AFRICA IN AMERICA

HOW IMMIGRANTS USE FAITH AND FOOD TO ADAPT TO THE SOUTH SIDE

(temple Shipley)

INSIDE

The next big thing is brewing in Pilsen
Southern cooking and community
A comic book for Chicago
Exploring how the blind dream
Network Upgrade

Pilsen tech incubator Cibola breaks up the boys club

by Shazia Ali

WHEN MAHRINAH VON SCHLEGEL MOVED TO Chicago to start a business, she felt a little lonely. “When I would go to networking events,” she recalls, “I would be the only Latino in the room.” She could see that minority and female entrepreneurship was not reflected in the growing energy around the Chicago startup scene that could be observed at incubators such as 1871 and Excelerate. But that didn’t mean it didn’t exist.

Incubators like Cibola, Excelerate, and 1871 offer fledgling entrepreneurs everything from access to investor capital to mentorship to cheap office space, private phone service, high speed internet, and access to vetted vendors for graphic design, marketing, social media, legal services, banking, and accounting. Von Schlegel notes that Cibola’s fees are half that of other tech incubators.

Cibola has hosted events relating to innovations in the tech market, as well as community-focused events. Von Schlegel talks enthusiastically about Cibola’s efforts in the new and growing hardware movement, which provide product makers with the tools to make everything from circuit boards to organic soaps. Cibola also hosts the Chicago International Social Change Film Festival, which connects viewers of films that highlight social issues with organizations working on those issues, so people who watch the films can make a direct impact. In addition, Cibola has hosted gaming nights, hackathons, conferences, and a record fair.

“We see ourselves as a model of community economic development,” von Schlegel says. “Something like Cibola could exist in any community.”

As for location, Pilsen was a natural choice. Other than the fact that there are no startup incubators south of 95th, von Schlegel was attracted to the wide variety of backgrounds and languages that attract in interesting ways in the area. “The 25th Ward is the most diverse in the city. We have Chinatown, UIC, Little Italy, down to Little Village,” she explains.

Despite the challenges of helping traditionally underrepresented groups tap into the energy of tech entrepreneurship, von Schlegel and Cambry are confident Cibola is up to the task. “Everyone here is building, growing and, doing amazing things,” von Schlegel says.

Von Schlegel and her business partner cite Pilsen’s burgeoning art scene as an inspiration. The relationship between art and creativity in entrepreneurship was something von Schlegel noticed during the time she spent in the startup communities on the East and West coast before moving to Chicago. “We wanted Cibola to be visually cohesive with the rest of Pilsen,” she says, a concept evidenced by the large graffiti mural on one wall that was painted by a Chicago artist.

In its short existence, Cibola has made strides in achieving one of its main goals. Von Schlegel and Cambry are currently working with organizations such as the Women’s Innovation Network, the Women’s Health Conference, and the Women in Business Conference to promote women entrepreneurs. Cibola is also working on launching a business pitch event aimed at attracting Latino entrepreneurs.

Cibola’s future plans include the launch of an international seed stage accelerator, which works with international venture funds to match Chicago tech entrepreneurs with opportunities in Latin America and Europe. Cibola hopes to try a new incubation model that takes entrepreneurs into international markets to gain new experiences and to identify opportunities to adapt successful American ventures for foreign markets.

With Chicago’s most high-profile startup Groupon facing post-JPD troubles as its stock price plummeted and founder Andrew Mason fights to keep his job, the future of Chicago’s tech startup scene may be even more uncertain. But Cibola is betting that Chicago has only scratched the surface of its startup potential, and tapping the entrepreneurial spirit of minorities and women will help to fulfill it. “We’re starting to see much more focus on women in technology, and that wasn’t there even just a year ago.”

For more information visit www.buildcibola.com
Dissenting Colors

By Alexandra Garfinkle

THE WALLS AT SLAW ARE WHITE. AT LEAST, they are in the exhibition room, which is sandwiched between the worn grey of the snow-covered outdoors and the wooden-flored back room of this alternative art space in Pilsen. The back room doubles as the apartment of director Paul Hopkins and is furnished accordingly—bright kitchen counter-tops, a cushioned of chairs, and a bed onto which coats were thrown as visitors flooded the gallery on Saturday night. The occasion was the opening of the exhibition “Extended dissent is no longer goodby,” which showcases the work of artists Carmen Little and Dave Richards.

The styles of the artists, though both abstract, aren’t quite coherent. On the white of the walls, Little’s pieces—varying in size from medium, from sculpture to painted glass and wood—including with Richards’ pieces, which are Styrofoam and cut, painted, and plastered onto another.

The fact that Richards’ and Little’s work are interpersed on the same white walls was intentional on Hopkins’ part. The tension in the exhibition comes most strikingly from the juxtaposition in color scheme between them. Little’s pieces are bright—pink, blue, white—and she describes her exhibition “Enlightenment.” Conversely, Richards’ pieces are faded greens, yellows, browns and blues, which he describes as “Industrial.”

“In any field of vision, you can’t see one artist’s work without the other,” Hopkins said. “Dave’s color palette makes Carmen’s gook garish, whereas the brightness of Carmen’s color scheme brings out the ugliness in Dave’s.”

A London native, Little is best known for her performance art as the “Queen of the exhibition ‘Extended dissent is no longer goodby’,” which also has a poem attached to it. This poem, entitled “The Importance of Being Less” is unique in that one stanza was written by Little and the other was written by Richards. One line from Little’s stanza—“I take a spin following my eternal friend / The cadmium yellow exit sign”—is painted in pink on the second panel.

“I thought it was a tough line, since it seemed to be talking about fear or cowardice,” Richards said. “I like the toughness of that, as though she isn’t withholding her criticism of my subconscious.”

This vulnerability relates to the title of the exhibition, “Extended dissent is no longer goodby,” which Hopkins explained. “It’s not in fashion, but that also doesn’t mean that’s its death or the end.”

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ARTS & CULTURE

By Nathan Worcester

IT’S STRANGE TO SEE COMICS UP ON gallery walls—not because they are somehow unworthy of a gallery setting, but because they seem to live and die in the books, newspapers, and portable electronic devices on which a single pair of eyes can slowly read them. On the walls of the Co-Prosperty Sphere this past Friday, the works featured in the Lumped Comics Issue exhibition were examined by two, four, or six eyes at a time. Most pieces comprised a lattice of sequential images—often as gorgeous as they were grotesque—colored green, blue, yellow, purple, or, most frequently, black and white. If there was a theme to the one and two-pagers on display, it was the pain and confusion of being alive; sex, violence, loneliness, and post-graduate angst abounded. But the observers, mostly artists and civilians indistinguishable from artists, seemed to be having a pretty decent time. They were taking it all in: the images, each other, and some combination of inexpensive-to-free beer and subterranean cigarettes.

It was hard not to try guaging others’ reactions to the pieces I viewed. How did the observers around me feel about Blaise Lamee’s searing takes on gentrification and the Internet? (On the latter, “You scream!” infelities like you was Dashboard, yeah we Dashboard professionals.”) But until I talked to some of the artists, I could only really react to the things I saw on my own unreliable terms.

Joe Tallarico puts together the regular comics section of “Lumpen” and edited the Comics Issue; one of his hallucinatory works might’ve missed a few standout comics, like Joe Panter as influences on his own style. “I kind of curated the issue to be a self-contained art show,” he added. Concretely, this meant using shorter works that didn’t involve much page turning and that could be easily displayed on a gallery wall. “I’ll say something really regrettable,” said South Side webcomic and comic artist Andy Biurkholder when I asked him if we could do a quick interview. Like the other artists who were still present at 10pm, he was a few beers deep. We looked at his piece, which paired a mysterious, interlocking body of images (scored to the lyrics of the song “Tits” by the Goo Goo Dolls) with a block of text: “I t’s hinet.” Though I hadn’t recognized the song, as I read and reread the piece, the drum-heavy music pulsing in the background set its rhythm. (“The song) seems like it’s about something, but it’s not really anything,” he said. He listened politely as I offered my interpretation of his comic—didn’t the upside-down heart mean something, frame everything? “That’s the beauty of comics... If you just draw simple actions, it always makes sense somehow, even if it doesn’t really mean anything. And then if you draw the actions more fragment-ed and more specific, they somehow can be interpreted more ways.”

Max Morris, creator of the Comics Issue’s nostalgic southwesternhernabroad rorschcape “Jungle Je,” showed some love to the old Zap Comics crew: “I always liked Spain [Rodriguez] and [Victor] Moscoso and S. Clay Wilson... Spain was a true comics warrior. You heard that he died at his drawing desk, right? [Ed. – “No, I didn’t”] “Yeah, he was working on a poster for a communist rally when he died.”

The works were interesting enough on the gallery wall, but the issue itself was even more rewarding on more careful inspection. Had I not picked up the issue, I would’ve missed a few standout comics, like George Hansens’ stream-trailer streak-o’-lightnin’, Aaron Renier’s tiger fantasia, Ian McCulffe’s lemon-scented “So Lonely,” and every single little interesting shape that Edie Fake assembled. I’m glad I read Lyra Hill’s “Banana Glove Game” more than once.

Co-Prosperty Sphere, 3219 S. Morgan St. (773)837-0145. coprosperity.org. Lumpen is distributed throughout Chicago.
DOWN THE BLOCK FROM A MCDONALD'S AND BURGER King lies the real thing—an authentic dining experience. Captain Hard Times Dining is a center for upscale soul food and a haven for community connection in Greater Grand Crossing. The restaurant is manned by a god-fearing champion community benefactor, Head Chef Josephine Wade. Wade, founder and owner of the 22-year-old establishment, is often visible busy behind the stovetop, preparing the food that solidifies her reputation bite by bite.

Captain Hard Times Dining

GREATER GRAND CROSSING

by Jason Huang

Captain's Hard Times Dining, 434-440 East 79th St. Monday-Saturday, 8am-11pm. Sunday, 11am-11pm. (773)487-7210. captainshardtimesdining.com

Fried Chicken for the Soul

FEBRUARY 7 2013 | CHICAGO WEEKLY

includes striking plates such as salmon croquettes, farm-raised catfish steaks, Long Island Duckling, and Rock Cornish Game Hen. The more traditional, however, can order pork chops, cheese burgers, short ribs, or pigs in a blanket.

“I highly suggest the quarter fried chicken,” says Yvette, my waitress for the day. “It’s what we’re known for around here.” Chicken quarters are lightly breaded in what seems to be a cayenne-infused breading and flour mixture, dunked into a pot of bubbling oil, and served with my choice of macaroni and cheese and chilled coleslaw. Something so simple could not have been executed so excellently, but indeed it was. One cut broke through the golden brown crust and into the moist and tender chicken. The breading held a powerful kick of agitated spice and tones of sweetness, slightly overpowered by the salt. This framing highlighted the meat, which was sometimes overpowered by overly complicated seasoning or uneven cooking. Nonetheless, I was immediately transferred to the eateries I patronized in my Southern birthplace.

The macaroni is cooked al dente with a bite to it. There are no embellishments: no fancy cheeses, gratuitous herbs, or experiments with ingredients. It was only pasta and sharp cheddar cheese, covering each morsel of the dish. While I would have preferred it to be more submerged in cheese, it was a good complement to the other dishes. Its flavor was more muted than the other more spicy items, however the cheddar introduced a familiar but beloved flavor to the palate after each bite. The coleslaw was neither too dry nor too soaked in their especially sweet and tangy dressing. Adjoining the steaming chicken and macaroni, it provides a cooling relief, marked by a creamy sweetness and crisp chomps.

“Will you be having peach cobbler?” Yvette said to the group behind me. She repeated this request to other patrons, so that when she reached me, I could not refuse. Peach cobbler seems to be a staple. The flaky crust and reduced peaches are mixed in with splashes of cinnamon to make a heartwarming final dessert.

Throughout my meal, many people walked in and out of Captain Hard Times. Some never ordered; they came in, addressed the waitresses by their names, and sat down with seated customers. Friendly pats on backs, silent fist bumps, and roaring laughs reverberated through the place. The mood was festive as diners moved around the place to shake hands or gossip.

Captain Hard Times manifests a true power of food, of shared meals; through simple ingredients and easy execution, food creates a bridge to disparate souls. “You should come back some time, and bring your friends!” said Yvette.
I was late on a frigid Wednesday night, and I was stranded miles from home. Immersed in a sea of unfamiliar faces, I was at a loss to ask someone for a ride home. My company was warm, but I had begun to resign myself to the prospect of a solitary, chilly bus ride home. Hopes for understanding gave way to brutal awareness that I was different, and that my trip home differed greatly from those around me. However, the Islamic patriarch seated near me discerned my sense of concern, and told a man from his congregation to drive me home through the snow.

The name of my companion was Mohammad, and he was a member of the Touba Dahira of Chicago. I had spent my evening with Mohammad and the other members of the Touba Dahira, enjoying their hospitality and Qur’anic chants. The chants draw on traditional Senegalese melodies, inflected with the kind of granite piety that persists across continents. Food and debate had rounded off the evening—traditional Senegalese chicken and onions were served and eaten by hand, while the brothers furiously monologued about problems—from a shot businessman to the cost of travelling back home—that African immigrants face throughout the Midwest.

Touba Dahira is a branch of the Mouride brotherhood, an order of Islam born under the weight of Western colonial oppression in Senegal. The rituals that made up the evening stretch back across the oceans and decades that separate the members of Touba Dahira from their home. The religious organization, and its constituent Mouride men and women, generates a sense of community. They are devoted to assisting the local Senegalese and African immigrant communities at large.

The Mourides follow the teachings of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, a religious poet and Imam whom the Mourides regard as a major spiritual figure. As the young men of the Mourides eagerly told me, Sheikh Bamba was exiled by the French in 1895 to Gabon. He then traveled around West Africa, before returning to Senegal a few years later. Falou Drip, a jovial Mouride with a booming voice, summarized Sheikh Bamba’s teachings for me: “Muslims should be real believers…the first thing that can help you [as an immigrant] is self-sufficiency!” He continued, “To step in the soil of America, it is really tough. Leaving your culture and religion is the biggest challenge that a human can face.”

Despite a doctrine grounded in self-reliance, the Mourides fit into a larger community as well. While East Africans tend to congregate in Rogers Park on the North Side, West African from countries such as Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, and Mali, have dispersed across the South Side. This constitutes a new underground—not the Italian speakeasies and Irish rackets for which Chicago was once known, but a tight-knit community of African immigrants striving to adapt and survive while building a cultural identity that straddles the old in Africa and the new in America. Nearly nine out of ten African businesses in Chicago have opened within the past five years. These run the gamut from hair braiders to traditional African restau-
rants, and they stand alongside numerous religious and ethnic organizations.

That Wednesday at Touba Dahira, the main drift of discussion concerned an 82-year-old Malian man in Indianapolis. Infirm and wishing to go home, the man could not pay for the trip, and was thus relying on the social grapevine to spread news of his plight in hopes that he might secure funds for his final trip back home. As I don't speak Wolof, the affable Mouride brothers took turns translating bits of the conversation. The discussion centered not on whether to help the man—that was a given. Rather, they were arguing over whether or not he had the right to go back. Should he die in Mall, where he had neither lived nor worked for many years, or in America, where he had spent so much of his life and raised a family?

The questions surrounding death play an important role in uniting different Africans as they adapt to life on the South Side. A representative from the Malian Community Association, who chose to only be identified by his first name, Sharif, told me that his organization began, “in 2001, after a member of our community had died…the family didn’t have enough money to send back the body, but other communities helped.” After that, a group of Malians got together to found their organization in order to protect and help Malians and other African immigrants who found themselves in similarly difficult situations.

Although the issues raised are not always those of life or death, it is this kind of informal networking that characterizes the African immigrant experience both within and across ethnicities and nationalities. The South Side is rife with similar gatherings, some more visible than others. A clubhouse in Englewood hosts First Presbyterian Churches, while a budding mosque in Bronzeville, while a burgeoning mosque in Presbyterians. Touba Dahira congregates in the basement sanctuary for Ghanaian Tabernacle Baptist Church in Washington Park. A representative from the Malian Community in this sense takes on a less ethnically charged tone than in the less formal organizations. Although Friday prayers showcase many West African tongues and styles of dress, the leadership of the mosque sees its role as connecting people through a common faith. Kilwan Martins, a Nigerian-American and Executive Director of Al-Farooq, told me that, “one of the good things about this mosque is that it takes the cultural out of religion…when you first come to Masjid Al-Farooq as an immigrant, it’s a little bit intimidating because you’re used to how religion is practiced back home.” At Masjid Al-Farooq the connections that accentuate local traditions are subsumed into the larger concept of Islam itself. Humaira Bazith, an executive director at the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, the organization that helped fund Al-Farooq, put it this way: “many immigrants look towards their faith…what you hold close to your heart helps you smooth over rough waters.”

In addition to organizations of the faithful, Africans have also begun to create home via more concrete means. There is talk of constructing an African Community Center on the corner of 79th and Cottage Grove, where a number of African-owned businesses have recently set up shop. A couple of the African hair braiding places that dot the South Side have popped up; as well as Mandela’s, an Afrocentric grocery store; a tailor called Keba Designs; and Yassa, a Senegalese restaurant. The area serves as a testament to the different ways that Africans make Chicago home. Take Yassa, for example. While some African immigrants look to the structure of religious practice or national borders to give them a sense of home, Awa Yasseu, the owner, looks more towards smell and taste. Yasseu is a mother of three, and has the culinary chops to garnish the South Side with the cuisine of a nation. The inspiration for her restaurant came from her first years as an immigrant. “I used to cook for my friends every Sunday…then all my friends would eat my food and say, why don’t you open a restaurant?”

The food she serves is heavily sublime and sublimely heavy, while portions are massive and prices low. When I asked her what she missed the most about Africa, Yasseu told me, “I miss the food!” Yasseu’s very presence exudes the idea of home: her motherly demeanor, idle comments praising her children, and the delicious food that her restaurant produces throw one into a feeling of comfort that welcomes not only her West African patrons, but also anyone who stops by.

Despite her success, Yasseu echoed almost every other immigrant I met by telling me, “I wish I could just go back (to Africa)”
Regardless of the extent to which each immigrant had enmeshed themselves in their community—from Mouride brother to Islamic scholar to restaurateur—each left Africa thinking that they would surely return. Al-Farooq started out in a basement in the late ’90s, Farooq, Yassa—all took many years to establish. The success stories above—the Mourides, Al-Farooq—have to “take the good with the bad.” In his mind, in order to adapt and find home, they must find the best in both cultures. However, he also argued that the home culture should be preserved as much as possible, saying that, “the first home is Africa, the second America.” Another man named Modou Seck proclaimed through a thick accent that “We never stop thinking about going back home…When people leave Africa, they always aspire to go back.”

The South Side’s African immigrants discuss home often, and questions about what they miss are inevitably met with a bittersweet delight. Before the Mourides sat down to chant from the Qur’an, a discussion of what home really meant broke out. Diop argued that immigrants have to “take the good with the good.” In his mind, in order to adapt and find home, they must find the best in both cultures. However, he also argued that the home culture should be preserved as much as possible, saying that, “the first home is Africa, the second America.” Another man named Modou Seck proclaimed through a thick accent that “We never stop thinking about going back home…When people leave Africa, they always aspire to go back.”

The splintering of views crystallizes the complex emotions that underlie the African experience of finding home in Chicago. Much of this comes from the massive gap between the immigrants’ expectations of what life will be like in the United States and the hardship they face upon arrival. It’s worth remembering the success stories above—the Mourides, Al-Farooq, Yassa—all took many years to establish. The Mourides were founded as a small community in 1986, Al-Farooq started out in a basement in the late ’90s, and Gueye was in the United States for twenty years before opening Yassa.

However, some remain alienated in the face of these successes. Across the street from Yassa is a shop called Keba Design. When I went to pay a Monday morning visit, I found a taciturn tailor and his friend, Omar, who was less reluctant to speak with me. A middle-aged Senegalese man who owns a limo service, Omar came to the United States after working at the U.S. Embassy in Dakar for seventeen years. He gave by far the frankest assessment of the situation of African immigrants on the South Side. Through a raspy lilt, he told me, “When people come here, they think that you can work the same as in home, and make twice as much…When they come, many spend all their money in the first few months…Some people think their hosts [Americans] don’t like them very much.”

Similarly, Gueye told me that the most unexpected thing she encountered upon arrival to America was rejection by the locals. “The first time when you come it’s very difficult to adapt yourself…and for them to understand you is very hard, and sometimes you feel rejected by people…You might feel like you done something wrong.”

Cultural barriers even find their way into places of worship. Rilwan Martins from Al-Farooq told me that for the important holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, certain things are verboten, and the community feels much more scattered. “Eid al-Adha is the [holiday of] sacrificing of the ram. Back home… everyone can slaughter, here, if the inspector is not there, you can’t. Back home… you can walk to your friend’s house to say happy Eid, but here you have to drive across town!”

All of the Africans I spoke with left Africa with the intention of returning in the near future, and told me that all the Africans they knew felt the same way. However, many find that they lack the money to return. One Mouride brother explained, “Everyone expects to go back, but reality is too hard.” According to Omar, “Maybe 60 out of 100 families come here and spend all their money immediately, and then realize that they have to work hard.”

In spite of the financial hardship and profound homesickness that accompany the communities, most people come to enjoy American life. Modou Seck, a Mouride brother, told me, “This life is cool…it’s better to make a living here.” Another brother told me that he spent almost a decade driving a cab before gaining exponential financial independence as a banker at JPMorgan. As Gueye said, in spite of the difficulties of adjustment, “I love America so much! I want peace and happiness for all the American people!”

As to the future of the Mourides, they recently bought a clubhouse in Bronzeville. Using collections, they are planning on refurbishing the building and turning it into a proper meeting place. Al-Farooq remains one of the fastest-growing mosques in Chicago, and Imam Ousmane is achieving recognition in the region for his measured sermons and unvarnished readings of the Qur’an. Gueye was less optimistic about the future of Yassa. “Business used to be wonderful, I hope it gets back to what it was…A lot of families cannot afford to come spend and eat here.” The children of the immigrants place this story in a striking relief. Their families face hardship: as Omar told me, “Very few families can make more money than they can back home.” In spite of the warm sentiments of the Mouride brothers, Diop told me, “I want my son to feel that Senegal is his home.” When I asked him what would happen if his son felt more American, another Mouride brother jumped in, and told me, “We can’t really control it. We want the child to be more African, but this is just destiny.”

The South Side’s African immigrants have a vivid memory of their home, but one that fades with years and generations. Although African cultural roots may persist, the immigrant aspect will fade away as the elders pass on, either back to Africa or deeper into American life. Around halftime through the Mouride meeting, the warm chaos was interrupted by the arrival of a teenage boy, the son of one of the brothers, bringing us dinner. One of them called to him, “I remember the day you were born!” Another brother told me, “We’re all as a family here.” The kid gave an awkward smile and, with a perfect American accent, said goodbye.
Dropping Bombs

Nate Marshall’s favorite word is “scruples,” because he likes the way it sounds. In moments of silence, he flails his hands to convey emotion. From moment to moment he seems joyous and lighthearted, and as such it is hard to believe that the poetry he writes is born from personal experience. That is, until he reads it. At a reading at the University of Chicago’s Logan Center this past Friday, Marshall, a former contestant in Chicago’s annual Louder Than a Bomb youth poetry slam, spoke forcefully of the guns, the violence, the addiction he witnessed growing up in the South Side’s “100s.”

Like many of the participants in Louder Than a Bomb, Marshall found solace in slam, a form of spoken poetry that gave him, and still gives other teenagers across Chicago, a voice. Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel’s 2010 documentary “Louder Than a Bomb”—screened alongside Marshall’s performance—documents the way the festival gives teenagers like Marshall, many of whom recall being labeled by society as unmotivated and unable to accomplish anything substantive, the ability to rise in their own way. The film shows young people, including Marshall, as they converse with messages of hatred, respect, distrust, and—most prominently—love for their own art.

A question-and-answer session with Marshall and director Greg Jacobs followed Friday’s screening. The last question was directed at Marshall: “How do you know when you should write and something?” He transitioned straight into a performance of several of his poems, reciting over an overlay of music suggesting the potency of auditory perception. As the music faded, Foreman, who is African American, continued to read the speech aloud, eventually returning to his keyboard as King’s voice faded back in. (Mosum Shah)

Seeing—or not seeing—the dream

This past Thursday, a stylish woman in a fur vest and high-heeled boots escorted a man in sunglasses to the center of the small gallery space inside the U of C’s Logan Center. The man took his seat behind a keyboard and ran his hands across the keys. He then picked up a Braille script and welcomed the crowd, asking how they were not once, but three times.

As Foreman began his speech by talking about learning to play the piano, a lifelong passion that he dates back to age six, but which his parents tell him began when he was barely 18 months old, he talked about his admiration for incidental music—known to most of us as background music. For those with sight, incidental music usually conjures up imagery. But for Foreman, this background music colors the sonic landscape of his world. As an example, Foreman described many of the scenes he associates with organ music: Sunday mass, old-fashioned ice skating rinks, sports games.

After telling his story, the lights dimmed again, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech began to play overhead, intermingled with bright piano music. Dreams are visual experiences—so how are they perceived by someone who cannot see? King’s speech is rife with visual cues—from the red hills of Georgia to the snowcapped mountains in Colorado—but the overlaid music suggested the potency of auditory perception. As the music faded, Foreman, who is African American, continued to read the speech aloud, eventually returning to his keyboard as King’s voice faded back in. (Sasha Tycko)
In Defence, La Armada, Krang, Tras de Nada

OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Drive]

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Chicago weekly

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The Shrine, 2109 S. Wabash Ave. Friday, February 8, 9pm. $32. +21. (312)753-4231. theshrinechicago.com (Erica Weinberger)