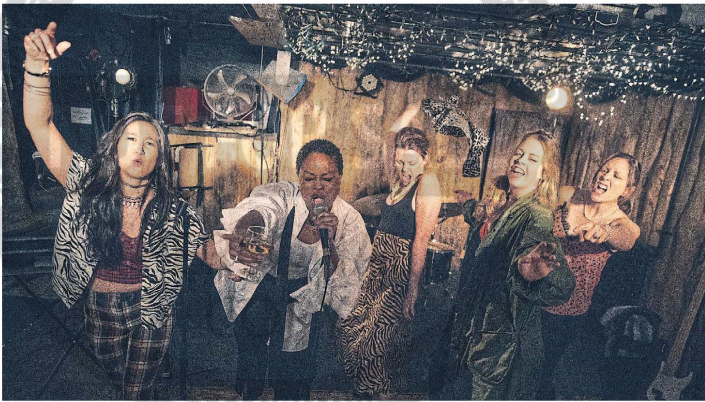


# ENTERTAINMENT



The comedic web series "Band Ladies" features Kate Fenton (Marnie), Vicki Kim (Cindy), Lisa Michelle Cornelius (Chloe), Dana Puddicombe (Penny) and Kirsten Rasmussen (Stephanie).

## Punk. Humour. Rage. GTA-shot 'Band Ladies' covers a lot of ground and generational angst for a 60-minute web series

**DENIS GRIGNON**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

On paper, or in that pitch to a big studio executive, it would seem too contrived to fly. Would audiences really buy into an eclectic group of five angst-filled, but comfortably-bored women in their 30s and 40s — some buttoned down and financially-secure, others flaky and/or free-spirited — who make a quick jump to punk rock musicians? Oh, and they make that leap from, literally, the restaurant booth where they're holding their book club meeting, to the open mic stage steps away.

That kind of drastic character metamorphosis typically takes at least a few full regular-length TV episodes.

"Band Ladies" attempts it in about four minutes. And get this: it succeeds.

The entire comedic web series, which was shot in the GTA and premiered Wednesday on streaming service Highball.tv, runs less than 60 minutes.

"Tremendously difficult," admits co-writer, Kate Fenton, about creating a super quick, but believable, story arc. "We tried hard not to focus on the

logic holes. But tried to really make the emotional trajectory clear."

Need to understand how vapid their lives were pre-punk transformation? When their book club chat threatens to steer away from an equally un-inspired romantic novel, Fenton's character, sensible mother and wife Marnie, warns, "Don't start a real conversation."

A few bottles of wine later — barely two minutes in web series time — when their taking the stage seems inevitable, big pharma shill Chloe (Lisa Michelle Cornelius) comically screams, "I gotta tell my truth. I GOTTA TELL MY TRUTH!"

And rather than take viewers through the pedantic process of how these unlikely punks become real musicians, director/co-writer Molly Flood, instead, cleverly points the camera to a to-do list at their first band meeting.

Far down that list: Learn to play instruments. It's a very succinct way to get to the jokes. And it works.

Laugh. Leave. Repeat.

It's not that "Band Ladies" is without a few small hiccup.

The acting, at times, seems a bit more forced than it needs to be — more suited to the live stage than the subtlety of the screen. (The cast, it's worth pointing out, are all connected via Toronto's improv and sketch community). But those infrequent scenes are forgiven, because the characters, even the selfishly entitled Stephanie, played convincingly by Kirsten Rasmussen, are so darn likeable.

The characters are also drawn from the writers' personal experiences. Vicki Kim's debt-laden bartender/aspiring musician, Cindy, for instance, was inspired by co-writer Dana Puddicombe's real-life tenure tending bar at The Rivoli.

"That was really an important perspective for me, because I worked at the Riv surrounded by comedy and music for years as I was pursuing my own career," says Puddicombe, self-isolating in her native Newfoundland, who plays self-made millionaire, Penny. "It offered an interesting edge of being on the inside and looking in."

Fenton, who attended Etobicoke School of the Arts and dated a musician in her teens,

recalls, "I spent a lot of time at the El Mocambo and Lee's Palace."

"Band Ladies," she says, "is like the truest form of my fantasy."

But don't expect a collage of silly sketches surrounded by loud, outrageous, three-chord songs. (The cast did write the lyrics and provided vocals to Christian Hansen's music).

"Band Ladies," while restricted to short episodes, does a nice job of delving into the genuine frustration — and anger — women of the cast's generation are feeling. That it does this via punk rock, Puddicombe points out, is fitting.

"As women get older, their 30s, 40s, 50s, their idea of themselves — their voice — well, there's a lot of bulls—t that's kinda thrown out. And they're starting to create this sense for themselves."

Here, too, she's drawing on her own personal experience as a performer nearing middle age.

"It's a time that the voice of women isn't celebrated as much," she laments.

"You're not the ingénue anymore... (you're) put in the corner a little bit."

"Punk offered an outlet that was screaming, tossing fits of... pure emotion and anger... at looking at your life."

Band Lady Marnie can relate. "I am a shell of woman," she confesses in her laundry room, before deciding, hey, "I can be a Mom AND a rock star!"

Fenton can relate, too: The born-and-bred Torontonain — ("I always found my way back here") — did Shakespeare for five years, pursued a teaching degree at Laurentian University and ran a theatre company with her husband of 15 years. When she eventually returned to Second City following the birth their child seven years ago, "I was really feeling, who am I? And how do I carve out space that is mine alone?"

Here, Fenton and brings up the #MeToo movement.

"Male misogyny has so much power right now," she says.

"There's a feeling that I personally possess that I can't ignore the rage that I walk around with every day."

"The punk music gave us space to address and voice that."

"Band Ladies" is streaming now on Highball TV.

## Had enough of 'Contagion'? Try these movies

These films provide some comfort through their élan, humanity and wit

**JAKE COYLE**  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

When many were rushing to re-watch "Contagion," the eerily prophetic 2011 Steven Soderbergh film about the outbreak of an easily transmitted virus, I was searching for more comforting escapes. I reached for "North by Northwest" the way a bushy greps for a pacifier.

Even in a pandemic, it's incredibly hard to watch "North by Northwest" without a perpetual grin on your face. Its jauntiness, buoyed by Bernard Herrmann's score, can outlast any calamity. The one we find ourselves in now doesn't feel so dissimilar to the blindsiding, why-me mystery Cary Grant stumbles into. We were just standing there, minding our own business, when suddenly a crop duster on the horizon turned and headed straight for us.

What to watch has been one of the most common quandaries of quarantine. For me, even "Groundhog Day" hits too close to home right now. But less obvious movies can also take on surprising relevancy.

I had forgotten, for example, that "Hud," Martin Ritt's 1963 black-and-white western, in-

volves an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Just when you're agog at Patricia Neal or swooning at Paul Newman (both refugees unto themselves), the film suddenly steps out of 1960s Texas and into today. Newman's Hud, standing over dead livestock, decries a larger injustice: "This country is run on epidemics, where you been?"

The Depression spawned some of the most effervescent movies ever made. Moviegoers, yearning for escape, flocked to lavish musicals, delirious screwball comedies and shad-owy film noirs.

That movie diet is as good now as it was then.

Since then, "escapism" has become big business and the domain of superheroes. But escape comes in many forms. Even the most challenging films transport, enveloping you in another world, another life — something that when so much is cut off from us feels like a lifeline.

In that spirit, here are some films, old and new, that can provide some comfort through their élan, humanity and wit. Warm blankets come in all sizes, comfort food in many flavours.

► **"My Man Godfrey":** Most of the best screwballs of the Depression uncashed a wild, free-wheeling face on American



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Ryan Gosling, left, and Russell Crowe star in the 2016 comedy "The Nice Guys."

digital rental).

► **"Out of the Past":** The noirs of the '40s might not seem like the stuff of warm blankets, but the best of them — "Laura," "Double Indemnity," "Gilda," "The Asphalt Jungle" — craft such an intoxicating bed of postwar alienation and fatalism that you can just lay down in them. Jacques Tourneur's 1947 "Out of the Past," with Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer and Kirk Douglas, has a smoky structure, nearly entirely told in flash-back, that makes it seem unknowable and new every time. (Available for digital rental)

► **"The Nice Guys":** A much more recent detective tale and a whole lot more ridiculous. Shane Black's 2016 comedy, with Ryan Gosling and Russell Crowe as private investigators in 70s Los Angeles, is part-noir, part-screwball. It's irresistible mainly for Gosling's all-out slapstick performance. Not just a B-side to his more lauded dramatic work, it's the best thing he's ever done. (Available for digital rental)

► **"I Know Where I'm Going!":** Little in movies reaches the sublimity of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's films. "The Red Shoes," "A Matter of Life and Death," "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp" and their 1945 romantic adventure, set on the Western Isles of Scotland, is maybe the most purely

infectious. Wendy Hiller plays a woman who, travelling to her fiancé, is trapped by stormy weather on the Isle of Mull — a stay that awakens her to the charms of the windswept isle's life, including a local naval officer (Roger Livesey). (Streaming on the Criterion Channel).

► **"Nobody's Fool":** The pleasures of this late Newman film, adapted from the Richard Russo novel, are endless. Set in wintry upstate New York, Robert Benton's film radiates warmth, a comically but affectionately dramatizing the small-town struggles of Newman's aged handyman and an exceptional cast of characters, including his landlady (Jessica Tandy, one of her last films), his one-legged lawyer (Gene Saks) and his rival (a never-better Bruce Willis). (Streaming on Amazon Prime).

► **"The Baytrippers":** For whatever reason, I've found Parker Posey supremely reassuring during the pandemic. Just can't imagine her taking anything from anybody, or global infectious disease. She, part of an ensemble in this 1996 comedy by Greg Motolla along side Liev Schreiber, Anne Mearns, Stanley Tucci and others. It's very much a '90s New York indie film, full of talk and deadpan humour, as a family navigates a Manhattan odyssey in a station wagon. (Streaming on Criterion Channel).

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