The McGill Daily

Volume 116, Issue 8 | Monday, November 9, 2026 | mcgilldaily.com | Jorjor Wel since 1911



Artificial Intelligence in Journalism: The *Daily's* Stance — Pg 3

Montreal's Poetic Autumn — Pg 9

Larger Than Life: Short King Warsame — Pg 6,7

The Rocky Horror Picture Show Comes to McGill — Pg 10

"It's Our Livelihood": AMUSE Pushes for Job Security at McGill — Pg 4

McGill DAILY le délit

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Volume 116
Issue 8

McGill DAILY

Editorial Board
3480 McTavish St, Room 107
Montreal, QC, H3A 0E7
phone 514.398.6790
fax 514.398.8318
mcgilldaily.com

The McGill Daily is located on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory.

coordinating editor
Ingara Maidou
managing editor
Adair Nelson
news editors
Justin Friedberg
Mara Gibea
Sonia Josephine Berman
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Lorin Kamaci, Enid Kohler, Shai Geballe, Jane Goodman, Jad Morin
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Published by the Daily Publications Society, a student society of McGill University.
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SOCIÉTÉ DES PUBLICATIONS DU DAILY

3480 McTavish St, Room 107
Montreal, QC H3A 0E7
phone 514.398.690
fax 514.398.8318
advertising & general manager
Letty Matteo
ad layout & design
Mathieu Menard

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Printed by Imprimerie Transcontinental Transmag. Anjou, Quebec.
ISSN 1192-4608.



Artificial Intelligence in Journalism: The *Daily*'s Stance

In October 1995, M.J. Milloy — then-Coordinating Editor of *The McGill Daily* — reached out to former editors asking for a statement on what the *Daily* meant to them. Joan Mandell (BA 1979), co-founder of *Al Fajr*, the first Palestinian-produced English-language newspaper in the West Bank, wrote: "*The McGill Daily* was my college life; it was journalism school run by students at a university that offered no journalism degree. It was the institution through which much of my philosophical, political, aesthetic, literary and social values took shape."

The *Daily* has often described itself as just that: an opportunity that enables students to partake in the processes of independent reporting and collaborative editing. Part of the *Daily*'s mission has always been to encourage students to develop a critical journalistic eye.

Today, the art of refining those "philosophical, political, aesthetic, literary and social values" has been interrupted by the Artificial Intelligence (AI) models that have infiltrated our academic spaces. AI has significantly shaped the way McGill students across various faculties approach learning; whether in drafting, editing, researching, or coding. Hence, McGill, which only has loose guidelines for professors and no enforceable university-wide policy, faces an epidemic of unconstrained AI usage.

As McGill lacks an academic journalism program, the responsibility of fostering journalistic skills within the student body falls on our campus publications. It is crucial that we, as the *Daily*, provide a conducive space for our writers to engage with the tools, ethics, and practices that make the field what it is — a public service predicated upon trust between reader and reporter. Therefore, for technical and ethical reasons, the *Daily*'s editorial board asserts that there is no room for the use of AI models at any stage of the writing or editing process. Our new AI policy, which can be found online in our Statement of Principles, reads:

"The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools by DPS members (i.e. contributors, staff writers, and editors) is forbidden for use at all stages of writing and editing articles for the DPS. This includes but is not limited to the use of AI for:

- The production of sentences
- Grammar checking (e.g. Grammarly and Quillbot)
- Research and Data analysis
- Art (generating or editing illustrations and photos)

All written article drafts sent where there is a reasonable suspicion that the author has used AI in the ways outlined in clause 1 have the right to be rejected by the editorial board.

If there is reasonable suspicion that a staff writer has used AI, the writer will meet with a member of the editorial board to discuss the future of their position at the *Daily*."

The decision to prohibit the use of AI in the production of the *Daily*'s articles was influenced by two major factors. The first relates to the harm AI poses to reporters' technical abilities to produce strong journalistic pieces. Reporting is an inherently social act; it requires reaching out to sources, interviewing individuals, and evaluating information for its accuracy. Student journalism hinges on its unique positionality, wherein it must represent a diverse campus community. This demands a proximity to and investment in the lived experiences of its primary readership, which AI can never authentically recreate.

There is also the issue of credibility. While AI can trawl the internet for reliable sources, these models cannot be held accountable for the information that they spit out. With no stand-in for a contract of integrity, AI is also incapable of maintaining the standard of accuracy required for journalistic reporting. BBC tested this by asking OpenAI's ChatGPT, Microsoft's Copilot, Google's Gemini, and Perplexity AI to summarize 100 of their news articles; 51 per cent of the AI-generated summaries contained "significant issues of some form," while 19 per cent of the answers stated "factual errors."

The process of re-writing and editing an article is another aspect of journalism that demands human discernment. Good editing requires the ability to understand the nuanced choices an author makes in writing about an event or story. The weight of choosing one word over another for example, or the intentional use of the passive voice over the active, requires a certain finesse that AI models have difficulty achieving.

Furthermore, our rationale for implementing this policy concerns the ethical implication of AI use. The *Daily*'s Statement of Principles has long affirmed our mission as an anti-oppressive paper to interrogate how power and privilege operate within different social and political landscapes. The maintenance of AI models, however, reproduces the very injustice we openly condemn. OpenAI's outsourcing partner in Kenya, Sama, pays workers approximately $1.32 to $2 USD per hour to train the model on sensitive content detection, despite the fact that the hourly wage in workers' contracts was stated to be $12.50 USD. This is not to mention the impact AI has on an environmental level; operating the data centres that power AI models consumes excessive amounts of water and energy. According to a June report by the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment, and Health, the "water footprint of the energy used by data centres in 2025, around 4.5 trillion liters, could fill 1.8 million Olympic-sized swimming pools." Moreover, the water used to cool AI data centres is often withdrawn from regions already facing drought or groundwater depletion, including Arizona and Querétaro, Mexico. Even when AI is not being used to plagiarize or steal, it remains an ethical landmine.

Fundamentally, journalism is a public service founded on trust. It is essential to shed light on stories which would have otherwise slipped under the radar. Good reporting is about seeing, listening, and paying attention to the world around us. It requires a human eye, and the use of artificial intelligence to draft, edit, and generate journalistic stories cannot and will never be able to replace the care and attention that goes into this practice. We implore our readers and writers to engage with the world in an informed and human fashion; to respect and love the labour that goes into writing and editing.

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Courtesy of AMUSE

"It's Our Livelihood": AMUSE Pushes for Job Security at McGill

AMUSE seeks consistent treatment across departments as disciplinary and probation rules remain under negotiation

Lorin Kamaci
Staff Writer

The Association of McGill University Support Employees (AMUSE) is pushing for more consistent rules on discipline, scheduling, and paid hours, saying casual employees face varying practices across McGill departments. These concerns form part of its ongoing negotiations with the university, which most recently met with the union on October 5 to discuss disciplinary procedures, probation, and hiring practices, with several issues remaining unresolved.

According to its bargaining team, AMUSE represents approximately 1,300 to 1,600 casual employees, employees hired on a temporary or occasional basis, at McGill. Its collective agreement expired on May 31, 2025. The union developed its bargaining strategy through member surveys conducted in 2024 and 2025, as well as a special general meeting in September 2025.

A subsequent meeting scheduled for October 27 was cancelled because of unforeseen circumstances on AMUSE's side. October 5 therefore remained the most recent session at the time of its responses.

With a new agreement in sight, wages that keep pace with inflation and stable employment are AMUSE's main priorities, the bargaining team told the *Daily*. The team also stressed that the university should recognize and respect AMUSE's role in representing workers and their rights.

"We're not a student group; we're a certified union of workers recognized by the province of Quebec," the team wrote.

The team said negotiations are still focused on non-monetary provisions, including job security and workplace procedures, with monetary discussions yet to come.

In written responses to the *Daily*, Neha Jhaj, AMUSE's Grievance Officer and a bargaining team member, emphasized the union's demand for protections comparable to those available to other workers on campus. "Casual workers shouldn't be treated so differently than any other worker," Jhaj wrote.

> "However, this does not mean that a worker is disposable, or that an employer has no responsibility to provide not just stability and transition, but communication as to what's going on."
> — Neha Jhaj, *AMUSE's Grievance Officer*

Seeking consistency across departments

Much of the disagreement concerns Articles 14 and 15 of the collective agreement between AMUSE and McGill, which cover disciplinary actions, administrative measures, and dismissals. In its published bargaining update, AMUSE reported that discussions were set aside on October 5 after the parties were unable to resolve several points of disagreement. McGill's account also confirms that these discussions were deferred to a later date.

According to AMUSE, employees' experiences can differ depending on their department or supervisor, even though they work for the same employer with the same collective agreement. Josef Jakubec, AMUSE's Labour Relations Officer and a bargaining team member, identified disciplinary procedures, shift scheduling, breaks, and paid hours as areas where inconsistent practices arise. He attributed these differences to McGill's decentralized administrative structure and varying interpretations of the agreement.

Jhaj explained that setting aside an issue allows bargaining teams to work through other articles before returning to unresolved proposals. She stressed that the precarious nature of contract work does not remove an employer's responsibilities toward its workers.

"However, this does not mean that a worker is disposable, or that an employer has no responsibility to provide not just stability and transition, but communication as to what's going on," she wrote.

The union is seeking clearer contractual language and greater access to workplace information to help identify inconsistencies. Jakubec argued that reducing ambiguity would benefit both employees and the university by limiting disputes over interpretation.

Jhaj linked these demands to the financial uncertainty facing casual workers. She said reductions in working hours or the elimination of positions can directly affect members' ability to cover basic expenses, which is especially pertinent given the rising cost of living.

"We, the members of AMUSE, use this income to pay our rent, our food, our bills," she wrote. "This is not novelty pocket change. It's our livelihood."

Probation and hiring procedures

Discussions about probation, the initial trial period of employment, have been more collaborative, according to Jhaj. She continued to explain that the current system can be difficult for both employees and McGill to track, as casual workers have irregular schedules and hours. According to AMUSE's published update, members may be unaware that they have completed their probationary period.

"At the moment, we're collaborating on something new that gives more members access to successfully passing probation," she wrote.

McGill's October 5 update describes the discussion as exploratory and states that the parties exchanged ideas and agreed to continue discussions. However, the university reported that no full articles were agreed upon during the session.

The parties also addressed the posting and granting of assignments. McGill's bargaining update records AMUSE's presentation of its proposal, with discussions to follow. AMUSE's published account identifies clearer job postings, timelines, and hiring procedures as its priorities.

> "We, the members of AMUSE, use this income to pay our rent, our food, our bills...this is not novelty pocket change. It's our livelihood."
> — Neha Jhaj, *AMUSE's Grievance Officer*

For Jhaj, clearer employment information would help members understand their rights and recognize potential violations before disputes develop. "This proactively prevents labour disputes rather than creating more of them," she wrote.

McGill did not respond to the *Daily*'s request for comment by the time of publication.

Solidarity with MUNACA

AMUSE has expressed solidarity with the McGill University Non-Academic Certified Association (MUNACA), whose "Facts are Facts, McGill" campaign challenges McGill's compensation and spending priorities. The *Daily* previously covered the campaign in its October 5 editorial.

Jakubec noted that members of both unions often share workplaces. He said McGill's spending decisions have affected both groups through changes to workloads, justified by the hiring freeze.

"To AMUSE, solidarity means supporting workers' rights across all bargaining units at McGill, because our struggles are intertwined," he wrote.

The bargaining team said agreement on improving job security and consistent workplace practices would help move negotiations toward monetary discussions.

For Jhaj, the goal is to give employees greater clarity before decisions affect their livelihoods. "We deserve to understand how decisions affecting our livelihoods are made, what rights and protections we have, and what to expect from our employer before we find ourselves dealing with the consequences of those decisions."

Readers can follow the negotiations through AMUSE's bargaining updates and learn more about MUNACA's demands through its "Facts are Facts, McGill" campaign.

Good People

Turning Connections Into Community with Aidan Licoppe

Gen-Z created app R3ACH aims to combat loneliness and foster friendships among young people

Enid Kohler
Staff Writer

Good People is a bi-weekly article series highlighting McGill students doing community-oriented work on and around campus. Because it's important to celebrate good people doing good things.

Why is it so hard to reach out? It is a simple question but one that resonated deeply with Aidan Licoppe, the co-founder and head of technology of the R3ACH app. With a background in coding and machine learning, Licoppe started to think about in-person social connection more seriously during the second year of his master's program in experimental medicine at McGill. Licoppe realized it was becoming more difficult for young people to form new friendships as screen time and social media increasingly eclipse face-to-face hangouts.

R3ACH, founded by brothers Aidan and Zachariah Licoppe and their friend Josh Campbell, was born out of a desire to do something about this problem. Launched in September, R3ACH aims to connect users to third spaces in their community. Similar to a dating app, R3ACH suggests social events in Montreal that users can swipe on to join. If a friend or mutual friend swipes on the same event, R3ACH opens a group chat with the time, place, and location of the event. "No more 'what are you up to' texts; no more trying to figure out conflicting schedules," R3ACH promises on its website. Currently based in Montreal and Boston, R3ACH is looking to expand to more cities as its following grows.

The *Daily* spoke to Aidan Licoppe about R3ACH. We talked about social isolation, the barriers to forming friendships, and how technology can be used to foster — rather than preclude — human connection.

This interview has been edited for clarity and conciseness.

Enid Kohler for *The McGill Daily* (MD): I want to start by asking about you. Why did you launch R3ACH? What is your background in technology?

Aidan Licoppe (AL): I did my undergraduate [studies] in bioengineering at McGill. Later on in my degree, I got more interested in the coding and machine learning side. For my master's degree, I switched to experimental medicine. I remember we were doing a class on digital health innovation, when we were talking about digital health solutions. One of our group members brought up the idea of loneliness. With that in mind in the summer, I talked to my brother and my roommate at the time, Josh. [Loneliness] is something that affects all of us, and especially young adults. We're living in a time that is isolating us more than ever. We started brainstorming, you know, 'How can we create an app that makes us less lonely and builds community?' And then it just went from there.



Image courtesy of Aidan Licoppe (centre)

MD: How would you pitch R3ACH to a potential investor in 30 seconds?

AL: The way we like to say it in one sentence is R3ACH is like Tinder for events, but you match with your friends.

When you want to connect with people nowadays, there's a bunch of barriers that get in the way, and R3ACH tries to address all of those able to get started. There's also a feature for people to go to events solo, but, ideally, you go with friends and naturally start building more connections the more events you attend.

MD: R3ACH's Linkedin biography reads, "Creating a world where technology strengthens human connection." I think we often perceive technology as having the opposite effect by limiting, instead of encouraging, human connection. How, then, does R3ACH use technology to foster human connection?

AL: I think it's such a counterintuitive thing that the technology we have now removes so many barriers associated with connecting with people. At the end of the day, we have the most sophisticated algorithms ever, right? On top of that, we have all the technology to be able to message each other and to organize things easier [now more] than ever.

But for some reason, these things are all being used in a way that facilitates [socialization] on the app instead of off of it. I think now, especially with our [shorter] attention spans, it's so easy to go on Instagram reels or something and get that dopamine fulfillment. Hanging out nowadays has to be so much more interesting for people to even get out of their house. We hope people can instead go on their phones and say, okay, I'm going to go on my phone to get off of my phone to build those relationships.

MD: What has the response to R3ACH been like since you launched two months ago?

AL: It's been really great so far. We've been doing some work on social media, talking to a lot of different groups, and trying to connect with student groups. One thing I noticed the most through my own use [of the app] is how much more people want to hang out than you think.

MD: Have there been any challenges or obstacles that you've encountered during the development of R3ACH?

AL: Oh yeah. I mean, with running an app — this is my first business — there are a lot of things you discover initially that you didn't even realize were a problem. I think one of the challenges for us has been just competing with the burden of short attention spans and all the other apps that are out there, but we've seen that once people get to experience the app and use it among their friends, they really love it.

MD: What is your vision for the future of R3ACH? In ten years, what do you hope R3ACH will look like?

AL: In terms of a broad goal, I want R3ACH everywhere where we can have it. North America is our first target. I would hope that one day R3ACH would be the default way in which people can actually connect and build community among each other.

MD: The tagline for this column is "good people doing good things." In the context of your work with R3ACH, what does being a good person mean to you?

AL: In terms of my work and what motivates me, [it's] just to use your gifts in a way that helps people. Just having an open-mindedness to helping others, having empathy, and being able to be a person that cares for others. I think thinking outside of yourself is the most important way to be a good person.

Learn more about R3ACH and opportunities to get involved on Instagram, @r3ach.app, through their website, r3ach.app, or download R3ACH on the App Store to experience it yourself.

End note: If you know good people doing good things who you would like to see featured in this column, email news@mcgilldaily.com.

> "Hanging out nowadays has to be so much more interesting for people to even get out of their house. We hope people can instead go on their phones and say, okay, I'm going to go on my phone to get off of my phone to build those relationships." — Aidan Licoppe, *Co-Founder of R3ACH*

Larger Than Life: Short King Warsame

"Disability is not inability"

Isabelle Lim
Culture Editor

In a video that has now amassed over 5,000 views on Instagram, Short King Warsame poses in front of an elevator in a bright, patterned yellow polo shirt and black slacks. One hand in his pocket, he smiles bashfully for the camera, flashing a cheeky thumbs up. The caption reads, "3'9" with 6' confidence" — which, in just a few words, sums up Warsame's ethos.

Many members of the McGill community know Short King Warsame from their Instagram Reels feeds. With thousands of views on each reel and just over 2,000 followers at the time of writing (though he's aiming for 10,000 by the end of 2026), Warsame is well-known both on and off campus as a beacon of positivity on social media. His most popular posts feature light-hearted content, mostly football commentary and videos of him at house parties and social events like OAP. In each post, he wears his signature toothy smile; except, of course, in the videos where he's lamenting his woes as a fan of Manchester United.

However, there is much more to Short King Warsame than having confidence and partying. For one, Warsame is a strong advocate for the empowerment of individuals with dwarfism. For another, he raises awareness in videos about social anxiety and the measures one can take to combat it. Warsame, for all the confidence he displays online, is no stranger to either of these issues — to him, they are largely intertwined.

On one of the last balmy fall weekends before the winter freeze is due to set in, the *Daily* sat down with Warsame over Zoom to hear about the trajectory that brought him to McGill; as well as the impact of social environment on one's self-confidence (he described this as having been pivotal in encouraging him to "participate, lead, create, speak publicly and advocate"). By sharing his story, Warsame said, he wishes to demonstrate to students of all demographics that they too can accomplish their dreams as long as they believe in themselves.

Life in Kenya

Warsame Abdikadir Ahmed was born in January 1998 in Dadaab Camp, a UNHCR refugee camp complex in Kenya. Established in 1991 to shelter Somalian refugees fleeing civil war in their home country, Warsame describes the camp as very "community-oriented," although living there was "difficult": families lived in tents together, and water and electricity shortages were not uncommon. However, these factors never affected his attitude — throughout his childhood, he dreamed of becoming a doctor.

These dreams, however, were often inhibited by the way in which he was perceived by his community. Because of his visible dwarfism, he was often subjected to bullying and hate from others. In a written memoir that he shared with the *Daily*, Warsame recounts how he had initially been barred from starting kindergarten at the same time as a friend of the same age. The principal had deemed him "too young" at a glance, without even bothering to ask him his age. "For the first time in my life," he writes, "I began to understand that society often evaluates people by what it sees rather than by what they are capable of becoming."

His family, well aware of the way people could treat him for his differences, barred him from going out and from attending school in his early years with other children around his age. "At that particular time, the community was still not exposed to as many [kinds of] people. [The fact that my] physical disability is visible made it difficult for [me] to go out," he recalls. "My family would not let me go out in fear that I would be bullied or even beaten up by the other kids." Despite their protective intentions, Warsame states that he "personally didn't want to spend [his] life confined at home because of how others might treat [him … and] often wondered how long [he] could continue living that way."



Image courtesy of Warsame Ahmed

Eventually, intervention from a teacher managed to convince Warsame's family to let him attend school. Warsame was overjoyed, describing the excitement and elation of putting on his first uniform. He was put in a class with other students with special needs and disabilities. Despite finally being able to find community, he and his classmates had to endure other students who would apparently walk by the classroom to laugh and shout insults at them. Warsame held his head high, but began to question his own self-worth amidst the immense bullying that he faced.

> "You don't want to just sit back and *hopefully* do good … You have to [act.] I am someone who believes in being hopeful, and at the same time, [thinks about] the steps I'm taking towards getting things done."
>
> — 'Short King' Warsame Ahmed

It soon became evident that Warsame was an academically excellent student, as he began to rank among the top students in his cohort — but this did little to stop the bullying. "Kids of all backgrounds were attending … so the environment was not welcoming and conducive for someone who was unique, because they would be the centre of attention. [I] worried more about people than academics," he says. When he later joined a class of able-bodied students, the scrutiny, gossip and bullying only worsened, causing Warsame's once-excellent grades to plummet and self-doubt to begin precipitating in his mind. "My performance was not that good because of the constant bullying. I [didn't] even feel safe going out, [as] I had to be worried about other people," he recounts, shaking his head.

Thankfully, one of his teachers had taken notice of Warsame's struggles, and recommended that he be transferred to Joyland Special Primary School — a primary school for individuals with physical disabilities in Kisumu, a city in Kenya over 600 kilometres from Dadaab. Despite initial doubts regarding the distance from home and an unfamiliar city, Warsame was encouraged by his family to make the leap and enroll at boarding school there — a decision that would change his life.

"Joyland … was for the physically handicapped. So, like, you find your own people … People who share the same condition in one way or another," Warsame explains, "so no one [could] remind [me] of my dwarfism or disability, [lifting] that load from my shoulders. Because I was in a different environment, I could focus on myself. I could focus on my academics." He grins in fond recollection. "Fortunately, I found myself again when I went to Kisumu. I forgot that I was someone living with dwarfism at some point. The environment did not remind me constantly that I was different."

In turn, Warsame's grades improved dramatically, and by the end of the year, he had

become one of the school's top-performing students. Financial constraints loomed as he went to secondary school, but thanks to more teachers who believed in and advocated for him, he was able to secure admission to Kisumu Boys' High School — one of the most competitive high schools in Kenya. Despite fears that he would be overwhelmed, Warsame embraced the new challenge. One particular teacher's advice stayed on his mind: "If you want respect, defeat them academically." And so he did, seeking mentorship from top-performing students and consistently ranking high in grades among his peers.

In his memoir, Warsame writes, "I still remember an important lesson from that experience: [p]eople do not fail because they lack ability. Many fail because they are denied environments in which their abilities can flourish. … What began as a quest for acceptance had evolved into something much larger. I was no longer proving my worth to others. I was discovering it for myself."

Eventually, his academic excellence led him to apply for the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (SRP). Given the singular nature of the WUSC scholarship, Warsame says it was well-known amongst his peers and in Dadaab Camp. "I think it's been [around] for two decades now? It's still operating, so everyone knows about it. It's one of the factors that motivates students."

Warsame recalls being inexplicably optimistic about his application. There were only 23 people eligible for the scholarship in Dadaab during his application cycle, and only two of them had competitive grades — one of them being Warsame. Canada, though Warsame knew little about it until after eventually being selected for the WUSC SRP, was like a beacon of hope. "I knew it [w]as one of the developed countries, where [one has] so many opportunities. That's what they used to tell us, [that] you [could] choose what you want to be."

Before departing for Canada, Warsame served a brief stint as a Biology and Chemistry teacher in Dadaab Camp, which he described in his memoir as a "deeply meaningful" experience. "I taught in the very society that had once questioned my value … The same community that had once misunderstood disability was beginning to see possibility instead. Education had changed not only my life. It was changing theirs as well."

Arriving in Canada

On 26 August 2022, Warsame arrived on Canadian soil to start his first year at McGill as a pharmacology student. Life here, including the way Warsame found himself being perceived and treated, was very different.

"The good thing with [Canada] is [that] everyone minds their own business. I've never come across anyone who said anything bad to me because of my dwarfism or how I look," Warsame mused in our interview. "Sometimes, [I] can see people staring at [me] weirdly, but I don't want to interpret it negatively … If anything, the people that I [have] interacted with [have been] positive, and they say, like, I'm a great guy, funny guy, things like that." When it comes to group projects, for instance, he can pick whichever of his fellow students he wants to work with without fear of suffering social rejection because of his dwarfism.

According to Warsame, Canadian culture has taught him a lot about independence. "The individualistic culture in Canada is a bit different from the collectivist culture in Dadaab … [here,] you have to figure things out on your own. Nobody tells you something if you don't ask, so I [learned how to] depend on myself. I learned how to cook; if I need appointments, I can book [them] on my own … That independence and [attitude of] going for what you want changed my life."

'Short King Warsame'

It was this independence and desire to reinforce his worth that led Warsame to begin participating in online advocacy. Despite having been on social media for a long time, Warsame only got serious about and consistent with posting content this past year. The alias 'Short King Warsame' was born from his quest for a unique brand that framed his short stature in a positive light.

"I used to fear people," Warsame said, "because of the environment. If I even saw someone looking at me, I would automatically think that they [were] looking at me because I'm a little person [even if they were not]. But I asked myself, 'How long do you want to live with these kinds of beliefs?' … I wanted to expose myself to people. Some people will be extremely mean, others will be really nice. I wanted to challenge that — that's why I joined social media.

"When I did my first video, I just [showed] half [of my body] because no one could guess that I was a little person like that. Then, I was like, let me just do full-body and see people's reactions … There were so many comments. I remember that video got a thousand comments — some of them extremely mean, and some of them extremely good. Then I just kept on posting videos, and I got used to people being mean … My goal was like, 'If they say something bad today, and something bad tomorrow, how long can they say something mean?' After posting for five or six months, most of the people who used to be mean got used to me; some of them even became my fans! … [Posting on social media] boosted my self-esteem, and it doesn't bother me when someone looks at me now. In fact, if someone looks at me, like, I'm gonna smile at them."

> "There are people who are living with disabilities that are still dealing with the things that I once dealt with … I don't want them to focus on their disability only. I want them to see it as just part of them and not their whole identity."
>
> — 'Short King' Warsame Ahmed

Warsame's audience ranges from members of Somali communities to McGill students. He has even been featured on BBC Somalia. When asked if he ever expected to gain as much attention as he has, Warsame shakes his head. "I [thought] I was gonna be [like] any other [person on social media. But I think after the first or second week, people were like, 'Hey, I know your Instagram. Can I take a picture with you?'" He chuckles. "I felt good because I got positive attention from most of these students. [Now,] people who never used to talk to me come up to say hi, maybe because they know I have a good personality. It's a good feeling."

At first, Warsame would post simply for exposure. Now, in addition to his light-hearted content, Warsame has taken on a mission to advocate for individuals with dwarfism and people who suffer from social anxiety.

"There are people who are living with disabilities that are still dealing with the things that I once dealt with. So I want them to see me as an inspiration, like, 'If Short King can do it, I can do it too.' I don't want them to focus on their disability only. I want them to see it as just part of them and not their whole identity." He recounts fondly how a mother with a 12-year-old child living with dwarfism had sent him a DM, telling him how watching his videos had helped her child to develop a positive self-image and not to see his dwarfism as an obstacle.

In addition to his social media presence, Warsame also works closely with WUSC McGill as their VP Peer Support and SRP alumnus, helping to connect the club with scholars who had previously enrolled at McGill through the program.

Moreover, Warsame has launched his own NGO, Rise Beyond Height, which aims to empower persons with dwarfism in Somalia and Kenya through advocacy, education, and inclusion. At the time of writing, he is working to launch his first awareness campaign. "A lot of people are not aware of the insulting nature of a lot of words they [commonly use] — words like 'dwarf' and 'midget.' People still use those in their everyday vocabulary." He hopes to create awareness about people living with dwarfism, and spread the message that no one should be underestimated just because of their physical differences. Once he graduates from McGill in Fall 2027, he plans to take a year off to focus on getting Rise Beyond Height to stand on its own feet, then pursue a master's degree in psychopharmacology (though where exactly is still unclear).

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>
> — 'Short King' Warsame Ahmed

Looking Forward

"Home, for me, is where I feel accepted." Having just received his Canadian citizenship, Warsame is planning to stay in Canada post-graduation. "[Home] can be anywhere … can be multiple things. It's just that home is a feeling of acceptance and being embraced for who you are."

Warsame believes that our self-perceptions factor massively into the realities we deem possible. "If today, I had the belief in me that I am incapable — for example: [because] I am a short person, I should always be dependent — I would really be that person … If I believe that I cannot do anything on my own, I will act in a way that suggests that I cannot actually do something … The brain acts according to the beliefs that you have. Psychology plays a great role in what someone can do." His pursuit of psychopharmacology, the scientific study of how medical substances can affect one's nervous system and the processes associated with it, is only natural as an extension of his interest in investigating these beliefs.

"You don't want to just sit back and hopefully do good. Hopefully I will feel good. Hopefully, you know, things will turn out. But things don't just turn out on their own spontaneously." When asked about hope and belief, and how those can translate to change, Warsame says: "You have to [act.] I am someone who believes in being hopeful, and at the same time, [thinks about] the steps I'm taking towards getting things done, you know?"

Warsame's childhood dream of becoming a doctor has since evolved, though he affirms that he still loves the sciences. Now, to encourage people to believe in themselves and act on such with confidence, he plans on continuing down the path of content creation and advocacy in addition to his studies. "I want to be someone who impacts lives now, who touches as many people as possible, whether [they] have a critical disability or not."

I would like to end this article with a quote from Warsame's memoir: "My story is not exceptional because I overcame challenges. Millions of people do that every day. My story matters because it demonstrates what becomes possible when society chooses opportunity over prejudice, inclusion over exclusion, and belief over doubt. If there is one message I hope readers carry with them, it is this: [n]ever underestimate a child because of how they look. Never assume limitations where potential exists. And never forget that disability is not inability. Sometimes, the greatest strength is found precisely where the world least expects to find it."

Five Minutes from Campus, A New Jazz Club Hits the Scene

L'Entracte Jazz Cabaret's rise to musical prominence

Shai Geballe
Staff Writer

At the Peel-Sainte-Catherine intersection, tourists observe the sights of Montreal's downtown core, peering through the carefully curated displays of designer stores. From the metro station nearby, commuters spill onto the sidewalk, rushing off to their jobs in the office buildings towering above. The hammering of construction work gives the already packed sidewalks a claustrophobic feel. But for those in the know, the bustling intersection offers more than street-level commotion. Walk into the inconspicuous doorway at 1112 Sainte-Catherine, marked by show brochures scotch-taped to the wall, and you'll be greeted by a flickering fluorescent "JAZZ" sign. Distant sounds of fluttering trumpet and percussive piano float by you as you descend the staircase. And just like that, you've arrived at your destination: Montreal's newest jazz club, L'Entracte Jazz Cabaret.

Officially opening in May after a sold-out Prélude Festival in March and April, L'Entracte Jazz Cabaret is the project of music enthusiasts Raphael Roy Dumouchel, Nikola Haddad, and Sajid Baina. "You know, we all have crazy, stupid dreams," says Dumouchel, a student at McGill's Schulich School of Music. Whether crazy or not, this dream certainly took a lot of work. Opening a new venue is a monumental and risky venture, involving in this case the retrofitting of a previously-empty basement with a stage, bar, kitchen, tables, lights, and more. But this hard work was undertaken with a purpose: Dumouchel emphasized the need for a new jazz club following the mass closure of venues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "As a band leader, seeing all of these clubs closing down was really, really sad." He specifically highlighted diminishing opportunities in the city for big bands — the 15-piece orchestrated ensembles immensely important to the jazz genre. Thus, L'Entracte was opened. All things considered, Dumouchel saw one thing as clear: "We need a fucking venue."

L'Entracte exists within a lineage of community-oriented jazz clubs opened by McGill students throughout the city. For over nine years, Resonance Café on Avenue du Parc offered a cherished community space with vegan food and daily performances until it had to close its doors in December 2021. St Henri's Le Basement also offered a venue for young members of Montreal's jazz scene, until its 2023 closure amid financial troubles. Drummer and McGill graduate Ryan Bennett described Le Basement as Montreal jazz's 'third place' after Resonance Café closed. Speaking on community-oriented jazz spaces in Montreal, Bennett told the *Daily*, "These places have, unfortunately, consistently struggled, but it is important to have more and more spaces and opportunities for different music because there are so many great musicians in town, and clearly so many people that are interested in the music."

L'Entracte is both a successor in this lineage of student-run venues, and a registered nonprofit. "All of the [proceeds are] distributed to musicians, to artists, to making a better venue," said Dumouchel. While employees have standard wages, the leadership team works on a volunteer basis. "Since this is a nonprofit, community is everything," Dumouchel added.

The *Daily* spoke with Kevin Dean, a longtime McGill professor and staple within the Montreal jazz scene. "[L'Entracte] is a very ambitious project, but…it has great potential and they seem to be on the right track." Dean, who has lent his Hammond B3 organ and piano to the venue, says he's keen to help out where he can. "It would be nice to have three full-time jazz clubs in town." A virtuosic trumpet player and band leader in his own right, Dean runs a Sunday organ night at the venue twice a month, and regularly collaborates with student musicians.

L'Entracte has collaborated with the Montreal International Jazz Festival, Sorties Jazz Nights and PGB Cymbals, all of which have helped the new club build its fanbase and improve the space. Pieces from various visual artists have been brought in to brighten up the room. Currently on display are works by Cam Berry and Kanna Anigbogu; a community endeavour indeed.

In its first few months, L'Entracte has attracted a diverse and growing community of locals and tourists alike looking for a unique listening experience, or even to test their chops in one of many weekly jam sessions. "We want people to just hang out," says Marie-Jeanne Paquet, L'Entracte's marketing director. "[P]eople from McGill, Concordia, UdeM, UQAM, people who are not from our city, we just want people to have a hub." Attendance has been further increasing as more passers-by discover this hidden gem. "There have been more people over time. Steadily more and more people are discovering…L'Entracte, and discovering that there is regular music all the time," notes Bennett.

Although the strides the venue has taken in its first six months in operation are significant, Dumouchel acknowledges that there is still work to be done to "make it more comfortable, make it more affordable, make it more accessible, make it sound better, [and] make it look better." As the venue is very large, with mostly-blank walls, the musical acts currently contribute more to the venue's atmosphere than does its decor. Dean notes that the venue's size has its benefits, allowing large audiences to experience the thrill of jazz music, but acknowledges that "they have some work to do on the sound."

If you are looking for a new venue to witness local jazz musicians exhibit their artistry, then be sure to make L'Entracte your next destination. Only minutes from McGill's campus, it is the perfect spot take a break from studying in McLennan, or to pick up a post-midterm beer. L'Entracte regularly features some of the most talented musicians at McGill, and provides a great exhibition of the artistry at the Schulich School of Music. "Show up on a Monday, meet new people, that's all we want, that's all we ask," says Paquet. She also highlights the $7 cocktail deal on jam nights. Bennett adds, "if you are intrigued by the music of jazz, it's worth it to just come out, see it, bring a friend, and experience having a nice, laid-back night, [and hearing] some music that is really exciting."

L'Entracte's student cover normally sits around $10-15, with additionial food or drink purchases recommended. Every Monday, a free-entry jam session follows the night's sets.

> All things considered, Dumouchel saw one thing as clear: "We need a fucking venue."

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Image courtesy of Shai Geballe

Montreal's Poetic Autumn

Recent awards and publications affirm the vitality of this city's literary scene

Kate Hansen
Culture Editor

For Eli MacLaren, October 8 was just another Thursday, until it wasn't. "I woke up, I walked my dog, I got a bit of work done." But "at 10:30," he reports, "emails just started going completely berserk."

It was that day, of course, that Canadian poet Anne Carson was announced as the 2026 Nobel Laureate in Literature. MacLaren, Department Chair for English at McGill University and specialist in Canadian poetry, thus found himself in high demand for interviews. This spotlight seems to have been accepted reluctantly — "I'm not an Anne Carson scholar," he admits — but the media came to him nonetheless. "As a professor of Canadian poetry, they want to know what I know."

It has been nearly a month since the Prize's announcement, when I find myself conducting an interview of my own, and the irony of discussing his media attention is not lost on me. Journalists, myself included, seem keen to contextualize Carson's win as a national achievement: she is only the nineteenth-ever Canadian Nobel Laureate, and only the second-ever in the category of literature. More important to me than Carson's citizenship, however, is the Montreal of it all; interviewing MacLaren in McGill's McCall MacBain Arts Building, I am thinking of all the times she may have walked these halls herself, in her time as a faculty member of the Department of Classics.

It is worth noting that Carson eventually left her post at McGill after criticizing the university's merging of Classics with the Department of History, calling it a "falter[ing]" and a "disappear[ance]." Response on campus to her Nobel win has nevertheless been strong, with many eager to emphasize her connection to McGill. According to *The McGill Reporter,* university President and Vice-Chancellor H. Deep Saini called the news "a source of profound pride for the entire McGill community." The *Reporter* itself reinforced this sentiment, beginning their article by introducing Anne Carson as a "former McGill Professor."

Whether Carson would be appreciative or not, there certainly seems to be an impulse to connect her success to our corner of the city. In the glass-panelled display case across from Professor MacLaren's office, I notice that the *Scrivener Creative Review* shelf has been given an Anne Carson do-over. The 1997 issue, in which the poet was interviewed, now sits pride of place.

As *Scrivener* co-editors-in-chief Jackson Pinkowski and Chloë Sproule put it in their joint statement to the *Daily*, "Carson's win made for a jubilant atmosphere here at [the Review] and at McGill. It almost felt like a holiday. Friends and peers turned their smiling, intelligent faces to one another and asked— 'Did you hear the good news?'" Pinkowski and Sproule, both masters students in the Department of English, are skeptical of a too-patriotic or school-spirited interpretation of this award, however, calling such an understanding "dubious."

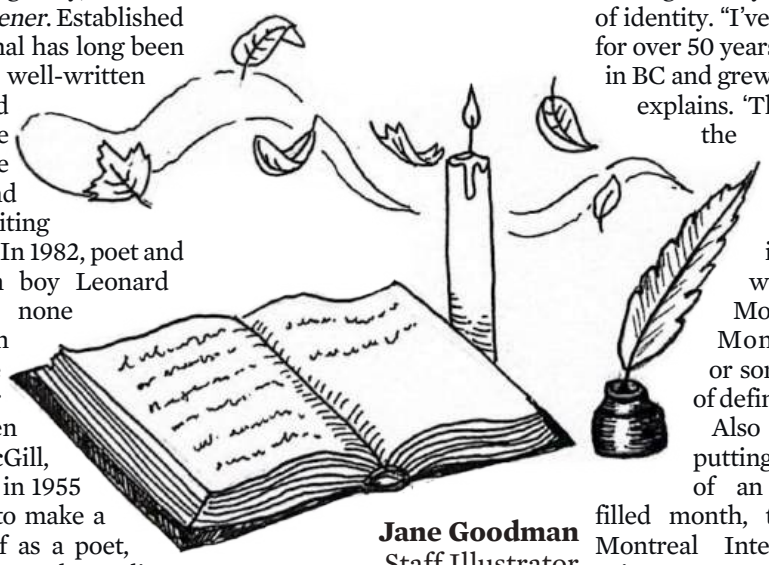
"[W]hat delights us most," they offer instead, "is the celebration of literature's *élan vital* that Carson's laureateship invites."

The statement as a whole is eloquent and artistic in its stylings, but this is, arguably, to be expected of *Scrivener*. Established in 1980, the journal has long been a haven for well-written students, and exemplifies the entwined nature of McGill and Montreal's writing scene as a whole. In 1982, poet and Montreal golden boy Leonard Cohen chose none other than *Scrivener* as the vessel for four new poems. Cohen studied at McGill, achieving his BA in 1955 before going on to make a name for himself as a poet, singer/songwriter, and novelist. He was not McGill's first student of English Literature to find success in creative production, either. Fellow Montrealer and poet Louis Dudek also completed his undergraduate studies at McGill in the 1930s, where he published his writings in none other than the *Daily*. He would later set up a publishing company, magazine, and contribute actively to literary journals, as well as take on a professorship in English at McGill.

When I ask MacLaren about the phenomenon of academics two-timing their scholarship with creative outputs, he points out "the places for poetry in our economy," or rather, the lack thereof. "We don't as a society buy and value poetry enough," he tells me. "The truth of the matter is [that] since the Second World War, poetry has been at home in the academy in Canada, and not very much… outside the academy." As a result, he continues, "many poets, they find their people in universities, and also, they find positions that pay." Even more than fiction, where a select few authors may find themselves with a zeitgeist-y (see: profitable) bestseller, MacLaren explains that poetry struggles to capture mainstream attention — thus the turn to academia for job security. "It's too cold, outside of the academy, to try to be a poet. There's not enough money in it."

Poet Brian Trehearne might know a thing or two about sheltering from this "cold" via academia. Last month, Trehearne saw the publication of his first poetry collection, *Paper Black Leaf,* with Montreal's own John Aylen Books. A McGill Professor Emeritus, Trehearne tells me that, on top of his successful academic career, he has been "writing [poetry] from the age of 15." After earning all three of his degrees at McGill, Trehearne took up a post on the other side of the classroom, joining the Department of English faculty as a professor of Canadian poetry.

Despite the stability that this may have offered, Trehearne is candid in our interview about his experience as both a scholar and a writer. "I think some people balance that better than I did," he says, confessing that "[f]or me, they were in pretty stark contention. They did not go together well."



Jane Goodman
Staff Illustrator

While *Paper Black Leaf* is Trehearne's first book, he "published a few poems in England, many years ago." Even this smaller-scale publishing took effort and perseverance, he tells me. "You always want something out in the mail. So I would circulate things simultaneously to at least one American journal, two Canadian journals, and one British journal." This dogged approach still did not equal consistent success, and he admits to having been discouraged. "I think I was too easily deterred by rejection."

Patience is a virtue, however, and *Paper Black Leaf* is a testament to Trehearne's considerable, if henceforth under-read, body of work. The book features poems from as far back as 1976 —when he was 19, he tells me— all the way up until 2004. Trehearne speaks of assembling the book as a massive personal undertaking, involving "enormous revision of…the archive," but this endeavour seems to have been worth it. On Tuesday, October 27, *Paper Black Leaf* was launched at Milton Parc's own The Word Bookshop, at an event which included readings of select poems by Trehearne himself. The Word's staff later told me that the event had seen an impressive turnout despite the store's small space.

While Trehearne seemed hesitant to claim himself as part of Montreal's contemporary literary scene during our interview, he remains a working poet in the city, connected to and participating in the local creative community. At the launch, for example, Trehearne was introduced to the crowd by another Montreal poet, friend and award-winning writer Derek Webster.

Trehearne was equally reluctant to overstate a specific geographic influence on his writing, but the poet-professor did speak to writing's ability to probe questions of identity. "I've lived in Montreal for over 50 years but… I was born in BC and grew up in Alberta," he explains. 'There are poems in the book that helped me understand some of the ways in which being a westerner in Montreal, or being a Montreal-westerner or something, was kind of definitive."

Also in October, putting the cherry on top of an already poetry-filled month, the McGill-based Montreal International Poetry Prize announced its 2026 winner. New Yorker Daniel Schonning was this year's recipient for his poem "Tallow", earning him $20,000 in prize money, publication in the Prize's upcoming anthology, and of course, much fanfare in the literary community. While the award is administered from our campus, it is international in focus, with previous winners hailing from around the world. In a quote to the *Daily* about the geographic diversity of previous laureates, director Carmen Faye Mathes asserted that the Prize aims to "bring together poets from around the world," particularly "at a time when many populations and the governments they elect are actively seeking to close borders." She also praised "the extremely hard-working Prize Committee here at McGill" for "connect[ing] with poets in places from which we don't traditionally receive a lot of submissions," with hopes to "open the door to even more great poetry."

> "When people talk about poetry, it restores it to its due importance. And if we don't talk about it, then it disappears."
> – Eli MacLaren, *English Department Chair*

The Prize came up in my conversation with MacLaren, too. According to the professor, celebrating an international slate of poets, rather than sticking to locals only, demonstrates that "writing in Montreal…is on par with any bar of [literary] excellence happening anywhere in the world. We're equal to that." He compares this to the "mature literary culture of the nineteenth century, [when] people went to Paris, people went to London." The Poetry Prize, he elucidates, brings outside engagement to Montreal's poetry scene, which is "good for literature."

MacLaren has lots to say about the underappreciation of poetry in the rush of contemporary life, but sees academia as a possible answer to this. "I think the most important thing is to do what we're doing, which is to talk about poetry. Because when people talk about poetry, it restores it to its due importance. And if we don't talk about it, then it disappears."

On that note, I ask MacLaren to recommend some of his favourite Canadian poems as a starting point for anyone hoping to dip their toe into this restoration. He offers up two answers: "A great early Canadian poem is by Archibald Lampman, called 'Winter Uplands.'" It's a very simple poem, and a very Canadian experience." For the more contemporary-minded, he suggests "Finger Pointing at the Moon" by Don McKay, from the poet's collection *Another Gravity*.

According to MacLaren, "people don't know their literary heritage in this country." For those who go looking, however, a "rich mythology, centred on Montreal and McGill" awaits. This mythology is not only relegated to the past, either. Next time The Word organizes a reading or book launch, or your roommate brings home the newest issue of *Scrivener*, or the cafe around the corner hosts an open mic, why not check it out? It's autumn 2026, and Montreal's literary scene is alive and kicking. Be a part of it!

Paper Black Leaf *is currently available for purchase at The Word and Paragraphe bookstores.* Scrivener *Issue 49 will be out December 6.*

The Rocky Horror Picture Show Comes to McGill

How the show's production championed queer joy and student activism

Sonia Josephine Berman
News Editor

Warning: spoilers ahead!

As the Halloween spirit crept in and neighborhood foliage shifted to an auburn hue, you may have seen crimson posters advertising Rocky Horror McGill on your walk to campus through Milton Parc or, perhaps, in the lavatory at McLennan Library.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975) is a campy, science-fiction film, released after an unsuccessful stint on Broadway in 1973. In the movie, a mundane, upper middle class couple — Brad and Janet — get a flat tire during a thunderstorm, leading them to seek out a phone at a nearby castle. Unbeknownst to them, the place is home to the alien Dr. Frank-N-Furter — who refers to themself as a "transvestite" — and their eccentric group of friends, lovers, and servants; this includes Magenta and her brother Riff Raff, Columbia and her boyfriend Eddie, and Rocky — Frank-N-Furter's blond and muscular Frankenstein-like creation. The film has since become a global cult-phenomenon, with theatres across the world still screening it decades after its release. Traditionally, a shadow cast — a group of people who dress up as the characters and act out the movie by lipsyncing in time with the film — often performs the show, while audience members wear costumes, use props to interact with the film, and shout at the screen between nearly every line of dialogue. Rocky Horror McGill, however, went beyond what's expected of a typical live-showing and incorporated activism into the event.

Rocky Horror McGill's Frank-N-Furter, also known by their stage name, Melissa Potamia, spoke with the *Daily* before the event, saying they hoped for "big reactions" from the audience: "I think that the participation is just such a big part of this show, and I'm very excited because it helps me with my lines too, [...] so I really appreciate everyone who will be shouting at the top of their volume. I can't wait to see everyone in the audience, and especially in a room like Leacock 132, that many people shouting — oh, it's gonna be fabulous. We're gonna cause this ruckus, which is the point of the show."

While a midnight showing on Halloween is the classic experience, Rocky Horror productions are a year-round event. This year, for the first time, a collection of students, rather than any specific interest group or club, organized and hosted its very own live showing.

On Friday, October 30 2026, I donned my costume (Magenta) and headed to the *Rocky Horror* live-showing in Leacock 132. Doors opened at 7:00 PM. Last-minute tickets were sold at the door, as well as individual prop bags. "The props that we [use] will definitely cause laughs," said Potamia.

"I think that they're unique to the audience that is coming, so I think it will make people feel very special and hopefully make them… I don't know… channel the energy of the film within [their] own lives."

Regardless of whether or not they had bought a prop bag, everyone received a copy of *The McKill Times* — a two-sided fictional newspaper sheet written in the style of *The Onion.* In addition to being the first prop used by audience members during the show, acting as a makeshift umbrella when the shadow cast sprayed the audience with water, *The McKill Times* provided a satirical overview of the causes supported by Rocky Horror McGill. While many of the statements made in the newspaper were reiterated by multiple speakers before the live show began, *The McKill Times* provided a disclaimer that "the views in this newspaper do not represent the views of the cast and crew, or any of the organizations which contributed to this paper."

> "This show is more important than ever [...] Transphobia is on the rise [...] The discrimination [against] trans people is so prominent in society — and even within our own generation, — Melissa Potamia, Dr. Frank-N-Furter, *Rocky Horror McGill*"

The newspaper touched on topics such as the lack of renovations for non-STEM buildings, McGill's ID policy, and GardaWorld. It also advertised upcoming events, such as: community lunches at Co-Op Bar Milton (BMP), the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers) vigil on November 6, the Coalition de résistance pour l'unité étudiante syndicale (La CRUES) protest on November 13, and the Teaching Support Union at McGill (TSUM) general assembly on November 23.

Moreover, the event provided exposure for various local groups and their causes through tables in the Leacock lobby: TSUM, the Association of McGill University Support Employees (AMUSE), CKUT-90.6 FM, the Montreal Trans Patient Union (MTPU), Change Course, and QPIRG McGill.

Rocky Horror McGill was clearly a two-way community-effort. QPIRG provided Rocky Horror McGill with funding and printing. The BMP solidarity meal program provided the cast and crew with snacks during rehearsals, and the Players' Theatre allowed access to their costume closet. Incidentally, all proceeds from the show's pay-what-you-can tickets and prop bags are to be split between the Sameer Project in Palestine and trans-affirming mutual aid funds in Montreal, including those organized by the MTPU.

At around 8:15 PM, the MC came out wearing a baseball cap and a black medical mask, likely for anonymity. Making a sermon-like speech on the problems posted by the McGill administration, they led the audience through the "Free Palestine" chant, and reflected on Tim Curry's legacy.

Prior to the show, Potamia had also spoken to the *Daily* about the tragic loss of such an influential icon: "I think that Tim Curry was such a unique actor for his appreciation towards the queer community throughout his career. His love for his art really inspired a lot of queer people. I think that he's deeply missed. I know that for a fact. I miss him."

The MC also brought attention to the problematic nature of the original 1975 film, which Potamia also elaborated on in their interview: "It's still quite a controversial musical. There's no way [of] approaching this musical without recognizing that there is transfemme-phobia, and that's a big part of why this show was kind of acceptable for its time. [...] As queer people, we have the opportunity to reclaim this as our own, and see the beauty and the absolute [...] joy that comes from watching this as a queer person.

"This show is more important than ever," Potamia expressed. "Transphobia is on the rise […] The discrimination [against] trans people is so prominent in society — and even within our own generation — that it makes me worried for what the future has for trans people."

Following the MC's speech, representatives of CKUT, QPIRG, the MTPU, and AMUSE spoke. CKUT and QPIRG emphasized the importance of voting in the Fall 2026 SSMU Referendum. The spokesperson for the MTPU brought attention to the fact that, GrS Montreal — the only clinic providing completely subsidized gender affirmation surgeries in Quebec — has the capacity to take on more patients but instead has increased its wait times, sometimes by years, due to lack of provincial funds. The AMUSE representative touched on the ongoing negotiations with McGill about their new collective agreement — a situation that is very relevant to many members of the production, who range from 17-year-old undergrads to 28-year-old PhD students. The AMUSE spokesperson concluded by a sentiment also printed in *The McKill Times'* editor's note: "McGill works because we do."

After this, the *Rocky Horror* virgin initiation began. This part of the production is different at every live showing. I have witnessed a variety of the strange inductions that make *Rocky Horror* a "cult classic." At the door, those who had never seen a live show before had been marked by a red letter "V" painted on their cheek. The MC came back out, stripped off their jacket and pants to reveal a black mini-skirt and bikini, and directed the *Rocky Horror* virgins to stand up. Then, they guided the newcomers, section by section, in moaning McGill President and Vice-Chancellor Deep Saini's name as if they were experiencing an orgasm.

Then, the live showing began; the famous red lips appeared on the screen and the song "Science Fiction / Double Feature" started to play. A member of the shadow cast appeared on stage and made their way through the crowd, which would happen repeatedly throughout the show.

The activist messaging continued throughout the production. In the opening scene of Rocky Horror, a billboard appears on screen. The shadow cast held up their own sign during this scene, but instead of reading "Denton: The Home of Happiness," their sign read "McKill: A MKULTRA Production." MKULTRA refers to the illegal psychiatric experimentation conducted between 1948 and 1964 at the Alan Memorial Institute, a hospital affiliated with McGill. Similarly, during the famous "Time Warp" dance scene, a banner was shown in the movie and by the shadow cast. However, the Rocky Horror McGill standard read "No Justice, No Peace" instead of the film's "Annual Transylvanian Convention" (Transylvania is the planet in the galaxy of Transexual where Frank, Magenta and Riff Raff come from). Furthermore, when Columbia performed a tap dance in this scene, the shadow cast member Columbia held up a Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) flag.

Beyond the activist elements, the show was impressive in its own right — especially for a production which, according to *The McKill Times* editor's note, started out as a "semi-joke" that "came to [them] over beers on a rooftop in late August." Extensive time and intensive effort had clearly gone into the project, with the cast and crew working through budget and time constraints to create a wonderful and entertaining final production on such a large scale. This is especially remarkable given that, according to Potamia, "[they had] thrown this together in, like, a month, and it was quite shocking that [they had been] able to do it."

Rocky Horror McGill's shadow cast went above and beyond to quite literally furnish the set, physically acting as inanimate objects: the windshield wipers on Janet and Brad's car, Frank's house door, and the workout bench Frank gifts to Rocky.

Creative substitutions were also made by way of props. Instead of a motorcycle and a saxophone as featured in the movie, the shadow cast member Eddie arrived on a Bixi and played a bright teal recorder during "Hot Patootie — Bless My Soul." A fake pickaxe was used first as a murder weapon when Frank-N-Furter killed Eddie, and then again as Brad's appendage. A bed sheet was also used twice: first it was held up like a screen and illuminated by a spotlight so that the audience could only see the shadowy silhouettes of the cast; and again during the final scene, when the shadow cast Brad vaped what seemed like a couple dozen puffs in place of a fog machine.

Potamia asserts, "I really hope that the audience [is] able to celebrate this musical for generations to come," and they hope that Rocky Horror McGill "will continue a legacy of future productions."

Rocky Horror is so much more than a campy film or a fun time — though it succeeds at being both. Above all, it allows queer joy to flourish by creating a safe space where one can be unapologetically oneself. As Potamia says: "There truly is nothing like *Rocky Horror Picture Show*."

Can Music Truly Be Personal?

Frankie Cosmos's Greta Kline speaks on what happens when a song written for yourself becomes meaningful to millions

Jad Morin
Culture Contributor

Any artist's willingness to share the custody of their music must not be taken as a sign of it being impersonal. "It's not mine, it's ours," Kline tells Radio TinTin, reflecting on releasing her music to the public. Kline has made a career out of confessional songwriting, creating lyrical and musical projects that are diary-like in tone — a diary that was never meant to reach millions of people.

Reaching millions of people is exactly what happened, however, when her 2016 song "Fool" went viral on TikTok in early 2021. It has now appeared in 367 thousand total videos on the platform, and counts over 220 million streams on Spotify.

"It wasn't even a single on the record; I didn't pick it out to be a huge hit," she says. "I've never really trusted my own gauge of what's good or not. [The success of Fool] is just further proof that I have no idea, and that all [I] can do is make the art – what happens to it after is out of [my] hands."

Kline drew inspiration for "Fool" from two sources: a poem she wrote in high school, and the then-recent experience of being stood up at a restaurant by a friend. The chorus showcases that experience, Kline repeating the now well-known refrain: 'You make me feel like a fool / waiting for you.'

"[Writing lyrics is] like writing in your diary," Kline explains. Except that when you're writing in a diary, "you're ideally not thinking about how cringey it's gonna be in ten years when you read it." The popularity of "Fool" has seen Frankie Cosmos maintain 1.4 million monthly listeners years after its release. This calls into question how truly "personal" her music can be. Can a project that acts as a diary maintain its unfiltered and raw feel when the confessions held therein have the potential to be perceived by millions of people upon release?

The unexpected success of "Fool" has forced her to re-examine what it means to make personal music. "Knowing that people are listening makes me hesitant to even claim my music to be personal. Because it really just is not — once you share something, it isn't personal, it's public," Kline explains.

This internal reflection has had tangible impacts on Kline's musical process and the creation of her later projects. Cognisant of the now-wider breadth of her audience, she consciously dials down the literal nature of her lyricism in favour of more abstract, poetic songwriting. Her songs' resulting ambiguity allows listeners to find their own meaning in the music, better fitting their individual realities.

"I've had so many times over the years where people say something to me about one of my lyrics that means something to them, or maybe people have a tattoo of a lyric important to them," she recounts, "and I'm like, 'I don't wanna ruin it for you by telling you what it meant to me in the moment that I wrote it,' because it's not important. At that point it's not mine; it's ours," Kline asserts. "It's not for me to control what the song is about."

"Fool"'s virality epitomizes on a massive scale Kline's general philosophy of music. The song has taken on a life of its own, venturing miles away from its original personal backstory and becoming much bigger than Frankie Cosmos itself. On TikTok, for example, the song has commonly been used by those looking to process their own experiences of feeling like a "Fool". Whether it's being broken up with by a romantic partner or having a best friend not text back, Kline's song has provided a space for people to make sense of their own experiences – ten years after she first used it to make sense of hers.



Image courtesy of Matthew James-Wilson

Despite her newfound, sizeable audience, however, Kline is intent on continuing to make music on her own terms."It's funny, it definitely still feels like we're making it for a small group of listeners. Even smaller than that, it does still feel like I'm ultimately making it for myself."

Is Wearing Makeup Really a Choice?

The illusion behind cosmetic liberation and its effect on women's autonomy

Salem Zeleke Sinishaw
Commentary Contributor

According to the concept of choice feminism, "any choice a woman makes is inherently feminist and … women's individual freedom to choose represents women's liberation." This is the belief behind the mainstream justification for the wearing of makeup by women and girls: these women and girls are actively choosing to engage in this self-styling, thus their behaviour is construed as a feminist act. However, choices are not made in a vacuum. The act of wearing makeup, for example, is predicated on the societal expectation for women to be beautiful. Making one's self up as a woman, then, is not a free choice, because being beautiful is an obligation. Makeup thus reinforces the idea that women must be beautiful, and also further advances the idea that their beauty must be a beauty of perfection.

In the United States, 38 per cent of women report wearing makeup at least a few times a week, if not daily. These women cite boosting confidence, special occasions, enhancing certain features, covering blemishes, and self-expression as their primary reasons for doing so.

The most devious of these justifications is that of self-expression. As feminist American Philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky asserts in her book *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, makeup, portrayed as a tool for expressing individuality, leaves little room for it. As no two beings are the same, self-expression naturally implies a variety. And yet, made-up faces on the streets, following popular trends or routines like "clean girl," "doe-eye," or "no makeup-makeup" looks, become identical. As Bartky says, "[p]ainting the face is not like painting a picture; at best, it might be described as painting the same picture over and over again with minor variations." Maybe, if a classmate showed up to lecture with flamboyant blue eyelids, I could be convinced of the self-expression argument. Instead, the mainly-conformist stylings of our student body confirm to me Bartky's point.

Considering that most women don't often step out of the appropriate makeup routine, the 26 per cent who claim to wear it for self-expression are deceiving themselves. And then there is the issue of the other rationales. Boosting confidence, special occasions, covering blemishes, enhancing features — these are all euphemisms for the desire to be more beautiful.

The question, then, is whether there is anything wrong with wanting to be beautiful, and whether women are even allowed *not* to strive for this. Society expects women to be beautiful and desirable. Pursuing physical perfection is thus not a choice at all but a required path. When women do choose to opt out of makeup, they face immediate social and professional frictions: they are told that they look "tired," "unprofessional," or "unwell." Beauty is an obligation precisely because the default state of a bare or natural face is treated as a failure of presentation.

What is strikingly interesting, is that it's a field reserved for women only. As Naomi Wolf stated in *The Beauty Myth*, "this embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary…None of this is true." For this reason, women account for nearly 90 per cent of all cosmetic purchases. Because women are assumed to be more beautiful than men, it becomes that they *must* be more beautiful.

If makeup really is a choice, what explains the queasy feeling of shame whenever they aren't made-up? I can't count how many times I have heard a woman apologise for the way she looks. Makeup is not only a symbol of women's obligation, but it further pushes the boundary of beauty into perfection. As stated by Bartky, the depth of shame of being considered ugly is a "measure of the extent to which all women have internalized patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability."

Makeup, along with all beauty rituals, are therefore examples of the policing of women's minds. And so the minds of women are like Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. His prison model presents a circular structure of individual cells with a tower at the center, the tower seeing everything within these cells. The cells are the minds of women and the tower is the internal voice — coming from society, patriarchy, etc. — which polices them. As said by Bartky, it is a state of conscious and permanent visibility. A state of self-surveillance: checking whether the mascara is running, whether one has gained a pound, whether one's pores are too big, whether one smells good. A woman is perpetually under someone else's gaze, even in her own mind. As John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* famously said: "[M]en act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object — and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."

In the mind of a woman, there is a he who requires the performance of perfected beauty. And this he is everywhere. It is in the camera of her iPhone, in the mirror, in the "get ready with me" videos, and in the 2 hours that girls spend getting ready before a night out. It has so usurped their minds, to the extent that, women often claim that beautification is "fun."

Ironically, women are simultaneously ridiculed for their interest in these apparently-trivial things such as fashion or makeup. Whether or not they participate in the pursuit of beauty, then, they are ridiculed. What must they do, then?

As one of my dearest friends recently put it, we must do what we can to get by. This is the idea explored by Kathy Davis in *Remaking the She-Devil: A Critical Look at Feminist Approaches to Beauty*, who argues that "cosmetic surgery might be a way for some women within the limitations of their present situation to end their suffering." Makeup may also be a means of ending the suffering from the apparent curse of being ugly. Although a collective agreement among women that they need not be beautiful would perhaps end this plague, there may be reluctance to join this movement, as some will refuse to part with the very real rewards that accompany adherence to beauty standards. As Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* wrote: "The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity."

Until all women agree, few women are incentivized to quit the system.

This article seeks to awaken the consciousness of those who view the wearing of makeup as an innocent choice. I do not wish to over-admonish my fellow women, however. Self-awareness is not freedom: a bird which knows her cage is no more free than the one who doesn't.

When Neutrality Becomes Silence: McGill's Responsibility to Protect Political Dissent

McGill's commitment to free expression is tested when students challenge the university itself

Lisa Banti
Commentary Contributor

McGill University encourages its students to think critically, question authority, and engage with the political issues that shape the world around them. Its own teaching guidelines emphasize questioning assumptions and examining competing perspectives, while its Statement of Academic Freedom recognizes the right to criticize university policies and administration. However, when students turn that same critical attention toward McGill's own decisions, the university's commitment to open debate becomes more complicated.

Recent discussions about academic freedom and institutional neutrality have brought this contradiction into sharper focus. McGill claims to support freedom of expression, but what does this commitment look like when students use their voices to challenge the administration?

In the October 2026 newsletter of the McGill Association of University Teachers (MAUT), President-Elect Gerbern S. Oegema discusses these questions in an article titled "Engaging with Global Conflict in a University Setting?" He proposes guidelines emphasizing institutional neutrality, respectful discussion, and rules surrounding campus demonstrations. These are not official university policies, however they offer a sense of how many educators and administrators within McGill are approaching the issue of political disagreement.

There is nothing inherently wrong with encouraging respectful discussion. Students and professors should be able to express their views without facing harassment or intimidation. Nonetheless, there is a clear difference between protecting people from harm and expecting political disagreements to remain comfortable. When the university places too much emphasis on how students express their concerns, it risks losing sight of what they are actually saying.

One suggestion Oegema poses in the newsletter is that students should bring their political concerns through the university's established governance systems. Although this sounds reasonable, the problem is that students have already been using these structures to voice their concerns. Yet they have received little clarity about what their efforts have achieved.

On September 28, more than 400 students gathered for the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) General Assembly, where they passed a motion calling on student representatives to oppose the renewal of McGill's exchange agreement with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. According to former MAUT President Steve Jordan, just nine students voted against the motion and two abstained. The motion was subsequently ratified by the SSMU Board of Directors on October 20, following a student vote in which more than 77 per cent supported its ratification.

Similar motions have also been adopted by MAUT and the Law Students' Society, as Jordan notes, reflecting concerns raised through the very institutional channels students are being encouraged to use.

McGill claims to support freedom of expression, but what does this commitment look like when students use their voices to challenge the administration?

Although SSMU representatives have reportedly discussed the Hebrew University motion with senior administrators, McGill has not publicly committed to acting on its demands. The agreement is not scheduled for renewal until 2028, and the motion is expected to reach the university's Senate in January 2027. While McGill is not legally required to act on every motion passed by a student association, if students take the time to organize, debate, and vote through recognized university bodies, they deserve clarity about how their concerns are being considered. Otherwise, participation begins to feel more symbolic than meaningful.

The tension between political expression and university authority, however, extends beyond just these meetings. In April 2025, following a student strike in solidarity with Palestine, McGill University sought a court injunction restricting demonstrations on campus, which the Quebec Superior Court granted on April 15. After SSMU criticized the injunction as an infringement on students' political expression, McGill's administration defended it as necessary to protect campus safety and prevent disruptions to academic activities.

Safety is a legitimate concern, and students should not have to worry about threats or intimidation while attending university. Nevertheless, protests are not always quiet or convenient. They are often intended to disrupt ordinary routines and draw attention to issues that might otherwise be ignored. However, disruption alone should not be treated as evidence of danger.

McGill's Advisory Panel on Campus Expression addressed some of these concerns in January 2026. It recommended that restrictions on demonstrations be transparent, proportionate, and applied uniformally, regardless of the political views being expressed. Such distinctions matter because rules that appear neutral can disproportionately affect certain forms of political expression, particularly student activism in solidarity with Palestine, which has faced restrictions and legal challenges from the university.

Debates surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict have made this distinction a particularly pressing issue at McGill. Students calling for Palestinian self-determination and accountability for violations of international law are also questioning the university's relationships with Israeli institutions.

Opposition to Israeli government policies, criticism of partnerships with Israeli universities, and advocacy for Palestinian rights is not intrinsically tied to antisemitism. Antisemitism is a serious form of discrimination, and Jewish students deserve to feel safe and respected on campus. Nonetheless, McGill has a responsibility to address discrimination without treating legitimate political criticism as inherently threatening.

The idea that students might push the university to reconsider its institutional relationships is not new. In November 1985, following years of student activism against apartheid in South Africa, McGill's Board of Governors voted to divest from companies with ties to the apartheid regime, making McGill the first Canadian university to take such action. Although the political circumstances differ from today's debates, the decision demonstrates that demands to reconsider financial ties on human rights grounds have a precedent at McGill.

These questions are also relevant to academic freedom inside the classroom. Professors should not feel pressured to avoid controversial subjects simply because discussing them might provoke disagreement among students. Academic objectivity requires careful engagement with evidence, not the avoidance of conclusions that some may find politically uncomfortable. Nor does it mean that every interpretation must be presented as equally convincing when research and established legal principles offer grounds for evaluating competing claims.

In September, McGill Provost Angela Campbell acknowledged that earlier university communications regarding academic freedom had frequently been understood as discouraging discussion of controversial issues. She reaffirmed that academic freedom protects unpopular arguments and criticism of institutions, including McGill itself.

That clarification is important. However, statements supporting academic freedom only go so far when students and professors remain uncertain about their limitations. As MAUT members have pointed out, earlier university communications have raised concerns about whether controversial expression is genuinely protected. In September 2024, SSMU revoked Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights' club status after McGill warned it would press financial ramifications unless the student union severed its ties with the group. Although McGill framed its demands as a matter of compliance with university policies, the decision illustrates how institutional pressure can directly affect student political organizing. People do not need to be explicitly told to stay quiet to begin censoring themselves. Professors might avoid controversial subjects in their teaching research while students may hesitate to criticise university policies or participate in political organizing if they fear institutional repercussions. Academic freedom must therefore be reflected in the university's actions, not simply affirmed in official communications.

McGill's previous restrictions on campus demonstrations, alongside concerns raised by MAUT members about the university's approach to controversial expression, raise questions about how these protections operate in practice. Without clearer assurances about when political expression might result in disciplinary action or other repercussions, students and professors may hesitate to criticize the administration.

Institutional neutrality raises a parallel concern: just as uncertainty about political repercussions can discourage criticism, the university's claim of neutrality can make its own decisions seem beyond question. McGill may have good reasons not to issue official statements on every international conflict, but remaining neutral does not exempt its own decisions from scrutiny. The university's choices regarding partnerships, investments, and campus regulations have consequences, and students should be able to question them.

Taking student dissent seriously does not mean agreeing with every demand. McGill can reject a resolution while explaining its reasoning, enforce reasonable safety measures without discouraging peaceful protest, and protect students from discrimination without restricting legitimate political criticism.

What matters is whether students and professors can challenge the university without feeling that their concerns will simply be set aside. The administration should be willing to engage with that criticism, even when it is inconvenient. A commitment to free expression means little if it only holds when the university agrees with what is being said.