

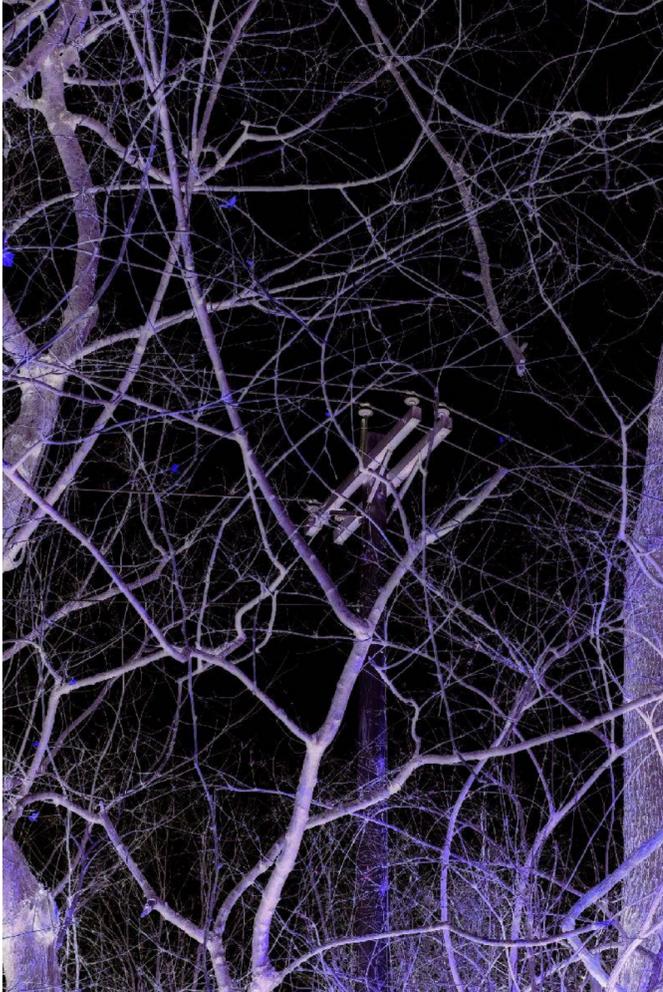
HENRI ROBBINS

PHOTOGRAPHER



**HENRI ROBBINS**

**VISUAL ARTIST**



# HENRI ROBBINS

## POET

### Birds

In gloved hands, tossed out, better than where they had been.

They were let loose, swept from their hideout.

Once they passed through the door, they flew out, clumsy, unprepared.

Like doves at a wedding, though in reality they were just mockingbirds.

As if they were let free from a cage, but instead they were stuck behind a wall.

You'd think they were caught for this, but they simply flew into the wrong place

Through a vent, dropping down, between the wall and our clothes dryer.

Even then, they fled with excitement, exuberance, overjoyed at their newfound freedom.

Nobody could guess that of the three there, three more were left behind.

I'm sure they're not there anymore; I doubt they had a proper burial.

But, if houses were built with a little more sympathy,

Or with a little more safety,

It would have never happened.

But birds can't fly straight up, at least not the kind we found.

These ones went in through an opening, simply invited themselves in.

Took a bit of a fall, and couldn't make it out.

So instead they waited, behind our dryer,

Hoping their clattering and rumbling would alert us,

Their benevolent wardens, so that we would let them free.

But we simply assumed that our dryer had broken and, for a short time

We went on with our lives, unaware.

### After

Awash in the lights, until we match them as they fade. Lunar melodies, leading to the birth of solar memories. We let our skin mirror the golden sunsets, and we listen to the words we never wanted to hear, we were taught to hear, we were taught to put so much meaning to.

And here, we listened to someone else's truth, the truth we bathed in, as the shimmering memories of a broken wish littered the ground. I wore boots, though. I knew how to walk across, but it was when I thought I was done - when I thought those shards were gone - it all came apart.

You were there, in the night, in the car, in the sunlight that mirrored you so clearly. You were there, in your cobalt, your flowing vermillion, painted over like a mask. You were there, in my yearning, in your pain, and you still listened to me - to every word I said, even as I droned on, even as I stopped listening to you.

Raindrops on the windshield, I missed something. Every morning, I wake up both relieved and disappointed. Foot on the gas, a sharp turn down a narrow road, I was stupid. I didn't care then, I worry what would have happened only a few minutes later, if I didn't have you.

But you were still there, and when you said the same thing, you split me like a knife. You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for me. You shouldn't say that, shouldn't think that. You know the burden of that. You know how much it hurts. The last person who said that, you know what happened to them. You deserve so much better, you shouldn't prop yourself up on me.

And there, we were, waiting for time to catch up to us. There wasn't any reason why, any meaning behind where we were. I just sat, waiting, figuring out who the hell you were.

We said the same words, but they were so different. Remember the summer? Remember the winter? Remember your sweater, my exhaustion, your understanding, my waiting, our missing, your falling apart?

It's not fair to either of us. Every word off your tongue is nothing but a snowflake of doubt onto the strained roof of my heart. Yet we still sing along to the same songs.

As that embrace held, that china-doll fragile embrace, you reached your hand around, past the horizon of the moon-flush trees, and lit your fingertips on the last shimmers of the once-golden sunset. I never saw you blow them out.

We've done a lot wrong, but I trust you. It's funny how those things happen.

It's funny how perspective can be so wrong to reason.

# HENRI ROBBINS

# JOURNALIST

## Q&A with Principal Bobby Dodd

Henri Robbins | Staff Writer

Since taking on the role of principal at Mason High School in May of 2018, Bobby Dodd has been working to create a school environment which involves students more. He's supported initiatives such as the Ignite Your Vision project, creating a platform for students' voices, and has made efforts to become more involved with the students in the school. Now, as he winds up his first school year as Principal, The Chronicle sat down to talk with Dodd about the direction he plans to take the school in the coming months, and to reflect on his experiences in the past year.



**Q: You've been working at Mason for about a year now, and you've been making a lot of changes to benefit students. Looking back, how's that been?**

**A:** I think things are going well. As a principal, you don't want to come in your first semester and just say 'we're making all these changes,' so it's good to come in and get a feel for where you are with everyone, especially the kids, and then from there you start listening to what people think we should do or where we can go, and then processing it and working with others to get us to go there.

**Q: How have your interactions with the student body been?**

**A:** I think they've been great. Now if I asked students they may think differently, but I always try to interact with the students as much as I can. I think oftentimes we under-utilize student thought and student voice, because traditionally in schools it was more of being compliant and doing what adults tell you to do. That's what your parents did when they were in school, but it's changed. We have to allow student ideas because we work for the students. It's not like you guys come to a school where I'm principal, it's the other way around.

**Q: Can you think of a time that your interactions with students changed either the way you were running things or your plans to run things?**

**A:** It's very important to change the way that I think, or some of the things that we're going to do in the building. Like looking at painting parking lots. Other schools are doing that, and we probably have one of the largest parking lots in the state of Ohio, so why wouldn't we do that? Because if you look at the asphalt out there, it's not the prettiest stuff to begin with anyway. So why not paint a parking space and show a little bit of originality, creativity, and a little bit about each student? To me, I look at that, and the amount of bad things that could come, compared to the positives, I think the positives outweigh it every time. If a student wants to do that, then I have a philosophy that we should try to say yes before we say no. They brought that up, I said 'yeah, if other places are doing it, we might as well. We should have

been the first ones doing it, instead of the eighth.

**Q: With what's going into effect, what are your primary goals going forward for the high school?**

**A:** Primary goals would be our three rocks that we focus on for the district: Improving culture, looking at inclusive excellence, and personalized learning. This year we've done a lot of focus on our culture, and next year we'll do the same along with inclusive excellence. We want to change the culture from being so competitive, and to maybe peel it back and find out why we're so competitive. I think competition against other schools in things such as athletics is healthy competition, but we have to look at the unhealthy competition and start peeling back a bit. To me, that starts with us, the administration and the staff, making the changes, and some of the things that we do are little changes, such as looking at homework. Is homework really important, are we assigning the right assignments, is it benefiting us the next day in class, are we using our class time the best way as staff so we can reduce the amount of homework and get more out of our class? So when the goal is to look at competition, I think it starts with us.

**Q: There's been a lot of talk about excessive homework and also of eliminating summer assignments, where is that going at the moment?**

**A:** Right now I'm getting ready to meet with teachers about summer assignments, why we assign them, what are we doing with them, and where are we going with them. I meet with teachers who used to give summer assignments but don't, I want to hear why they don't give them anymore. I'm meeting with teachers that do give them and I'm asking why, and I want to know how it affects the class and the student's grade at the start of the school year, because I just want to learn more about it before I say we're not having assignments anymore. As you know, our students here are very busy, so if we're going to give homework then I want it to be meaningful, and I want to be sure that what we're doing during the school day in the classroom is getting us the best bang for our buck during that time to limit the amount of homework after school. There's tons of research out there about the amount of sleep that students need to be successful, the time they need away from school to refresh mentally. There's a lot of things out there that lead me to believe that we give too much homework right now.

# School board votes to put levy on 2020 ballot

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

Fifteen years. That's how long since it's been since Mason passed their last levy, and the Superintendent has said that it's time for another.

After a recommendation from Mason City Schools Superintendent Jonathan Cooper, the Mason School Board unanimously voted 'yes' on a resolution of necessity for a 2020 levy at the November 19 School Board meeting, moving it past the first step to appearing on the 2020 ballot.

Before the vote, Cooper gave a presentation explaining why he supports the operating budget levy, discussing the financial needs of the school, the changes that have happened since the last successful levy, and the state of the other schools in the area.

"New revenue or new reductions are needed at this time," Cooper said. "Those are the only two ways that we can address that, either pulling in new revenue or, as [the community] saw in 2010, making significant reductions to our programming here at Mason."

The last levy to pass for the Mason school district was in 2005. When a second levy in 2010 failed, Mason had to make changes to academic offerings, extracurriculars, and school staff.

"We stopped some of the models in our schools that were good for [them] at the time because it wasn't something we felt like we could afford," Cooper said. "We changed the Mason Middle School teaming and went to a traditional junior high model and we changed from trimesters to a traditional model [semesters] at our high school. We closed Mason Heights to save money on that, went to wage freezes for all of our staff for 12-13 and 13-14, introduced pay-to-participate, and we consolidated bus stops and changed the whole transportation format."

Due to the operating costs of the district and the failure of the previous levy, the operating levy was deemed necessary by the board. Cooper specified that, while the school district has recently spent a large amount on the renovations to Mason Middle School, those come from a capital budget for building construction, maintenance, and other expenditures, which is separate from the school's operating budget.

"You cannot mix these moneys together, they are two separate buckets," Cooper said. "It's the way that our funds are set up as a public school, so we're not asking for money on this levy for capital pieces. We're looking for people and programs to continue to support the things that we're doing at Mason City Schools."

With the current levy, taxpayers would see two separate tax increases. The first would bring 4.75 mills to the school's funding and the second, which



Photo by Henri Robbins

Superintendent Jonathan Cooper proposes a new levy for the Mason school district, which will appear on the ballot in 2020.

would come into effect after a year, would bring 5.25 mills. The second would come into effect at the same time that another tax of the same value wears off, resulting in a monthly increase of \$13.75 for every \$100,000 of home value for taxpayers.

"Ohio funding for schools is set up for schools to come back every three to five years," Cooper said. "Mason has not passed an operating levy in fifteen years, so we have tried out very best to stretch the dollar as long as we can, but we're just at a point now where we need to have this conversation more seriously."

After the presentation, many community members spoke about their stances on the levy. General Electric (GE) Operations Vice President Casey Moran said that the levy failing would put the school's STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) program in jeopardy, something which has been beneficial to students entering the workforce.

"I'm very concerned about the things that are at risk," Moran said. "As vice president of one of the largest companies in the world, General Electric, I need STEAM. I do not have enough qualified candidates coming out of high school and college right now to meet the needs that I have at General Electric, and when I see things putting that at risk, I am concerned about this school continu-

ing to compete effectively as I'm hiring directly from high school."

After Moran spoke at the meeting, community member Sharon Poe spoke out about her opposition of the levy. She said there were many members of the community who were forced to move after the last levy passed, and that this would put many under additional financial stress.

"The taxpayers are taxed out," Poe said. "The taxpayers need a break, and you are saying that there will be a 13 million dollar deficit in 2021, so instead of finding additional ways to cut costs, you'd rather cut families budgets, cut their grocery bills, cut vacations, cut buying their kids school clothing? This school board has, in the past, constantly asked these taxpayers for more money."

While some opposed the tax, incoming school board member Desiree Batsche, who attended the school board meeting, said she was in support of the levy. She felt that the levy was the only viable option for the school to continue their operations without having to make cuts to specific aspects.

"I had a meeting with [the] superintendent, Jonathan, and I really feel that they have done everything they can do at this point to make the most out of the resources that they have," Batsche said. "I think there is an expectation that Mason City Schools excels as one of the best

schools in the nation. People move to this community because of that, and we have an expectation in the community that the schools maintain their quality education."

Cooper specified that the levy would be put in place to uphold the current operations of the school, as opposed to expanding. Were the levy not to pass, he said the school would potentially need to make cuts to class offerings and transportation, along with increasing class sizes and sports participation fees.

"By law, you do not have to transport high school students," Cooper said. "That is something we do because we believe in that and want to do that as a service. (...) If we have to cut six million dollars this summer, what we'll do is we will look at the classroom first and say 'what can we do to protect our students and the programs?'"

After his presentation at the school board meeting, Cooper said that the decision is ultimately in the hands of the community.

"The purpose of it was really to give our community every piece of information that they need, in terms of the facts, so that they understand why we're going at this time," Cooper said. "I believe wholeheartedly that our community needs and deserves to have all the information so they can make an informed decision."

## Diversity Council initiatives leave students in the dark

Henri Robbins | Staff Writer

While the school is pushing to be more culturally inclusive, they haven't reached out to the demographic that would be directly impacted — students. Superintendent Jonathan Cooper recently relaunched Mason's community-based Diversity Council at a meeting on the night of October 22. The council was created to promote diversity and understanding within the city. At this particular meeting, diversity awareness, initiatives, and teacher training were discussed, and while teachers, administrators, and community members attended, no current high school students were invited to the meeting.

Many clubs, such as Mason Inclusion Club (MIC), are based around involving students and creating understanding for people of different backgrounds and cultures. MIC board member Kennedy Hurks is glad to see administration working to improve the school environment, but said the school could be doing more to involve students in their initiatives, and has seen little actual change from them.

"Honestly, they talk a lot about it, but as far as doing things, they don't have much right now," Hurks said. "They say how they're doing a lot of mandatory diversity training, so that's something that's happening, but as far as getting students in diversity, it's my club's job to promote diversity, so they leave it to us to promote it to other students."

Junior Torie Postell said she would like to see more discourse between teachers and the student body since students will be the most affected by the changes that are coming.

"I feel like talking to students and getting their opinions on topics of diversity would help teachers more than having adults talk about these words that hurt and harm. If they grow up and this just becomes a part of who they are and how they speak, then how much further down the road will we be in this conversation when they're not even thinking it?"



Mason's Diversity Council met in the high school on October 22 to discuss the promotion and integration of diversity initiatives within the district.

Diversity Council, is hopeful for the future. Although there may be apprehension among older people, Orr said, there is a push from younger people to be more accepting and understanding. "My son's best friend, his parents are immigrants from China, they speak very little English, but they are best friends," Orr said. "They are intentional about cultivating a diverse set of friends, they are intentional about the language they use when talking about not only their friends but the things they see on TV, the conversations they hear adults have. They have corrected adults from saying those words that hurt and harm. If they grow up and this just becomes a part of who they are and how they speak, then how much further down the road will we be in this conversation when they're not even thinking it?"

Even with the changes that are happening, many students in the school regularly face adversity. Junior Audi Pallerla said he often is the butt of jokes from his friends, and even though he sees them in good humor, he would like to see change.

"It hasn't been anything serious, just your usual Indian joke, stuff about curry," Pallerla said. "It hasn't been anything where I felt like they've been demeaning me about it. It's just in a joking sense among friends, it hasn't been anything that makes me feel bad as a person. It's just a part of the culture now. I'm hoping that with everything that's going on right now, people will become more accepting of others. The

one thing I hear is 'I don't see color,' but the truth is you should see color and respect the color." In light of recent events, both within Mason and across the country, Postell said she is glad to see change, but is not happy about what had to happen for that change.

"Since there's a lot of negativity within the media and politics, and with what's happened at our school with racism and sexism, this is helping teachers understand that this needs to be discussed," Postell said. "It's kind of bad to think that we needed a negative to start looking at the positives of everything, but that's just my view of it. There's going to be backlash with everything you do, but there's no downside to at least trying to make a difference."

In his engineering class, teacher Joseph Schnell sees these issues frequently. He said these issues come from historical views of gender roles and create much greater difficulties for women to be recognized in the field.

Teachers, administrators, and Mason community members collaborated to put together ideas aimed at promoting diversity and cultural awareness across the district's schools and community.

## Women scarce in MHS computer programming courses

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

As technology moves forward, a major part of the population may be getting left behind. With dozens of scholarships being awarded to women who study STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and computer science, colleges are making a large push for women to become involved, but there is still a large gap between men and women in those careers.

According to studies by the National Center for Education Statistics, there were over four men for every woman graduating with a bachelor's degree in computer science in both 2010 and 2017, and two men for every woman graduating with a master's degree in the same time period. Similarly, most computer programming classes in Mason have a large majority of male students, which becomes more apparent in higher-level classes.

When she first started taking computer programming (CP) classes in Mason, senior Shreya Gundavaru said her interactions with classmates pushed her away from the field.

"People will try to tell you 'girls can do whatever they want', but then they'll praise you for doing something that's considered normal," Gundavaru said. "For me just going into computer engineering, they'll say 'oh, you're going into computer engineering' and I'm like 'yeah, I'm a girl. Anyone can go into computer engineering, it's not a big deal.' But people at Mason still have that mindset."

When Gundavaru took CP 1, there were only seven girls in her class. When she moved on to CP 2, she was the only girl in her class. Similarly, senior Deeya Shah's CP 1 class had four female students, two of who went on to take CP 2. Shah doesn't believe the ratio of students in the main issue, though. Instead, she thinks the issue is the way they are treated in the class.

Photo by Henri Robbins

When considering a career in STEM, Courtney agreed that the imbalance of gender could result in some conflicts and issues, but also that it could have some positives.

"Their positives and negatives to going into the computer programming field," Courtney said. "We're a minority, so if we do really well then we'll be hired and have a lot of opportunities, but then there's the other part. I feel like in the future, if I continue in this field, it'll be a lot like computer programming classes, where we feel singled out since we are girls."

Even though biases are starting to fade, as Schnell said, they are still a reality for many students. Gundavaru said that in her CP 2 class she almost never interacted with other students because of the assumptions they made about her abilities.

"Automatically, the second you walk into the class, everyone underestimates you," Gundavaru said. "Even the kid next to me didn't talk to me for the first three weeks of class. He would be confused and he would be afraid to ask me because I was a girl and he'd be like 'oh, you don't really know this.' This class was really confused and he didn't know what to do so he finally asked me, and then he realized 'oh, she knows what she's talking about.'"

While many female students will face adversity in the classroom, that's not always the case. Schnell said, even though some issues arise, students are usually able to work together.

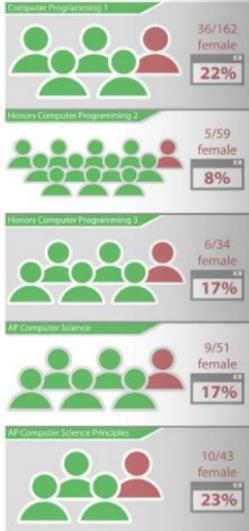
"I have never seen sexist behavior or females not working well with males," Schnell said. "There's a lot of group work in the class, and when there are males and females working together, it seems to work out well. The thing that I've noticed, though, is that the girls have a tendency to work together. Because they're in the minority, I think they feel more comfortable doing that."

To help students become more integrated, Gundavaru said that girls should start being involved in computer science earlier on, possibly even in middle school.

"I feel like it's just an issue of having more girls there," Gundavaru said. "Encouraging it in middle school, or start classes in middle school if they could, as a computer elective."

Many colleges today are pushing for more women to be involved in STEM, but even that can feel alienating to many, said Cooper.

Graphic by Henri Robbins



Although there is a large generalized push for female students to become involved, Schnell said that directly getting students to apply can be more difficult due to the barriers between students and elective teachers.

"When I have conversations about scheduling, any students who I think have a good mindset for engineering, which is basically creative problem solving. I try to say 'hey, you should take this class as well,'" Schnell said. "I've gotten a few female students to sign up because I basically said 'hey, I think you would be really good at this,' but I have to rely on counselors or other science teachers to propose or suggest taking the course if they're not already interested in engineering in the future."

Because of these limitations in recruitment, along with the issues with interactions in the classroom, Gundavaru said there is often a loss of interest in female students when they take these classes.

Photo by Henri Robbins

## OPINION: SCIENCE HUMANIZES US

February 20, 2019 |

Henri Robbins | Staff Writer



Opportunity is a word that means a lot: It's what pushes human ingenuity, it's what makes us take risks, it's why we have such a desire to create, but also, it's a little robot on Mars.

One that ran for fifteen years straight when it was only meant to last 90 days. One that contributed more to scientific discovery than most people ever will. One that saw an opportunity and took it.

It's something that means a lot, especially to me. I grew up with the two rovers, Spirit and Opportunity. I got to see them explore an unknown world, and I was able to see them exceed all expectations. Even though I never made the connection until now, I feel like that's one of the things that I thought was so amazing about it, and what drew me to it. When everything was against them, when they had nowhere to go, when they had outlasted even what they were designed to, they kept going. There was nowhere they could go except forward, and that's what they did. That's what we all do.

We've been doing it for years. Ever since the first rocket soared into the sky, there was something about it that spoke to so many of us on the Earth. To see something abandon the only place we ever knew, to experience that journey into that great unknown that we have all seen, all looked up at with curiosity, that captivated all of us as children in the night, that was an experience that spoke to everyone. It sated, even for a moment, that desire to know more, that desire to escape. It elated the restless child with toy spaceships hanging from the ceiling, star maps along the walls, a telescope pointed to the skies. Even if we weren't all that child, we all had a piece of it inside of us.

It wasn't just Americans, either. Sure, NASA was the first to put man on the moon, but they weren't the only ones to take notice — that footstep, that one small step, was heard across the globe. The world changed on that day, the skies no longer seemed like a barrier but a challenge. The man in the moon no longer mocked us, but welcomed us. The Greek gods in the sky no longer sat upon Mount Olympus, untouchable. We had our messengers to them, our rovers, and we wanted to say all that we could.

We flocked to the story of the rovers because they, despite them being completely inhuman, were so inarguably *human*. Everyone has felt alone, and everyone has pushed themselves past that. That feeling of complete misdirection, the experience of the unknown, the wary navigation of one's own life, those are all so absolutely human experiences, and being able to look to the sky and see that, not one, but two more "people" were going through that, and to see them making the most of the situation, that can be enough to spur us on, even if we don't know it.

That, really, is what scientific discovery is about — making the world better in any way that it can. If people can look to the skies and see change, if they can look around them and see growth, then that's what really matters. Science isn't some far-off development that nobody truly cares about, it's in the hands of everybody. To see the planets that surround our own, to see them not only as rocks but as actual, living worlds, that doesn't just help some guy in a lab — it humanizes the cold, dark universe around us, and it makes us feel a bit more at home in our corner of it.

## OPINION: A TROUBLING SITUATION

March 13, 2020 |

Henri Robbins | Online Editor



How often are birds a problem in your life? Is it fairly often? I wouldn't think they are, so let me tell you: When they're a problem, they are a problem.

To start this story as simply as possible, our dryer was acting weird. My mom didn't want to do laundry, because every morning the dryer would start rattling uncontrollably. Nobody knew why.

So we tried to figure it out. At some point, one of us noticed that the vent that goes to the dryer had fallen out, and now there was just a hole in the side of our house that led nowhere. The vent was closed off on both sides so that air could get through, but dust and debris (and whatever else) couldn't. But, with one side wide open, something could get in. To be exact: Six birds got in. But not out.

There's not quite a comparable experience like seeing some dude in massive gloves walk out of the laundry room with not one, not two, but three entire birds in his hands, especially when he proceeds out the front door and releases them like doves at a wedding. That is surreal. What is even crazier, mind you, is seeing his co-worker waltz out with a massive chunk of tubing from the dryer, which he then proceeds to point downwards and give a few hard blows, propelling three more birds onto the ground. None of whom are alive at that point.

Regardless, it's not the three dead birds that have found their way onto our driveway that matters at the moment, nor is it the three that made it out. What matters is looking at the whole situation. Six birds, all of whom were confused and disoriented, made their way into the tubing behind our dryer. Each of them probably thought that they had found some warm and cozy place to coop up for the winter, but they were all greeted by a dark, small, inescapable room. As each of them tried to flap their way out of the predicament, none of them had any luck.

Now I'm going to branch out and go on a limb when I say that each one of them probably thought they had found a hollowed-out tree to coop up inside of. It's a fair assumption, considering how common trees probably are to the average bird. Each of them thought they had found something familiar, something that they understood. All of them followed what they understood, and for that, they paid the price. Sure, it made sense in their worldview — just as much as sprawling cities can be understood by pigeons — but it turns out that they weren't in the world they thought they were.

And today, so many students struggle in the same way as the world around us changes constantly. We were all told growing up that the world of tomorrow will be completely different from that of yesterday, but we were never told how — we're lost in what should be forests, but are nothing of the sort. We've been told to live a certain way, strive for certain status symbols, and to act like they were supposed to back in the '50s and '60s. Nobody is willing to admit it, but the status quo has changed since then, and trying to keep to that same world won't do any good. Politics, social conventions, and even the way we power our cars is all beginning to change.

Times are changing, and if we don't look out for it, we'll get trapped in the inner workings of a world we know nothing about.

## ALBUM REVIEW: SLEEPYHEAD BY CAVETOWNS

March 31, 2020 |

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

Rating: 7/10

With the success of Cavetown’s sophomore *Lemon Boy*, many expected him to be something of a one-hit wonder, but as Robin Skinner releases his third full album, he both retains his initial stylings and builds upon them, creating an album that exudes a sound of pure peace and calm, yet still holds a strong emotional presence. As the album opens, tracks like *Sweet Tooth* and *For You* open with Skinner’s melodic voice over unusually strong instrumentals, which then transfer to tracks like *Telescope* and *Trying*, which present a consistently diverse yet subdued sound, almost entirely being predominantly acoustic, yet sometimes building up to something stronger. And this is no issue – the pacing of the album, and the placement of any more powerful instrumentals, are all done to a degree that makes it feel completely natural. More than anything else, quite a few of the tracks reminded me of *C418*’s work for *Minecraft*. While that connection may seem something of a stretch when listening to either side by side, they both create the same sense of relaxation, immediately calming the listener yet having an underlying strength that will go almost unnoticed in passive listening.

Illustration by Henri Robbins

## ALBUM REVIEW: FETCH THE BOLT CUTTERS BY FIONA APPLE

May 7, 2020 |

9/10

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

As a name that many have heard, but not many have listened to, Fiona Apple has been prominent in music circles for years, always creating something of a buzz when she would show up, but has always remained fairly obscure despite that. Fiona’s most recent album, *Fetch The Bolt Cutters*, is a pensive reflection on life at large, casting a large net across her life and drawing in the most gripping parts with her powerful voice and genius-adjacent instrumentation.

As the album opens up, *I Want You To Love Me* and *Shameika* offer two sides of the same coin, both in topic and instrumentation, a contrast of calm and chaos put next to parallel songs of remorse and respect, both backed by the same flowing piano. From there, *Fetch the Bolt Cutters* brings it around to a seemingly calm and complacent yet undeniably strong reflection on expectations, sparse and minimal but perfectly eccentric, swiftly transitioning to *Under The Table*, a direct rejection of those expectations.

Past the first four tracks, Fiona Apple’s *Fetch The Bolt Cutters* has an undeniable strength to it. Exuding a learned confidence, each track feels perfectly honest yet just cryptic enough, holding itself to both a pure openness and an artistic abstraction of any specifics. Even as tracks like *Newspaper* and *Cosmonauts* find themselves on opposite sides of Fiona’s spectrum, they both feel fully developed and powerful, expressing both her vast range and undeniable talent. As each track plays, none of them feel repetitive or unnecessary, with each contributing a very specific piece to the overall form of the album.

Fiona Apple’s latest project is nothing short of exceptional. With a powerful voice backed by poetic lyrics and clever instrumentation, it’s a new take on a worn-out world that encompasses the ordinary life that has become foreign to many today.

## ALBUM REVIEW: MISS ANTHROPOCENCE

March 13, 2020 |

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

Rating: 7/10

With a large part of the album released as a series of singles over the last year, one might think that they knew what to expect from Grimes’ most recent project, but even from an artist known for her experimental stylings, the diversity in sound in Miss Anthropocene is astounding. Creating an eclectic yet cohesive mix of sauntering lyricism, frayed yet cohesive instrumentals, and crippling basslines, Grimes has somehow released an album which is totally jarring, yet inexplicably leaves listeners aching for more. The diversity of tracks is astounding, as the engrossingly obtrusive Darkseid, which is nothing if not powerfully oppressive, uses its rippling ending tones to open into the unexpectedly acoustic first notes of Delete Everything, which is the closest to a traditional track on the album yet still unnervingly atypical. As it leads into tracks like New Gods and IDORU, the album continues to push the atypical, with Grimes following her typical whispered, cryptic verbiage and enchanting, evocative instrumentation, all of which she takes into a new, fully-formed experience. Past the music itself, it allows a small glance into the twisted, strange worlds that she is able to create, evoking images of both modern technology and centuries-old ideas, morphing them into an entirely imagined, yet all-too-real investigation of the digital age.

## ALBUM REVIEW: EVERYDAY LIFE BY COLDPLAY

December 13, 2019 |

Henri Robbins | Staff Writer

Coming into this, I expected to be absolutely unenthused. I had a list of quips to make about how bland Coldplay is, how generic their music sounds, and how little I reacted to the tracks of the album. I had it all laid out, ready to take the shots, but this album ended up surprising me. Moving past the expected, unchallenging, Super-Bowl-Halftime-show-esque stylings of their previous works, Coldplay’s Everyday Life has some genuinely great moments. As a strong delve into politics, something which the band isn’t exactly known for, it’s able to tackle broad issues with a minimizing, human perspective. Tracks Trouble in Town and Daddy touch on well-known sociopolitical issues in a humanizing, if still expected perspective. Similarly, the commentary throughout is able to hold meaning, and is a promising delve into social awareness. Instrumentals in tracks such as Arabesque, along with incorporations of multilingual lyrics, are unexpectedly compelling and serve to make the double LP feel much more cohesive than it would be otherwise. The sound is, of course, the same that Coldplay has typically promised. While it may not be perfect, it’s still pretty good if you like their brand of easy-to-listen rock, and has many tracks which are a comfortable departure from the expected. Overall, while this album may be pretty good in a lot of senses, the most surprising twist was that it was able to get me to listen to a Coldplay album all the way through.

## ALBUM REVIEW: JESUS IS KING BY KANYE WEST

November 15, 2019 |

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

Score: 3/10

I miss the old Kanye, but I want new Kanye. After listening to Jesus is King (JIK), it could be a solid album. As Kanye’s new delve into Christianity, it’s a step in an unknown direction, and, at least sonically speaking, it’s pretty good. That doesn’t mean it’s all that and a side of waffle fries, though. It’s not something that I’m tempted to listen to again. It doesn’t have the jarring hooks, the abrasive lyricism, the derisive topics that West is known for. It doesn’t have the experimental production, or the innovative sound. What it does have is a message of religion that falls short of encapsulating any real faith. The lyrics are nothing short of Kanye espousing his own worth through biblical allusions, comparing himself to the likes of Jesus and asserting his worthiness, his salvation, and his belonging in Heaven. Some tracks hit well, such as *Selah* and *Follow God*, but others – the most egregious being *Closed On Sunday* – all fall short of anything meaningful or worthwhile.

That’s not all, though. After listening to what’s purported to be a leak of Yandhi, an unreleased project of West’s which was scrapped for Jesus is King, the album feels empty. It feels like an unfulfilled promise. While some tracks in Yandhi don’t hit, they are much more “Kanye” than what we got. They all subscribe to his sound, his production, his telltale layering of the human voice, even if it’s not as strong as Runaway, Jesus Walks, or Ultralight Beam. Yandhi isn’t perfect, not even close, and it’s still better than what we got. Really, Jesus is King was a hodge-podge of half-baked ideas repurposed into a pseudo-evangelical experience. It falls short of everything it tries to be and, more than that, falls short of what we all know it could have been.

## ALBUM REVIEW: GINGER BY BROCKHAMPTON

September 20, 2019 |

Henri Robbins | Online Editor

Rating: 9/10

Publicized as a “Summer album” for the months before its release, Brockhampton’s Ginger fulfills that claim only in the broadest of senses, yet still knocks it absolutely out of the park. Opening with a somber guitar and the resounding cry of “I don’t know where I’m going,” the project immediately marks itself as a painfully open commentary of morality, later covered by a guise of killer instrumentals and well-versed wordplay, but still underpinned by the dark themes of the album. Throughout the tracks, members weave their way through topics of romance, religion, regret, and redemption, all underpinned by a common thread of betrayal – presumably in regards to former member Ameer Vann. While some tracks, such as Boy Bye, take on a more poppy, positive sound, they all lean to a more experimental style, taking in sound signatures and motifs from across decades to formulate a standalone, yet referential sound. It takes in layers of sound and emotion, built up over the last few years of their work, and turns out a cohesive, strong, yet still emotionally vulnerable project. The boys explore the highs and lows of their lives, honing in on their time in Brockhampton but looking at their entire lives, coming to terms with their traumas and bringing it to a collection of heartbreaking ballads, intimate sounds, and soul-tearing lyrics, hitting an emotional climax at the grippingly reflective Dearly Departed and finding a mourning release with the closing Victor Roberts. All in all, the album serves as a both a reflection of the group’s past and a maturation of their sounds and perspectives, signifying a shift to a new era.

“When somebody that you know throws you in the fire, how do you survive?” – Dome McLennon, Dearly Departed

6

Feature

February 1, 2019

# Depression worsened by frigid weather conditions

Henri Robbins | Staff Writer

Many students are beginning to feel a bit under the weather, and the weather is to blame.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), more commonly known as seasonal depression, is an issue that many students face. Although it can occur throughout the year, symptoms usually begin in the fall and winter seasons. Junior Josephine Sim, who faces both clinical and seasonal depression, feels that people do not understand the severity of the issue.

“Dealing with depression on a daily basis is obviously an issue, but seasonal depression is another thing, because it adds more pressure on an already-existing problem,” Sim said, “(depression) is like I’m in a pool and I don’t know how to swim, and seasonal depression is the action of drowning.”

With this, there are lots of methods that people use to prevent depressive episodes. Certain tasks, such as cleaning or other small jobs around the house, tend to help Justin Rose.

“Something I would recommend for most people to do, especially if they deal with depression, is to make their bed in the morning,” Rose said. “It sounds super simple, but it’s something you can say that you did. You have this accomplishment that you did. Just do small little tasks, set goals. Make them super specific. Like, ‘I want to clean up my house’ is a no. Clean up your room or clean up a pile of laundry and say you did that in a day. Always leave tasks to do to just get your mind off of things.”

Rose was diagnosed in his freshman year after family and friends noticed a major shift in attitude and demeanor during the winter months.

“Around fall and winter, it just started to a little more difficult, but it got really bad freshman year because I switched out of my old school to Mason,” Rose said. “I went into darker places than normal. It was around that time that I actually talked to someone about it over text, and their parent read it and reported me to the school, and I actually got suspended for a wellness check, where I had to have a therapist write a note saying I’m okay to go to school and I’m not a danger to myself or anyone else. That’s when the whole process started.”

Even though SAD is very prominent, many people still do not see it as an issue. Psychologist Michaela Kramer said that it is fairly common, even if not everyone sees it.

“It’s certainly a real thing where your mood, energy level, and motivation take a dip – signs are similar to what we see with depression,” Kramer said. “Along with work not being completed as much, students also aren’t as social but are noticeably irritable.”

Even then, not all cases occur in the winter. Sophomore Arisu Yoshida suffers from episodes in the summer. Even though she focuses on work and her creative writing, the heat and lack of routine over break makes her more susceptible to depressive episodes.

“I feel like I’m in an oven,” said Yoshida, “and it makes me completely useless at progressing with any of my creative works. I’m more inspired by winter. Funny enough, I draw summer settings. Sunsets, beaches. I think of summer as the time of year where you take adventures, but I just spend it staying home and being sweaty.”

Because of the many different symptoms, SAD has many different treatments. While a great number of them are specifically for patients who suffer in the winter, there are also many that work year-round. Psychologist Jeff Schlaeger said that the treatments work to increase overall mood and productivity.

“There’s traditional counseling, but there’s also actually light therapy – technically called phototherapy, and it’s all about the Vitamin D from a special lamp,” Schlaeger said. “We had a staff member that retired who was a special educator who actually did phototherapy on the students.”

Depression isn’t just sadness, though. Yoshida said over the summer, she feels extreme unmotivation and finds herself unable to work on anything.

“You have to force yourself into a routine so that you don’t completely give up on everything,” Yoshida said. “If you say ‘this is a checklist, and if I complete everything then I did good today,’ that’s what keeps you going.”

Around four to six percent of people suffer from seasonal depression, and 10 to 20 percent suffer from mild SAD, according to American Family Physician.

Sim said that, even with the awareness today, it can be hard for many students to realize they have an issue. She wants to see students reaching out and getting help, but recognizes that it can be something of a challenge for them.

“I definitely feel like some people who aren’t very aware or open to it, who don’t realize they actually have a problem, aren’t doing anything about it, and I feel like that needs to change because, well, depression sucks. It’s not something that people should just live with thinking it’s normal. It’s not something that you should try hiding. Even if it’s a personal thing, you should definitely seek help somewhere, because it’s not something that you want to constantly live with.”



Illustration by Henri Robbins