



# GEM: GIRLS EMPOWERING MOVEMENT STORY

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Photo: Breanna Tillie, *The West Georgian*

Middle school is often a challenging and somewhat awkward time in life where young people are attempting to figure out who they are and where they fit in, all while navigating school assignments, extracurricular activities and responsibilities in their homes. The stresses of being in middle school may be overlooked by busy adults, and it is indeed possible that the physical and mental health of a middle school student may suffer due to the student's preoccupation with other obligations and the lack of time the adults in their lives can spend addressing such matters.

Representatives of the Girls Empowering Movement, also known as GEM, participated in the University of West Georgia's Spring Involvement Fair on Jan. 22. GEM is a program created by girls for girls. It seeks to provide mentorship and community for middle school girls in the areas of cardiovascular health, nutritional health and mental health.

"Our first student organization fair was great," said Georgia Hamby, president of GEM girls with the UWG.

"We had a lot of people come by and tell us that they've heard of us. That made us really happy because we're trying to get our name out there and spread the word about our organization because it is so important for girls," said Hamby.

GEM visits middle schools all

around Carroll County, making themselves known through flyers that are sent home with the students. A pre-survey is taken into account for the female students, and the number of girls signing up has been exceeding expectations.

"Our goal was 250 girls to keep the program up and running," said Hamby. "And we have surpassed that. It's been really nice."

The mentors working with GEM are assigned to at least one school, and the mentors lead various activities for the girls that get them moving and active, as well as getting to know each other.

"We like to get to know what the girls like and what they want to do, and center the activities around that," said Hamby. "Some parents sign the girls up and sometimes there are girls who don't want to be there at first, but once they understand that we want them to come back and participate then they do get more involved in the activities."

Some parents sign their daughters up for GEM so that they can develop leadership and teamwork skills through the activities, as well as get their daughters physically active.

"Technology is really big right now, I think a lot of kids go home and go straight onto TikTok or some other social media. GEM is a great opportunity for girls to take an hour to build friendships and get active," said Hamby. "We also strive for

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inclusivity. We understand that not everyone participates in sports and we want everyone to enjoy this. With our activities, we try to avoid games like dodgeball where you pick on the weakest link and get them out."

Hamby encourages other students in college to get involved with GEM, because not only is the mentorship a benefit to the girls, but it is also a benefit to the mentor.

"When I came back to school, I told myself that I wanted to be a part of something," said Hamby. "GEM had a table set up at a job fair that I happened to go to, and I gravitated towards that table. I'm so glad that I got involved because it really shifted my perspective on some things.

"I did not think I would ever work with middle schoolers in any kind of way, but I support the mission of this program," continued Hamby. "I love how we are empowering young girls and equipping them to be set up for success when they get older."

# GARDEN CLUB BRANCHES OUT TO GROW COMMUNITY

KESHAWN ALLEN  
Contributing Writer

UWG's Garden Club offers opportunities for students and faculty members to learn about and cultivate horticulture skills. By hosting events and having meetings throughout the semester, the Garden Club's goal is to teach others how to care for the particular vegetation that they might like to grow and how to help the environment as a whole.

At the meetings and events, club members and guests will be able to educate themselves on the plants that they are interested in working with. They will also get to learn more about what they can do to help the environment and keep plants alive. With over 150 clubs and organizations at the university

centered on community, the Garden Club offers countless opportunities for students to gain volunteer hours. Students also maintain awareness about growing more plants and keeping gardens clean, protected and healthy so that the environment can be safe.

Edmonson wants to ensure that reaching out and collaborating with other clubs and organizations will be an excellent chance for the Garden Club to give back. They want to be able to better inform those who have little or no knowledge of what it takes to grow plants.

"We definitely want to get more involved with outreach not only on campus but for other organizations

as well," says UWG Garden Club President Joel Edmonson.

The Garden Club plans to develop ways to raise money for the non-profit organization Keep Carrollton Beautiful. With the money that will be donated to the organization, plants and flowers will be planted around Carrollton. The Garden Club also wants to give other organizations a chance to gain volunteer hours by working with Keep Carrollton Beautiful to pick up litter on the side of the roads.

Education is another desire for the club to be able to raise awareness. They plan on educating people about the roles and the responsibilities it takes to upkeep a garden, no matter the size. They will hold an event in the next few months where the Master Gardeners of Carroll County will give out gardening tips for plants and crops. Even though it is a Garden Club-led event, anyone is allowed to participate and it will take place at the garden on campus.

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“Another goal that I had in mind was redoing the gazebo that was part of the Bonner House on campus. They were going to tear it down, but they ended up putting it in the garden.” says Edmonson.

The gazebo is now located in the campus garden, which is up the hill from West Commons dining hall. The garden is currently filled with plants and crops that the club donates to food kitchens and the Wolves Don't Waste program at UWG. With the gazebo being in the garden, Edmonson believes that renovating and decorating the gazebo will bring more attention and new members to the Garden Club. Currently, the club has only five active members, but they plan on branching out and accepting more plant and garden lovers.

If any student or faculty member is interested in joining the Garden Club, meetings are held bi-weekly on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the campus garden. More information can be found on WolfConnect.



Photo: Keshawn Allen, *The West Georgian*

## UWG BIOLOGY ALUMNI SPEAKS ON CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER KEEPING

JEFF IGBOKWE  
*Contributing Writer*

The Biology Program and the Special Events Committee at the University of West Georgia held its second seminar of the spring 2024 Biology seminar series last Friday, which welcomed UWG alumni Gillian Barber back onto campus as a guest speaker.

Barber attended UWG from 2018 to 2019, graduating with a BS in Biology and Honors distinction. Barber made her return to campus to give current students interested in a career in Environmental Biology guidance on how to get involved in the field as well as how to properly manage school and your mental health. She shared with them her career journey so far, from being a student at UWG to her current work as a fellow at Chattahoochee River Keeper (CRK), a fellow meaning a person specializing in a specific field post formal education.

“I’m a fellow, and what I do is handle the trash trap program with my supervisor, and I also do water quality testing in LaGrange,” said Barber. “There we test for E.coli and make sure there’s no sewage spills. On occasion, I staff events and do artwork for CRK, as well as microplastic sampling.”

Barber joined CRK in Dec. 2023 as a trash trap fellow. The trash traps are small-stream litter collection devices with the purpose of catching any garbage floating in the river from stormwater runoff. These devices use booms to guide the garbage into a collection area where it can be captured and emptied by hand after a rainstorm.

While this role was important as the volume of garbage in rivers, lakes and oceans has become a global crisis, Barber wanted to prove her worth to CRK as

she had more to offer the organization. She began identifying small creatures rescued from the trash traps, and wrote a short paper called “Unveiling Microplastic Contamination in the Chattahoochee River.” Her extra work and overall knowledge of Environmental Biology have helped her become an asset to CRK. Barber has an invite to test 25 to 50 water samples in LaGrange as well as assist with educational programs and events for the youth.

“Here at UWG I took a Marine Biology course with Dr. Yvette Garner and that’s what really got me interested in switching from lab science like genetics to going into Ecology, Marine Biology, and Watership Protection,” Barber said. “From there, I looked into doing a senior thesis with phytoplankton, and then I did my master’s degree, so it all kind of spiraled from that first course at UWG.”

During her seminar, Barber noted how the University has been instrumental in helping her strive to prosper in the field she knew she was capable of succeeding in. Attending the University of Georgia before enrolling at UWG, she spoke about how she felt she needed to re-adjust after a rough time at UGA.

A new environment on a large new campus, new relationships and issues with time management took a toll on her mental health. UWG’s smaller campus size and the fact that she already knew the professors since the age 16 from the University System of Georgia (USG)’s Advanced Academy of Georgia, drove Barber to make the switch.

One of the key messages Barber was able to provide to students was that in her line of work, being proactive was key to helping you stand out, and seize opportunities.

“With Environmental Biology, Ecology and all of that fieldwork heavy stuff, I think it’s really important to have hands-on experiences out in the field,” said Barber. “A lot of time in the classroom you just learn about it, whereas going out and putting your hands in the soil, in the water and on animals is really what makes your resume stand out.”

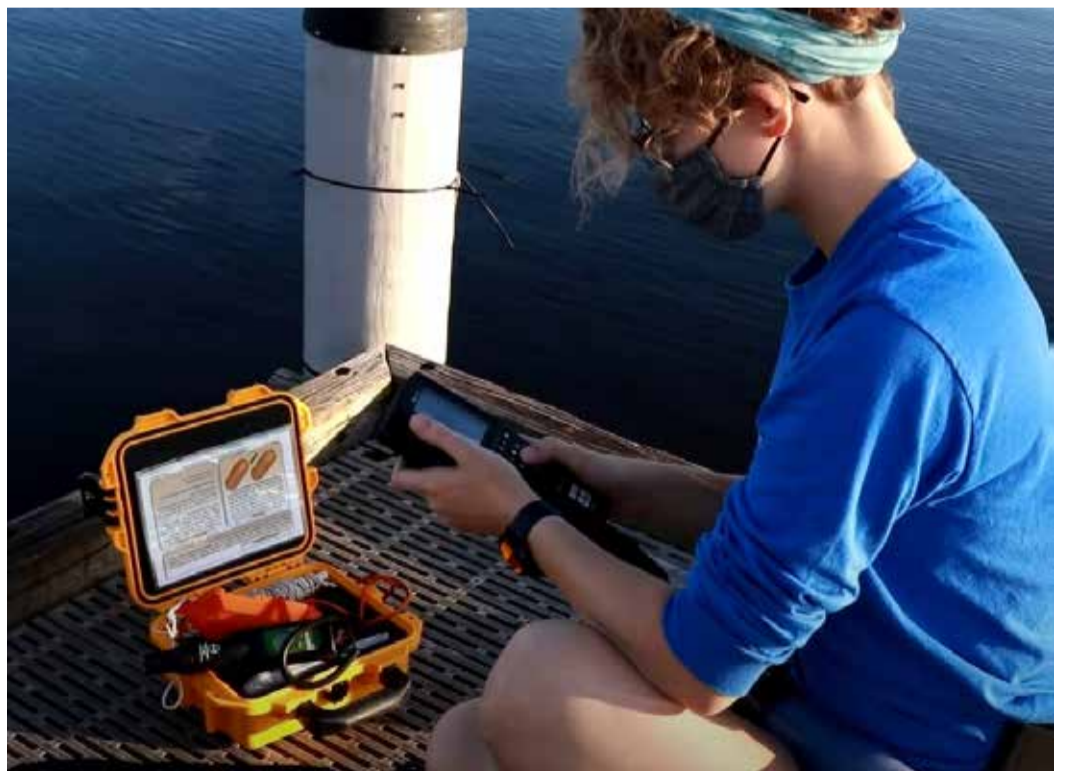


Photo: Gillian Barber

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## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



Photo courtesy of Kapoor House

### MONSOON: ATHEN'S MOST ICONIC ROCK DUO

EMMA SWALES  
Editor-in-Chief

In the music world, a traditional rock band consists of at least four members. A singer, guitarist, bassist and drummer. Although this setup is common, famous bands such as The White Stripes, The Black Keys and The Kills have established that just two people can be as powerful as a fully equipped band. Creating and performing music as a duo is hard work, and truly iconic two-piece bands are slowly becoming a thing of the past. Monsoon, an introspective power-punk pair from Athens, Ga., has accepted this challenge and proven that it only takes two.

Most musicians tend to focus on a specific genre and stick to what fits, but that isn't the case for vocalist/guitarist Sienna Chandler and drummer Joey Kegel. This dynamic duo unveils the perfect chaos of cyberpunk, a little bit of 90's alternative rock and new-wave indie. Monsoon breaks the restrictive mold of genre and constructed an entirely new sound that is almost undefinable.

Monsoon got its start in 2012 when Chandler met Kegel while attending a rock camp called Camp Amped in Athens. The twosome quickly began writing songs and working on what would soon be their debut album, *Ride a Rolla*.

"We were in high school, so we didn't really know how the process was for being in a band," said Chandler. "We just played shows and then 2015 was when we released *Ride a Rolla*. We were just playing downtown and managing being in high school while simultaneously

entering this very adult world."

Soon after the album's release, Monsoon was contacted by Toyota in regard to their title track, "Ride a Rolla." The car company wanted to use the song in an advertisement that would air right after the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show.

"They Facebook messaged me on our band page, and we said yes to it," said Chandler. "It's still like one of those really surreal unbelievable things because we had only played in Athens, and I wondered how did they find me and how did they know Monsoon?"

Although *Ride a Rolla* was gaining lots of traction, Monsoon decided to take a break and split up in 2016. After their extended hiatus, Chandler decided to reach back out to Kegel and reunite the iconic artsy rock duo.

"I was 22 and I was thinking we need to get the band back together," said Chandler. "I was probably the youngest person to ever say that just because we started so early. During that time, I was super bummed that there was no outlet and no Monsoon.

"I reached out to him and said, 'Hey do you remember that thing we used to do and do you want to do it again?'" continued Chandler. "I wrote a couple of new songs and showed them to him and thought he would have to say yes."

Kegel said yes and Monsoon immediately started to build its sophomore album, *Ghost Party*. The couple was low on money, so they decided to engineer and record the entire

album themselves. This challenge allowed them to get creative with their unique sound and shape their own craft.

"We started steamrolling into the Ghost Party universe which took about 5 years," said Chandler. "It was a really long process and such a wonderful one."

"It was a learning curve trying to figure out a different sound," continued Chandler. "Around that time, we learned about the infamous harmony stacking and we went overboard adding a lot of harmonies on the album. It's a big part of the album because we didn't know any better."

*Ghost Party* finally made its debut in February of 2022, announcing the couple's long-awaited return to music. According to Chandler, this album allowed the band to expand and grow a larger audience. This successful comeback led to lots of new fans, shows and touring.

"We have gotten roped into this whole DIY touring thing which completely snowballed," said Chandler. "It has gotten to the point where I wanted it to be, but now I'm in this flux of saying 'I have got to write new songs, I also have this tour coming up,' and all these things."

Monsoon has recently announced a stacked itinerary for its 2024 tour and will be traveling to several southern states. According to Chandler, the iconic pair is here to stay and working towards lots of new and unique material. Monsoon's yin and yang energy has shown that a strong duo can be even more powerful than a traditional four-piece band.

"It's great, fast forward ten years later and here we are. We have been playing together since high school," said Chandler. "I am very grateful to be where we are right now."

### MIDWXST TAKES ATLANTA BY STORM WITH SOULFUL SOUNDS

SAL LARocca  
Contributing Writer

On Oct. 27, I had the privilege of catching up with the Indiana artist, Midwxst, after his electrifying show in Atlanta. The artist, whose real name is Edgar Nathaniel Sarratt III, shared insights into his musical journey, influences, and the unique flavor he brings to the music scene.

Hailing from Indiana, Midwxst reflected on how his hometown's lack of musical diversity pushed him to carve out his own style.

"I had to make my own swag because there wasn't anybody making that type of stuff in my city," said Midwxst.

The artist acknowledged the initial resistance to his unique sound but expressed gratitude for the growing

support and recognition for his mature and distinctive approach.

One of the highlights of the interview was Midwxst's discussion of his unusual musical influences. While mentioning iconic figures like Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, and Bill Withers, he delved into the controversial topic of Elvis Presley. Despite acknowledging Elvis as a pivotal musician, Midwxst didn't shy away from critiquing the artist's appropriation of black culture.

"Elvis stole my people's shit," said Midwxst, highlighting the complexity of his admiration for Elvis's art while addressing cultural appropriation.

The artist talked about the impact of his

music, describing it as akin to the quiet, wise character in high school dramas. Drawing a parallel to the sad character from "Inside Out," Midwxst emphasized his realist approach to music.

"I live in reality. I will keep it real with people," said Midwxst, expressing his aversion to artificiality.

Midwxst's performance in Atlanta left the audience in awe, with standout renditions of tracks like "Tally," "223's" and "Heartache Blues." The artist's ability to blend soulful sounds with a realistic and profound approach to music sets him apart, making him a force to be reckoned with in the industry.

Midwxst's performance demonstrated not only his skill as a musician but also offered insight into his genuineness and dedication to remaining true to himself. With his distinct voice and viewpoint, Midwxst is sure to make a lasting impression on the music industry as he keeps making waves in the scene.

# “A SIGN OF AFFECTION” WARMS THIS COLD SPRING— A ROMANCE WITH SIGN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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*Contributing Writer*

Amongst the spring anime of 2024, “A Sign of Affection” looks to be the cozy romance of the season for not just anime fans, but also a much wider audience. With its pilot episode airing on Jan. 6 on Crunchyroll, the story follows Yuki, a deaf college-aged girl, and Itsuomi, a trilingual backpacker who spent a good portion of his life living in Germany and visiting many different countries.

As the series progresses, the two obviously develop a romantic relationship, but there’s more to it than that. Itsuomi, a chronic polyglot, learns sign language to communicate with Yuki not simply because he likes her, but because she made him realize that even though he had traveled the huge world, the world Yuki possessed through her signs and expressions was unknown to him.

Conversely, Yuki, who has been deaf all her life, has never been outside Japan and in general has lived a rather sheltered life. Her relationship with Itsuomi allows her to explore the broader world of

languages and culture alongside romance and friendship.

“A Sign of Affection,” or “Yubisaki to Renren” in Japanese, is adapted from Suu Morishita’s manga, which began in 2019, and the anime breathes life into the artist’s stunning manga style. The animation is clean, the fashion is stunning, and the characters are beautiful. Not just that, but the use of text and music (and sometimes lack of sound) really elevates the setting and atmosphere of the world Morishita has created.

The series incorporates other kinds of romantic relationships with other cast members, including unrequited love. Unlike many romance tropes or plot devices, “A Sign of Affection” does the unthinkable—The characters communicate thoroughly and healthily, meaning that the misunderstandings and miscommunication often so common in the genre do not exist.

The characters are realistic, but also maintain a wholesomeness and comedy that propels the story forward. One

character in particular named Oushi, serves as the common romance trope of Yuki’s childhood friend and Itsuomi’s romantic rival. Yuki calls the way Oushi signs “harsh,” and he is indeed a character that is rough around the edges, however, the series does a good job of humanizing him beyond his trope. Though, it should be noted that there is no love triangle because Yuki does not reciprocate despite his feelings.

Romance genre aside, this series circles around themes of language, communication, and the transition into adulthood independence. Much like the movie “A Silent Voice,” which also features a deaf girl, “A Sign of Affection” carries a weight of reflection to the current awareness in society towards hearing disabilities. However, unlike “A Silent Voice,” this series is not as dark, with an all around warm and fuzzy aesthetic. In particular, I enjoyed learning Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and the German phrase “Ich drücke dir die Daumen,” meaning “I’m pressing my thumbs” which is the German way of saying “good luck” or “do your best.”

While the manga is up to volume 10 by now, the animated series has only four episodes with the first three episodes being free to watch in Japanese dub on Crunchyroll, the English Dub is also available for premium subscribers. The show or manga is great for romance lovers but also for those interested in learning about other worlds.



## A SIGN OF AFFECTION

©Suu Morishita, KODANSHA/ 'A Sign of Affection' Production Committee



Photo courtesy of Crunchyroll