

THE COMEDY GAZELLE

THE LATEST IN CHICAGO COMEDY

THANKSGIVING
LEFTOVER EDITION



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
KYLE LANE & SAHAR CHAVOSHI



ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I moved to Chicago last October, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey supercharge herself with a firm slap of the puss.

Why haven't I heard of her before?

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it's easy to miss.

That's why I'm starting The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to showcase this city's unrivaled talent. To keep everyone up-to-date on the scene, and to do it in a fun way. And not just in a one-off article, but all the time.

Each issue will feature an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

INTERVIEW: KYLE LANE & SAHAR CHAVOSHI, 3
COMMUNITY BULLSHIT, 11
ART: CHRIS GRIECO, TOM RYAN, 12
BOOK REVIEW: MODERN ROMANCE, 14



INTERVIEW: THE COMEDY BAR

Kyle Lane and Sahar Chavoshi are co-owners of The Comedy Bar (@thecomedybar), a comedy brand with venues in Chicago, Nashville and Dubuque. We met at their Chicago club, where we discussed the power of comedy, common mistakes, failure and more.



What's a common mistake that you see a lot of young comics making?

Sahar: Lack of professionalism.

Kyle: A lack of professionalism, and I think that they try to progress too quickly.

S: They don't trust the process. There's definitely a process, and young comics tend to think you can get from A to Z without going through the process. They don't really understand the work it takes to get to that goal they're trying to achieve. And a lot of times people get really discouraged and you see them quitting sooner than they should. There's a lot of really funny ones that you just see disappear.

K: If they're in a hurry, and a lot of them often are, I can usually tell that they want to be famous and they don't want to be a comedian. Because that's two very different things. Being a comedian is a lifelong commitment. The ones that become great really enjoy taking their time, being in the community, and being an artist. The ones that want it now are typically the ones who want the attention and want to be famous, and they typically fizzle out.

How do you avoid falling into that trap?

K: Think about why you're doing it and be honest. Be honest with the level of commit it takes. It's difficult to be great in standup when you're young, because standup is about

failure and trauma and experience, and living through it and learning from it. Then articulating those things to an audience to help them learn and bring them together to laugh. It's an entire artistic process, and typically a lot of failures don't happen unless you're living life. Your comedy matures when your life matures, so take your time. As much as you obsess about wanting to be a comedian, you need to obsess about living life, too.

Kyle, where does your interest in comedy come from?

It comes from the pain. I found comedy very early in my life. It helped me make sense and have some control over the dysfunction of my family. I've always been absolutely fascinated by the power of comedy and the tool that it provides us in language and psychology, and just being human. I was lucky enough to know at a very young age that I wanted to have a career in comedy. Ten years old, I knew I wanted to be a comedian. I read every single book on the matter, studied it, performed it for many, many years — did pretty well, made a decent living as a comedian, and then I went to the back side of production and learned everything about that.

Why did you want to go to the back end?

Honestly my goal has always been — because of what I came up from — to bring humor to the world. I still think there's so much undiscovered about comedy. For me, it was like I can sit here and perform — and it's really self fulfilling and I enjoy it — but am I

really bringing comedy to the world? Am I really taking comedy by the reigns and using it in the most powerful ways that I can? And I felt like I wasn't.

So it was very easy to step away and focus on the behind the curtain stuff. That to me is more fascinating: when you get off the stage and see what comedy does, and what building audiences is about, and why people are really laughing – like psychologically – and what this laughter and this comedy does for our culture and our community and our species.

It sounds like you really believe in the power of comedy.

Laughter is such a powerful tool of love, it may be one of the most powerful tools to actually bring people together. Comedy, when done responsibly and done right – and this is why I love Dave Chappelle so much – it challenges the mind. Comedy is where we're allowed to grab the hand of the audience member and bring them to the edge of something challenging and have them look over that cliff, and say, "Hey it's okay." Hell, you can even laugh about it.

Some people do it irresponsibly and can be very self serving. Comedy can be this amazing tool that brings the world together, or you can sort of see Trump use comedy and the superiority complex to hurt and bully people with it. Love is the same way, right? You can use love responsibly or use it very irresponsibly and cause a lot of damage.

What do you think people can do to use comedy to its full potential?

I think being vulnerable is very important. I think a lot of people are really in their own heads. And whether you're being vulnerable with a friend, or family, or a coworker, being honest and vulnerable are usually the first tools to bringing humor. Empathy and understanding, it all ends up becoming a laugh in the end. If you open yourself up and you're not afraid of falling on your face, you'll learn that everything's gonna be okay and that as time goes on, laughter always comes.

Do you think comedy's gonna take off coming out of the pandemic?

I do. The pandemic has created a lot of cohesive trauma. We've all gone through this together and the way we heal as humans, especially as Americans, is we learn to laugh about our pain. As divided as we are right now, this



Stephen Spinola (@mr_mcstevie)

pandemic is going to bring some cohesive empathy to the world. And comedians, it's their responsibility to talk about this pain. A comic's job is to responsibly shape those painful things and articulate them into humor, so we can move past it. Comedy's not gonna go anywhere. Religion is dying. I don't know about you, but I was raised Catholic. Raised by my grandmother. She said, "You're going to church three times a week if you're gonna live in this house." So I had to go to this Catholic church – which is comedy in itself – but it was packed. That's what you did as a kid in a small town in Ohio. And now when I go back to church with my poor grandmother for Christmas, there's nobody in there. God is dead. You can quote me on that.

"GOD IS DEAD."

– KYLE LANE

You think comedy is the new religion?

I think that comedy is going to give us a reprieve to help deal with the truth. People are so up in arms about Trump lying to us, but the world's been lying to us for thousands of years. And we're sort of reaching a culmination in humanity that has to deal with some pretty hard facts. We're all stuck on this Earth together like it's a prison cell — it's got great amenities, don't get me wrong — but it's still a prison, and at the end of the day, all we have is each other. And the best way to deal with each other is through laughter.

Is that why you're opening locations all over the country?

I think comedy's more popular than it's ever been. I've been doing comedy in Chicago for 17 years. I see more people coming out for comedy now than I've ever seen in my life. And that's on the performance side and the audience side. It's sort of never been easier. And for us, we're trying to develop a comedy brand. One arm of that brand is our venues, and we're trying to open those live venues all over the world. We've got an opportunity in the UK, and we've got two other locations in the United States that we're working on as soon as the pandemic's over. We're gonna continue to open live venues, but we also have cameras in our clubs to create virtual content. We wanna be able to bring UK, Iowa, Chicago, and Nashville comedians through our brand online. So if you're in China or Canada, you're still getting a taste of Comedy Bar and what we have to offer. There's fascinating stuff with comedy going on in the world.

Do you think there's going to be a “Comedic Revolution?”

I think we're in it. I think with the internet connecting everybody the way it did, everybody's more vulnerable in ways they weren't before. Even just making Facebook pages and putting up their thoughts and their tweets. That didn't exist before. So you're sort of watching this culmination, this great moment of evolution of the human mind, where we're sort of opening ourselves up to the world.

Do you have a business background at all?

No, dude. Look, I went into this as a selfish comedian. I started the Comedy Bar when I was 25 years old. I was a performer. It started as one show on a Saturday night at 8pm at a nightclub. And it became way bigger than me, to the point where I was like, “Jesus, should I really even perform anymore if I'm gonna take this seriously?” So I got into it for completely selfish reasons. It's just been the last six, seven, eight years when Sahar and I really fell in love that we've sort of gone on this magical sort of path - what can we really do with this? Where can we take this comedy thing?

So how did Comedy Bar get to where it is now?

Have you ever read the book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell?

I have, yeah.

It's a fascinating theory on how people get separated from the pack. We were lucky enough to be in an outlier moment for comedy. Essentially, the world was different. Social media was new, and so what we got lucky with is we created a brand — Second City had been around for 50 years, Zanies 40 years, iO 30 years, whatever. They were basically changing their entire branding and marketing format to go online, and so were we. And so immediately the Comedy Bar brand was shifted into focus right along with these brands that had been around for decades.

That's how you see yourself as an outlier?

Well, we got very lucky in that it would be harder to start now than it would then. It wasn't oversaturated. We were one show, but then we did this great marketing campaign and we added more shows and more days. We became this online comedy brand, then we took that momentum and we've never stopped.

Do you think it's more difficult to be original now because of the internet?

I do. I'm not on social media, and one of the reasons I refuse to be on there is because I lose my creativity. I lose my ability to take data from my own experiences and failures. You start getting on social media, especially as an artist, and it tanks your brain. These kids right now, when I teach these internships they go, "When should I first post a video?" Never! If you're really an artist, it's not about being that to everybody else, it's about being that to you. Don't put it out there unless it's good. If you're gonna put out footage of your sets, it should be when you've already got a new set that you're filming. It shouldn't be, "Hey I'm putting this joke out, and then I'm gonna tell it for three more years at local rooms." Before you know it, you're hated for that joke because it's been heard so many times and you rely on it as a crutch. So you really gotta be strategic when it comes to putting your art out there.

How do you avoid that trap of relying on an old joke?

If you're performing for a paid audience and it's a good show, there's no reason you can't tell that old, proven joke. But always have an open mind. Tell that old joke and maybe try to add a twist onto it and don't be afraid for it to not work. But at the end of the day, comedy is about failure and you do not get good without the bomb. So when you're going into these rooms where it's an open mic level or maybe an alternative showcase, you should almost always be trying all new stuff. You should know that 90% of the time, you're going to fail. But that 10% of that joke working right is everything when it comes to progressing and maturing your set. Unless it's a club that's paying you, you should always bring your B game.

***Laughs* I like that.**

Your A game should always be brought for the paid gigs. We develop this thick skin that hurts us as comedians, where we think we've always gotta be funny. And that's just not the case. You gotta know when to be funny. There are some times when you do have to bring your A game, but 90% of building up your artistic abilities has to do with bringing your B game and knowing how to fail. You have to know how to sit in the bomb. You have to know how to be resilient to the shame and embarrassment that comes from failing in front of people, because it's in that moment when you learn something new about your character as a comedian. The comics that fail the best are the comics that are the funniest.

**CHRIS HIGGINS (@MYBUDCHRIS),
ONE OF CHICAGO'S FINEST FAILERS.**



Do you think that young comics especially are too afraid of bombing?

I think everybody in the world has stage fright and everybody in the world is afraid to be vulnerable in front of other humans. It's a trust thing. So when you're new, yeah you're terrified. And when you first bomb the first few times, you wanna go kill yourself. It's a horrible feeling. And so the fine line when you're new is, "Hey I gotta develop and learn how to do this because this is part of the process, but I also can't develop such a thick skin that I don't ever wanna bomb and don't wanna be vulnerable and therefore I don't ever learn anything."

That's what happens when comics develop a great five minutes. You see them peak and they start repeating the same jokes because they've taken more of an importance to being funny in that five minutes than actually being a loser and failing and learning. It's like, no no no, just because you've figured it out for a few minutes — you're actually hurting yourself if you keep going that direction. You need to go the other way. You need to challenge yourself by failing and not feeling good. That's how you'll add more time onto your sets.

That's interesting. Just having a five minute set doesn't make you a comedian. Or even an hour?

Oh god, not at all. I think an hour can make you famous. I'm sorry, but you see so many comedians that get these hour special deals on Netflix and by their second or third ones, it's like, "Man that sucked." Because they weren't ready. They weren't ready to put out four hours of comedy specials in 2-3 years. That's trying on anybody. If you develop an hour special, that's pretty impressive. You definitely want to get to that point, but you need to be able to learn how to throw that hour away and do it all over again if you really want to be a comedian, right? That's the tough part.

Like a Carlin or a Louis.

The best — Dave Chappelle, Carlin, Pryor, Williams — they just go up, they don't go up because they know they're the best, they go up because they have no fear of being vulnerable. They have no fear in failing. They've done it a million times, they know how to do it. So what they talk about, it's even presented differently. It's presented with, "Hey, I have no fear in this." And so it's digested differently. It's an attitude, a perspective.

If we go up self-serving as a performer, "Hey these people need to laugh at what I'm going to say," you're almost always going to fall on your face. One of the biggest things comedians need to remember is that you don't have to make them laugh. Just because they didn't laugh, doesn't mean you didn't challenge their minds, or make them think or open their minds, even if they disagreed with you.

What're your thoughts on the Chicago scene?

It's better than any comedy community in the world. There really is a lot of support. And there are a lot of rooms that really allow you to fuck it up forever until you learn how to do it, and still your name isn't dragged through the mud. You can still get booked at clubs and still really earn it. Because of the improv community and the bar shows, and places like Comedy Bar and Lincoln Lodge and Laugh Factory, you can really hone your craft and not get beaten and bruised.

Do you think Chicago's the most supportive comedy community?

You will not go to any other community and get the support you get in this city. And that's in the improv scene and in the standup scene. It's one of the reasons we parked ourselves down in Nashville. They're very early in building their comedy community, but they're a city full of stages. There have been all these comedians that have come out of the woodwork and they've built a little scene down there. The one thing they were missing is a brand that would support them and give them open mics with real audiences, and give them real pay, and guest spots on headliner shows. That community is developing two-fold every year. It's fascinating to watch.

What's it like being in all those smaller cities?

In Iowa, for example, they come from three hours away. They come from Omaha to do the open mic. It was so fascinating for me to do a small market because I wanted to see what comedy could do there. I wanted to see how it could change the culture. And it's been fascinating to see that our open mic lists are 30 people, but they're all driving two, three, four hours. It's all these kids who wanna do comedy. But that's our thing: we're into building comedy communities and comedy culture.

How has your presence impacted some of those communities?

In Dubuque, [Iowa] you've got the wealthy sitting there with people that are maybe not so well off. And they're listening to local comedians and headliners come in. They're having a really good time, and all of a sudden these Iowa cats are getting better at comedy, and so some of them are getting booked in Chicago. So you're building these bridges and pathways that would've never existed for these people. And all of sudden, comedy becomes a part of Iowa culture. Now people go out on a Friday night and they wanna go see comedy. So the comedy show opens their minds, maybe makes them meet a neighbor they never knew had that sense of humor, they become friends, maybe they want to bring bigger acts to their big theaters. And all of a sudden, it's a happier town. It's a happier culture. It's really neat.

If I'm a reader and I believe in what you're doing, what can I do to further the spread of comedy?

Support your local comedians. Support your local venues. Whether it's ours, or a bar showcase, or an open mic. Just keep going. Share their stuff on the internet and try to be vulnerable and funny yourself. If you've ever thought, "Hey maybe I'd like to do comedy," that's where it starts. Just get up and go do a joke at an open mic. Or hell, just tell a story. It doesn't even have to be funny. Just get up and do it. Comedy, whether it's helping you be more vulnerable and reflective, or helping you get drunk and laugh, it's in our veins. It's in our blood. And I think that as time goes on, people will come to the same conclusion as we have about comedy.

Sahar, where did your interest in comedy come from?

S: I think I liked standup as much as your average person did. Basically, I got involved in the community through a gig I found on Craigslist, and that's when I met Kyle. Within a few months of meeting him, he told me he was starting this room and asked if I wanted to help, and the rest is kind of history.

Is it difficult owning and operating a business together?

It definitely has its challenges, because sometimes you don't know whether to prioritize your personal life or the business. But it's really rewarding, too. I don't think I'd ever

work for anyone besides Kyle or myself now, having done it. But it definitely has more pros than cons. I really enjoy having this thing we are working together on constantly. It's kind of like a common goal that we always have to connect over.

Have you encountered any challenges being a female in the industry?

There's the obvious challenges of dealing with gross people. But for as many pigs there are out there, there are a million more great, amazing, creative, awesome people. Being a woman you deal with some different types of challenges, but I'm not on stage so that helps. But I think there are a lot of benefits of being a woman, too. People tend to like you more, they listen to you a little more. And it helps that I have Kyle and we're a team, so they know if they're gonna mess with him or I, they're gonna mess with the other, too.

I wanted to ask you about something we mentioned earlier. You don't necessarily care if people are laughing, you can still be entertaining without needing laughter?

Right, so it's not always just about getting the punchline in and making people laugh. A lot of people can enjoy comedy and they don't necessarily show it through a laugh. Sometimes people are just smiling. As long as you're up there doing comedy successfully, and you can gauge that success however you want —

How do you gauge it?

One thing I always train my staff on when I hire them is that you're supposed to keep your ears on the stage and eyes on the audience. If you're watching your audience, you know if they're enjoying it or not. And sometimes that enjoyment isn't audible, but if you have a whole crowd full of smiles and positive feedback on the way out, then you did your job. Maybe it wasn't one of those crazy fun, memorable nights where you have belly laughs, but it was still a decent show and the audience still left happy. If you didn't bomb, you didn't completely fail. You got through to someone and you can only get better.

What do you think causes most comics to bomb?

They'll forget about the audience. There have been many times when I watch a comedian who I know has good jokes and they just bomb. And it's because they forget about the audience. They forget to consider who they're talking to. It's a two way street. It's a conversation, not a performance. You're there to connect with another human being, and it just so happens that there's a bunch of them and one of you. I think a lot of comics, especially the newer ones, will go, "I wrote these jokes, I'm gonna go up there and tell them." They're kind of predestining themselves and they're afraid of straying from what they planned on doing and having that willingness to listen. I don't think comedians think of themselves as being listeners.

What advice would you give to comics trying to be more vulnerable?

Just go up there and try to talk to the audience. If you're not getting paid to perform, then bring your B game. Talk to an audience member and try to connect and make that person laugh, and I guarantee you other people in the audience are going to laugh too.

I asked Kyle, but why do you think a comic should come to Chicago?

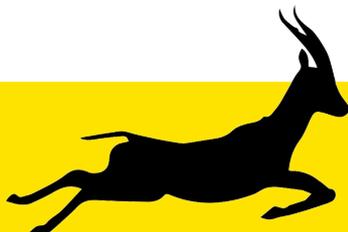
I really feel like Chicago is the college town for comedy. You come in and you can learn every aspect of it from improv to sketch to standup, and you can try all of it and get a really well rounded comedy education by being here. From our internships at Comedy Bar to classes at Second City, it's a very supportive and well rounded city for comedy. I'd call it the comedy capital of the world. Maybe others would disagree, but it's definitely a great place to start and you have so much more access. If you go to LA, you're never going to get as many opportunities.

Last question. Who's a comic you think should be on everybody's radar?

Personally I've really enjoyed watching Geoff Asmus. He kind of falls into that category that Kyle talked about, where he's not afraid of failing up there. He's very vulnerable and kind of just says things, even though he knows they might be offensive. I think sometimes he tries to be offensive, but he's really funny. A lot of the funniest moments I've had watching him are things that he didn't write that just kind of came out because he was connecting with the audience so well. And he's one of the few comics that I've seen that have been trying to write and perform and do a lot during the pandemic. Some people are kind of taking a break – which is fine – but it's been interesting to watch how quickly some people are progressing during the pandemic, because there's just so much less noise around you. He's someone that I've seen very much evolve over the last six months.



GEOFF ASMUS (@GEOFFREYATM), AKA "DADDY," RELISHING THE LIMELIGHT.



COMMUNITY BULLSHIT

UPDATE: Nate Burrows

During quarantine, Comedian Nate Burrows has been making and delivering lunches for the staff at various ICUs and hospitals. Last issue, Nate was kicking off a coat drive and taking individual orders from single mothers on what their families needed for the winter.

From Nate:

So far we've provided winter kits for 120 families and are going to continue through December! We're also planning on doing a social distanced tailgate (COVID pending), where you can donate long underwear or a toy and get an Italian beef in return!



Comedian Nate Burrows (center) doing The Lord's work



If you'd like to donate to Nate's coat drive, you can drop off at 5114 S Elizabeth St, Chicago IL, or reach out to Nate and he'll trade you a sandwich! He is also collecting old boots, hats and scarves!

If you don't have any old winter gear, but would still like to contribute, you can donate at: [gofundme.com/moralewiches-for-precious-blood-ministry](https://www.gofundme.com/moralewiches-for-precious-blood-ministry)

Thank you for your support!

ARTWORK



"Saint of Central Park"

**CHRIS GRIECO IS A CHICAGO-BASED
ARTIST, COMEDIAN, AND HORROR FAN.**

 **@CHRISGRIECO.JPG**

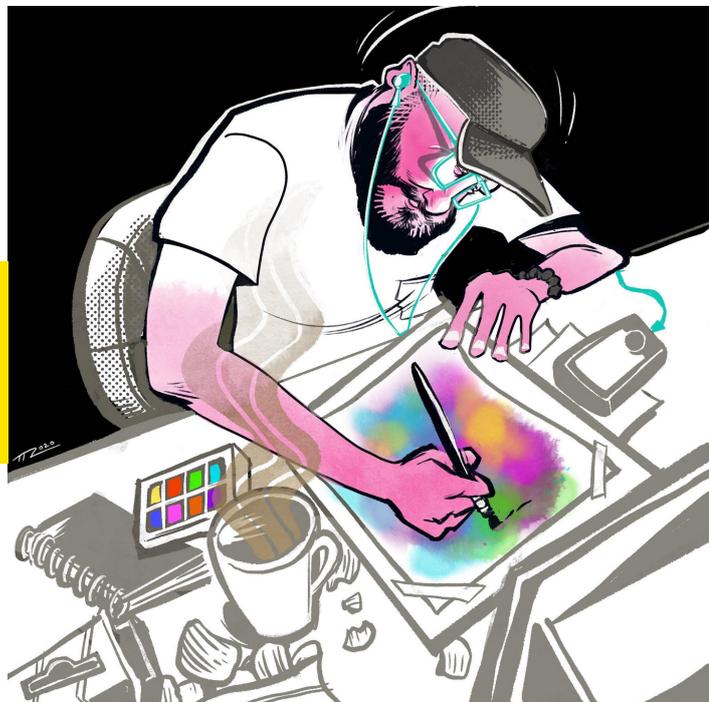


"Selfie"

**HAVE ART TO FEATURE?
DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE**

COVER ART BY COMEDIAN / ARTIST TOM RYAN

📷 @TIPS.ARE.APPRECIATED



BOOK REVIEW: MODERN ROMANCE

By Keay Crandall (@keaycrandall)

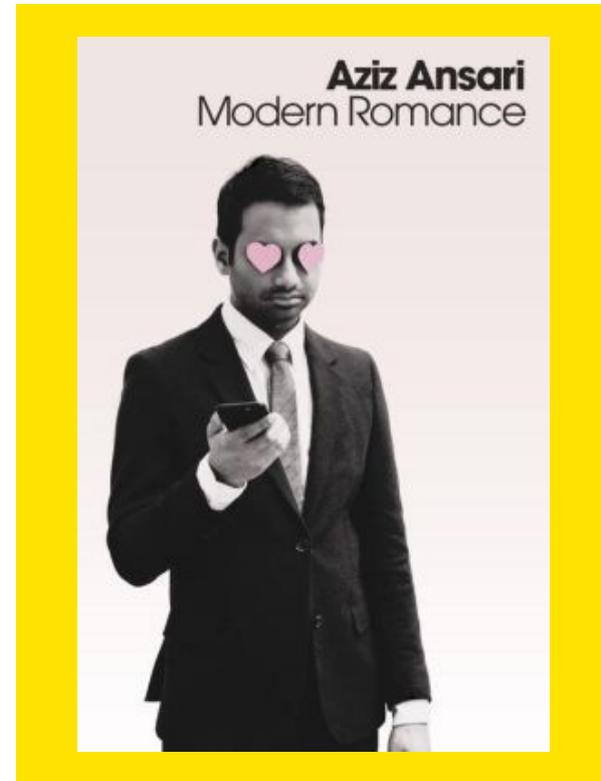
MODERN ROMANCE

Most of Modern Romance was graphs, pictures of people's text messages and photoshopped pictures of The Rock on vacation in Hawaii. It's a pretty good read if you want to feel productive, but don't want to spend a lot of time actually reading.

I didn't think I was going to like this book because I'm not shallow enough to appreciate Aziz's humor. What really kept me intrigued were all of the graphs and statistics he gathered from professional sociologists and anthropologists. The rest of the book is him creating jokes at the expense of peoples' sad and failed relationships. It reads like a research paper that's trying to be funny. Basically, Aziz went on a journey of interviewing people on Reddit about their relationship habits and is making money off any romantic who buys his book. His other "research" was going to his top five vacation destinations, eating local cuisine and occasionally asking people about dating culture. I wish I could afford to do that kind of research.

Modern Romance predates Aziz's #metoo allegations, which explains why I found it on the sale shelf for \$2. A broke bitch reads what she can afford.

Overall ranking: 6/10 Gazelles.



**CAN'T GET ON STAGE?
TOUGH SHIT! READ A BOOK.**

UNABRIDGED BOOKSTORE

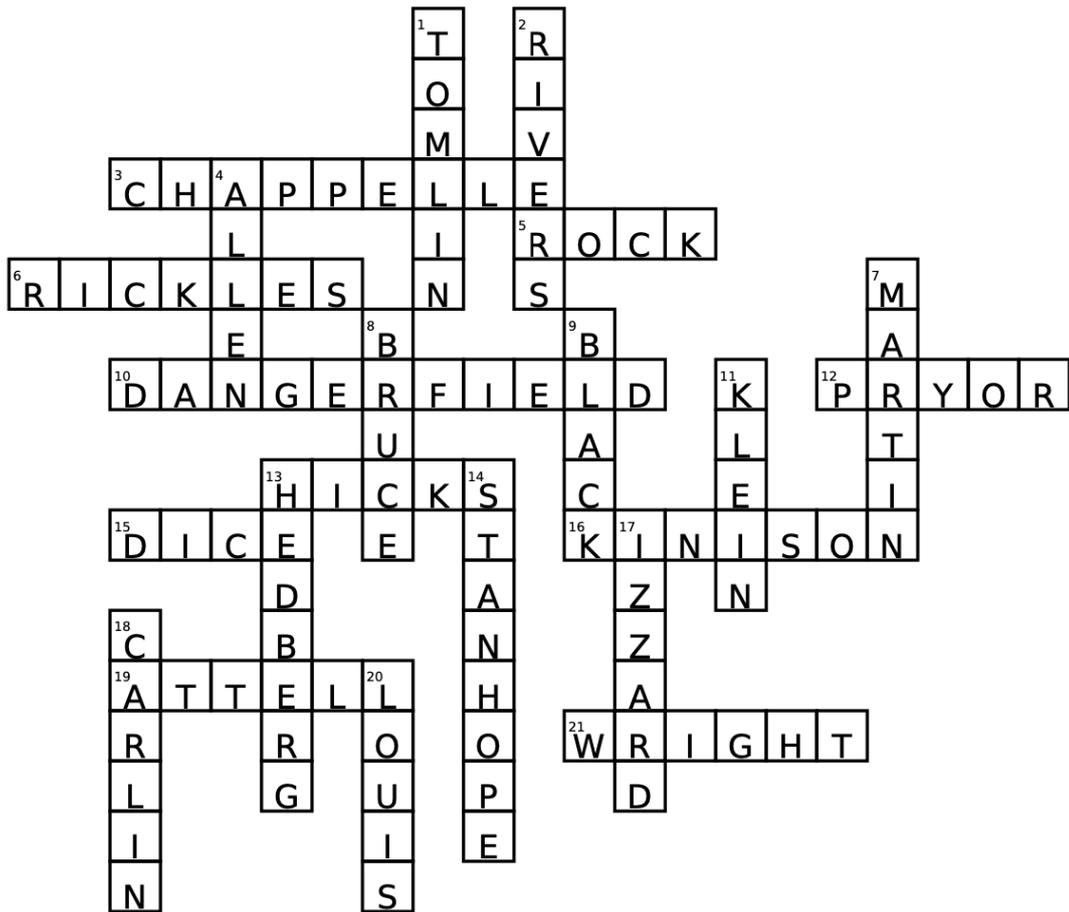


3251 N BROADWAY

THEY HAVE BOOKS!

COMEDY SECTION IN THE BACK LEFT BY THE
NUDIE MAGS!

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION



**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE.
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE? SELF PROMOTE?
DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE**