



GOING PUBLIC

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CTA leaves its mark on books, music

Say what you want about the cramped conditions, slow service and the general grime scene that is the CTA. Doubtless, the agency doubles as a mass transit muse.

"Going Public" tracked down three longtime riders—an author, a performance artist and a songwriter—who channeled some creativity from the CTA. The three shared their sources of inspiration and how they transformed transit angst into art.

Riding and writing

At first, it was just a transit time-killing hobby for Marcy Henry. Henry, 36, said she would pull out her journal on the "L" or bus and jot down notes about strange CTA sights, sounds and experiences.

After adding some stream-of-consciousness prose to her ponderings, Henry submitted them to the Chicago Cultural Center and received a grant to turn them into a 104-page book called "The CTA Chronicles," which was published last year and is available on ctachronicles.com. Intriguing chapter titles include "The few. The proud. The egg donors." and "Always Addison."

But what specifically about the CTA turned Henry from observer to author?

"It's such a strange combination of public and private," said Henry, an Andersonville rider and assistant professor of Humanities at Harold Washington College. "People don't really talk to each other."

"Though they are sharing a ride and sharing experiences, they pretend not to see each other or notice what's going on. Frankly, I think it's because nobody wants drama."

Henry, however, said she's had her share of CTA drama, including being chatted up by a malodorous woman she dubbed "salamami mami" and receiving "a message from God" from another bus rider.

"He told me the message was that God wanted me to sleep more," Henry said, laughing.

Are you a bus or 'L' artist?

If you were to write or sing about the CTA, what would your subject be? Send your comment—along with full name, age and neighborhood—to goingpublic@tribune.com. Your opinion might just get published in "Hey, CTA!" on Wednesday.

Your attention please

Sounding off on public transportation isn't just for Wednesdays anymore.

Visit redeychicago.com/ctablog to read our staffers' CTA posts and respond, or voice your opinion at our CTA hot line: **312-222-3069**.



inspiration.

"It's just such a lack of space, it's absolutely slow, and that just adds to the problem."

There's also the issue of it taking 40 minutes to get from Division to downtown. Ridiculous."

Newman said she has performed the piece at several local venues, including Homolatte, a spoken word show staged at Big Chicks, as well as at HotHouse. Audiences, Newman said, ate it up. You, too, can check out Newman's poem on redeychicago.com.

"I think there's a lot of discussion about relationships with different transit lines," said Newman, who said she has moved on from Blue and, having decided to park and ride from the California stop, is exploring a rider romance with the Green Line.

CTA songs

Lakeview rider Jim Simonis is no stranger to CTA songwriting. About 30 years ago, he penned "Broadway Bus," an ode to the No. 36-Broadway route. Then, a few years ago, he wrote "Cell Phone Breakup," a song about a woman involved in a loud, sobbing breakup during rush hour on the "L."

"It soon became an annual show at the