



*cæsura neighborhood*



# **cæsura 2024**

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## High

The two-day Harmony City Fest was billed as “A Medley of City Unity.” At a time when citizen camaraderie was fracturing, city leaders teamed with concert promoters to bring residents together. A wide, major street was closed, large amplifiers were placed throughout, and two main stages were erected at either end where artists of wide-ranging genres would perform.

Isla, who was most interested in Saturday night’s electronic dance music headliner, was excited to be part of this shared experience. Storefronts along the way enticed festivalgoers with window displays and specials to attract diverse customers. An eclectic conglomeration of attendees tramped the sidewalks leading into the festival with her. Everyone fit in because each of them was out of context.

When she arrived, few children attending the morning performances were still present. A lingering boy froze directly in front of her, blocking her path. Isla’s purple-streaked blond hair was alive. Iridescent glitter of magnificent colors smeared across an abundance of unconcealed skin sparkled against the sun. The tiny inseam on her honey yellow, vinyl shorts was actually longer than the cluster of tiny purple starred stripes spanning the length of the sides. A large purple star dotted each breast on her matching honey mini crop top which, from his angle, didn’t quite cover enough. He was amazed that such a magical creature was freely walking the streets.

The boy extended his little arm and his little hand in a gesture of giving. He wanted Isla to have his red balloon.

“For me?” she asked, her voice a dream.

He nodded.

“Thank you!” Her wide smile and sparkling purple lips deepened the spell. A single thin braid falling down the front of her bedazzled face pulled him in farther. Her wide eyes and monochromatic blend of overflowing purple eye shadow and eye liner hypnotized him. She accepted the balloon and snapped her eyebrows up one time at him. This gesture was immediately stored deep in his mind, the only part of the interaction he’d hold on to forever.

“OK,” his father said. “I think you’ve had enough for one day.” The boy took his father’s hand, reluctant to move his gaze away from Isla. “I thought you’d be older when we had the talk about things we don’t tell your mother.”

Isla floated from one stage to the other. She knew the molly was taking effect when she found herself spinning to the music, arms extended, head toward the afternoon sky. She released the red balloon to watch it soar.



It ascended, drifting back and forth along the currents between the skyscrapers. Untethered, it danced to the music as the helium pulled it higher and higher. When the sound of the festival faded, it moved to its own time, still rising. The balloon twisted and swirled, shaking its tail in the breeze.

Everything disappeared. It was alone. The atmospheric pressure surrounding it lessened. The air inside began to expand. The pace at which it gained altitude slowed... drifting, drifting, drifting... until it burst. Gravity took effect. The plastic and latex began its descent.

Day one of the festival concluded with a flourish of stage lights and bone vibrating base. The crowd raised their hands and screamed out. Clarity swept over individuals who were bonded together in that euphoric moment.

Amid the fallen confetti and lost blinking rave lights, Isla sat on the asphalt. Her legs formed parenthesis in front of her. Her eyes avoided the harsh flood lights of the cleanup crew. Her hair was tangled.

"Do you want help up?"

Isla's eyes squinted toward the voice. It was a lady like her. It could even have been her. She said, "Yes."

The raver held out both hands and squeezed them into fists twice to encourage Isla to grab on.

"OK," Isla said, clasping her hands.

She was pulled up. They embraced.

"Did you have fun?" the lady asked Isla.

"Sooooo much fun."



## About the Writers

**Jennifer Campbell** is a writing professor in Buffalo, NY, and a co-editor of *Earth's Daughters*. Her most recent book, *What Came First* (Dancing Girl Press), contains reconstituted fairytale poems. Jennifer's work has recently appeared in *Slipstream*, *The Healing Muse*, *ArLiJo*, and, *American Journal of Nursing*.

**Peter Neil Carroll** is the Poetry Moderator for Portside.org. He has published nine collections of poetry, including *This Land, These People*, *The 50 States* which won the Prize Americana in 2022. His new collection, *Sketches from Spain: Homage to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* has just arrived. He lives in Belmont, California.

**Yuan Changming** edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan in Vancouver. Credits include 12 Pushcart nominations for poetry and 2 for fiction besides appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17), *BestNewPoemsOnline* and 2019 other literary outlets worldwide. A poetry judge for Canadas 2021 National Magazine Awards, Yuan began writing and publishing fiction in 2022.

**Christopher Cleary** is a former metropolitan Atlanta English teacher and a regular guest artist who facilitates writing workshops on dialogue, comedy, and audio dramas at the annual Georgia Thespian Conference. Recent publications include *The Harsher* by The Playwrights Publishing Company (UK), "A Good Bar" by *Better Than Starbucks*, and "Dog Food" by *Mystery Tribune*. His young adult novel *Writing on the Wall* was published by Immortality Press.

**Arfah Daud**. I teach high school at Sequoia High in Watsonville. An Alternate Education school where we help provide a unique educational experience for students seeking a different environment to the traditional setting. I am a storyteller, and my medium is poetry. Like life, getting to the end of poem is never a straight line. Most of the journey is obstacles and tangents. Reading and writing poetry would give me an opportunity to share my life's path with the community.

**Salvatore Difalco** lives in Toronto. His short prose has appeared in a number of print and online journals.

**M. J. Donovan** started her writing career coauthoring science textbooks and agricultural publications. She has since branched out to more creative genres. Her poetry has appeared in the *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Tule Review*, *California Fire & Water: A Climate Crisis Anthology*, and elsewhere. She currently resides among the sycamores in California's Central Valley.