, with queer-centric features from Morocco (“**Bouchra**,” screening Saturday), Mexico (“**Jaripeo**,” Monday), Thailand (“**A Useful Ghost**,” Monday), and Greece (“**Uchronia**,” Tuesday), as well as “**Tender Revolutions**,” a program of shorts from the SWANA region of Southwestern Asia and Northern Africa. The festival also features a restoration of Harry Dodge and Silas Howard’s groundbreaking gay road picture “**By Hook or By Crook**” (2001) on Sunday. For the complete schedule and ticket info, check out Wicked Queer’s website.

On Friday, the **Harvard Film Archive** digs into its vaults for a pair of films starring the late, great British actor Bob Hoskins. The evening begins, appropriately enough, with John Mackenzie’s gangster classic “**The Long Good Friday**” (1980). Hoskins plays hard-nosed London mob boss Harold Shand, who spends a particularly grueling day trying to maintain control of his criminal empire, wheedling the American Mafia on one hand and fending off attacks from the IRA on the other. Hoskins hits more tender (if no less seedy) notes in Neil Jordan’s “**Mona Lisa**” (1986), in which he plays an underdog ex-con who becomes an unlikely lover and defender of troubled call girl Simone (Cathy Tyson). Together, the films provide a showcase of Hoskins’ versatility and screen presence. Both films screen on beautiful original 35mm release prints from the HFA’s collection.

On Sunday and Wednesday, the **Kendall Square Cinema** turns its Filmmaker Focus on an overlooked feature from maestro of the macabre David Cronenberg. Though not a horror movie in the strictest sense of the word, “**Maps to the Stars**” (2014) is just as disturbing as any of the director’s work. The jet-black showbiz satire casts its net across a wide

array of Hollywood fringe-dwellers, including a star-obsessed burn victim (Mia Wasikowska), an egotistical child star (Evan Bird), a sleazy celebrity psychologist (John Cusack), a limo driver and aspiring actor (Robert Pattinson), and a pill-popping has-been movie star (Julianne Moore). Moore won Best Actress honors at the Cannes Film Festival for her performance, which is by turns hilarious, tragic, and horrifying (the Academy, for its part, flinched, awarding Moore that year for her more conventionally pleasing work in the Alzheimer’s drama “Still Alice”). The resulting film proves that, even when not dealing with exploding heads and drooling fly monsters, Cronenberg knows how to get under your skin.

On Monday, the **Somerville Cine-Club** returns with another free screening at the **Somerville Public Library (Central Branch)**. This time out, the Club screens the cult cyberpunk classic “**Johnny Mnemonic**” (1995), starring Keanu Reeves as a cybernetically enhanced “data courier,” carrying sensitive information in a chip implanted in his brain. The version screening will be the 2022 black & white edition, in which director Robert Longo desaturated the film’s color to get it closer to the film noir look he originally envisioned. Preceding the film is a rare 3-D 8mm digest print of “**The Mad Magician**” (1954), starring Vincent Price as the titular villain (red-and-blue glasses will be available at the door). It’s a safe bet to say this will be your only opportunity to catch this particular bill on screen — and it’s free, to boot!

On Wednesday, the **Somerville Theatre** continues its “Feel Good Films” series with “**The Commitments**” (1991), widely considered to be one of the best making-the-band movies ever made. Robert Arkins plays Jimmy Rabbitte, a young hustler in working-class Dublin determined to assemble and manage an old-fashioned blue-eyed soul band. Using all the unscrupulous means at his disposal, Jimmy pulls together a ragtag group of misfits and some dubiously acquired equipment and manages, almost in spite of himself, to make his dream come true. Of course, the precarious nature of creative collaboration rears its ugly head, and the band, dubbed The Commitments, struggles to stay afloat. While painfully relatable to anyone who’s ever played in a band, “The Commitments” is also warm and hilarious and has a killer soundtrack.

REVIEWS

A dull affair, even with time travel

The title of this slack crime comedy-cum-love triangle calls to mind Paul Mazursky’s open relationship romp “Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice.” That 1969 curio starring Natalie Wood and Elliot Gould played on character and the times. Here, as directed by BenDavid Grabinski, “Mike & Nick & Nick & Alice” pretty much steals concepts from elsewhere and mixes them together in the blandest, nod-and-wink, not funny way. Vince Vaughn (“Swingers”) and James Marsden (such a good JFK-like prez in “Paradise”) play Nick and Mike, hitmen who are the target of a local mobster named Sosa (Keith David and his glorious baritone, sadly wasted). Allegedly, it’s because Marsden’s Mike ratted out Sosa’s son Jimmy Boy (Jimmy Tatro, “You’re Cordially Invited”), who got colared and had to do time.

The film’s set in the aftermath of Jimmy’s release. Why Sosa, a Black man, refers to Jimmy, who is not Black, as his son is never fully explained — though both spew the same low brow rhetoric and spend much of their time at strip clubs, ogling and hooting. But then there’s the two Nicks, who happen to be one and the same. Did I mention there’s a time machine? There is, and so Vaughn’s Nick from the future comes back to get the Nick of the present to help save Mike.



Adding further complications is that Nick’s estranged wife Alice (a fiery Eliza Gonzalez, who is about the best thing in the movie) is hooking up with Mike.

Much of what transpires is four talking heads hatching overly complicated plans to save Mike from Sosa, who has dispatched the feared cannibal hitman, “The Baron,” to extract his pound of flesh. It’s all punched up pulp pablum made further infuriating by the ersatz use of Wong Kar-wai’s slow-mo, “gun-fu” flare. It’s as insulting to the viewer as it is to Wong. Then there’s the gotcha ending that’s palm plant worthy and then some. If I could hop in a time machine and go back, I’d skip this inanity and spin up Wong’s cool Asian-noir “Chungking Express” (1994).

— TOM MEEK



Streaming on Hulu

Games of the rich and evil

It’s been almost seven years since the release of “Ready or Not” (2019), the horror-comedy sleeper hit in which an unwitting bride is forced into a deadly game of hide and seek by her husband’s wealthy, devil-worshipping family. The sequel, aptly subtitled “Here I Come,” picks up where its predecessor left off, with Samara Weaving’s Grace staggering out of the burning mansion of the Le Domas family in her bloody wedding dress. She is whisked to the hospital, where she is questioned in the rather suspicious deaths of her in-laws. She’s also unhappily reunited with her estranged sister, Faith (Kathryn Newton). Then things go really awry for Grace. It seems the Le Domases were just one of several powerful families to make similar Satanic pacts, and that by surviving the game Grace has activated a rare “sudden death” round with the remaining clans. Grace and Faith are abducted from the hospital by an eerie legal counsel (Elijah Wood, delightfully smarmy) and taken to a palatial estate where they are forced into yet another game, this time of cat and mouse. Can Grace and Faith survive one more night of dodging the blood-thirsty 1%?

By expanding the scope of the story, “Here I Come” loses some of the economy that made the first film such a nasty treat. In particular, it sags under the weight of the convoluted rules of the game (the word “bylaws” was uttered so many times it felt like a legal thriller, not a horror flick). The two sisters have to do some by-the-numbers trauma-dumping, too.

Once “Here I Come” finally gets going, there’s good, bloody fun to be had. Weaving is even more assured this time out, her terror mixed with annoyance at having to do all this over again. It helps that



Samara Weaving (top) and Elijah Wood (bottom) in “Ready or Not 2: Here I Come.”



she’s surrounded by an enjoyably eclectic supporting cast, including horror director David Cronenberg as a shadowy family head and Sarah Michelle Gellar as his spoiled yet savvy daughter — body horror and Buffy! As with the original, the funny running gag is that today’s elites are too pampered to know how to use their expensive weapons — Nestor Carbonell, channeling a suave Spanish tycoon, can barely load his sniper rifle, let alone aim. And there is an undeniable catharsis in the series’ “eat the rich” satire which feels even more potent now. If you can’t cackle at a room full of obnoxious billionaires suddenly exploding into clouds of bloody goo, you probably haven’t been watching the news.

— OSCAR GOFF



At Landmark Kendall Square, Apple Cinemas Cambridge, and AMC Assembly Row 12.

■ Do you know of a restaurant opening or closing in Cambridge or Somerville, or do you have other food news tips? Send them to business@cambridgeday.com.

Gerald Peary reviews a life: his own



Courtesy of Gerald Peary

Courtesy of Gerald Peary Gerald Peary, dean of Boston film critics.

By OSCAR GOFF

In the world of Boston film criticism, few names loom larger than Gerald Peary. He signed on as film critic for the legendary Boston alt-weekly *The Real Paper* in 1978. In the decades since, Peary has written for the *Globe*, the *Phoenix*, and at 81 is still reviewing for the *Arts Fuse*. He’s interviewed luminaries from Agnès Varda and Akira Kurosawa to John Waters and Mel Brooks. He’s edited or written 10 books, including 2024’s “*Mavericks: Interviews with the World’s Iconoclast Filmmakers*.” Peary’s latest book, “*A Reluctant Film Critic*,” turns the spotlight on a subject closer to home: Gerald Peary.

It’s a book he started in 1986, while in an arts colony in Canada. “I was supposed to do one project, [but] I didn’t like it, and I ended up doing this one instead.” More recently, Peary has taken to a daily Facebook practice of posting brief remembrances of his childhood.

The book has richly detailed stories of his youth, much of which the Cambridge native spent in the hills of West Virginia.

It’s a remarkably warm and vivid book, though Peary said he had no family photos to draw on. “Our family did not have a camera,” he said. “While most people have thousands of childhood photos to wake their memory up, I have none of those.” He drew on a deep bank of memories. “People don’t seem to remember what happened to them between the ages of four and eight, and I do.”

One that might be an origin story for the critic involves the Brattle Theatre as a child in the early 1950s. Coming full circle, Peary will be back at the Brattle Saturday to host a double feature, “*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*” and “*The Boy With Green Hair*” (both 1948, though Peary reckons he saw both around age seven in ’51 or ’52).

“I picked two films which were seminal to my childhood, that I was completely crazy about,” Peary said. “I’ve seen them since, and continue to

think they’re really just sublime films.”

Part of the appeal of both films was that they terrified the young moviegoer, particularly “*The Boy with Green Hair*.”

“I was so scared that my hair would turn green that I had nightmares for weeks and weeks and weeks!” he said. It proved formative to Peary’s budding tastes: “I want movies to move me intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, physically, and that’s what ‘*The Boy with Green Hair*’ did.”

Peary says taking in a movie at the Brattle has remained largely unchanged. “The charm of the Brattle is that it will always look the same and feel the same and smell the same,” he said, then gave an affectionate laugh, “Nobody ever has enough money to fix it in any major way!”

Peary said we look at our upbringings “to try to figure out who you are today.”

“I’m a kind of an alternative, intellectual person, and [I’ve been] trying to figure out, where did that come from? And it seems to have always been there. At age four and five I was already trying to read books, and by the time I was six and seven I was movie crazy. And that’s me today: book crazy and movie crazy.”

The world of criticism, and of journalism as a whole, has changed dramatically since the 1970s. In a time when even legacy publications are trimming or eliminating their arts coverage, aspiring critics find themselves faced with a narrowing path. As the city’s elder statesman of film criticism, Peary’s advice is simple: “Get a day job!”

Then, more seriously, he adds, “It’s about love of the movies. If you love them enough to want to write about them, you’ll do it probably as a happy amateur today.”

For those willing to write despite the financial realities of the field today, he said “We always need good film criticism, and it’s really interesting to see what young people have to say about movies.” So, he says “Write away. Write away.”

Grapes

From Page 1

One of the largest local arbors is above the patio at The Neighborhood Restaurant in Union Square. Owner Sheila Borges-Foley, 57, says she has white grapes that were planted by the property’s last owner, and Concord grapes that her Portuguese father planted when he bought the property in the 80s. Concord grapes are common in the area, having been developed in 1849 by farmer Ephraim Wales Bull in nearby Concord.

“In the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, all the Italians and Portuguese [immigrants] had a grapevine,” she said. “There was a grapevine in everybody’s backyard.”

Locals say immigrants brought cuttings with them from their home countries. It’s possible they were grafted onto local American grape vines, which could survive the Northeast’s cold climate.

Borges-Foley’s father used his grapes to make wine, which the family served as an aperitif or used to cook. But, “It tasted like dirt,” she said. “It was deep, very robust. The old school guys liked it.”

Although she still has her father’s wine barrels on the patio, Borges-Foley says she doesn’t have time for wine making. Instead, Borges-Foley and her staff harvest the grapes when they ripen over her patio, then make jelly, which gets served with toast to diners, or sold in jars.

Borges-Foley’s grape arbor is pruned annually by a Portuguese man named Manny, who first provided the service for Borges-Foley’s father.

“I prefer that old Portuguese tradition over someone who studied it [in school],” she says of her grape vine maintenance. “It’s an art that they learned in the old country.”

But not everyone has a Manny. Emily Borkowski, 28, rents a unit of a house in Ward Two and prunes an extensive grape arbor on the property with her boyfriend. Borkowski’s landlord told her that the vines were planted by the house’s previous Portuguese owner, who harvested the grapes to make wine for his neighbors. It still yields hundreds of pounds of grapes a year, but now, “It’s like a rat’s nest,” she said. “Quite literally. There are rats living in them.”

If Borkowski and her boyfriend don’t prune the vines in the spring, the vines can’t support the fruit that grows. The grapes don’t fully ripen, and eventually shrivel up and die. But pruning means harvesting ripe fruit in the fall — before it falls to the ground and attracts wasps and rats.

“I either care for them or deal with the consequences,” she said, of her “love-hate relationship” with the arbor.

Other local residents have cultivated their own relationships to grapes. Matt McKeon, 49, owns a home near the Somerville Armory. Maintaining grapevines is hard work, but to him, the effort



Ruth Tam

Two Somerville residents prune the grape vines at Havurat Shalom near Powderhouse Square in Somerville.

is worth it. His family harvests 20 to 35 pounds of grapes from their arbor each year, to make over 100 jars of jam that they gift to friends.

“The idea that we can take this stuff that is growing in our yard and make something delightful and useful is its own reward,” he said. “It’s about learning to do something new that you’re not familiar with, experimenting and getting some things wrong but still having something to show for it.”

McKeon dreams of one day selling his family’s jam — one version with cinnamon and cloves and another with cardamom, ginger, and turmeric — at the farmer’s market at the Armory. Luckily for him, Cambridge and Somerville both have permitting processes for making food in a residential kitchen and selling directly to a consumer.

Not all urban plants are safe to eat, but eating urban fruit is safe, according to local experts. Although soil in urban areas is often contaminated with lead, Elsa Petit, a lecturer at University of Massachusetts Stockbridge School of Agriculture, says that grapevines behave like “excluder plants,” which do not take in toxic elements like heavy metals from soil. Although lead can accumulate in the roots, there is a “much lower” concentration in

the leaves and “extremely low” levels in the berries, making fruit and wine “not a major pathway of exposure” to lead, she said.

Beyond the utility to humans, tending to arbors is also “huge for biodiversity,” she said. “If you have a diversity of plants, you have a diversity of microbes [which in turn] feed different birds and [other] species.”

Matt McKeon didn’t know anything about grapes when he bought his Somerville home in 2011. But he and his wife “figured it out.” Now, it’s a family affair. “It’s very satisfying and we wanted our kids to experience it,” he says.

McKeon’s grapevines also have roots in Portugal, or at least people from there. They were gifted to his home’s prior owner by their Portuguese neighbors, who hailed from the Azores. In a rapidly changing neighborhood, grape arbors are reminders of past families and species who lived in the area, tended to, and enjoyed local gardens.

“Keeping these vines going and making things from them... it feels like I have this connection to the history of my town,” said McKeon. “It roots me here in ways that make me feel at home.”

Katz-Christy agrees. Taking care of grape arbors, laborious as it may be, is a way of “tending to our ancestors, plant and human.”



Ruth Tam

Grape vines grow all over the area – including at the Bikeway Community Garden along the Somerville Community Path.

BOOKS

Utopia or Bust

By ERIK BAKER

“The Sealed Envelope: Toward an Intelligent Utopia.” By George Scialabba. Yale University Press, 2026

The book that first made me recognize the Cambridge writer George Scialabba as one of the most important living American intellectuals arrived with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, in the early spring of 2020. The slim volume bore an audacious title: “How to Be Depressed.” Somehow, it seemed to be written for me. Bookended by an introduction and an interview—in which Scialabba reflects on depression in his characteristically wry and penetrating voice—“How to Be Depressed” consists of notes and records taken by therapists and clinicians over his decades of mental health treatment.

The information conveyed about Scialabba’s inner life recontextualized my reading of his essays, each one having crystallized vast learning into a diamantine critical intervention. Through “How to Be Depressed” I came to see his essays as hard-won achievements, produced amid cycles of despair and professional frustration that threatened perennially to silence his voice. I read about Scialabba’s career insecurity; his struggles to surmount the mundane roadblocks to realizing his potential that our society strews before all but the most well-resourced; his grief at losing the meaning-making framework of his youth (Catholicism); his inability to replace it with anything commensurable. The non-academic path Scialabba trod looked to me as a byway for a questing life of the mind. And I recognized, with a twinge of self-reproach, the emotional and material advantages I too often took for granted.

In “The Sealed Envelope:

The Sealed Envelope
Toward an Intelligent Utopia

GEORGE SCIALABBA

Toward an Intelligent Utopia,” Scialabba collects essays that together make an overt case for the exemplary experience I had reading “How to Be Depressed.” The book affirms a precept by the philosopher Richard Rorty: moral and political progress transpires insofar as solidarity or sensitivity to the suffering of others expands in “detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like.” Rorty thought the novel is our most powerful technology for expanding understanding of what other people experience and what we are capable of. Scialabba, in the essays here collected, suggests the nonfiction of public intellectuals such as Rorty, the journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, and the historian Christopher Lasch (the book’s three dedicatees) serves the same function.

Scialabba is aware that intellectuals do not always display what he likes to call “moral imagination” in impressive quantities. Yet he maintains that their failures can be as instructive as their successes. One especially incisive chapter examines the transformation of the journalist Christopher Hitchens from left-wing provocateur to warmongering

neoconservative during the War on Terror. Scialabba observes that “Hitchens’s generous and romantic temperament” struggled to accept the “long, slow process” of reforming the United States to truly align with the democratic ideals he professed. It was Hitchens’s love of the fray that tempted him to throw in with the swashbuckling idealists in power then. Their promise to spread democracy here and now must have been “overwhelming” to Hitchens. Scialabba concedes that his interpretation is ultimately speculative. I think he’s right.

In that essay, first published in 2005, he describes the George W. Bush administration as “the most ambitiously and skillfully pack of liars as American history has seen.” That W.’s record has been shattered is not the least of it. Scialabba’s writing career, now in its fifth decade, has coincided with an uninterrupted process of devolution from the New Deal’s social democratic vision, toward the nihilism that rules us today. The evidence he arraigns is enough to make me wonder whether our present situation might not represent a foundational rot beneath our way of life. Is human progress really possible with moral imagination in such evidently short supply?

In essays about Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Gray, Allan Bloom, and others, “The Sealed Envelope” takes this harrowing question extremely seriously. Scialabba can’t bring himself to answer definitively. If progress is not metaphysically guaranteed, neither it is hopeless. If the re-enchantment of the world is vain, he wants us to believe that “imagination and social criticism” might at least accomplish its re-humanization. “Depressions virtually always end,” he wrote in “How to Be Depressed.” The essential thing is to hold on.

WHAT WE’RE READING

Staff faves from MIT Press Bookstore

Cambridge Day is checking in with local bookstores to find out what reads staff are recommending and why. This first one features selections from the staff at the MIT Press Bookstore, 314 Main St., Kendall Square.

“The Salt Grows Heavy”
by Cassandra Khaw

A ravenous mermaid, who has just escaped her husband after her children devoured his kingdom, and a plague doctor made of stolen parts struggle to survive in a grim folktale world that is even more monstrous than they are. The two find strength and meaning in each other’s company, but will that be enough to get them through?

The “Salt Grows Heavy” will hit hardest for readers with some familiarity with fairytale and fantasy tropes, since much of the fun in the narrative comes from seeing how Khaw refreshes and inverts well-worn tropes. Khaw’s writing is just as beautiful as it is raw, and it goes a long way to selling the atmosphere if this strangely cathartic, hopeful horror.

A word of warning: This is a book about pain and cruelty and Khaw knows how to make the gore drip off the page. The narrative is creative and specific in its brutality and inflicts violence on named characters whether they deserve it or not. I don’t mean to imply that “The Salt Grows Heavy” is unbearably bleak; that cruelty highlights the beauty of each small act of kindness, and lends extra urgency to the romance at the center of the story. Still, the book has teeth and isn’t shy about using them. If body horror is a no-go for you, skip this title. — recommended by Rae

“A Beast Slinks Towards Beijing”
by Alice Evelyn Yang

Qianze starts having unsettling visions when her father reappears on her doorstep after

vanishing eleven years before. Covering three generations, a half-forgotten prophecy, Chinese history from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria to the Cultural Revolution, this book is probably the best thing I’ll read all year, which is unfortunate since I read it in January. If you liked “The Poppy War” by R. F. Kuang, or if you like family sagas, or if you like good stories, you’ll love this one. — recommended by Rebecca

“Attention is Discovery: The Life and Legacy of Astronomer Henrietta Leavitt”
by Anna Von Mertens

How do you measure the scope of a galaxy? Astronomer Henrietta Leavitt (1868-1921), working as a human computer at the Harvard College Observatory at measuring photographic plates, found the way. Von Mertens presents Leavitt’s life, work, and legacy in a richly illustrated volume that draws some of its images from the observatory’s breathtaking Astronomical Photographic Glass Plate Collection. This is a book for anyone who cares about the history of science, of photography, or who has ever looked up at the clear night sky. — recommended by Rebecca

“White Cat, Black Dog”
by Kelly Link

This is the book that made me love short stories, and also made me go and read everything else Kelly Link has ever written. This is a collection of fairy tale retellings, but not like you’ve ever heard them before. A group of talking cats runs a weed farm. A troupe of musicians puts on a fake funeral every night. Those don’t sound familiar, do they? Link’s writing is so incredibly beautiful, simultaneously real and surreal in a way that makes you think for a second that magic might just really exist. — recommended by Tabitha

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September 13, 2025

SILYS
By Sam Reinert September 13, 2025

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CULTURE

Poetry

From Page 1

Founded in 1927 as a shop for rare literature, it refocused solely on poetry in the 1970s, according to Somerville Poet Laureate Lloyd Schwartz. It is now owned by the family of the late Ifeanyi Menkiti, a Wellesley College philosophy professor and local poet.

The shop hosts regular poetry readings. “This is a spot where many writers and poets can intersect and meet each other,” said Fraser, who became its manager in 2022. “Grolier offers a space for community to gather and a place to browse without the feeling of having to buy anything and works as a catalyst for creative ideas.”

It’s also the place where a German documentary crew went to shoot scenes for a film on Pulitzer-prize winning poet and band leader Anne Sexton, a regular patron at the Grolier during her life. Fraser also co-founded Staircase Books in 2022. The Cambridge-based press publishes chapbooks and supports emerging poets.

Evening readings

At the Cantab Lounge, a diverse crowd of poets, students and other patrons fill the underground space every Wednesday evening. Boston Poetry Slam, a group founded by then-Cambridge residents and poets Michael Brown and Patricia Smith in 1991, hosts these weekly gatherings and has since 1992 (with a break during the pandemic), when the Cantab was also one of seven locations for that year’s International Poetry Slam.

“This has been a cornerstone of Central Square, the only registered cultural district in the city, and I think the Cantab has influenced a huge part of that,” said Myles Taylor, who directs the weekly slam nights.

To Taylor, the show’s success has come from its consistency and familiarity. “If you show up in this building on a Wednesday night, you will find us — you don’t need Instagram, don’t need the website, don’t need friends to bring you here — you just show up.”

Kaitie Dilán, known better to Cantab crowds as Kaitie D, works in film and television and has been a regular at the poetry slam



John Wilcox

Stephanie Blair Mitchell reading from "Viewfinder" at the Lizard Lounge.



Alex Degterev

Poet and local high-school teacher Michael McCarthy performing poetry while simultaneously playing the fiddle at City Night Readings.

for years. “I used to work 60-80 hours a week and I had no social life outside of work, so when the [2023 Writers’ Guild of America strike] happened I was like, oh crap, I need hobbies and to make friends as an adult.”

At the Cantab, they quickly found both.

Just a bit more than a mile across town from the Cantab, local poets and poetry enthusiasts congregated inside the warmly lit Little Crepe Café on Fridays for its City Night Readings. The aroma of meat or vegetable-filled crepes and fresh coffee waft over the room. The weekly event here is run by former Cambridge Poet Populist Jean Dany-Joachim.

“If I were to just be a writer for my own sake, yeah I could do that, but to have a room full of people who celebrate the same thing I celebrate, to find joy in words the way that I do, I don’t think there is any price you can put on that,” said Joachim.

Some nights Joachim invites specific poets to take the stage, but all nights are open to anyone

who wants a turn at the microphone. “To me it’s not the fame of someone that matters, but the level at which they celebrate.”

Just blocks away from the café, the Lizard Lounge Poetry Jam on Sunday nights starts off with an open mic, for anyone who wishes to try a reading. Then comes a slam where poets compete for a prize of \$100, and finally a featured poet reads.

The featured poets and open mic participants typically perform with the backing of the Blake Newman Group, a New England live jazz trio that improvises around each voice. Newman is both the bassist and the emcee of the evening. The resulting show feels like a head-on collision between different art forms and poetic style, turning the night into a kind of celebration of sound.

Stephanie Blair Mitchell was the featured poet on a recent

Sunday. Mitchell, a longtime Cambridge resident, has been to its Sunday night event before, and also to City Night Readings at Little Crepe Café, but this was her first public reading of poems from her new collection, “Viewfinder.”

She says the vibe Newman creates is “incredibly supportive,” and she was struck by how the band’s music changed her reading. “You start to pay attention to the pacing and the energy, and it’s a different way to realize the meaning behind the verses.”

“It feels like poetry is thriving in Cambridge when you’re on that stage,” Mitchell said.

Somerville scene

A few minutes’ drive away in Somerville, SomerWrites is an event series that helps bring together both beginners and well-established featured writers in different genres, including poetry, to share their work and learn from one another.

Started by the Somerville Arts Council and headed up by council member and poet Sarah Beckmann, the series held its first gathering in January at Portico Brewing. “The event series is an opportunity for people to not only share their work but connect with other writers in the area and build a sense of community,” said Beckmann.

The event mixes an open mic free to all attendees alongside talks and readings from fea-

tured guest writers, with Lloyd Schwartz kicking off the series in late January.

While there are readings and workshop events scattered around the city — like poet David Blair’s Somerville Poetry Workshop held at Arts at the Armory in seasonal stretches — Beckmann said she wishes the city had a scene more like Cambridge’s. The one in Somerville “is not nearly as robust as I or many other writers would like it.”

Still, she says the local scene has a warmth to it that is unusual. “Sometimes these [poetry] spheres can be competitive and semi-inaccessible — which is why the openness, kindness and enthusiastic support everyone has shown during SomerWrites has been so special,” said Beckmann.

Mentioning that 25 people recently signed up for the event’s open mic — out of a crowd of nearly the same size — she said, “People here are so excited, so respectful and so kind, and they’re just excited to have a new space to come to, to share their work and connect with other writers.”

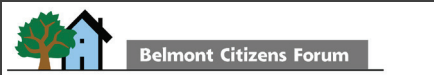
Joachim had a simple message about the accessibility of poetry in both Cambridge and Somerville. “You don’t have to wear a big hat and walk down the street studying the stars to be a poet here, no, you can still have your feet on the ground,” he said lightly, “you can smile, you can dance and still be a poet.”



Alex Degterev

Boston Poetry Slam Director Myles Taylor.

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CAMBRIDGE

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Rare bird sparks debate

By SALLY DE FAZIO AND
MAGGIE HUFF-ROUSSELLE

Editor's note: Jeanine Farley is on vacation; this is a guest column.

A new resident moved into our building at TenTen Memorial Drive recently, and one day last month we noticed a bird unlike anything we had ever seen before in our small courtyard with the new neighbor hovering solicitously above it.

As regular readers of “Wild Things,” we decided to investigate further.

The creature is apparently quite domesticated, since it made no attempt to fly away from the neighbor. She even let her owner pick her up — is it a ‘her’? — and cuddle her. Or it. Given that the neighbor brought it outside, we figured it must require area to roam, like a free-range chicken. We speculate it will not survive if trapped in a small cage (unlike free-range chickens).

But the bird, if it was indeed a bird, did not appear to have wings nor did it roam. Was it injured, perhaps? We had no answers to quell our confusion, and then, in an astonishing bit of luck, later that day we ran into the new neighbor in the hallway.

We learned she is Dr. Jeanne Rigolote, here on a fellowship from her native Dominica in the Caribbean, and that her strange animal is a bird (she keeps it in her apartment) of the species *Oiseaux amoureuse*. It does not appear in the iPhone app, Merlin, that we use routinely. This explains why we were flummoxed. Like the elusive ivory-billed woodpecker (we think it does exist!), this bird has no photographs or song recordings, but there are entries that appear to be members of the amoureuse species in eBird, the global online database where citizen scientists record sightings.

With enough to go on, we



A photo of the mysterious bird “gimmieakiss.”

continued digging into this new (to us, anyway) creature. We stumbled across a study of the kiwi (bird) of New Zealand, also flightless. Like kiwis, this specimen has a rotund body, estimated to be the size of a small domesti-

cated chicken. Also, like a kiwi, the wings are so rudimentary that they are, in effect, invisible.

Dr. Rigolote, who is a native French speaker, has no memory of seeing her pet in the wild when she lived in Dominica, but

said she knows the creature as gimmeakiss. That immediately had us thinking of the Mountain Chicken, which is not at all a chicken but in fact a very large frog (*Leptodactylus fallax*), with a body as large as a spring roaster. “Oh, crapaud!” Rigolote exclaimed when we shared our thoughts. Just when we thought we had offended her to get that response, she said, “Non, it’s not a toad.”

We kept up our quizzing. It turns out Dr. Rigolote can imitate its mating song, which vacillates between a sucking sound and a smack. In Dominica’s native French-laced Creole, gimmeakiss is the translation of donnez-moi-un-bisous. Aha! Now that does sounds more like a bird’s call, like the barred owl’s “who cooks for you?” especially when Dr. Rigolote does her imitation. Both the English and French Creole names make sense given the unusual anatomical feature of this rare avian, a beak that has been modified into a highly-pigmented lip-like structure suitable for scavenging small

items on the ground.

Having bugged Dr. Rigolote enough, we turned to our other neighbors. We have discovered many of them have also seen and been puzzled by the gimmeakiss.

One of them, Catherine, a nine-year-old who recently completed reading “Animal Farm” in both English and German, captured a portraiture of our mystery creature during a visit with Dr. Rigolote. (See drawing.) She also wondered if the bird was injured because it didn’t move the whole time she was drawing it.



Gimi-a-kiss

Catherine's drawing of the gimmeakiss.

Catherine sparked an incident when she was showing her drawing at the bus stop. Another child of the building was there with his father, who turned out to be the ichthyologist Professor Quatschkopf. Professor Quatschkopf is an active member of the German GfUI (Gesellschaft für unmögliche Ichthyologie*) and disagreed wholeheartedly about the avian conclusion. “This specimen is obviously a dehydrated fish,” he wrote later in an email that was sent to every resident in the entire building. “It is likely related to the smooth puffer fish of New England (*Lagocephalus laevis*). It is likely this specimen was near the banks of the Charles River, found itself out of the water and dehydrated while, one might say, ‘in mid puff,’ and in doing so, reduced its fins — NOT WINGS — to mere rudiments.”

It didn’t end there. In response, Dr. Rigolote pushed “reply-all” and simply wrote: “You Old Fart. I mean, Fool. It’s the Poisson d’avril.”



D. Galon via Shutterstock

A mountain chicken frog in its natural habitat.

Wild Things is taking questions

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North Island brown kiwi.

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