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a student publication

The **Montgazette**

FREE
The Students' Voice

Issue 85

Serving Montgomery County Community College and the Surrounding Community

March 2021



"Insurrection at the Capitol"
Read on Page 7.

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The Montgazette
The Students' Voice

from the
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The unexpected positives of the COVID pandemic

Josh Young

The Montgazette Editor-in-Chief

Hello, and welcome back to everyone who has returned to their studies at Montgomery County Community College. I hope you all have a positive, successful semester. As always, I am happy to extend a warm welcome to students who are entering their first semester at the College.

I would like to harken back to a letter I wrote one year ago, when the COVID virus had just started its spread across the globe and into the United States. At that time, the College decided to move to a completely remote environment in the middle of an active semester, and I am sure I was not the only one who was experiencing an anxiety attack at that point in time.

Not long afterward, while I was recovering from that initial shock, I wrote a letter where I talked about some of the unexpected positives that could come out of this pandemic. Among the things that I highlighted was the increased amount of time we would get to spend with close friends and family, thereby giving us the chance to reconnect, and also the time we would get to engage in activities and hobbies that we had neglected, due in part

to our busy schedules. Luckily, this particular prediction came true for me, for the most part; however, since that letter, there have been many other positives to come out of this less-than-ideal situation.

In addition to spending more time with close friends and family members, there has also been a resurgence in community spirit. In the months immediately following the shutdown of businesses and other local institutions, online conversations involving community members on Facebook and other social media groups rose 82%, according to Wunderman Thompson. In the months since, community engagement and spirit has stayed relatively stable. As a result, many of us have actually met and talked to people online we likely would not have before the pandemic. Additionally, there have been many feel-good stories of neighbors helping each other out by buying groceries for those who are immunocompromised or are at an increased risk of death from COVID.

We have also been looking after ourselves better by eating healthier and becoming more

physically active. According to a study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health that examined Belgian adults, of people who were classified as "low active" (getting little to no exercise), 58% reported exercising more during the pandemic, in part because of the free time that they now have. Of those people who were active before the pandemic, 77% reported exercising as much or more than they had been. Other studies have found similar results in the U.K. and U.S.

The pandemic has also shown that the ability of employees to work remotely is possible on a much wider scale than most businesses had previously thought. In fact, in the first chaotic months, businesses adapted to the new normal and identified ways to maintain operational efficiency in the face of staggering difficulties. This principle can also be applied to colleges, which had to create online classes and platforms on a massive scale. In the future, we may see more people work or attend school from home (which younger generations, especially, have been pushing for years).

Most importantly, however, students have learned just how resilient they really are. We, as students, have been forced to adapt on the fly in an environment of almost constant uncertainty, resulting in frequent battles with adversity, while also having to provide for ourselves. Despite this, many of us have succeeded and continued our education in pursuit of the goals that we have yet to achieve but are striving toward.

Also, I would be remiss in not mentioning the teachers who have been forced to move to an entirely online format (which may be new for them) and who have come through despite these challenges. This is especially true for faculty members who may not be as tech-savvy as some of the other members. I hope that everyone takes this one-year benchmark as a point of reflection, recognizing that when the going gets tough, you can be successful despite historic obstacles.

With that said, I will once again bid you all adieu and wish you all the best of luck during this semester and beyond in your academic, professional and personal lives.

Trying to make the best of it: School in the era of COVID

Michael Chiodo
MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

The COVID pandemic has affected virtually everyone on the planet in one way or another, and students and teachers are no different. It has now been close to a year since schools were closed nationwide, and although some schools are beginning to gradually open back up with limited capacity, the vast majority of students are still taking online classes.

Kayley Chiodo, a sophomore at Upper Dublin High School, has not been inside a classroom in nearly a year. She muses that when she left school on a Thursday afternoon early last March, she never could have imagined what would come next: “It was honestly a pretty normal day. There were some rumors of maybe school being closed the following day, but we all thought it would be very brief, kind of like a snow day.”

Of course, it was not just like a snow day, not in the least. Chiodo explains that at first it was very tough,

but that she gradually grew more accustomed to the new normal, “The first couple of months, it was pretty boring. The assignments weren’t ‘required,’ there were no classes and there was nothing to do. This year, it’s been easier. I never thought I’d be so happy to have class all day!”

Chiodo also said she is thankful that the pandemic hit early in her high school career rather than later. Millions of high school seniors had their final months of high school ruined, with proms, field trips and graduations canceled.

Connor Jamison graduated from North Penn High School last summer and now attends Penn State University. He says that missing out on the final months of his high-school journey was deeply upsetting, “For years, I looked forward to going out on a stage, receiving my high school diploma, and having a big graduation party. I never got to do that. We

had a drive-by, virtual graduation ceremony, and a small party, but it wasn’t the same.”

Jamison says that this year in college has been easier. “We’re all used to it now,” he says, adding, “and you know, I’m not really stressing about missing out on things now. At the end of last year, every day I would think about whether we would be able to have prom or graduation, along with being stressed about going to college in a few months. My stress level is definitely lower [now].”

Jamison is just one of millions who had their senior year of high school cut short. And sadly, millions more are currently going through the

same experience, with the class of 2021 potentially experiencing a fully virtual senior year.

Hopefully, this will be the last senior class to have virtual graduation ceremonies. It may be too late for Jamison and the millions who shared his experience, but Chiodo and her classmates have the opportunity to have normal senior years.

With a vaccine rollout finally a reality, and thousands of Americans getting vaccinated daily, a light is beginning to appear at the end of the tunnel for students. One thing is for sure: Students may never again take for granted meeting for class in an actual classroom.



Everyone has had a different school experience
in the age of COVID.

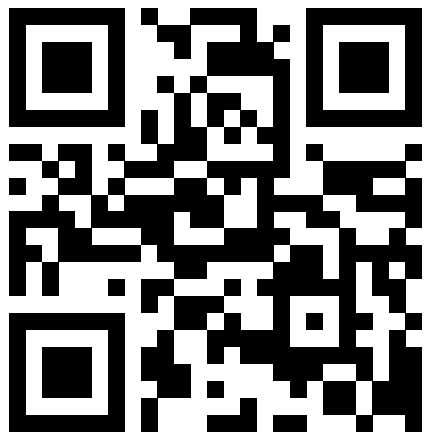
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Opinion: Stephen Breyer may need to face political reality

Nicholas Young
The Montgazette Contributor

America just experienced its most turbulent year since 1968, and maybe its worst ever. The pandemic has ruined and taken lives, with two diametrically opposed parties having fought for political power at the national and state levels. Race issues have come front and center, just as they did in 1968 when George Wallace, a radical conservative and segregationist, shockingly won presidential electoral votes. Whether or not the vaccine finally ends today's virological nightmare is yet to be seen; however, the political nightmare will almost surely continue.

As the Biden Administration takes control of the White House, the Supreme Court has become a focus of the public and the Democratic party. According to The Washington Post and other sources, Justice Stephen Breyer, the eldest liberal justice, has been pressured by many Democrats

to step down, so that Biden can nominate a younger liberal justice in his place, a practice that has become common for new administrations in past years. For example, the Trump Administration compelled former conservative Justice Anthony Kennedy to retire, and he was then succeeded by conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Keeping this seat is incredibly important for the Democratic party, as the Supreme Court already has a 6-3 conservative majority after the Trump Administration managed to confirm three Supreme Court Justices. The Democrats got burned twice during Obama's second term, once because of political maneuvering and the other due to a lack of foresight. Late Justice Antonin Scalia died suddenly in his sleep, but Obama was not able to get now U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland confirmed because of Republicans',

more specifically Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's, evasive maneuvers.

This lack of foresight came into play when Ruth Bader Ginsburg was asked to retire in 2013, but she steadfastly refused to give up her seat, maintaining she was healthy enough to continue. This was before anyone saw the advent of Donald Trump's meteoric rise through the primaries all the way to the Presidency. Ginsburg fought to stay alive until Trump would be forced to leave the White House, but she unfortunately passed away in September 2020, four months before Biden would take office. If she would have known the Trump Presidency was coming, then she almost certainly would have retired. Sadly for her, she could not foresee this now infamous outcome.

Continued on Page 6.

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Stephen Breyer

Continued from Page 5.

If Justice Breyer retires or a vacancy opens up, for whatever reason, Biden will certainly nominate the first-ever Black woman to the Supreme Court. There have been two names specifically discussed for the vacancy: Kentanji Brown Jackson and Leondra Kruger.

Of the two, Jackson appears to be the more progressive. She assisted indigent defendants, people who are too poor to pay a fine or to even hire an attorney, for two years before becoming a litigator at a private firm. She was nominated to become a judge for the United States District Court for the District of Columbia in 2012 by former President Obama. Since then, she has had a hand in many important rulings, particularly ones that have gone against the Trump Administration.

Many of these rulings involve matters surrounding immigration and executive decisions. In August 2018, Jackson invalidated parts of an executive order limiting the time labor unions could spend with their members. She clashed

with the Department of Homeland Security many times over border wall actions and deportations. She stopped Homeland Security from “fast tracking” deportations of illegal immigrants without immigration court hearings and from circumventing certain environmental laws to continue to build parts of the border wall. Jackson’s most significant ruling came in 2019 when the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives sued Don McGahn for not appearing when subpoenaed. She ruled in favor of the committee and wrote in her opinion the phrase “Presidents are not kings,” which gained loads of media attention.

Kruger is more moderate and has been known to be a swing voter during her short tenure on the California Supreme Court. Her history as a judge is brief and she does not have as many cases with federal significance under her belt as Jackson does. She clerked for former Justice John Paul Stevens and was an assistant to the United States Solicitor

General, arguing 12 cases before the Supreme Court, even countering her old boss during oral arguments. Kruger also has a more diverse background than does Jackson, as the daughter of a Jamaican mother and a Jewish father. Replacing Breyer with Kruger would also [add space]continue the tradition of the “Jewish” seat, a longstanding norm since 1916, where at least one person of Jewish descent has been a Justice on the court.

Breyer’s retirement during Biden’s term feels inevitable, especially at the age of 82. The next in line to become the eldest judge would be the staunchly conservative Clarence Thomas, 10 years younger than Breyer. Neither of them has health concerns, so Thomas’ retirement could be another 8-10 years away, and who knows which party will occupy the White House at that point. To keep the bench from falling too far to the right, though, the Democrats need Breyer to show foresight and retire while they hold the Presidency — and, just as importantly, Congress.

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Opinion: Dear America, the sixth of January was a domestic terrorist attack

Amanda Hadad
MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

“And we are going to the Capitol, and we are going to try . . . and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country,” former President Trump bellowed toward a crowd of supporters at the “Stop the Steal” rally on January 6, 2021. Soon afterward, according to ABC News, thousands of rally attendees marched toward the Capitol Building, where congressional members were assembled to certify Joe Biden’s victory in the presidential election.

What happened next was an act of domestic terror: “an insurrection, incited by the President of the United States,” declared Utah Senator Mitt Romney. Armed with weapons, angry Trump supporters violently breached Capitol security in hopes of overturning the election by intimidation and violence. The FBI identifies any person or group that commits criminal actions on United States soil to promote an ideology deriving from domestic influences as a domestic terrorist. These influences include right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism, as well as religious and environmental groups.

Time and time again, these groups radicalize individuals to carry out violent acts like the

Oklahoma City Bombing, The Charleston Church Shooting, and the Congressional Baseball Shooting. In this case, however, it was former President Trump, his allies and right-wing extremist groups who persuaded supporters to believe the Democratic Party stole the election.

The lies started in November.

Shortly after the Associated Press declared Joe Biden the winner of the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump took to Twitter and claimed to his 88 million followers that he had won: “We won this election, and we won it by a landslide.” He insinuated that Democrats stuffed the ballot boxes with illegal votes and kept Republican observers from watching the ballot count. (Of course, none of those charges held up in court.)

The Washington Post reports that supporters immediately received emails and texts from the Trump campaign, repeating Trump’s false narrative of a stolen election. They hoped to raise money for his newly established PAC and motivate his voters to protest results in their respective states. But Donald Trump’s motive was even more ominous: He sought to overturn the election results by rallying his supporters against the democratic process itself, long

established in the Constitution.

Thirteen Republican senators followed suit and refused to acknowledge the results of the election. Ted Cruz, the junior senator from Texas, promised to contest the votes of the swing states Donald Trump had lost. He often repeated Trump’s claim of election fraud. Cruz focused his legal efforts in Pennsylvania, a critical swing state that Trump won in 2016. He publicly indicated that higher voter turnout numbers were suspicious and warranted a court battle. According

to The Texas Tribune, Cruz implied that Philadelphia voting officials kept observers out, and, therefore, voters had reason to question the number of ballots counted in the critical battleground state. In addition to Cruz, Missouri Senator Josh Hawley questioned the validity of mail-in ballots, noticeably in Pennsylvania, and threw his support behind the election fraud campaign. Again, none of these arguments stood up in court.

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Discarded Trump campaign signs in North Wildwood, New Jersey.

Photo by Kylah McNamee.

Dear America

Continued from Page 7.

Although these tactics seem innocent, they did, in fact, have a significant effect on voters. A recent Marist survey finds that only a quarter of Republican voters trust the results of the election, while 95% of Democrats and 67% of Independents accept the results as fair and accurate.

Meanwhile, while Trump and his allies continued to mislead supporters about the election's integrity, right-wing extremist groups pledged support to keep Trump in power no matter what. NPR reported that organizations such as The Three Percenters, The Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Texas Freedom Force, and other self-described Nazis and white supremacists vowed to keep Trump in office.

These groups embraced a wide array of theories, including that corrupt politicians are selling the country to communist government actors who plan to strip

citizens of their rights. In fact, Jon Ryan Schaffer, a member of The Oath Keepers, told NPR reporters, "We're not going to merge into some globalist, communist system; it will not happen. There will be a lot of bloodshed if it comes down to that, trust me." And while none of the theories hold, on January 6, 2021, there was plenty of bloodshed.

Five died, and more than 200 people were injured on Capitol Hill that day because some of former President Trump's supporters believed their actions would thwart the peaceful transition of power. "I'm hoping the message was strong enough," recalled Trump supporter Adam Newbold. "But unfortunately, maybe it wasn't. I hate to see this escalate more."

Those who stormed the Capitol that day used violence to further their agenda, as any terrorist would—plain and simple.

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Opinion: Is the College Theatre going to last?

Alaysha Gladden
MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

The Montgomery County Community College Theatre Arts Program has been an incredible experience for me and a lot of other students. It has helped me with my mental health, and I consider myself lucky to have a place to create such great bonds with faculty and students. But will those bonds continue to be strong with the pandemic seemingly pulling us apart?

As crazy as everything is in the world right now, it is troubling to feel that as time goes on, we will not be as close to each other as we once were, even in the “new normal.” Being a part of the theatre community is as though I am with my second family; I feel nothing but unconditional love when I am around the other students and the teachers.

Ava Hollow, a Theatre Arts student at Montgomery County Community College, has been in every theatre production the College has put on since 2018 and a leader in the Drama Club. She states that “the friendships and relationships that we have built will last a lifetime, whether or not we ever get to perform live theatre again.”

Adjusting from studying and being a part of live theatre to the world of theatre through Internet and Zoom has been challenging. The faculty has been trying to make the situation feel as normal as possible by making sure to talk to students about how their own mental state has been affected.

In fact, according to Hollow, “Some of the new theatre students say that they appreciate that even with COVID stopping a lot of things, they are so grateful that the teachers and students have not given up on theater and still want to keep the community going.”

Although the theater community at the college is still in good standing and getting newcomers every semester, the big issue in a lot of students’ minds is losing their own passion and drive for performance. For me, the Montgomery County Community College Theatre Arts Program was not just a place where I took classes to get credit; it became my family.

Although students are still able to participate virtually in putting on a play and performing it, it is also very sad that they don’t get all the full hands-on training because they are not able to be near one

another right now.

Once upon a time, not only could students audition and be a part of a play, but they were also able to build an entire set and design the stage however they envisioned it. To see something in your mind put to paper, and then to create it in the real world, is an exhilarating thing to accomplish; not many at a young age can say that they have been a set designer, lighting designer or costume designer before getting their associate’s degree.

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Production of “Mr. Burns: A Post Electric Play.”

Photo by Alaysha Gladden.

Opinion: Astrology, not just your daily horoscope

Audrey Schippnick
MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

Look up. The picture the stars and planets paint are much greater than what the human eye can capture. The study of their influence on us has intrigued many over time — but nothing like the interest Generation Z has shown with the current boom in new-age astrologers.

Think of an area of your life: family, where you live, your career. You name it and there is a part of our galaxy that will have an influence on your story. The study of astrology systems and the planets' transits has gone as far as pointing to when major social, political, or economic movements of their own will occur. Most of us do not like thinking that we as individuals, or as a society, are so predictable. Astrology is no longer just the small column at the bottom of a magazine; this is a growing and trendy way of life.

Astrology is made up of twelve zodiac signs and twelve corresponding houses. Each zodiac represents an archetype, and each house corresponds with an area of your life. For example, the first house correlates to the physical body, the appearance, and it is known as the house of self. By entering one's birth date, location of birth and birth time, a natal chart can be composed. This applies to businesses and countries as well, if all of the above information is known.

Gen Z has used social media, specifically TikTok, to resurrect an interest in the age-old study of astrology. An astrology enthusiast, Maren Altman has repainted the image that many see in the stars, mixing new technology with centuries-old techniques.

Astrology is not a belief. The system does not care if you utilize it or not. It is there to be recognized or ignored. Altman uses the power of predictability by referencing historical events along with their planetary positions when comparing them to upcoming events. Combining this with such a popular

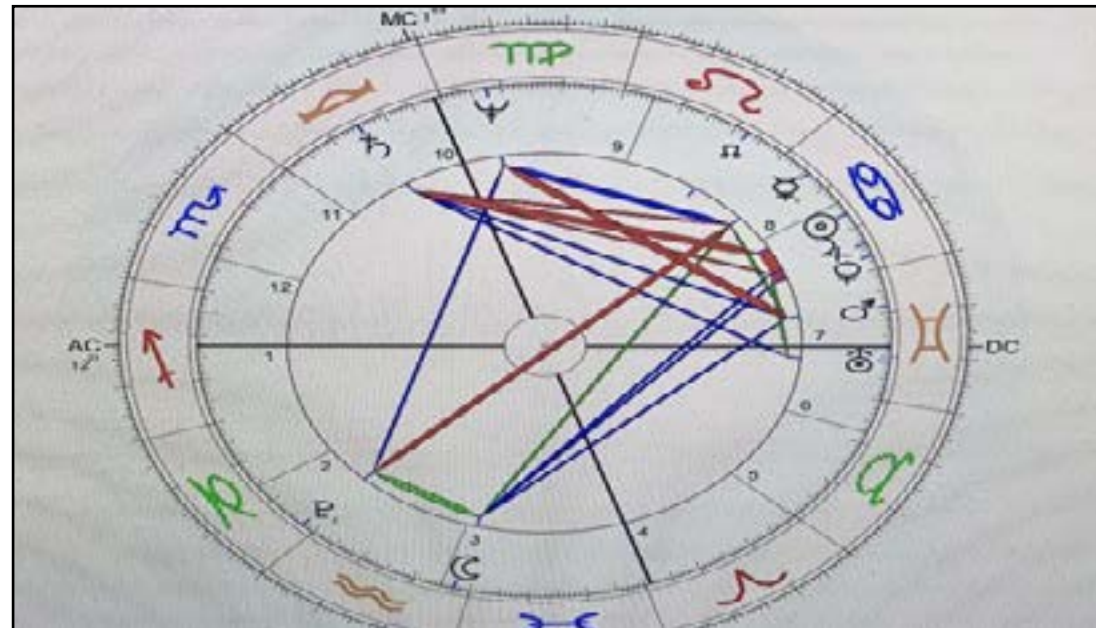
social media platform makes her methods easily accessible to enthusiasts and to those who are newly curious.

Stars that have been around since before the beginning of humanity as we know it are here to assist us even in the modern world. Altman specifically uses astrological history as a guide to predicting crucial times for buying stocks and even cryptocurrency. Astrology can also be utilized for political events. The famous line "Millionaires don't need astrologers, billionaires do," stated by J.P. Morgan, comes to mind. If elitists are aware of the system, then the general public should be as well.

Months ahead of the 2020 election, Altman made a video with predictions for the election's result. In it, she broke down a play by play of what, then, eventually did happen. Altman predicted President Biden's win, Donald Trump's rejection of the results

and the questioning of the legitimacy of the election. She has commented on the fall of the value of cryptocurrency before it occurs in order to encourage the public to stop investing. The use of these systems is not new. They are simply becoming more apparent to the public as readings become accessible to a newer and wider audience.

Whether you choose to use astrology for a giggle, or if you use calculations to your advantage — it will always be there. The strategic use of astrological systems shows correlation, not causation. We will always exist under the influence of forces much greater than ourselves. This is not a religion. It is an option. With millions across the globe stuck in quarantine, social media platforms have boomed like never before. We might as well use our mandated free time to broaden our horizons.



The U.S. birth chart, free and easily accessible to the public.

Photo by Audrey Schippnick.

OPINION



The Montgazette
The Students' Voice

Opinion: Making music through a pandemic

Emma Daubert
MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

Making music is an important part of many lives, as it challenges the mind and allows people to express themselves. Because of the recent global pandemic, however, those challenges have been taken to the next level. Schools these days have been forced to find a way to transfer teaching and extracurricular activities online, and that includes music.

Shania Daubert, an elementary school student learning the trumpet through virtual music classes, says that she feels it “would be better to work in person and would have been easier to learn and play with the other students.”

From my own experience in a band program, pre-pandemic, I can say that some of my favorite times to play were during big band practices. Being around everyone and able to learn and play together changed the experience completely. In fact, the feeling of having another student, one who comes from an entirely different musical background, play next to you helps you grow as a musician. You learn to blend and mix your sound into the sound of the band as a whole, and it is exhilarating. Thinking

of not having that exposure to other musicians could have changed my passion for music altogether.

Katie Snyder, a student majoring in Music Education at University of Delaware, who has been in music programs throughout her years in school, says, “The pandemic has certainly changed my perspective on music, but not my passion. I am just as dedicated to music as I was when I started, but the lens through which I see it has changed.”

A big task since the pandemic started has been trying to feel just as connected as we were before, without being near one another. Most schools have resorted to dropping the big band aspect and focusing on helping students learn more about themselves and their instruments individually with private lessons. This allows students to strengthen their basics and become better musicians in their own way.

Snyder, however, feels her musical experience has definitely been lessened by the pandemic overall, although her professors are doing everything in their power to ensure that the students still have music in

their lives. When asked about student-teacher connections during this time, Snyder stated, “No, I do not feel as connected, due to the lack of face-to-face instruction, and when we are face to face, it is in very small groups that do not get to interact and truly be immersed in the music.”

Moving toward reopening and

safer times post pandemic, it looks as though many music programs will change forever, as teachers have developed ways to learn and grow online. We can only hope that these newly reformed programs will continue to give students a community feel and immersive education within this modified experience.



Band instruments flute, piccolo and trumpet.

Photo by Emma Daubert.

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About The Montgazette

The Montgazette is published twice a semester from October to May by the students and advisory staff of Montgomery County Community College.



Avast ye!

The Buccaneers have captured the booty!

Sufyan Davis-Arrington
 The Montgazette Contributor

Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are the 2020 Super Bowl champions, defeating the defending champion, the Kansas City Chiefs, and their high-powered offense by a final score of 31 to 9. The Buccaneers prevented the Chiefs from scoring even one touchdown.

Quarterback Patrick Mahomes of the Kansas City Chiefs struggled tremendously to find open receivers and the end zone. According to CBS Sports, Mahomes completed 26 of 49 passes, throwing for only 270 yards and 2 interceptions. In comparison, Tom Brady, quarterback of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, completed 21 of 29 attempts for 201 yards and 3 touchdowns. The game was a one-sided affair. In an attempt to buy time, Mahomes scrambled for a total of 497 yards before releasing the ball as Tampa Bay's defensive line feasted on the Chief's depleted offensive line, who were without three prominent members. Inside linebacker Devin White put the icing on the cake for the Bucs by intercepting the ball in Tampa Bay territory with a minute and 33 seconds remaining in the game.

Tom Brady officially won his seventh Superbowl, personally possessing more championships than any other organization in the NFL. As many may know, Tom Brady won six of his championships with the New England Patriots during 20 seasons alongside coaching legend Bill Belichick. In the 2020 offseason, Tom Brady had an acrimonious departure from the Patriots, largely fueled by a frayed relationship with Belichick, and eventually decided to continue his illustrious career in Tampa Bay.

Along with Brady came tight-end Rob Gronkowski, who decided to come out of retirement and collaborate with his former Patriot teammate once again. Together, Brady and Gronkowski have been one of the most prolific QB-to-receiver duos in NFL history. In the playoffs alone, Brady and Gronkowski have combined to record 13 touchdowns, one more than the San Francisco 49ers Hall-of-Fame combination of Joe Montana and Jerry Rice, who had 12 postseason touchdowns.

According to CBS sports, Tom Brady has been named Superbowl MVP three times in his career. Now at age 43, he says in an ESPN report that he is not quite finished yet, stating that he "will definitely consider playing past age 45." Does Tom Brady have more championships in him? I guess football fans will have to wait and see.

Speaking of "old," Bruce Arians, head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, became the oldest head coach to win the Super Bowl. More importantly, though, Arians is the first coach in the history of the NFL to assign all major coordinator roles to African Americans, according to the Tampa Bay Times. Offensive coordinator Byron Leftwich, Defensive Coordinator Todd Bowles, Special Teams Coordinator Keith Armstrong and run game coordinator Harold Goodwin are all recognized for their strong work in making the Bucs a championship team this season.

According to an article by William Ricks of Sportscasting.com, Bruce Arians is a strong supporter of racial equality and social justice, with the belief that Black

coaches in the NFL are undervalued. Arians certainly appears to be correct, as less than 15% of the coaches in the NFL are Black — in a league where they make up roughly 65% of the athlete population. Due in part to Arians' and others' efforts to shine a light on the lack of Black coaches in the league, this may open the door to more opportunities for African American coaches.

In addition to the coordinators, Arians hired two full-time female assistants, Lori Locust and Maral Javadifar, to be a part of his organization. Locust is an assistant coach for the defensive line and is in her second year with the team. Also in her second year, Javadifar is an assistant strength-and-conditioning coach on the staff. The advent of female coaches is another new wrinkle that is slowly taking shape in the NFL, a league where it once would have been unthinkable to have a female coach. Here, once again, Arians appears to be leading the charge.

Not to be outdone, however, is a man who Philadelphia sports fans know very well — Andy Reid, who is now with the Chiefs. Reid, long known for being one of the most forward-thinking coaches, boasts seven minority coaches on his staff, including offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy. Bieniemy was one of the most talked about head coaching prospects in the most recent hiring cycle in the NFL, largely for his role in developing Patrick Mahomes. Yet, Bieniemy walked away with nothing and is currently negotiating an extension with the Chiefs.

Continued on Page 18.

Opinion: Russian rhythmic gymnasts are the strongest athletes in the world

Krystyna Ursta
MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

Margarita Mamun wakes up, grabs her morning latte, and gets ready for her day. She takes the earliest morning bus for the long ride to Novogorsk, Russia, to start her grueling daily training. This young lady is getting ready for the 2021 Summer Olympics, which will take place in Tokyo. She is a rhythmic gymnast.

Rhythmic gymnastics is a very beautiful sport. Performances feature flexible elements with featured apparatus and props such as rope, hoop, ball, clubs, and ribbon. Many think it should be taken off the Olympic discipline; however, I believe we need to follow this sport more closely because these athletes are some of the best in the world.

Among these talented athletes and their teams, the Russian Federation Rhythmic Team is the strongest. Their athletes have consistently brought back home Olympic gold medals since the 2000 Games in Sydney. In fact, as of 2021, RFRT won five Olympic medals in a row. The Russian team developed many different moves that only athletes from their country can perform because of the moves' complexity. They have a highly secret training process and the best coaches in the sport. However, back in 2002, Alina Kabaeva and Irina Tchachina were accused of doping and were banned from performing in any rhythmic gymnastics' competitions

for 7 months. The Russian team believes this was a planned rumor spread in order to help other teams worldwide catch up with Russian rhythmic mastery.

Rhythmic gymnastics is a sport that meets art and makes a perfect "yin and yang" balance that deserves to stay in the Olympic Games schedule. The Olympic committee has been considering removing rhythmic gymnastics from the Olympic Games schedule, unless Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique allows male participants to compete both in individual and group acts. Many rhythmic coaches around the world support this idea. Male competitors will have their first chance to perform professionally and compete at the 2021 Russian Games.

Irina Viner, a head for coach of the RFRT, is a living legend who will forever be remembered for her accomplishments in this beautiful and delicate sport. Her path to coaching in rhythmic gymnastics was very unexpected. Viner wanted to learn a "bridge" move and now she is the most famous coach in the rhythmic gymnastics world. Her methods are very harsh and many think that she puts too much pressure on the young athletes; however, you can't deny the success her methods bring the Russian team.

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Olympic Silver Medalist Yana Kudryavtseva.

Photo by Pixabay.com.

Opinion: Eagles in disarray

Daniel Johnson

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Philadelphians and NFL fans alike were surprised to hear that the Philadelphia Eagles were letting go of Head Coach Doug Pederson after five seasons with the team and a Super Bowl win in 2017. Reports over the last couple of weeks state the firing came in the wake of the Eagles quarterback controversy between starter Carson Wentz and backup Jalen Hurts. Despite Wentz's struggles this season, the front office, including General Manager Howie Roseman and Owner Jeffrey Lurie, made it clear to team and league officials that they still believed that Wentz could regain his MVP form.

On the other hand, Pederson was not so keen on the idea of committing to Wentz as quarterback, which created tension between Pederson and team officials throughout the 2020 season. Ultimately, after a 4-11-1 season from the Eagles, and the mounting disagreements between Pederson and the front office about the future direction of the team, the Eagles fired Pederson and may have made one of the biggest mistakes in franchise history.

While Wentz's talent is obvious, there clearly has been dysfunction between Wentz and many factions of the organization. Despite efforts by Wentz two years ago to mend relationships within the locker room, he is now faced with even more disunity than before.

Recently, former Eagles safety Malcolm Jenkins had some choice

words about how the Eagles have handled their offseason to this point, stating, "I don't think they did him [Wentz] any favors by trying to ... protect his ego or trying to really protect him as a player as opposed to — just like every other player — keeping it performance based and really being real about what he needed to improve on." Jenkins' words reflect those of many others in the past about the Eagles showing too much favoritism toward Wentz.

Wentz has struggled at times in his career and especially this year, leading the league in turnovers with 15 interceptions and four fumbles in the 2020 season.

With multiple reports surfacing about a potential Wentz trade heating up, the quarterback's leadership value has taken a big hit inside the locker room. A well-sourced piece written by Joseph Santoliquito of the PhillyVoice details the current relationship between Wentz and his fellow players, reporting that players were "pissed" upon hearing that Wentz planned to ask for a trade, feeling that Wentz quit on the team and his teammates.

A source within the Eagles organization told Santoliquito, "Is there anyone in here who's going to believe in [Wentz]? I can't speak for everyone, but I have a good feeling that there are a lot of guys who don't right now." Wentz has been silent, failing to deny any of the accusations in recent months and, notably, failing to publicly welcome Eagles' new

Head Coach Nick Sirianni.

The Eagles have a respectable backup quarterback in Jalen Hurts, behind whom the team seemed to rally late in the season. Common thought by many fans was that Hurts' play at the end of the season would likely earn himself at least a shot at the starter position next year. However, the team chose to move on from their standout coach, most likely to appease and salvage a relationship with Wentz and keep him as the face of the franchise. Now, current trends and reports point to the Eagles moving on from Wentz.

Likewise, the player that likely forced the Eagles to make those moves (Wentz), wants out of town just two years after receiving a massive contract. And, once again, he got his wish on February 18, as Wentz was traded to the Indianapolis Colts for a 2021 third round pick and

a conditional 2022 second round pick, a ridiculously low value for a player of his stature. This officially leaves the team in a complete rebuild mode with a new head coach in former Colts offensive coordinator Nick Sirianni who did not impress many at his introductory press conference.

After winning Super Bowl LII just four years ago, the Eagles have now lost the quarterback who won the game and was named its MVP in Nick Foles. They lost their coach in Doug Pederson, who led the franchise to its first championship in 57 years (1960) and its first Super Bowl in just his second year with the team, largely due to Wentz. And now, they are without all three of them with an aging, oft-injured, and overpaid roster. The Eagles front office has gotten themselves into this mess and now they must get themselves out of it.



Doug Pederson (left) and Carson Wentz (right).

Photo by Bing.com Creative Commons Images.

Film Review:

“Wolfwalkers”:

A sheep among wolves

Nina Lima

The Montgazette Contributor

Cartoon Saloon’s smashing finale to their Irish folklore trilogy, “Wolfwalkers,” recently earned a nomination for best animated film at the Golden Globe Awards, the most important precursor to the Oscars. Their competition was steep, with studio giants like Disney, Dreamworks and Sony already having several early season awards under their belts.

Ireland’s Cartoon Saloon began their animation journey in 2005 when their first film, “The Secret of the Kells” entered production. With a team of only 300 animators, “The Secret of the Kells” earned recognition at home and abroad by snagging a nomination for best animated film from the Oscars while also winning several equivalent awards from Ireland, Scotland and even South Korea’s biggest award shows.

After their first film’s success, they went on to produce “Song of the Sea” in 2014 and “The Breadwinner” in 2017, earning several more nominations and awards, but still they lived in the bigger studios’ shadows. Despite Cartoon Saloon’s youth, they may have a shot of stealing past their competition with their most recent film, the vivid and charming 2D animated film, “Wolfwalkers.”

“Wolfwalkers” tells the story of a young aspiring hunter, Robyn, and her father, who is hired to kill the last pack of wolves in 17th century Ireland. Against her father’s wishes, Robyn sneaks into the forests and stumbles

upon a free-spirited girl, Mebh, who claims to be a Wolfwalker: a human by day but a wolf when she sleeps.

While trying to help Mebh find her missing mother, Robyn uncovers the truth about the forest and herself. The film spins a tale full of whimsy and imagination with the backdrop of the Irish town of Kilkenny, briefly after the English sieged and took control of it in 1650, promising an engaging experience for young and old movie watchers alike.

“Wolfwalkers” is a visually exquisite film; each frame is seemingly plucked from the pages of a children’s book. From the crowded and angular streets of Kilkenny to the fluid and rich vegetation of the forest, every moment is bustling with unforgettable imagery.

What’s more, the score perfectly captures the mystery of the Irish folklore, paying homage to traditional songs. Through the use of clever cinematography and striking color contrasts, Cartoon Saloon proves that

2D animation is not only alive and well but that it can still pack a punch. Sean Bean brings life and depth as Robyn’s father, making the audience want to cheer for him one moment and nearly hate him the next. Themes of friendship and found family make “Wolfwalkers” a film that touches your heart and sticks with you long after the credits roll.

While Disney’s “Soul” comes from the well-established Pixar universe and Dreamwork’s “The Croods: A New Age” is a continuation of an already beloved story, “Wolfwalkers” appeals to an audience’s inner child and wraps the viewer in a mystical, dreamlike world unlike any other release this year.

The film’s masterfully woven story and incredibly detailed artwork give “Wolfwalkers” endless re-watchability, a rare quality in an animated film. The competition may be strong, but this love letter to Irish folklore may just be enchanting enough to beat them out and win the Golden Globe and Oscar for best animated film.

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Theatre

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Using Zoom also adds the problem of performing plays online, such as when someone's connection drops. It was troubling in rehearsal when a screen would just go black or log actors out of their Zoom room. During tech rehearsal, actors faced many complications, including access to Internet and Wi-Fi support.

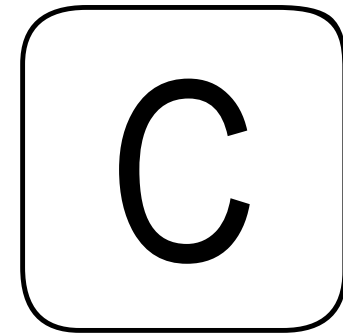
Hollow says, "I thoroughly enjoyed still being able to continue doing theatre, but I did find it to be more hectic, virtually, than in person. It also made me upset that we couldn't really get the experience of going out to eat or bowling, as we normally would, to bond with one another."

The Theatre Arts Program is gaining a bunch of new faces, but the veteran students are feeling a little discouraged because they know what it was like previously and how different it is now.

Megan Kinn, a new Theatre Arts

student at the College, says that "even though I am honored to be a part of the plays and productions and get to see my friends through a screen, it hurts, as well, not to be with them in person. It's hard to get out of our own heads when we are surrounded by the same people and looking at the same four walls in our rooms and do not feel as excited as we normally would be."

We are all wondering when the world will be free of COVID. However, I believe that even with all the difficulties and challenges that come with doing theatre virtually, the Theatre Arts Program will emerge as strong as ever. The bonds and connections between students are too pure for anything to get in the way. The Montgomery Community College Theatre Program is a safe space for teachers and students and will remain so well into the future.



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Film review: “Sound of Metal”

Nicholas Young
The Montgazette Contributor

The deprivation of the ability to go to movie theaters has been easily one of the most irritating things for me throughout the pandemic. My love for the experience knows no bounds, and, without it, I feel incomplete. However, the advent of streaming services has been able to satiate my desire a little. That said, “Sound of Metal,” featuring Riz Ahmed, Olivia Cooke and Paul Raci, makes me even more frustrated that I could not experience it in a theater.

A great portion of the film is predicated on sound design and, even more importantly, silence. Darius Marder, director and principal screenwriter, expertly lets the audience hear what Ruben Stone, the main character, hears

during his freefall into total deafness. Conversations are either muddled or incoherent, until he is assisted by a machine or another person.

The silence is purposefully unnerving and deftly placed in the film. This aspect is clearly meant to be heard in a theater, where the darkness and protruding silence would truly penetrate the audience. Frustratingly, we have been denied this luxury. That is not to say that the movie cannot be enjoyed in one’s own home; it just means that viewers must leave aside the time and absolute focus to appreciate this excellent movie.

The individual performances by Riz Ahmed (also in “Nightcrawler”) and Paul Raci are truly masterful. Since the lack of dialogue and

interspersed moments of silence are tantamount to the film, facial expressions and eye movement are vital to a believable performance. Riz Ahmed achieves this in spades and creates a portrayal of a heavy-metal drummer, for which he practiced two hours a day, losing his most important sense so effectively that it could easily win him an Oscar for Best Actor. Every moment of triumph and despair is evocative and brings the audience closer to the character’s reality.

The most important aspect of this film is almost certainly the inspiring moments where Stone becomes part of the deaf community and tries to cope with his loss of hearing, with the community’s guidance. He learns sign language,

makes friends, plays games, and so on, all with the nagging problem of maintaining his sobriety. The film holds nothing back in terms of what it is like to live as a deaf person. The crew of actors also features many deaf individuals, such as Lauren Ridloff, a cast member of the upcoming Marvel film “Eternals.”

The only possible flaw I could level toward this film would be that it is a slow burn in the beginning until the sections involving the learning center and onward. Otherwise, this film has “Best Picture” written all over it. If you have the time and focus to sit down and watch this exquisite movie, do yourself a favor and watch it in the dark with good speakers to truly enjoy the experience.

Gymnastics

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The trainer’s last name sounds like the English word “winner,” and, with reference to her, many use the popular quote “Viner takes it all.” Indeed, Viner’s pupils do take it all. Viner trained stars like Yana Batyrshina, Yulia Barsukova, Laisan Utyasheva, Alina Kabaeva, Irina Tchachina, Yevgeniya Kanaeva, Yana Kudryavtseva, Margarita Mamun, Dina and Arina Averina, and many more. However, Viner’s most famous graduate is Alina Kabaeva.

Kabaeva is known for her ahead-of-her-time rhythmic techniques, which require incredible flexibility, artistry and charisma during her performances. The gymnast and her trainer revolutionized rhythmic gymnastics and brought countless new elements and works with rhythmic apparatus. Kabaeva’s mastery was incredibly

ahead of her time.

In mid-2000, FIG decided to lower the standards for risqué moves and elements in the gymnastics performances, due to other countries’ teams not being able to compete with the high skills and new elements Kabaeva introduced in her performances. Other athletes were simply not flexible enough to repeat those elements, so FIG decided not to grade them for Kabaeva, which made it harder for her to get the high scores she deserved.

Another one of Viner’s pupils, Yevgenia Kanaeva, is known to be the best rhythmic gymnast of all time. Through her career, Kanaeva won more than 63 gold medals, three silver, and zero bronze. She became an Olympic Champion twice, winning a gold medal in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and, again, in the 2012 London Olympics.

The trainer and her graduates have fought hard for rhythmic gymnastics to be taken seriously in the Olympic Games. Mamun successfully proved to the world that rhythmic is an incredibly hard sport with the mastery of her craft on display in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. She won an Olympic gold medal, which helped bring more attention to this sport. News all over the world reported that the RFRG team had, once again, won an Olympic gold medal, now 16 years in a row!

The Russian team proved once again to be the strongest and the most unique team of the Olympic athletes, perhaps ever to compete. Audiences all over the world are impatiently waiting to see what the graduates of Irina Viner have prepared for the 2021 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan.

Film Review: Take another drink: “Druk”

Josh Young
The Montgazette Editor-in-Chief

Despite COVID shutting down theaters and disrupting virtually every aspect of everyday life, there is still one thing that cinephiles can count on: studios around the globe figuring out a way to release movies, no matter what. And the Danish film “Druk,” which translates roughly into English as “binge-drinking,” certainly fits that bill.

“Druk,” which debuted at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2020, follows the story of four friends, Tommy, Martin, Peter and Nikolaj, who all teach at the same high school in Copenhagen. Each of the four friends are miserable and feel that they are in a rut. However, the protagonist, Martin, played by the great Mads Mikkelsen is perhaps the worst off. His marriage is crumbling, his kids do not seem to care about him, parents of his students are concerned about his boring teaching style, and it is clear he is trapped in a deep malaise of depression and sadness from which he feels he cannot escape.

Then, at a dinner party to celebrate Peter’s birthday, Martin’s mask finally slips as he tearfully says he does not

know how he got like this. The four then come together to embark on a pseudoscientific experiment to test out the (real) hypothesis of Norwegian psychologist Finn Skarderud, who speculates that humans are born with a blood alcohol content (BAC) that is 0.05 percent too low, and that by drinking to this threshold people are more relaxed and creative. As one might imagine, things start off well but do not stay that way.

While this film certainly has an intriguing plot, it could very easily unravel into a hot mess, partly because it would be much easier for each of the characters to come off as caricatures or merely people with whom the audience does not have a connection. Fortunately, this does not happen, in large part because of two things: the direction of Thomas Vinterberg and the performance of its lead star, Mikkelsen.

Vinterberg, who previously worked with Mikkelsen on the Oscar-winning film “The Hunt” (check it out!), does a tremendous job of taking the viewer into the lives of each of the

four characters — and shows alcohol’s effects on each of them — while at the same time making sure that the plot, and our focus, stays centered primarily on Martin. Vinterberg does this by splicing together scenes from the other three characters that give us a glimpse into their lives and their pasts — but pausing to really show us who Martin was and is. In doing so, we also see how alcohol comes to take on an increasing role in each of their lives.

But it is Mads Mikkelsen who gives “Druk” its heart and emotional pull. Mikkelsen has a knack for playing dark, wounded characters whose real selves are revealed over time, such as his breakout character Le Chiffre in “Casino Royale” and, perhaps, his most famous role, Dr. Hannibal Lecter in “Hannibal” — and he uses this ability to full effect here.

The early scenes, where Mikkelsen sits alone in a dark room in a deeply depressed state as his wife ignores him, and where he is grilled by irate parents, are extremely uncomfortable, as Martin looks to be on the verge of

an emotional breakdown. Later, when he starts drinking and takes a renewed interest in his job, the scenes are initially empowering and uplifting. But, as this plan starts to unravel, Martin’s life becomes that much more depressing.

The plot points eventually build up into the finale, which may be the best and most exhilarating ending to a film as any in the last five years. All I will say about it is that Mikkelsen is a former professional ballet dancer, and he puts these dancing skills to good use.

“Druk” may be the best movie of the year, despite the unlikeliness of its even being nominated for an Oscar, as the Academy has a notorious penchant for ignoring foreign films (“Parasite” exempted). That said, voters for the European Film Awards seem to appreciate the power of this film. “Druk” took home the awards for several “Bests”: Screenplay, Actor for Mikkelsen, Director, and Picture. I certainly hope it at least takes the award for Best Foreign Film at this year’s Oscars.

Buccaneers Superbowl

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The passing over of Bieniemy seems even more curious when one looks at who was picked instead, most notably the Texans’ hiring of David Culley and the Lions’ hiring of Dan Campbell, both white men with less dazzling credentials. While we might be able to chalk that up to the Texans and Lions being two long-suffering franchises that appear to be allergic to winning, the same could not be said

for organizations such as the Los Angeles Chargers.

Although the Chargers have never won a Super Bowl, they do have a history of being competitive and bouncing back quickly from rough spells in their history. Instead of Bieniemy, the Chargers hired Brandon Staley who, was defensive coordinator for the Los Angeles Rams. Considering the spectacular rookie season that quarterback Justin Herbert put

together on his way to winning Offensive Rookie of the Year, the hiring of Bieniemy seemed like a match made in heaven. Perhaps this demonstrates that while the NFL has made some strides regarding diversity, there are still some steps left to be taken. After all, recent evidence in football and beyond shows the massive benefits of having a coaching staff of diverse races and backgrounds.

Film Review:

“To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before” and its sequels

Lauren Meter
The Montgazette Contributor

Have you seen “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before”? If you saw the first movie, you are likely hooked and also saw its sequel, “To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You.” Did you know that a third film was released on February 12, 2021? The final installment is called “To All the Boys: Always and Forever,” and it can be viewed on Netflix, which produced all three movies with the help of series writer Jenny Han. For those who have never heard of this series, it is about a romance between a boy, Peter Kavinsky (Noah Centineo), and a girl, Lara Jean (Lana Condor) and the various struggles and triumphs of their relationship.

Lara Jean lives with her father and two sisters, Kitty and Margot. She lost her mother as a child, but her family remains strong. Peter has lived with his mom since his parents’ divorce. The two characters have their shortcomings, but together they are the picture-perfect couple.

Their romance begins in “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before,” which was directed by Susan Johnson and released in 2018. In the beginning, Lara Jean writes to all her loves and hides the letters in her closet. Her younger sister finds the love

letters and sends them out in the mail, to let her crushes know how Lara Jean feels about them. Eventually, she is confronted by one of the letter’s recipients, Peter Kavinsky, her crush.

While Peter discovers Lara’s passion for him, other boys in her school discover that she also has crushes on them, which leads to lots of drama. Throughout the film, the characters toy with the viewer’s emotions, but Laura and Peter manage to survive and walk away as a couple. This first movie is by far one of my favorites compared to the sequels. I recommend that if you see any of these movies, you at least watch this one because then you will have to watch them all.

The romance continues with “To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You,” which was directed by Michael Fimognari and released in 2020. The film begins with Lara Jean constantly comparing her relationship with Peter to that of him with his ex-girlfriend, Genevieve. At the same time, while Lara Jean is working at Belleview Retirement Home as part of her high school’s volunteer program, she reconciles with a boy who received one of her letters, John Ambrose. He catches feelings for Lara, and she fails to tell him about

her commitment to Peter. As a result, Peter and Lara Jean’s relationship suffers some turmoil, but the two kiss and make up at the very end of the movie. I did not find this plot as interesting or intriguing, but the second film (or book) in a series usually is not as great as the first. I still recommend watching this movie, so you can at least keep up with the storyline.

In February 2021, the third film, “To All the Boys: Always and Forever,” was released and directed by Michael Fimognari. The story centers on Lara Jean returning from Korea after a family trip for her senior year, as she is figuring out her college plans. During the film, she is deciding if she wants to

continue her relationship with Peter, with all of her coming life changes. I found the movie heartwarming, but it occasionally took an emotional toll. I recommend binge watching this sequel if you love high-school romance-drama movies.

I found all three of these movies to be suspenseful and touching. The plots of these films are intriguing, but the development of the characters as they grow is the strongest reason to get invested in the series. In the first movie, “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before,” Lara Jean is awkward and standoffish. As for Peter, he is introduced as arrogant and insensitive. Throughout the movies, as Lara Jean and Peter’s relationship grows,

the two mature into complex young adults.

While Lara Jean and Peter are preparing for college in the last movie, “To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You,” the two characters are clearly not the same people they were in the first film. Lara Jean has become social and more easygoing, whereas Peter is now kindhearted and selfless. Not only is their character growth compelling, but their relationship is out of the ordinary, as Peter is an attractive, popular, athlete, whereas Laura is an odd geek, but he ends up falling in love with her after reading her love letter. If you like high-school romance-drama movies, then I believe this series is for you.

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