

PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP CONCERT SERIES AT SHAPESHIFTER LAB

December 18, 2024



December 17, 2024

The September return of the Coop's monthly concert series at ShapeShifter Lab brought out Coop talent, music lovers, and friends and family. ShapeShifter Lab is just across from the Coop at 837 Union Street. Don't miss the next event on January 10.

Photo story by Caroline Mardok



Maya Solovey performing with Ilusha Tsinadze while a young fan and her children, Dora and Antonio, support her on stage.



Left: The Coop series is family-friendly. Right: Bev Grant, the original founder of the Coop concert series, performing her folk songs.



Jay Rodriguez and Alexis Cuadrado curated the September 13 concert. They are both professional musicians, composers and producers.



Maya Solovey performing as her son Antonio looks on.



Right: Anita-Mae Kahan performing her cello pieces.



Top: Anita-Mae Kahan singing a Georges Brassens song in French. Bottom right: Anita-Mae Kahan (cello) performs with Adam Kahan (bass).



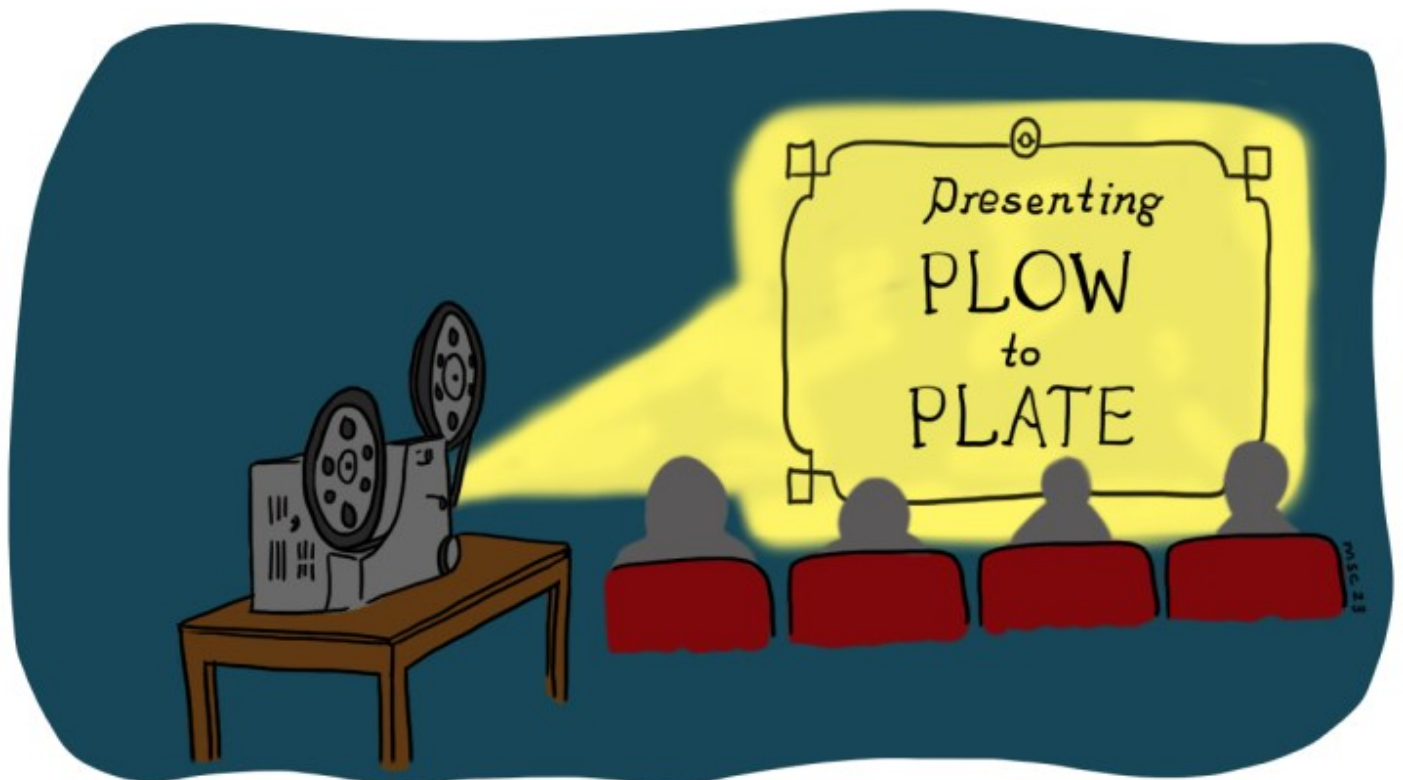
Top left and bottom right: Caroline Davis performing solo. Top right and bottom left: Fortuna Sung, cofounder with Matt Garrison of ShapeShifter Lab, which generously provided its performance space.

If you're interested in performing at the PSFC Concert Series, fill out this form.

We are also looking for PR professionals to help with social media promotion for works-lot credit. If you have relevant experience, send your résumé and letter of interest to membership-office@psfc.coop.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

December 18, 2024



Urban Farmers

By Adam Rabiner

It is relatively easy for those of us who live in the hustle and bustle of New York City to forget that only a little over a hundred years ago much of it was farmland. In 1900, a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article, “Haying in Brooklyn Borough,” describes a reporter who “began to leave civilization and saw farms fighting with brownstone lots to maintain their struggling dominance.” But scattered vestiges of that original period remain. For example, the 47-acre landmark Queens County Farm Museum—dating from 1697 and featured prominently in the 2017 documentary, *Urban Farmers*—is one of the longest continually farmed places in New York State. Composed almost entirely of young women farmers, the historic site educates the local community about regenerative agriculture through its fields and gardens, livestock, farm stand, composting program, apiary, monarch waystation and teaching gardens.

Another historical farm, built in 1810, is the 11-acre New York City landmarked Decker Farm located in Historic Richmond Town on Staten Island. Unlike its Queens counterpart, whose director spoke freely with the filmmakers about their mission and thoughts on urban agriculture, Decker refuses to allow filming or grant interviews. We do learn that Staten Island has the most open land of all five boroughs, but fewer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) locations than its rival boroughs. Ironically, Decker Farm has allocated a single acre of land to an individual who uses it to supply a CSA located in Brooklyn.

Yet most of New York City’s urban farms are much more modest. Many are former vacant lots, dating back to the 1960s and 70s, that were claimed by their local communities and turned into community gardens. One example is East New York Farms! which has been working with youth, gardeners, farmers and entrepreneurs since 1998. *Urban Farmers* shows some of these young school kids, and their instructors, tending their plants, composting, discussing the importance of discovering where their food comes from, learning about food justice and food deserts and creating a viable market for their fruits and vegetables. The program does not necessarily aim to create urban farmers, but rather to teach leadership skills to youth that can be carried down any future path its interns and volunteers embark on.

Urban Farmers is not an in-depth study of these three locations and what they have to offer. Rather, it uses the three different farms as a starting point for various discussions about the current food system. If you are not a member of a CSA, the spirited conversation about its benefits to both consumers and producers might just inspire you to join one. If you complement your Park Slope Food Coop shopping with occasional jaunts to a local farmers' market but are a bit shy interacting while you purchase okra, this film could prod you into asking a question or two. The farmers seem to love talking to curious customers.

Urban farming, even in a dense metropolis like New York City, is here to stay. Community gardens still have few legal protections but there are coalitions and even bills to preserve them in perpetuity, like the historic farms featured in the film. And as land becomes scarcer, rooftop farms, like Brooklyn Grange, not featured in the film, may represent the future. What *Urban Farmers* demonstrates is that in 2023, just as in 1900, no matter where you go in this vast megacity, you can land upon a place where you can smell the roses—and perhaps even some manure.

"Urban Farmers," November 14, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and two children, Elan and Ana.

GIVING NEW LIFE TO COOP PACKAGING

December 18, 2024



By Juliet Kleber

The Coop has instituted robust recycling, food donation and compost programs to minimize waste. But some members are finding even more novel ways to repurpose the Coop's discarded packaging and other refuse.

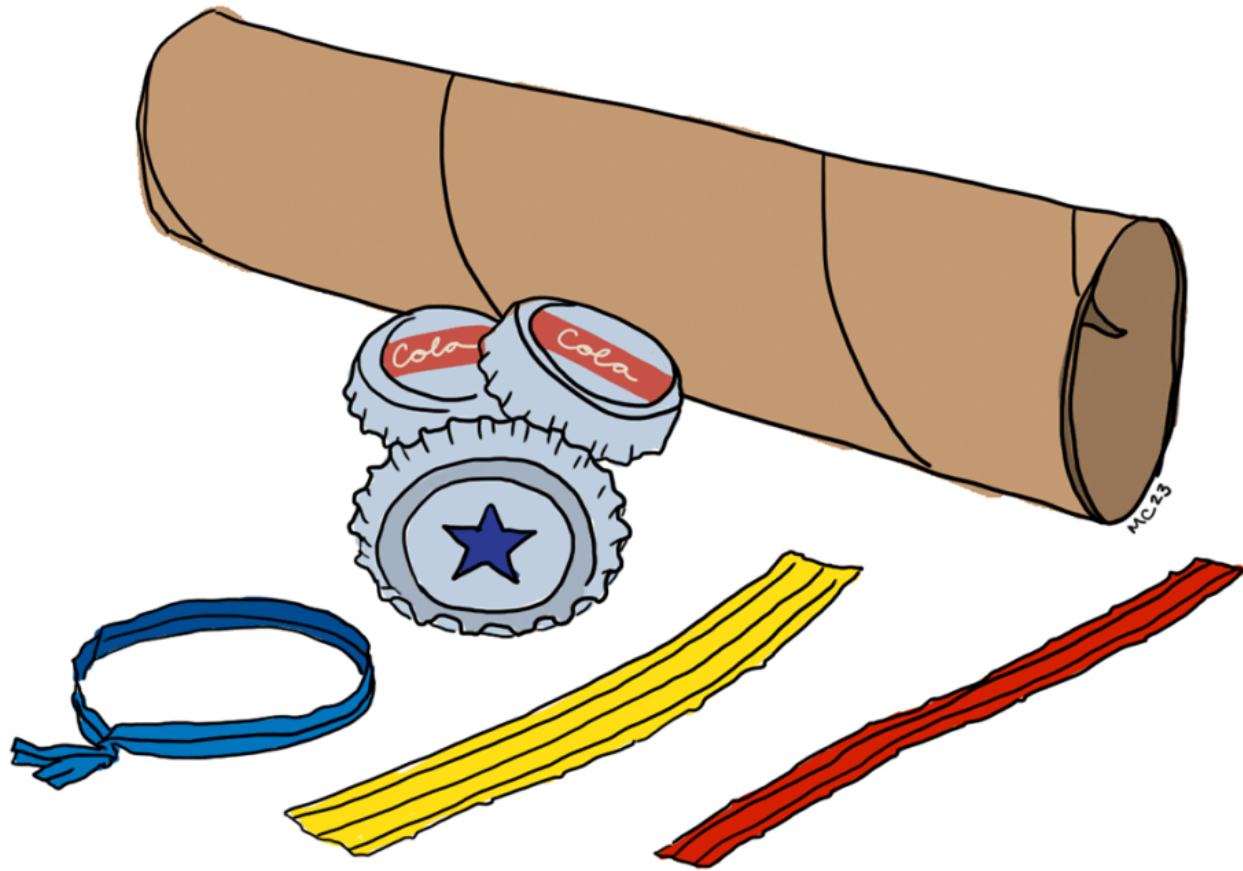


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Wendy Gelsanliter, a Coop member since 2005, is one of them. Gelsanliter is the Materials Center Educator & Coordinator at Teaching Beyond the Square, a local education non-profit. Located on 16th Street just outside of Union Square, the Materials Center houses a collection of found objects donated by New York City residents and businesses, including the Coop. These are items that would typically be discarded after a single use: commonplace objects like coffee machine pods, metal and plastic bottle caps and paper towel tubes, as well as more specialized materials, such as discarded samples from architecture and design firms that make recurring donations. But the discarded items are not just collected—they become “clean, resorted, curated, beautiful trash,” Gelsanliter explained in an interview with the *Gazette*. “People walk in and say, ‘Oh my god—I want to live here!’ ”



The center is open to the public by appointment—visitors can buy materials for \$2 a pound to repurpose for their own projects. But the materials are primarily used as a medium for creative play at the center’s Materials Trailer and in its Materialized Classroom program, which visits schools across the tri-state area in order to give children an opportunity to play, create, and experiment with the objects.

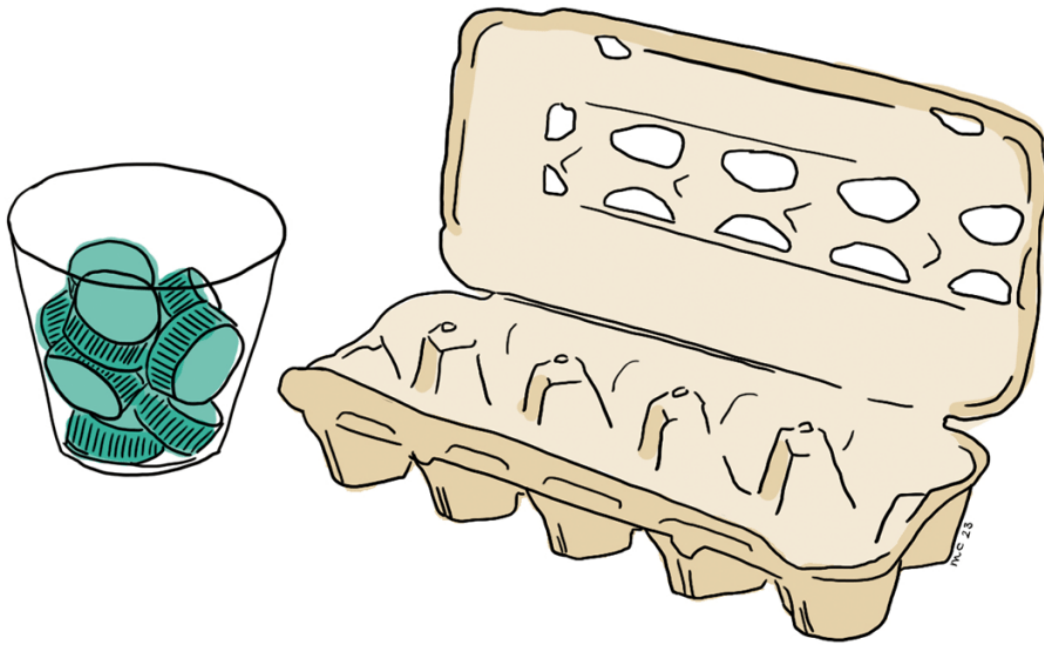


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Children from pre-K to 6th grade engage in open-ended exploration with these found objects, sometimes using them as building materials: “A pre-K student might use objects and say, ‘It’s a playground’ or ‘It’s a ship,’ ” Gelsanliter said. But they might also just enjoy pouring bottle caps from one container to another, or shaking a jar full of buttons to hear the sound it makes.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

“It’s not about the product; it’s about the process. When the grownups get involved, they’re the ones intent on saying ‘What did you make?’ But when they step away the children are so interested in discovering what these materials can do. They’re silent—totally engaged in exploring.”



Gelsanliter is always looking for interesting materials and the Coop has become a great source. It started with can carriers. “I saw someone shelving beer and throwing the can holders into a box,” she explained. “He saw how excited I was... but wanted to know what I was going to do with them, so I explained.” That person put Gelsanliter in touch with the Coop’s beer buyer, Kusi Merello, who now puts the can carriers aside for her. In 2022, Gelsanliter collected approximately 65 pounds of plastic can carriers from the Coop. By May of 2023, she has already collected 20 pounds of plastic—and has just begun collecting other supplies like cardboard, twist-ties, and the plastic tubes inside rolls of register tape when she shops.

Whether students are art-making, experimenting, engineering or just appreciating sounds, colors and textures, the program requires that they follow only two rules:

1. Be kind to others.
2. Be kind to the materials.



Children do not use tape or glue to make permanent objects and all materials are collected at the end of their work to be reused again in the next classroom. Not using adhesives forces problem-solving, Gelsanliter says, but it also allows the life-cycle of these materials to be extended as much as possible. Twist-ties typically last several months, sometimes up to a year if they arrive to the Materials Center in good condition. And children are taught how to use the materials conscientiously. “We teach children not to break the cardboard. And there’s great care in the cleanup process; we teach the children that if you use a twist tie and twist it around, please make it straight and put it back in the jar.”



PHOTO BY WENDY GELSANLITER

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Coop staff and member-workers have been interested in and supportive of Gelsanliter's collection. "I walk around [the Coop] so excited. And people are interested when they see me taking things—I saw a color of can carrier that I needed and asked the member stocking if I could have it. He was curious what I was going to do with it, so I showed him some of the pictures on my phone. What the kids can make with these things is amazing."

"I save everything I ever use—I wash and keep every bottle cap," Gelsanliter said. "Before you throw something away, look at it carefully and ask, 'If I had a whole bowl of these—could I do something with it?' If the answer is yes, don't throw it away. 'If I clean all these apple sauce pouches and put them in a jar it will it look good?' If so, then keep it. Once you start looking at things in a different way, you can't stop seeing it. Your whole life changes."



Receiving Coordinator Jerome Petitgand and his seven-year-old son, Luc, have also seen creative potential in the Coop's refuse, though they've taken a somewhat more

concrete approach. For the past six months, they have been building a detailed model of a medieval castle and village using packaging materials from the Coop—primarily the cardboard boxes that the Coop’s bananas are received and sold in. In an interview, Jerome and Luc told the *Gazette* that the inspiration for the project came from reading the 1977 book *Castle* by David Macaulay, which chronicles the construction of a fictional castle in written and illustrated detail. Jerome explained that their construction project began with the central keep and village but expanded over time: “Luc realized we needed land to subsidize and feed the people.”



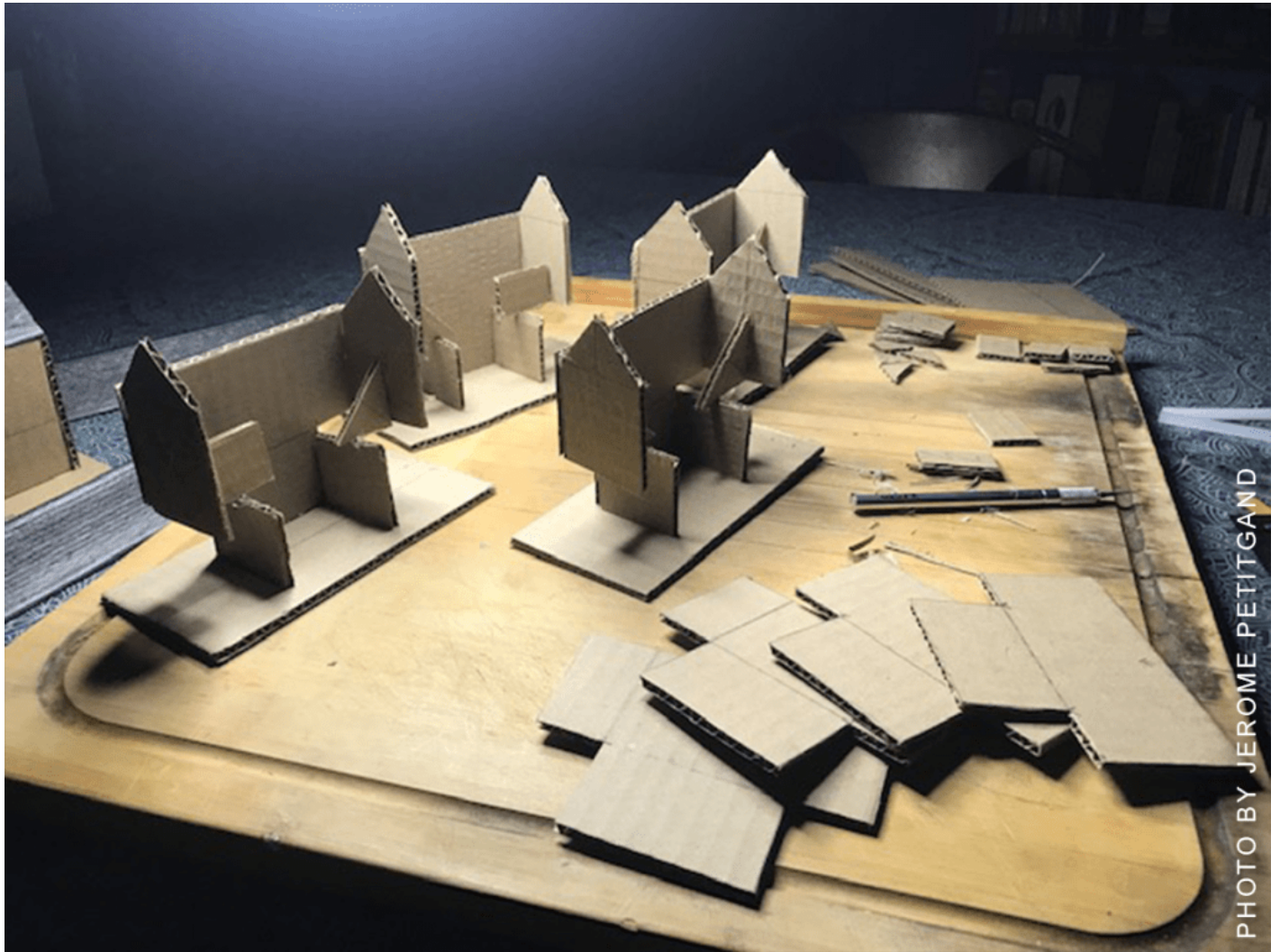
PHOTO BY JEROME PETTIGAND



At present, their settlement features the castle, bridges and archways, and multi-story houses, all surrounded by a guard wall featuring watchtowers, a gatehouse, and siege equipment for the toy soldiers attempting to scale it. While Luc did draw some detailed maps and plans, the buildings are modular and rearrangeable.



The buildings are mostly made of flat cardboard cut from banana boxes—they make up both the structure of the buildings and their details. Tiny strips of cardboard are glued onto the facades to replicate the half-timber work of their Tudor-style houses. The towers and turrets of the castle and wall are made with the tubes that hold the Coop’s rolls of produce bags. The roofs are made from the edge protectors used to stabilize boxes (again, mostly banana boxes) when they’re stacked onto pallets. They’re typically about four feet long, but Petitgand and Luc have found that they make perfect slate-like roofs when cut to size.



“I built things like this when I was a boy, even though everything was plastic and beautiful and you could just buy it,” Petitgand told the *Gazette*. “We decided to make it ourselves from scratch instead.” He’s found that he and Luc share that affinity for building. The two have spent many cold winter afternoons and rainy Sundays working on their project, often for four or five hours at a time. And aside from glue guns, hot glue, and tools like box-cutters and X-Acto knives, their village has been made entirely from free, discarded materials.

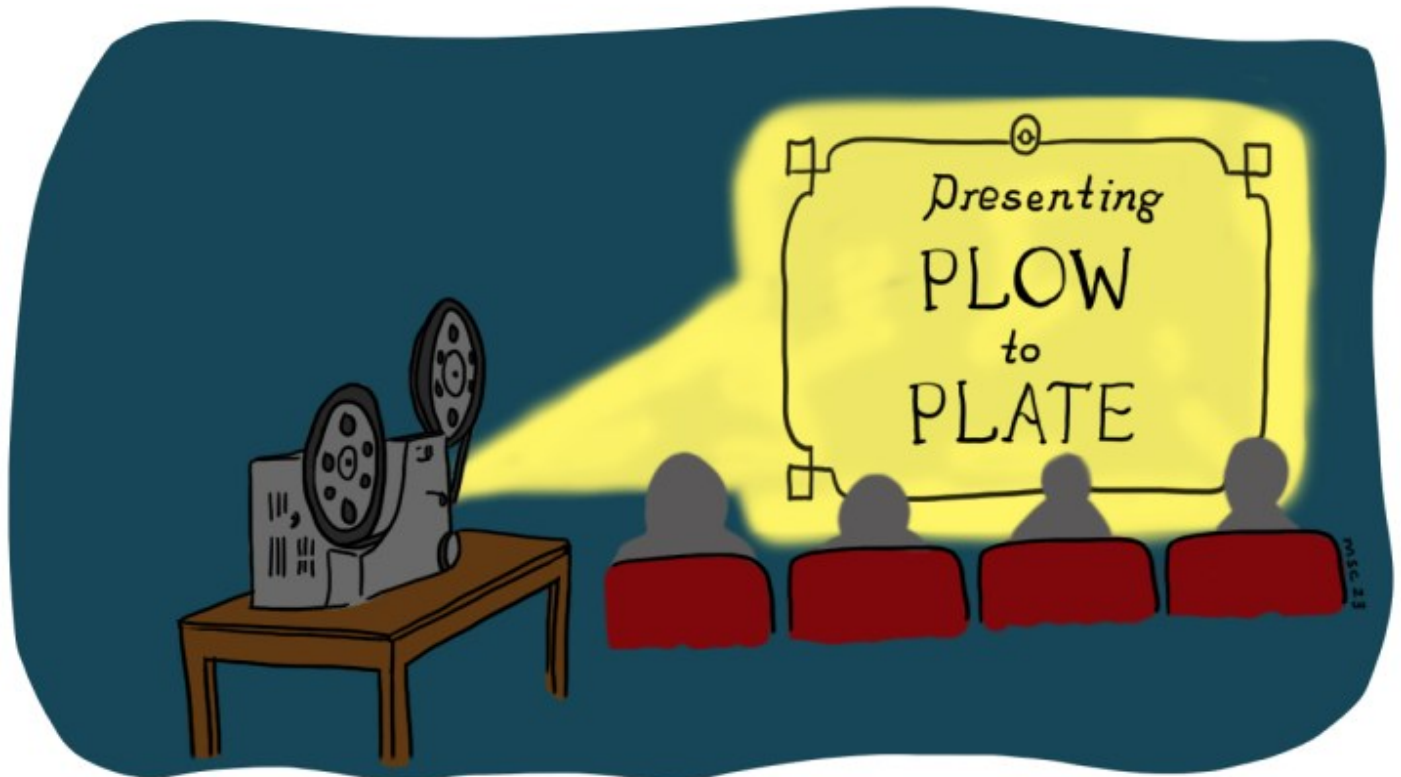


Now that summer is approaching and the weather allows Luc more opportunity to play outside, the village is often packed away in the seven banana boxes that hold all of its composite parts when it's not being worked on. But the project is far from over. Luc and Petitgand are already planning its next expansion: viking boats and river, all made from Coop cardboard.

Juliet Kleber is a writer and editor based in Bed-Stuy. She serves as a member of the editorial board of n+1 magazine.

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A MATTER OF TASTE: SERVING UP PAUL LIEBRANDT

By Adam Rabiner

The media feeds an image of the celebrity chef as cocksure and invariably nasty to their sous-chefs and other kitchen underlings. The 2011 documentary *A Matter of Taste* tracks the career of Chef Paul Liebrandt, the British transplant to New York who gained fame in 2000 (when he was only 25) for a three-star (excellent) review of his restaurant Atlas from *New York Times* critic William Grimes. By chronicling Liebrandt's ups and downs, hangups and insecurities, as well as his long road to redemption, the film challenges some of the easy assumptions about the life of celebrated and talented masters of food.

You first see Liebrandt in a kitchen photo shoot wearing a white double-breasted jacket stained with a bloody handprint. A pig head sits nearby on the counter in a pool of blood beside a green apple. Aware that he looks like a lunatic murderer at a crime

scene, Liebrandt says, "I'm not a nutcase, I'm just an artist." Liebrandt's dishes, creative and unexpected combinations of ingredients like chocolate-covered scallops and smoked bacon sorbet, plated beautifully with swirls of green, red and yellow sauces, resemble paintings by Miro. His one-of-a-kind creations, lacking reference points, mean that whether an invention is "good" or "bad" comes down to one's palate and whether a diner (or critic) likes it or not. One signature dish, a wasabi-apple sorbet amuse-bouche, sounds precious and ridiculous, but almost everyone who had it thought it was the best thing they ever tasted.

Liebrandt's self-identity as an artist has drawbacks chronicled in the documentary. - First, he quits Atlas over menu disputes and in December 2001 takes a job at Papillon, a modest French bistro and bar. Immediately he elevates the pub menu to haute cuisine, but in June 2002, due to a poor business climate, the owners are forced to return to more neighborhood-friendly burgers and fries. Liebrandt grins and bears it for several months, but you can see his unhappiness, as he glances at the clock on the wall and visibly wrestles with his underemployment. After three months of mounting frustration, "his brain going to jelly," as he puts it, he quits. Things aren't going great in his personal life either. "I am too nice," he laments about not having a girlfriend. "I get to the friend zone, not to the end zone."

A Matter of Taste picks up three years later, in December 2005. Liebrandt has opened his own business and is now making ends meet as a food and drink consultant working on varied projects like gourmet marshmallows. Eventually he lands a gig as the Chef Director of Gilt, located in the New York Palace Hotel, and quickly learns that working with hoteliers, as opposed to experienced restaurateurs, has its own set of problems. As he deals with the many rules that curtail his free expression, he constantly feels like his "balls are on the chopping block."

Despite these challenges he's determined to earn another three-star review from the *New York Times* whose new food critic, Frank Bruni, replaced Grimes in 2004. Much of the tension and a driving theme in the documentary is the striving and effort required to get a three-star (or higher) review. Of course, the creativity and genius of the che-

f—and their ability to not just prepare an excellent dish but also to tell a story or evoke an emotion—matter. But so does the more prosaic stuff like 18-to-20-hour workdays, exacting perfectionism executed with military-like precision and efficiency, a clean and well-organized kitchen and to some degree the whims and tastes of the critic.

Liebrandt parts ways with Gilt in January 2007 and laments that his career seems to be going down the toilet and that he is not as economically stable as he should be at his age. The portrait being drawn is less about the stereotypical tyrannical chef barking orders and screaming at his cowering staff than about how even those with great talent still struggle to make their way in this extremely competitive and tough city.

Eventually Liebrandt's life gains some footing as he finds a girlfriend and teams up with well-known restaurateur Drew Nieporent to open up Corton on the site of Drew's famous Montrachet in Tribeca. Will they sway Bruni to give them that coveted three stars? Tune in to find out.

A Matter of Taste, June 13, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife Dina and two children, Elan and Ana.