

## Actor Jussie Smollett is indicted on 16 counts

BY SONIA RAO

A Cook County, Ill., grand jury has indicted “Empire” actor Jussie Smollett on 16 felony counts for allegedly lying about a hate-crime attack, according to multiple reports. The indictment, returned Thursday, comes two weeks after prosecutors charged Smollett with felony disorderly conduct for filing a false police report.

Smollett, who is black and openly gay, told Chicago police in late January that he had been attacked by two people who yelled racial and homophobic slurs, hit him, poured a chemical substance on him and wrapped a rope around his neck. He also said at least one of the attackers had yelled, “This is MAGA country,” referring to President Trump’s campaign slogan. The incident attracted a great deal of attention as celebrities and advocacy organizations expressed their support on social media, and Smollett said on “Good Morning America” in mid-February that he was “forever changed” by the incident.

But skepticism about Smollett’s account grew as police continued to investigate, questioning two “persons of interest” who turned out to be brothers of Nigerian descent who had previously worked on Fox’s “Empire.” Within days of the “Good Morning America” interview, police announced that the trajectory of the criminal investigation had shifted, and that Smollett was being treated as a suspect.

Smollett was arrested Feb. 21, and prosecutors alleged he had paid the two men, Abimbola “Abel” Osundairo and Olabinjo “Ola” Osundairo, to help him stage the attack. They said Abel Osundairo and Smollett were close when they worked together on the set of “Empire,” where Abel was a stand-in for a love interest of Smollett’s character, Jamal Lyon, and Ola was an extra. Prosecutors also alleged that Smollett told the brothers what to say and provided them with a \$100 bill to cover supplies, including rope, ski masks and red hats that resemble the MAGA sort.

Chicago police said at a Feb. 21 media briefing that Smollett faked the attack because he was “dissatisfied with his salary” on the Fox drama. Executive producers said in a statement issued the next day that Smollett’s character would be removed from the current season’s final two episodes.

“Jussie adamantly maintains his innocence even if law enforcement has robbed him of that presumption,” Mark Geragos, an attorney for Smollett, said in a statement Friday.

Smollett was released on \$100,000 bail. The Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office has not returned The Washington Post’s request for comment on the 16-count indictment.

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This multilingual Canadian comedian can properly offend people in France and Canada. Now, he wants to find out whether America can take a joke.



BILL O’LEARY/THE WASHINGTON POST

Sugar Sammy, in town for a show at the Birchmere, about whom French GQ wrote, “The funniest man in France is québécois.”

## SUGAR SAMMY, FLUENT IN FUNNY

BY ELAHE IZADI

Comedian Sugar Sammy is trying to describe how he can move to a new country and figure out enough of the local quirks to poke fun at them. “The French will say, ‘How do you know us so well?’” he says in an interview in Washington. “I’m like, ‘Because I’ve watched you, I have listened to you. I’ve been, I’ve been . . .’” and he pauses. The Montreal-born comedian performs in four languages, and currently he cannot summon the English word for what he wants to express. “That’s the only drawback of being bilingual: Sometimes you’ve got to look for the word if it comes to you in French first.” He thinks aloud — victim? suffer? — then resorts to his iPhone before it finally comes to him: “Subjected!” “I have observed, I’ve listened and I have been *subjected* to you for the last two years,” he continues. “So that creates something that’s not going to go unnoticed.”

SEE SAMMY ON C2

### TV REVIEW

## The end is near — but first, sex!

BY HANK STUEVER

The modern manners of sexual fluidity get a rigorous workout in filmmaker Gregg Araki’s series “Now Apocalypse,” premiering Sunday on Starz.

It’s a half-hour mash-up of millennial relationship shenanigans interrupted by the suggestion that the world will soon be overrun by libidinous lizard monsters who find humans good, giving and game. At least, that’s what I gather from the five episodes (out of 10) made available for review.

Weird as it wants to be (and therefore tonally inconsistent), the show is what you might get if a sex columnist were forced to write the screenplay for a cheap sci-fi flick. Or maybe it’s the sort of thing John Waters would be making if he were young again.

At 59, Araki’s no spring chicken, but he does stick to the vision he set out with in the 1990s, when his provocative indie films (“The Living End”; “The Doom Generation”) were hailed as examples of a “new queer cinema” movement



KATRINA MARCINOWSKI/STARZ

Kelli Berglund and Avan Jogia in Gregg Araki’s “Now Apocalypse,” a new Starz series that likes to swim in the shallow end of the pool.

that looked beyond tortured coming-out dramas and instead presented sex-positive stories about characters who don’t necessarily stick to their places on the orientation spectrum.

“Now Apocalypse” is, in a way, the fuller expression of the Araki ideal, where everyone is a little

bit anything, and the world always seems on the verge of ending.

Avan Jogia stars as Ulysses, an unmotivated but gorgeous young man in Los Angeles, who fills his days with existential shiftlessness and sex (or the pursuit of it).

SEE TV REVIEW ON C2

### MUSIC REVIEW

## Country’s best voice, singing groaners

BY CHRIS RICHARDS

First things first, Maren Morris has the best voice of any country singer working today — a way of melodic air-walking that makes the “country” part of that assertion feel more debatable than the “best” part. She knows how everybody sings in Nashville, but she also knows how everybody sings everywhere else — which makes her phrasing feel so worldly, so wise. Listen to her jump in and out of her lyrics and you’ll hear a sophistication that feels like something metaphysical.

But the words, the words, the words. On her second album, “Girl,” they really gunk things up, no matter how Morris tries to sing her way through, over or around them. It feels almost criminal when a singer this expressive describes her own heightened emotional state as “the feels” — which occurs tragically and repeatedly on a song of that very title. Epic voice, basic lyrics, rough scene.

On to the “country” part. Is it



JAMIE NELSON

Maren Morris wastes her amazing breath on platitudes on her new album, “Girl.”

still worth debating whether this high-def music qualifies as country? As a vocalist, Morris takes her Nashville inheritance — vowels that curve parallel to a twang; legible, unambiguous lyrics — and sets them to tunes built with

acoustic guitars, synthesizers and electronic percussion. If pop-influenced country bugs you, try thinking of her music as country-influenced pop. Then ask yourself if there’s any difference, or if that difference matters.

Unfortunately, Morris does little to help us transcend these riddles with “A Song for Everything,” her ode to the power of song — more specifically, the songs of Coldplay, Katy Perry, James Taylor and the Boss. “What’s your time machine? Is it Springsteen or ‘Teenage Dream?’” she asks at the outset. “What’s your takes-you-back? Your first falling-in-love soundtrack?” She’s trying to convince us that music is vast and variegated, but the song itself has the cloying, one-size-fits-all snugness of a Target commercial. (Which is strange, considering “The Middle” — her excellent 2018 megahit with EDM producer Zedd — triggered the kind of mass-endorphin-avalanche that every Target commercial

SEE MORRIS ON C4

## THEATER REVIEW

## ‘Silent’: Swept away by a broken man’s stream of consciousness

BY NELSON PRESSLEY

Washington theater doesn’t see a lot of solo turns with the bravura force that Pat Kinevane brings to his Olivier Award-winning “Silent.” The Irish actor spellbinds in all kinds of ways during his dark tale of a homeless man ravaged by grief, spinning rich tales with his sonorous voice and practically dancing through the silent films his character imagines. It’s a coup for D.C. Irish arts organization Solas Nua to have Kinevane for a few weeks at the Atlas Performing Arts Center.

The production comes from Dublin’s Fishamble company, and Artistic Director Jim Culleton has tailored his taut, much-toured production for the Atlas’s small Lab II space. The project is part of a loose trilogy Kinevane has created about people living on the margins, and as he plays the homeless figure at the center of “Silent,” he’s apt to engage you directly about, say, Paris, or anti-depressants, before sailing off into memories of the traumas that wrecked his life and left him on the streets.

Modern Irish drama bristles with colorful, language-driven monologues, but this is different. Culleton and Kinevane forge a



GER BLANCH

Irish writer-performer Pat Kinevane is enthralling in his Olivier Award-winning play “Silent.”

high theatricality that sometimes lifts into cinematic fantasy; the main character was named after Rudolph Valentino, and Kinevane is fully capable of silent film star overdrive. Then it’s back to disarmingly direct conversation

with the audience, dropping racy jokes and observations about sleeping rough that will give you pause and ratchet up your awareness. The toggling is an effective way to slice into mental illness and addiction while building a

character and a set of circumstances that feel awfully well observed.

As Kinevane cycles through minor anecdotes and big scenes, you’re tempted to say the show is a touch too thick with detail and

digression. Yet the kaleidoscopic picture of the man’s shattered life — especially his relationship with his deceased gay brother — grows brilliantly clear. You pick up the key facts by degrees; that core story about the brother, grim and cruel, has repercussions that, in this man’s tortured mind, never settle down.

For all its demanding twists and flamboyance, “Silent” never feels like an actor’s showcase. Kinevane is close enough in this intimate space that he can spend a lot of time a few feet from you, speaking in a whispery purr. But the voice and body both prove to be tremendously expressive as he fills the stage and takes on characters from a grotesque in-law to the wife — you can practically see her as he cradles a blanket — who threw him out of the house. This is high-level acting, hand-in-hand with a shrewdly crafted portrait that you’ll find hard to shake off.

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**Silent**, written and performed by Pat Kinevane. Directed by Jim Culleton. Music by Denis Clohessy; costume design by Catherine Condell. Through March 24 at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, 1333 H St. NE. \$35. 202-399-7993. [solasnua.org](http://solasnua.org).

## A morning after? Nah.

TV REVIEW FROM CI

while his nights, when not also occupied by sex, are filled with dreams of disturbingly prescient images. “I do s--- sometimes and I really don’t know why,” Ulysses tells the viewer, in narration. “To avoid boredom, I guess? To feel alive?” The emptiness of that self-characterization is classic Araki, where alienation is a default pose.

Ulysses’s best friend Carly (Kelli Berglund) thinks he may be taking too many puffs off his cannabis pen; she’s an underemployed actress who gets by performing sex acts on her laptop for pervy customers. His longtime roommate Ford (“Awkward’s” Beau Mirchoff) is a gym hunk deep in puppy love with a frosty, Frenchy astrophysical theorist named Severine (Roxane Mesquida), who is involved with a top-secret project at a lab.

Much of the first half of the story is squandered on the basic banter of beautiful people, shot through Araki’s Skittle-colored visual style and hipster sensibilities. They’re all trapped in an excruciatingly cool Spotify playlist; the only way out, it seems, is through near-constant sex. Using a dating site and a peppering of text messages, Ulysses pursues a mysterious but unreliable beauty named Gabriel (“Teen Wolf’s” Tyler Posey). During their furtive first encounter, Ulysses experiences something more intense than an orgasm; the show suggests nothing short of a cosmic unleashing.

Araki’s libertines are fun to follow as they romp and revolve, but what happens to them seems a little too shallow, too prolonged and too low-stakes. Perhaps Araki is saving the really trippy stuff (the rise of the lizard creatures, maybe) for “Now Apocalypse’s” back half, where one hopes that the pace will pick up. Viewers who aren’t feeling the creator’s particular groove can’t be blamed for checking out of a show that so intentionally allows style to prevail over substance, and often forgets to check in with the apocalypse it has promised in its title.

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**Now Apocalypse** (30 minutes) premieres Sunday at 9 p.m. on Starz.

## Comic Sugar Sammy plays to his crowd, whatever the language

SAMMY FROM CI

That sense of observation and lingual dexterity has allowed Sugar Sammy — whose real name is Samir Khullar — to perform in far-flung places, including South Africa, India and France, where he lives part-time and serves as a judge on the French version of “America’s Got Talent.” And after packing massive venues in Canada and getting plenty of buzz in France, he plans to tour every year in what he calls “the mecca and the birthplace of stand-up”: the United States. (He’ll be performing Saturday at the Birchmere in Alexandria.)

“My comedy comes from a place of fascination and love,” he says. “At the same time, it’s a roast. It’s a cultural roast.”

You would think going to foreign countries and making fun of the people there would be somewhat terrifying, but Khullar has long been a provocateur. Starting in 2012, he toured Quebec with “You’re Gonna Rire,” the province’s first large-scale bilingual comedy show, which used both English and French. In 2016, a reported 115,000 people attended the last performance, a free outdoor show at the Just for Laughs festival. The show’s popularity was a big deal for a place with deep divisions over cultural and linguistic identity.

His ire is especially sharp when aimed at those in Quebec who want sovereignty. In 1995, a hotly contested referendum to proclaim sovereignty from the rest of Canada was narrowly defeated. Provincial Premier Jacques Parizeau blamed its failure on the wealthy and “the ethnic vote.”

Khullar was 19 at the time and had just started to perform comedy. “A lot of things were said, and a lot of things were put out there, and going through that, there was



JUSTINE LEAPHAY

“My comedy comes from a place of fascination and love,” Samir Khullar says. “At the same time, it’s a roast. It’s a cultural roast.”

no way it wouldn’t color my comedy,” he says. “It shapes my point of view.”

The comedian, with a stage name he picked up from his university days, grew up in Notre-Dame-de-Grace, a predominantly English-speaking part of Montreal. He also performs in Hindi and Punjabi, which he spoke at home with Indian immigrant parents. And he learned French in school. (In Quebec, children of immigrants are required to attend French-only schools.)

He started out performing mostly in English. But then he decided to do French-only shows, as Paul Ronca, a Just for Laughs director who owned a comedy club when he met Khullar, recalled to Canadian television’s “W5.”

“When Sammy approached me and was like, ‘I want to do it in French,’ I said, ‘Wait a minute: you’re an Anglo-Indian guy from NDG. There’s no way you’re going to pull this off,’” Ronca said. “I’ve seen so many who speak French

have a hard time doing this.”

Ronca added: “I think he’s more fearless than most.”

Khullar saw an opportunity to do something other comics weren’t doing: perform a thoroughly bilingual set. He and many others in Montreal live in both worlds and have a sense of “dual” citizenship, he says, despite the separate English and French entertainment industries. “If I look around me, in my neighborhood and in the city, there are a lot of people like me, but we didn’t see that representation on television or in pop culture,” he says.

His approach touched off provincewide debates, such as after his 2014 ad campaign with English-only billboards promoting shows. They read, “For Christmas, I’d like a complaint from the Office de la langue française,” referring to the entity that enforces Quebec’s strict rules for upholding French as the dominant language, including French requirements for signs. The text was later blacked out, and replaced with French text

that read, “For Christmas, I got a complaint from the Office de la langue française.”

Some political commentators have accused Khullar of desecrating the French language. His critiques also provoked a death threat before a 2014 show from someone who called the comic a “federal clown.”

For the most part, Khullar says, his audiences can take the jokes aimed at their way of life because he’s always been viewed as an outsider, even in Canada: He was an outsider entering the French Quebec circuit, and in the rest of the country, “It’s like, ‘Oh, it’s that guy from Quebec!’”

He touches on race, relationships and politics, with a penchant for crowd-work that he weaves throughout his act. He takes a make-fun-of-everyone approach, calling out people in the crowd to cheer if they belong to an identity he’s joking about, whether it’s white people, Arabs or fellow Indo-Canadians.

In France, he joked, “I love France. You guys are my favorite Arab country.” In Quebec, he asked the Quebecois to cheer and told them: “You guys got your own little section over there. Are you happy with where you’re sitting, or do you want to separate?”

Performing in so many places also allows him to see similarities; in the United States, we have a president who has proclaimed himself “a nationalist,” and “you see a lot of parallels everywhere in the world. You don’t just see that here. You see parallels in Quebec, you see parallels in France.”

By 2016, Khullar relocated to France, where he lives part time. He immersed himself in a new society because he wanted a new challenge. He’s done well for himself there, performing in theaters and winning praise in the local press. French GQ wrote that “the

funniest man in France is québécois.”

He doesn’t think about crafting new jokes based on the language he’s speaking but rather where he’s performing. “It’s not a linguistic adaptation, it’s a cultural adaptation,” he says. “So my French show in Quebec is not my French show in France.”

Unlike in Montreal and France, where he can be recognized by strangers on the street, in the United States, he can wander undisturbed through coffee shops or Whole Foods and observe our idiosyncrasies to write new material.

“Just coming into a country, into a culture for the first time, you notice things that that culture takes for granted, that becomes wallpaper to them almost,” he says.

When Khullar entered the United States for his current tour — which has taken him to Atlanta and Caroline’s in New York — he noticed signs proclaiming “Welcome to America” in English and Spanish. It struck him: Canada has two official languages, but seeing Spanish signs in the United States contrasted with the harsh public rhetoric around immigration.

“For a country that doesn’t want Mexicans, you sure are sending mixed signals,” he jokes. “It’s like if I told a girl I was breaking up with her and I told her, ‘Let’s talk about it over a romantic dinner and a bath,’ she’d be like, ‘Oh, that guy wants me to move in here, and give me permanent residency.’”

He wrote the joke in the airport, and added it to his American act. [elahe.izadi@washpost.com](mailto:elahe.izadi@washpost.com)

**Sugar Sammy** performs Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at the Birchmere, 3701 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria, \$29.50.

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the **GUIDE** to the Lively Arts

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|---|--|--|--|---|---|
| <b>CHILDREN'S THEATRE</b>                             |  |  |  |   |   |
| GALA Theatre<br>Picasso                               | March 9, 16 & 23 at 3 pm<br>March 11-15 &<br>March 18-22 at 10:30 am                     | Discover the mysteries and inspiration behind the life and work of the creative genius from Spain. With music, dance, puppets, a bullfight, and an art lesson!                                   | GALA Theatre<br>3333 14th Street, NW<br>202-234-7174<br><a href="http://galatheatre.org">galatheatre.org</a>   | \$10-\$12                                     | Bilingual   |
| <b>MUSIC - ORCHESTRAL</b>                             |  |  |  |   |   |
| The Apollo Orchestra<br>With Amit Peled, cello        | Sunday, March 10 at 6pm  | The Apollo Orchestra will be joined by cello virtuoso Amit Peled in a free performance in the John F. Kennedy Center Terrace Theater. Program includes works by Rossini, Saint Saens and Kodaly. | Terrace Theater, The John F. Kennedy Center<br>2700 F Street, NW<br>Washington, DC 20566<br><a href="http://www.apolloorchestra.com">www.apolloorchestra.com</a> | Free  | Tickets will be distributed in the States Gallery beginning at 5pm, two per person. |
| <b>OPERA</b>  |  |  |  |   |   |
| Bel Cantanti Opera<br>Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro | SAT. 3/9 at 7:30 pm<br>SUN. 3/10 at 3:00 pm<br>FRI. 3/15 at 7:30 pm<br>SUN. 3/17 at 3:00 | Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro (the Marriage of Figaro) sung in Italian with English supertitles, fully staged and in costume, with an orchestra.   | Randolph Road Theater<br>4010 Randolph Road<br>Silver Spring, MD<br><a href="http://www.belcantanti.com">www.belcantanti.com</a>                                 | Tickets \$40<br>\$15 students<br>\$35 seniors | Group discounts available<br>Ticket sales online and at the door.                   |
| <b>COMEDY</b>   |  |  |  |   |   |
| Capitol Steps<br>Make America Grin Again              | Fridays & Saturdays<br>at 7:30pm   | A musical, political satire. We put the MOCK in Democracy!<br>Info: 202.312.1555<br><a href="http://www.capsteps.com">www.capsteps.com</a>   | Ronald Reagan Building<br>1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW<br>Tix available at <a href="http://ticketmaster.com">ticketmaster.com</a><br>202.397.SEAT                   | \$36  | Discounts available for groups of 10 or more.<br>Call 202-312-1427                  |

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