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For Immediate Release

2022-23 TD Amplify Cabaret Series Launches New Format Hosted by Local Music Heavyweights Sargeant X Comrade

October 27, 2022 - CALGARY – The 2022-23 season of the TD Amplify Cabaret series from Arts Commons Presents launches into exciting new worlds with vocalist Yolanda Sargeant and producer Evgeniy "Comrade" Bykovets, aka **Sargeant x Comrade**, at the helm. In a brand-new format created by Sargeant x Comrade, this season brings four retro-futuristic space-themed talk shows to the stage – think Johnny Carson at the International Space Station – starting with **Mars: Second Home** on **November 18 & 19** in the **Engineered Air Theatre**. Also new this season, audiences are invited to meet the artists following each performance in a post-show lobby reception.

Combining lo-fi technology and futuristic settings is signature to Sargeant x Comrade's award-winning sound, as well as the theme of the 2022-23 TD Incubator program, "Lo-Fi Futures," which the duo is leading as this season's Incubator Fellows. Launched last year, TD Incubator is Arts Commons' latest artist development program aimed to support local creators who move between genres, art forms, and styles with networking, workshop, and public presentation opportunities. **Mars: Second Home** will be the first public performance by the interdisciplinary artists from 22-23 TD Incubator cohort, including last season's Fellows, **Jae Sterling** and **Contra** returning in conversation. Joining them will be interdisciplinary artist, muralist, and creator **Mackenzie Bedford**; cellist and experimental musician **Jenny Crane**; and **Kue Varo**, the solo project of musician and multi-instrumentalist **Kat Dodge**.



Yolanda Sargeant and producer Evgeniy "Comrade" Bykovets. Photo by Asim Overstands.

"As an emerging artist the TD Incubator, and with it the TD Amplify Cabaret, is a wellspring of equipment, mentorship and opportunity," says Mackenzie Bedford. "However, what's more exciting is the cohort of amazing artists along for

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the ride beside me! This city has a collaborative, tight-knit interdisciplinary arts community, and it's an honour to find space to grow with them."

More artists from the 22-23 TD Incubator cohort, officially announced on October 14, will appear throughout the season at Arts Commons in the Media Galleries (Broadcast Lab and +15 Soundscape) along with three additional TD Amplify Cabarets – **Venus: Future Love** (Feb. 10 & 11, 2023), **Earth: Mothership** (Apr. 21 & 22, 2023) and **Moon: Indigo Child** (June 2 & 3, 2023). Each Cabaret will continue Sargeant x Comrade's talk show format – with Sargeant and Bykovets as the evening's hosts – a revisioning of the typical cabaret style to infuse the evening with personality, humour, and retro style as well as showcase the thrilling performances signature to the TD Amplify Cabaret series.

"We're really happy to be working with this select group of artists - we can't wait to see what they come up with." Says Evgeniy "Comrade" Bykovets. Yolanda Sargeant adds: "The artists we've chosen are going to inspire each other - and they're all so different, which is why we think the variety show format is the best way to present them."

Mars: Second Home will feature performances and conversations that explore the notions of mirrors, doubles, and the uncanny valley. Performers include musician Jenny Crane, whose passion is discovering the ways that a traditional instrument like the cello can move between genres and artistic mediums, and Kue Varo, with an ethereal, dusky sound evoking otherworldly vibe through her vocals and guitar. The stage will be bathed in light and imagery created by muralist, animator, and visual artist Mackenzie Bedford. 2021-22 TD Incubator Fellows Jae Sterling and Contra also return to share their voices on stage and pass the proverbial torch to Sargeant x Comrade. Both Jae Sterling and Contra are founding members of the artist collective THOTNATION/SANSFUCCS. As well as a musician, Jae has left his mark as a visual artist and holds the distinction of being one of Calgary's first Black muralists, painting *The Guide & Protector* in Chinatown. Along with her work with THOTNATION/SANSFUCCS collective, Contra is one-half of the ground-breaking duo, Cartel Madras with her sister Bhagya "Eboshi" Ramesh.

The TD Amplify Cabaret series, now entering its fifth season, has an established reputation for engaging local artists in conversation with the most pressing cultural, social, and artistic questions of today. Exploring subject matter as diverse as drag shows to the experience of Black artists living in the prairies to love notes to the universe, TD Amplify Cabarets push the boundaries of live performance. Learn more about the full lineup of the 22-23 season of cabarets at artscommons.ca/cabarets.

What: TD Amplify Cabaret – Mars: Second Home
Where: Arts Commons, Engineered Air Theatre
When: Friday, November 18 & Saturday, November 19, 2022 at 8pm
Who: Arts Commons Presents
Tickets: 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca/mars

To purchase tickets to **Mars: Second Home**, or any of the TD Amplify Cabaret series, please call 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca/cabarets.

For media inquiries, high resolution images, or more information contact:

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Arts Commons is the largest performing arts centre in Western Canada located in the heart of downtown Calgary. For over 35 years, it has been a key contributor to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and well-being of Calgarians. It is home to six resident companies, including Alberta Theatre Projects, Arts Commons Presents, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Downstage, One Yellow Rabbit, and Theatre Calgary. It houses six gallery spaces, five theatres, and the Jack Singer Concert Hall, and promotes local, national, international, emerging and established artists with a focus on inclusion, diversity, accessibility, and equity.

The **TD Incubator program** is designed to support this idea and the artists who are increasingly choosing to move between and blend artistic forms – musicians who make their own films, dancers who are blending movement with visual art, actors who are expanding into spoken word poetry. Prioritizing artists from communities who reflect the diversity and vibrancy of Treaty 7 territory, the mission of TD Incubator is to accelerate these artists' careers. As the largest arts centre in Western Canada and a gathering space for all artistic disciplines, Arts Commons is uniquely positioned to grow, celebrate, elevate, and learn from these artists.

BIOGRAPHIES

Sargeant X Comrade is a collaboration between the Queen of Lo-Fi Soul, **Yolanda Sargeant** and producer **Comrade (Evgeniy) Bykovets**. Lo-Fi Soul was the new genre that the duo pioneered after not being able to find an appropriate label to fit their eclectic style. Sargeant X Comrade infuses jazz, soul, funk, dancehall, hip-hop, as well as other genres into a unique sound that combines the old with the new. Sargeant's rich vocals take centre stage while Comrade's production takes you on a multi-layered, genre-bending journey from beginning to end. Add some high-profile musicians and features in the mix and you have the Sargeant X Comrade rich formula for their own unique brand of music which has earned them multiple awards in 2021 and 2022.

Mackenzie Bedford is a telescope for queer space. The universe, by nature, is mysterious and queer. Exhausted by perspectives that lack the imagination and diversity it demands, she is revealing the queerness of the cosmos through colour, light, and movement.

You can find them animating, painting murals, or projection mapping across Alberta. In their free time, they are learning to perform burlesque. Their influences stem from growing up as a closeted queer kid in a small town, using an early 2000s internet connection to connect, explore and escape.

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Jenny Crane is a multi-faceted Cellist who is passionate about performing within diverse music genres and collaboration between multiple artistic mediums, including film and visual effects and composing original compositions for cello.

Jenny holds a master's degree in music performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and an undergraduate degree in music performance from the University of Montreal. Jenny began her studies with John Kadz in Calgary at the music academy of Mount Royal University. She has had the opportunity to learn from world class Cellists including Andres Diaz, Laurence Lesser, Hans Jorgen-Jensen, Desmond Hoebig, Ron Leonard, and Steven Isserlis.

One highlight of her career has been performing for the composer Krystof Penderecki at the Morningside Music bridge international music program in Gdansk Poland, performing movements from his Divertimento for solo cello.

Contra is a multidisciplinary artist who navigates the Canadian arts and culture landscape as a musician, director, producer, and creative strategist. Her most prominent project to date is through her work in Cartel Madras, an expansive and experimental music project now signed under Sub Pop Records. As a founding member of the THOTNATION/SANSFUCCS collective her artistic journey has also brought her into the world of art direction, visual production, and creative strategy. Challenging cities, industries, and narratives to allow new voices in is at the very centre of how Contra pursues all her creative endeavours; furthering culture and allowing art to thrive.

Using her eclectic professional background within the creative sector, Contra has been able to combine her artistry with business strategy and marketing acumen with initiatives through her collective. Through her work in Cartel Madras, she has developed counter-culture showcases for new artists while touring extensively within Canada & The United States giving her an immediate, essential and thorough pulse of the underground across Canada. In 2021 she expanded her expertise into overseeing the creation and production of art exhibitions, digital series and documentaries.

The dusk-tinged songs of **Kue Varo & the Only Hopes** are ethereal yet immediate, shrouded in mist but immediately distinct. The titular Varo leads the group with lyrics, vocals, guitar and more, but her trusty Only Hopes help bring to life the music that carries her grit-marked, dramatic vocals through your ears and into your soul.

It all began in 2021 when Varo connected with multi-instrumentalist Bob Quaschnick in her previous home of Montreal. The two found a heart-first song writing dynamic that was akin to alchemy, birthing songs with a natural chemistry you can hear on tracks that alternate between breezy and severe. The lineup was rounded out by Matt Doherty on drums and Connor Harvey-Derbyshire on bass and synth. Cut to now and the band has been selected for residencies at Calgary's Grand Theatre and has appeared at major indie festivals Big Winter Classic and Sled Island.

Not ones to lose momentum, the group has just released their debut track Feelin' Lucky and will follow that up with an EP in winter 2022. All of which was produced by JUNO Award-winner Russell Broom (Art Bergmann, Jann Arden, The Last Waltz Remembered), each track sheds a bit more light on Varo and her troupe.

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Jae Sterling is a multidisciplinary artist and founding member of the THOTNATION/SANSFUCCS collective. Beginning as a musician, he has extended his art form over the years to include painting (acrylic & oil), digital design & mixed media, streetwear design, and written essays.

Through his early years in Kingston, Jamaica to the landscapes of North America, Jae has spent the past few years developing his artistry by weaving his experiences growing up in Jamaica, South Florida, and coming into adulthood in Canada into all his projects. In 2019, his exploration in hip hop led him to be one of 10 artists selected for the National Music Centre's Alberta residency program. Sterling has so far released four music projects and has toured in Alberta & Ontario.

In 2020, Sterling embarked on an ambitious year-long multimedia exhibition, Riding Horses with White Men (RHWWM). This exhibition debuted in Calgary in summer 2020 and is currently touring across Canada into 2021. The success of RHWWM led to him being one of Calgary's first Black muralists, painting The Guide & Protector in Chinatown.

Jae's more recent work, falling under the self-styled title of BULLY, veers towards examining race, sexuality, violence and art's ability to retell and heal histories while simultaneously violating them. Jae continues to work on releasing a collection of essays from the RHWWM exhibition and launch BIG BULLY apparel among other projects.

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