

EVENT TITLE: The Time Is Now: How (and Why) to Launch a Literary Magazine, Sponsored by CLMP

Event Description: CLMP's Firecracker Award winners and finalists in the Best Debut Magazine category share the ins and outs of launching a magazine, building a readership, and developing strategies for success and sustainability.

Event Category: Publishing

Event Organizer: Community of Literary Magazines & Presses (CLMP)

Event Moderator:

Montana Agte-Studier is the Director of Membership and the NYSCA NYTAP Program at CLMP. She holds a BFA in Jazz Flute Performance and a BA in Arts in Context with a focus on Literature and Music from The New School University. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Epiphany*, *The Ocotillo Review*, *New South*, and *The New Guard*. Also a musician, sculptor, painter, photographer, and amateur arborist, she lives in Washington Heights, New York City.

Event Participants:

NaBeela Washington is the Founder of *Lucky Jefferson*. She is an Alabama-raised poet, editor, and budding art collector who holds a Master's in Creative Writing and English from Southern New Hampshire University and Bachelor's in Visual Advertising from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has been published in *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Washington Writers' Publishing House*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Crazyhorse*. You can usually find her enjoying long strolls, sewing, learning to be a better baker, or binge-watching anime. Connect with her at nabeelawashington.com.

Adriana E. Ramírez is the Co-Founder of *Aster(ix)*, a literary journal giving voice to the censored and the marginalized. Adriana is a Mexican-Colombian writer, essayist, critic, and poet based in Pittsburgh. She is a columnist and books editor for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Adriana won the inaugural PEN/Fusion Emerging Writers Prize (2015) for her novella-length work of nonfiction, *Dead Boys* (Little A, 2016). Her full-length work of nonfiction, *The Violence*, is forthcoming.

Nina Lohman is the Publisher of *Brink*, a literary journal dedicated to publishing hybrid, cross-genre work. She is the Literary Programming Director for the Mission Creek Festival and the Nonfiction Editor of *PromptPress*, an interdisciplinary book-arts journal that pairs writers and visual artists to create and publish new work. Her writing has appeared in *The Huffington Post*, *Paste Magazine*, *The Rumpus*, *Essay Daily*, *The Other Journal*, *Earth Island Journal*, and elsewhere. Her hybrid nonfiction book *The Body Alone: An Articulation of Pain*, is forthcoming.

Moderator Opening Remarks:

Welcome to The Time Is Now: How (and Why) to Launch a Literary Magazine. A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let Alisa Reynya [locate in audience] know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from using scented products during the discussion.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Thank you for coming! Once again this is The Time Is Now: How (and Why) to Launch a Literary Magazine, sponsored by the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses, also known as CLMP. Founded in 1967, CLMP is the largest and oldest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting independent literary publishers: magazines, presses, and chapbook and zine publishers mission-driven to publish literature. These organizations make up an underserved, uniquely vulnerable and essential field that connects the greatest diversity of writers to equally diverse communities of readers. You can learn more about CLMP at our website, clmp.org.

My name is Montana Agte-Studier, and I'm the Director of Membership and the NYSCA NYTAP Program at CLMP. Today we're going to be talking to three of CLMP's Firecracker Award winners and finalists in the Best Debut

Magazine category, discussing the ins and outs of launching a magazine, building a readership, and developing strategies for success and sustainability. We'll be taking questions at the end of the discussion, so please save your comments until then. And now, it's my pleasure to introduce our panelists:

NaBeela Washington, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Lucky Jefferson*. NaBeela is an Alabama-raised poet, editor, and budding art collector who holds a Master's in Creative Writing and English from Southern New Hampshire University and Bachelor's in Visual Advertising from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has been published in *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Washington Writers' Publishing House*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Crazyhorse*.

Adriana E. Ramírez, Co-Founder of *Aster(ix) Journal*. Adriana is a Mexican-Colombian writer, essayist, critic, and poet based in Pittsburgh. She is a columnist and books editor for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Adriana won the inaugural PEN/Fusion Emerging Writers Prize (2015) for her novella-length work of nonfiction, *Dead Boys* (Little A, 2016). Her full-length work of nonfiction, *The Violence*, is forthcoming.

And Nina Lohman, Publisher of *BRINK*. She is the Literary Programming Director for the Mission Creek Festival and the Nonfiction Editor of *PromptPress*. Her writing has appeared in *The Huffington Post*, *Paste Magazine*, *The Rumpus*, *Essay Daily*, *The Other Journal*, *Earth Island Journal*, and elsewhere. Her hybrid nonfiction book *The Body Alone: An Articulation of Pain*, is forthcoming.

Moderator Questions and Panelist Responses:

Would each of you give us a brief overview of your magazine? What's your mission, what's your focus, how long ago did you launch, where are you based, are you a nonprofit or for profit, etc?

NW: *Lucky Jefferson's* mission is to publish social change. We do this by reimagining books and creating interactive community experiences to center modern readers.

We are a remote nonprofit publisher creating spaces for all writers and artists.

AR: *Aster(ix)* is a literary journal and online magazine that places people of color and other marginalized folks at the center of the larger cultural conversation. We launched in October 2013, are based in Pittsburgh, and we are neither a profit nor a nonprofit. We do not operate on a business model and generally avoid capitalism as much as possible —a “no profit possible” model. We are best described as an old-school patronage type situation. (Our strategic partners, Blue Sketch Press, Little Owl Creative, City of Asylum Pittsburgh, and the University of Pittsburgh cover most of our expenses. *Aster(ix)* itself has neither income nor expenses.)

NL: *Brink* is a nonprofit, in-print literary journal that is published twice a year. We are dedicated to creating space in the literary world for hybrid and cross-genre work created by individuals who tend to reside outside traditional artistic disciplines.

That means we seek out and publish work that often requires more than one modality to tell the story it needs to tell. *Brink* was launched in the Spring of 2021 and we are headquartered in Iowa City, Iowa, but we have editors that span the country from Georgia to Arizona to New Mexico to Oregon.

What made each of you decide to start a lit mag? What made you feel like a new lit mag was needed in the field?

NW: I decided to begin *Lucky Jefferson* because I found myself without a sound writing community. I had just begun my masters program in creative writing and English and realized I knew more communications and advertising folks than writers. I wanted to be a part of the change makers that are working to shake up traditional publishing.

AR: We wanted to create a literary space that could archive literary and artistic works, that encouraged experimentation and conversation among those of us who work on the margins.

NL: I write hybrid nonfiction and it has always been a struggle for me to find places that are willing to take risks and publish my work. Even now, I hear back from editors who like my work but struggle to understand how to put it

all in print. I came to realize that if I'm having this struggle likely other people are as well. *Brink* was founded with this opportunity in mind: there is space in the literary world for reputable, professional publishers who are willing to take risks and put their shoulders behind hybrid and cross-genre work.

Brink publishes work that falls squirrely in the genre categories, but we work hard to pair this work alongside work that presses boundaries. Hybrid work celebrates the narratives that are often sidelined because they (or the people who write them) don't always *fit* cleanly in what is expected. We're pressing against that limitation.

I think the world we live in often requires writers (and prepares readers) to tell stories and present art in a multifaceted way. Our goal, as editors, is to rally in support of an author's vision. This takes extra time and attention and we absolutely think it's worth it.

How long did you consider launching a lit mag before you actually did it?

NW: For a year or more; On our website it says that we were founded in 2018, and that's when I felt my most imaginative about *Lucky Jefferson*; it's when it moved from an idea to more of a concrete thing. In 2019 is when we would publish our first collection of work, now know as *Testament*.

AR: *Aster(ix)* took about six months to come together as a lit journal. It was built from decades of conversations with writers, dating back to 1997 when Angie co-founded Women in Literature and Letters, and building on work that I'd begun with the National Hispanic Institute. I provided the infrastructure and Angie handled the vision and content.

NL: *Brink* percolated in my mind for about a year and a half before the initial conversations started to take place. David Mitchell has this great line in *The Bone Clocks* where he writes "the soul is on the edge of what's visible, like a clear glass marble in a jar of water." For a long time, that's what *Brink* felt like for me. I could see the contour but not the exact image. I knew there was something there but it wasn't until I started having conversations with Poetry Editor Hannah Bonner and Fiction Editor Alisha Jeddelloh that I could begin to see the marble, so to speak.

How is actually running a lit mag different than you thought it would be? What are some things that are better/easier than you expected? Things that are harder than expected?

NW: I don't know what I imagined but I thought that my passion alone would be enough for this work and the road ahead. It takes so much more than that to create change. And that's a painful realization, especially when you're 2 years into running a new publication.

Things that have been relatively easy, getting enough submissions to create a publication; things that have been not so easy, getting to a place of financial stability.

AR: Both Angie and I had a good idea of what we were getting into, both having been a part of literary mags before. So we brought our experience to the table and tried to simplify operations as much as possible. We divided our tasks pretty well and have honestly been able to make it work.

NL: It has been a ton of work and at the same time have felt prepared to launch and uphold running *Brink* as a nonprofit for these first few years. I have a background in nonprofit fundraising and that experience has prepared me to be really direct with fundraising and finances. It's forced me to do the work of budgeting and planning.

I wasn't quite prepared for all of the storage I would need in my home. *Brink* is really run out of my home office and a spare closet.

One thing that is more difficult than I expected: I had anticipated that it would be easier to apply for grants in the first few years of launching a nonprofit, but that has not been the case. Many granting organizations—for very good reasons—require evidence, like 3 years or so, of published work before you are able to apply for grants. I get this, but I had hoped to find more support for freshly launched projects. That's a big reason why I was so grateful for the opportunities, support, and promotion made possible by the CLMP Firecracker Award. Being nominated for this award is purchase in the publishing world and we're really grateful for that.

What has been your biggest challenge so far? Have you overcome it or are you still figuring it out?

NW: Funding. Curating motivation for myself to keep going.

AR: We wish we could pay our writers and that we could pay more artists for their work. We're perpetually trying to figure that out. But it's important that most everything we offer is free and not behind a paywall. Only a handful of pieces are exclusive to the print.

NL: 1. Understanding and honing in on the timeline for when everything needs to happen. There are so many moving pieces to contend with and there is a lot of pre-planning and back-tracking math that needs to be done to ensure that everything is done on time. It's not just planning the journal itself – that part is always energizing and fun. Understanding the margins of what happens before publication and what happens after publication takes a lot of time and effort and clear communication. I think this will be an area where we are constantly shifting in order to be more effective and efficient. Our team has excellent communication (thanks to the google suite) but we're learning as we go. 2. Distribution. On a couple of levels. First, shipping costs are outrageous, so understanding how to balance what part of the shipping costs we take on as a press and how much to ask the reader to assume. But also understanding how, aside from direct online sales and local businesses, how to get our journals into more places. It's a weird cycle: because we have smaller printing numbers, we aren't eligible for distribution. But we can't print more copies until we have more places to distribute. It's a slower process than I might have anticipated but I think we are getting closer to being able to work with a distributor and not just store and mail everything from my kitchen table. 3. Libraries – how difficult it can be to get into this circuit.

Every few years, another article comes out about the current “magazine renaissance” going on. However, the interest in and demand for literary magazines is near consistent, and there seem to always be a slew of new literary magazines launching every year. What is it about right now that makes you feel like you're in the best magazine renaissance yet? Why is now a good time to jump into the fray and start a lit mag of your own?

NW: It felt like the perfect time to start a publication because people seem more open to the idea of change. You can't change much if you don't have people in agreement. And with major publishers merging, I think more and

more writers desire authority over what happens to their work as well as the literature that shapes the future.

AR: I don't actually believe that now is any different than any other time. Start a magazine if you want to! If there's a void you can fill, fill it. Don't worry about the zeitgeist.

NL: It's easier than ever to expand the boundaries of a team and contributors. Platforms like google suites and submittable and social networking make it possible to get the word out about the work you are doing and that unique problem your lit journal is trying to solve. Last year we had over 2K submissions which tells me that writers are hungry and they are informed. They are looking for places to publish their work.

Other Questions:

How do you feel that your lit mag compares to other lit mags out there? What makes you different? What makes you stand out? What makes your lit mag necessary?

What is something you wished you knew before starting a lit mag?

If you could start over, would there be anything you would do differently from the beginning?

What advice would you give someone thinking of starting a lit mag?

Have you had to reassess or change any policies you put in place at the beginning based on the real needs of the lit mag once it was up and running? (i.e. many publishers vow to not charge for submissions until they realize the cost of a submission platforms)

What submissions platforms do you use? Do you charge for submissions? Are you overflowing with submissions, or are you constantly looking for more?

How do you reach writers? How do you convince them that, out of all the magazines out there, they should submit to yours?

How do you determine who your audience is? Has it changed at all from when you first started to now? Has it surprised you at all?

What's your marketing strategy? Do you send newsletters? Are you on social media? Do you have any novel approaches to reaching your readership?

How many people work at your lit mag? Are they paid or are they volunteers? Are you looking to expand, or are you happy with the current staff size?

What are some strategies for success you've developed since starting your magazine? What mistakes can you see other lit mags making that will inevitably negatively affect their sustainability?

What's the most fun thing about running a literary magazine?

Q&A