

E | LIVING & ARTS

Elevate takes downtown public art to new level, E3

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MUSIC



Singer-songwriter India Arie says that she speaks her truth in her music. CONTRIBUTED BY 42WEST

Arie: Music reflects maturity

Grammy winner took a 4-year hiatus.

Songs on her fifth album share themes of liberation and courage.

By Kristi Wooten
For the AJC

It was Halloween 2009 when India Arie hopped a plane at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and temporarily left her successful career behind.

She had just finished a 10-week tour opening for John Legend in support of her fourth album, "Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics." Before that, she'd been headlining her own tour. But on this day, she was done. Exhaustion, self-doubt, a bad breakup and a dispute with her management had brought her down. So she sought refuge on an island in the Pacific Northwest.

As the cold air stung her face on the ferry ride following the long flight, she remembers feeling an overwhelming sense of relief.

"It was the beauty of being free. I felt like I was going in search of something and didn't know what it was," said Arie, 38, speaking last month from Seattle, where she kicked off a two-month tour supporting her fifth and latest release, "SongVersation."

"Once I admitted to myself that I needed to make changes, I was willing to do whatever it took," the Atlanta-based singer said. "I was like, (God), just tell me what it is, because I want to feel good about my life. I thought what I wanted to do at that time was retire."

Riding high on hit songs including "Video" and "I Am Not My Hair," Arie had been a frequent presence on the R&B charts throughout the 2000s. She'd racked up 21 Grammy nominations, garnering four wins, and sold more than 10 million records worldwide. But the success had begun to feel hollow. She no longer

Arie continued on E7

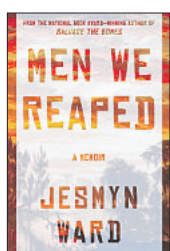
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For video of India Arie, including the official clip for her single 'Cocoa Butter,' go to MyAJC.com/sundayliving.

What's inside

5 lives cut short

Jesmyn Ward's memoir of growing up in Mississippi is an elegy for her brother, cousin and three friends who died young. E4



Tipping point

How much should you give your server at a full-service restaurant? A counter-service eatery? A coffee shop? John Kessler offers some tips. E6

PJ Personal Journeys

An award-winning feature that spotlights the lives of extraordinary individuals and the stories that define our region and connect our community.



Chantelle Rytter leads the Atlanta Beltline Lantern Parade last month. After kicking off the Art on the Atlanta Beltline public art showcase for four years now, the parade has been given permanent status as an annual event. PHOTOS BY HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM

Pied Piper of the Beltline

Chantelle Rytter is shaping the culture of Atlanta, one joyful parade at a time.

By Suzanne Van Atten
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Supporting an illuminated top hat and a paper parasol, Chantelle Rytter walks along the eastside trail of the Atlanta Beltline past Ponce City Market. It's nighttime, but the late-summer heat hangs on well past dark. A trumpet bleats a jazzy tune behind her, the thump of a bass drum keeps time.

She is surrounded by thousands of cheering spectators; thousands more follow her. It is the fourth annual Atlanta Beltline Lantern Parade, and Chantelle leads the way.

"I think I might cry," she says to no one in particular. An estimated 10,000 people have gathered along the 2.7-mile stretch between Irwin Street and Monroe Drive for the annual event. What most of them don't know is if it weren't for Chantelle, a small, self-effacing woman with a very big dream, there would be no parade.

Some come to Atlanta to make their mark in business, others to establish a lifestyle. Chantelle set her sights on something altogether different: to ignite the artistic passions of the city and infuse it with some New Orleans-style magic.

Her arrival from the Crescent City 12 years ago coincided



with the explosion of Atlanta's intown neighborhoods. Young transplants and suburbanites were scooping up new apartments and condos and renovating old homes, and they were eager to find fun ways to connect with one another and their new urban community. They adopted the

An estimated 10,000 people marched in the 2013 Atlanta Beltline Lantern Parade or watched it pass by as it snaked along the eastside trail from Old Fourth Ward to Midtown. Chantelle hopes to someday host a lantern parade on the westside trail.

HOW WE GOT THE STORY

I first met Chantelle Rytter a decade ago when she won second place in a fiction contest I managed for another publication. Her comical story about working at a parade float factory in New Orleans always stayed with me. Only recently did I realize she was the creator of the Atlanta Beltline Lantern Parade, among other community arts events. I became intrigued — in this era of self-promotion and self-interest — that an artist would invest so much time and effort creating something that didn't put money in her pocket or her name in lights. So I went to a workshop, I made a lantern and I marched alongside Chantelle in this year's parade. And I was there to witness what it was like when 10,000 people came together to make merry just for the simple sake of joy.

Suzanne Van Atten
Features Enterprise Editor
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on a hot summer night in a festival of lights?

Should a tear roll down Chantelle's cheek right now, her Cheshire cat smile is proof it would not be out of sorrow but joy at the sight of all she has wrought.

Continued on E10

Next week: An eccentric pioneer in the cable TV industry carries on in the faint afterglow of fame.

VISUAL ARTS

Atlanta Contemporary Art Center reopens

Closed for the summer, ACAC's Art Party will show off renovation.

By Rosalind Bentley
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Four years ago, curators hung a vintage white Mustang from the rafters of the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. The car, part of artist Mark Wentzel's piece, "Morale Hazard," dangled above the concrete floor from a Herculean chain. The steel girder supporting the coupe seemed to groan.

Months before, Contemporary Artistic Director Stuart Horodner allowed architects David Yocum and Brian Bell to slice out a section of an exterior wall for their piece, "Boundary Issues." The opening, half below ground level and half above, was the size of a large patio sliding door. The

ACAC continued on E7



Artistic Director Stuart Horodner (right) and Managing Director Stacie Lindner visit The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. BOB ANDRES / BANDRES@AJC.COM

PERSONAL JOURNEYS

Pied Piper of the Beltline

Chantelle Rytter's parades are creating a culture of community in Atlanta neighborhoods.

continued from E1

2

Everybody loves a parade

Chantelle, 46, lives in a tiny, Depression-era shotgun cottage on a hill in Grant Park. There are just four rooms, each one jammed with curiosities. Vintage dolls, hats, figurines, masks, purses, toys, lanterns and framed photographs clutter every surface. A bookshelf in the bedroom displays a large collection of rocks and feathers.

Gifts from past loves hold pride of place. On the bedroom wall is an antique vanity set with gilt-edged brushes and combs, a gift from her first boyfriend. On a shelf in the next room is a wooden box holding a palm-sized brass compass given to her by "a pirate I dated for a minute," she says. In the parlor, a long strip of canvas dotted with tiny hand-painted flowers is tacked on the wall, the work of an artist she once loved.

She shuns air conditioning in warm weather, preferring to spend her time on the back deck overlooking shade trees and the neighbor's yard fowl. Her big red tomcat, Rex, lolls at her feet. Here she works on art projects and listens to audiobooks or NPR. She doesn't own a television. When friends make pop culture references, she usually just laughs and pretends she knows what they're talking about.

Chantelle laughs often. It's a gentle laugh, sort of a cross between a chuckle and a giggle. And like her voice, it has a slightly husky quality. She radiates warmth, but there's a distinct edge to her, too. Steeped in Mardi Gras culture, she's no stranger to letting the good times roll. And you get the sense that if you got in her way, she'd kill you with kindness first, but if that didn't work, she'd just stomp you where you stood.

Asked to recall her first parade, the Baltimore native doesn't hesitate. It was the Fourth of July in Dundalk, Md., home of her paternal grandparents, where she spent summers. She doesn't remember much about it except that she went every year while growing up. But when she was in the eighth grade, the parade hosted a float-building competition and she helped create the winning entry — a cardboard pirate ship. That she remembers.

After graduating from Penn State in 1991 with a degree in integrated arts, Chantelle didn't know what to do next, so she moved to New Orleans.

"I wanted love and adventure," she says.

She landed a waitress job on Bourbon Street and rented an apartment behind Igor's Lounge. The city was as beautiful and exciting as she'd hoped, and she loved how friendly the people were. Six months later, she celebrated her first Mardi Gras and two things occurred: Her passion for parades was firmly established, and she met her future husband. Less than a year later they were married. As far as Chantelle was concerned, life couldn't get any better.

3

Torn between two cities

That changed a year later when Chantelle's husband took a job in Atlanta. She begrudgingly agreed to the move. It was a decision she regretted from the start. Her primary objection? Atlanta wasn't New Orleans. But she had specific complaints, too.

"It's not a visually beautiful city. It doesn't have a pedestrian center. It's a land-locked motor city!" she says, her voice growing loud and emphatic. "People were like, 'Oh, Little Five Points! It's like the Quarter!' and I was like, 'An intersection of the Quarter!' I was not impressed at all, except there were very nice people. I made a lot of friends."

Three years later she convinced her husband to return to New Orleans, but they missed the friends they left behind. That's when Chantelle started the Krewe of the



Chantelle demonstrates how to make a top hat lantern as participants David Durand (from left), Mark Alfonso and Jill Wiscombe look on at the Euclid Avenue Yacht Club in Little Five Points. HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM



Chantelle, who lives in a Depression-era shotgun cottage filled with her whimsical creations, built her first parade float for the Dundalk, Md., Fourth of July parade when she was in eighth grade. She later worked a seasonal job at Blaine Kern Studios, building Mardi Gras floats in New Orleans. HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM

Grateful Gluttons, a private social club patterned after the crews in New Orleans. The goal was to get their Atlanta friends to come to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. Eight of them did that first year in 1999. And they came back again for the next Mardi Gras, and Jazz Fest, too.

Alas, the marriage didn't last. Asked what happened, Chantelle responds wryly, "The usual: drinking, gambling and other women."

The day after she left her husband, Chantelle got a seasonal job building Mardi Gras floats at Blaine Kern Studios, where she mastered the art of papier-mâché. The gig ended two months later and Chantelle, acknowledging the irony, eventually moved back to Atlanta to be near her friends.

She assumed that was the end of the Krewe. But members wouldn't let it go. It was the first year of the Little Five Points Halloween Parade, so Chantelle decided the Krewe would carry on and its Atlanta debut would be the parade.

"Being removed from what I loved most made me realize that it's really cool to be part of contributing to the culture of a city, and I can do that here," Chantelle says.

The first year they just walked the parade, but the next year they built a float called Swamp Nation.

"We were really, really fabulous, but we did not win and we got mad," she says.

The following year they partnered with the Euclid Avenue Yacht Club with one goal in mind: to win. Their float,

Lost at Sea, featured a sinking pirate ship, a cannibal island and a dozen motorcycle sharks. The Witches Cup was theirs, an honor they've won seven times now.

Each year the floats got bigger and more elaborate. There was Freak Show, featuring Talulah the Tap Dancing Torso. The Purple People Eaters. The Child-Eating Tiki Monster. The Snallygaster. Phantasmagoria.

Then one day Chantelle stuck a tomato cage on her head and realized it made a perfect structure for a skeleton. Just like that, floats were out and building a fleet of 8-foot-tall Day of the Dead skeleton puppets was in. The towering skeletons have since become a signature of the Little Five Points Halloween Parade. And along the way, some-



Chantelle, founder of the Krewe of the Grateful Gluttons, is surrounded by the group's Day of the Dead skeleton puppets, which will appear in the Little Five Points Halloween Parade on Saturday. CONTRIBUTED

thing happened. Chantelle began to detect some of that New Orleans-style *joie de vivre* right here in Atlanta. The Krewe was growing — up to nearly 50 people now — and they'd launched more annual events, including the Gingerbread Trailer Park Design Contest at the Yacht Club and the Gnome March in the Inman Park Festival Parade. And Chantelle started riding her bicycle everywhere, which exposed her to parts of the city she'd never noticed before when she'd zoomed by in her car.

Where once there had been derelict houses and buildings were now fixed-up bungalows and new businesses. Neighborhoods like Kirkwood, East Atlanta Village and Old Fourth Ward were coming into their own, Decatur was turning into a fine dining destination and West Midtown was transforming warehouses and industrial sites into a high-end dining and shopping district.

Fueled by her successes and increasingly aware of the possibilities, Chantelle began to formulate a dream. She'd become fascinated by lantern parades, popular throughout Asia. Having only seen them in photographs and videos on the Internet, she wanted to create one in Atlanta. She'd also come to realize that her events cultivated a sense of community.

"I believe from the bottom of my heart that people — live and in the flesh — having a silly good time together with a mutual purpose fosters enduring bonds between people and place," Chantelle says.

She was perfectly poised when Art on the Atlanta Beltline, a weeks-long public art showcase, began soliciting grants for installations and performances along the fledgling trail. What better way to encourage people to embrace the Beltline than by staging a fun event there, Chantelle thought. She proposed the lantern parade, and it was selected to kick off the showcase in 2010. The first year it attracted 500 people. By year three, it was drawing 1,250.

4

Sowing seeds of light

"Lit hat! Lit hat! Everybody look," Chantelle shouts as a tall man stands in the middle of the room, modeling his illuminated hat. It is a unique design with a curved peak up top and an exaggerated bill that suggests a cartoon prop. His female companion, seated at a table nearby, stops gluing streamers to a parasol and looks up at him with admiration.

The crowd claps and whooos while Chantelle snaps a photograph.

In the weeks leading up to this year's parade, Chantelle leads nine lantern-making workshops around town. This one at the Yacht Club is devoted to hat making, oth-

PERSONAL JOURNEYS



Chantelle experiments with new lantern forms on her back deck. This giant stick fish has been created with thin strips of bamboo and masking tape. Eventually she'll cover it with tissue paper or perhaps a thin, translucent fabric. HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM

ers focus on parasols, globes and torchieres. Thirty or so people crowd around tables, wrestling strips of bamboo, colored tissue paper and glue into something resembling headgear.

"The thing about tissue is you have about 30 seconds until it turns to mush," Chantelle advises as she moves around the room offering encouragement. She's wearing a black skirt and a black Krewe T-shirt that says "Weird Gone Pro." Her dark, shoulder-length hair is twisted into a bun with a purple flower tucked through it.

Jeanne Flint of Pine Lake has marched in every lantern parade. This is her second workshop.

"What's not to like," she says when asked to explain the parade's appeal. "It gets together a lot of different people from a lot of different backgrounds, and we get to bring knowledge — especially about the Beltline — to people."

The workshops mostly draw middle-aged women, but there are several men, including a corporate CEO, and a family of four with two young boys.

Every year Chantelle frets that people won't show up, but the workshops all fill to capacity — to the point that some people crash them. They are an important part of Chantelle's vision. She sees them as seeds she sows to make the parade bloom. It's a way to recruit new participants and increase the number of lanterns year after year. And as happy as she is to see people re-create the parasols and top hats she demonstrates, she is ecstatic when someone takes her concepts and creates something totally unexpected, like the man in this workshop who makes a 4-foot-tall hot air balloon hat.

"People are full of wonderful surprises," Chantelle says. "They have amazing ideas in their heads and they don't even know that when they arrive."

5

10,000 points of light

Parade day finds hundreds of lantern-toting people milling around the intersection of Krog and Irwin streets in Old Fourth Ward waiting for show time. The sun has set, but dark has yet to fall. Chantelle is located in an empty lot by the Stoveworks building, surrounded by Krewe members and their assorted lanterns and puppets. She's wearing her usual Krewe uniform, black skirt and black T-shirt. She's braided her hair into pigtails and capped her head with a 2-foot-tall orange top-hat lantern. Strapped to her back is a small black pack that holds the pole of her parasol, blue and purple streamers fluttering from its rim.

Before the parade begins she has to find Beltline President and CEO Paul Morris to give him a roll of tape, and she needs to hit the portable restroom. As she snakes her way through the crowd, most people don't realize she is the organizer of this event — that without her, they wouldn't be here right now. And she makes no effort to let them know. When confusion arises over who's next in the queue at the restroom, she sweetly begs



Chantelle makes her way to the front of the pack to lead the Great Atlanta Bicycle Parade down Peachtree Street last month. She organizes four bike parades a year for the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition's Atlanta Streets Alive events. CURTIS COMPTON / CCOMPTON@AJC.COM

permission to go next instead of pulling rank.

Just before the parade starts, Chantelle climbs up a small stepladder to address the crowd as the sky begins to darken.

"Your participation is what makes tonight magical," she says into the microphone. "It is truly the brilliance of individuals that illuminate a community. Holding up a light is a universal gesture of faith and support. Thank you for holding up a light for the Beltline."

With that, she cues the band and the procession begins, but Chantelle doesn't just walk the parade. She twirls it, high-steps it and dances it, her parasol dipping and tipping as she goes. Her eyes sparkle and her smile is a mile wide as she claps her hands and shouts approval to people lining the route brandishing their own lanterns.

Behind her is the seven-man Wasted Potential Brass Band, setting the tempo with a ragtag repertoire of "Summertime" and "When the Saints Go Marching In." Following them are two 14-foot-tall glowing giant puppets that lurch and loom overhead. And stretching behind them for roughly two miles are thousands of men, women and children illuminated by lantern globes, parasols, stars, torches and high hats. Some wear costumes, others have painted their faces. One man carries a fish-shaped lantern the size of a Mini Cooper

'People are full of wonderful surprises. They have amazing ideas in their heads and they don't even know that when they arrive.'

Chantelle Rytter

EVENT PREVIEW

Little Five Points Halloween Festival and Parade

Noon-10 p.m. Saturday. Parade starts at 4 p.m. Free. Euclid and Moreland avenues, Atlanta. l5phalloween.com

Grant Park Halloween Lantern Parade

7:30 p.m. Oct. 26. Line up begins at 6:30 p.m. at Grant Park Pavilion, Cherokee Avenue, Atlanta. Paper jack-o-lantern workshops, 11:30 a.m. today and Oct. 20, Grant Park Farmers Market. Free. Presented by Grant Park Conservancy and Krewe of the Grateful Gluttons. www.gpconservancy.org, www.gratefulgluttons.com.

on his shoulders. A woman hoists a voodoo doll lantern more than five feet tall. At the end is the Seed & Feed Marching Abominable band in all its beaded, bedazzled glory.

As the parade progresses, three young children, each carrying a globe lantern on a stick, fall in and lead the way. A short while later, four agile boys jump in front and breakdance their way down the route. Spectators line the Beltline, crowding bridges and hillsides, balconies and patios, cheering and shouting. They hang out apartment building windows and rush outside of restaurants. Many of them display their own lanterns and glow sticks and strings of colored lights. What looks like a spinning UFO from a distance turns out to be someone standing on the roof of a building, twirling an illuminated hula-hoop. Tucked up against a weed-covered berm, dinner party guests sit at a long table set with dozens of burning candles, watching the parade pass. All ages, all races, all smiling and clapping and glowing, inside and out.

The only hiccup of the night occurs when the parade approaches its end point at Piedmont Park. The traffic cop who was supposed to help the parade cross Monroe Drive is a no-show. Stopping at the curb and throwing out her arms to halt the band, Chantelle waits

for the light to change and then leads the parade across the street, past Park Tavern and down the hill into the vast lawn behind it. As the river of lights flows into the park, Chantelle dashes back up the hill and across Monroe to greet parade participants, snap photographs and help people navigate the street crossing.

It takes nearly two hours for the last stragglers to cross Monroe. Not until then does Chantelle finally accept a can of PBR and cheer another parade well done. But it's just a prelude to the real celebration, which takes place much later at a Krewe member's house. That's when, around 2 a.m., Chantelle strips naked and jumps into the backyard pool. An hour later she's in bed asleep. She needs as much rest as possible because tomorrow is another parade.

6

Keeping the lights on

Over breakfast two days later at a restaurant in Grant Park, Chantelle reflects on the weekend's events. In addition to the lantern parade on Saturday, she organized the Sunday afternoon Great Atlanta Bicycle Parade, sponsored by the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition. She talks about adding more bands to next year's lantern parade, of having to marshal it more like a street parade because of its size, of managing the inevitable gaps in the procession — the bane of all parade organizers. She talks about building a dozen phoenix bike kites for the bicycle parade.

She talks about needing a space — a place to host workshops, sell lantern kits and materials and store the large lanterns and puppets and phoenixes. She talks about the upcoming Little Five Points Parade and Grant Park Halloween Lantern Parade later this month. And she talks about the next big thing she wants to create: Regatta Illuminata, a lantern parade on water, possibly in Roswell.

What Chantelle doesn't talk about until she's prodded is what makes her worry, what keeps her awake nights. Like most artists, it's money.

She used to work as a corpo-

ABOUT THE REPORTER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Suzanne Van Atten joined the AJC in 2006. As features enterprise editor, she manages content for the Sunday Living & Arts section, including book reviews, arts features and Personal Journeys. She is also a creative writing instructor and travel book author. Previously she was arts and entertainment editor for Creative Loafing Atlanta and the Marietta Daily Journal.



Hyosub Shin was born and raised in Korea. Inspired by the work of National Geographic photographers, he came to the United States about 10 years ago to study photography. Past assignments include the Georgia legislative session, the Atlanta Dream's Eastern Conference title game, the Atlanta Air Show and the Atlanta Braves' National League Division Series.



ON MYAJC.COM

See a photo gallery and a video of the 2013 Atlanta Beltline Lantern Parade at www.MyAJC.com/personaljournies.

Here's what our readers have to say about last week's Personal Journey:



This is one of the finest pieces I have ever read in the AJC and for that matter, in any print publication. This one piece is worth a year's subscription to the AJC.

Art Huckabee, Cumming

This was an EXCELLENT story. I am a recent transplant to Georgia, and I can't say I am impressed with the state's politicians and officials. But the AJC — I consider that the bright spot of Georgia!

Marie Drew, Decatur

Tell us your Personal Journey at personaljourneys@ajc.com.

rate caterer for a law firm until her art projects, which are funded by grants, took up too much time. Now she works part-time for Bicycle Tours of Atlanta, showing off the city she once loathed, but now loves, to tourists. The income is sporadic, and she has no health benefits or 401k. Her truck, a gift, has more than 200,000 miles on it and failed to start this morning.

"I love what I'm doing so much and I would be very sad if I had to stop and go get a damn job to have health insurance and a reliable income," she says. "I have to shut that [concern] down because I could spend all day worrying about that and not get on with my joyful self."

And Chantelle needs to channel her joy so she can fulfill her mission to keep spreading it around, inspiring people to tap that quality in themselves and helping them find it in their city.

"Everybody, everybody has a need to express creativity, to make a little something to show somebody," Chantelle says. "There is a universal need for creative play. I've got to give it up to Julia Cameron and 'The Artist's Way' for making the connection that your creativity is your divinity. 'That joy that we feel?' she says. "That's grace."

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Go to MyAJC.com/personaljournies to comment on this story and read what others are saying.