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From Left: Angela Antoinette Bey, Dawn McDougall, DJ Sylo and Maryan Captan.

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18 young Philadelphians shaping the future of the city's creative class

Meet the Philadelphia creatives living life outside the box

BY **BRANDON BAKER, AUBREY NAGLE AND LEAH KAUFFMAN**

Welcome to a new age of creativity.

The city's creative class, those folks who work in the arts, media, marketing, entertainment, law and technology, today make up a staggering 34.6 percent of Greater Philadelphia's workforce. That's slightly above the national average of 32.6 percent, and part of a decades-long shift in the economy away from industry. And, as the

ongoing theory goes, these creatives are helping to usher in an age of urban America when young people are moving to cities, population is being rebuilt through amenity development and a new economy is being born from innovative ideas.

Below, find 18 young people in Philadelphia's creative class who are helping to recraft the city as a creative powerhouse.

Maryan Captan



Maryan Captan is a Philadelphia artist and poet. Captan is also supervisor for The Monkey & The Elephant, where she coordinates arts events. Eddie Al-Shakarchi / Maryan Captan

Occupation: Artist and supervisor at nonprofit café The Monkey & The Elephant, which hires young adults who've aged out of the foster-care system.

Age: 27

How she's making her mark: Captan is pushing for arts accessibility. At present, she's spearheading an effort to launch First Friday in Brewerytown and is organizing a new open-mic series at The Monkey & the Elephant called "Youthquake," meant to give young artists a

platform for their voice. In that same vein, she founded the Philadelphia Poetry Collective and coordinates Fleisher Art Memorial's Teen Lounge, a group that gives teens a forum for voicing their opinions on public art and social identities. "I've never learned more than watching teenagers and young people push against and redraw creative boundaries," she told PhillyVoice. "I'm always impressed with how much tenacity and fearlessness young people hold when it comes to voicing their fears, passions, and anger, particularly through art."

Challenges: Getting people to take creative minds seriously. "I've always just ignored those who doubt the capabilities and creative minds of young people," she said. "Young minds are incredibly fluid, electric and unafraid, and I think that sort of rebellion scares people – *speaking out* scares people."

Mantra: "Talk to everyone, be kind, and always follow through."

Nate Mell and Wynn Bauer



Wynn Bauer (left) and Nate Mell (right) in their Felt + Fat studio.

Occupation: Owners, Felt + Fat

Age(s): 29 and 30

How they're making their mark: Their Port Richmond-based ceramics manufacturing company, Felt + Fat provides gorgeous custom porcelain plates, cups and mugs to restaurants like Laurel, High Street and Fork.

"We can make anything we want in this city. Wynn and I have a wide range of interest beyond our current focus on tableware and we are excited to begin exploring those possibilities in collaboration with the many talented craftspeople in Philadelphia, Mell told PhillyVoice.com."

Challenges: "The biggest challenge for us right now is keeping up with demand while maintaining our high standards of craftsmanship. Thankfully we have been building and training a really strong team of young designers and crafts people around us as we grow, the investment in local talent is really paying off."

Mantra: "How can we make this better?"

Joy Waldinger



Joy Waldinger is a Philadelphia-based artist who teaches others how to use sustainable materials in their art-making. Handout Art / Joy Waldinger

Occupation: Teaching artist

Age: 23

How she's making her mark: Waldinger strives to use art as a tool for environmental activism. "I teach students that art is all around us, and anything can be art," she told PhillyVoice. She led a workshop at the Wagner Free Institute of Science that taught artists how to make prints with recycled fabrics and tiles. Herself, Waldinger had a sustainable materials exhibit at the North Philadelphia Resource Exchange Center, which showcased linoleum prints based on insects Waldinger caught herself. She advocates environmental sustainability, but also the responsibility of artists to continue passing along the message that art and science don't have to be foreigners. Her art -- and the message of environmental responsibility that comes with it -- is like a marrying of the two. "Art and science are both dedicated to finding truth and beauty," she said. "And they're better together than apart."

Challenges: Overcoming her tendency toward strong emotions, and discovering ways of learning that work for her. "Some things really don't come easy to me and I have to work extra hard at it, but persistence, positivity, and some grit can really get you far," she said. "I am proof of that."

Mantra: Her advice to other artists is to stay positive, stay engaged and stay active. "Another mantra I live by," she added, "is funny and shallow, but can get you far: Fake it 'til you make it."

Jonathan Ristaino



Jon Ristaino, a Temple alum, is a Philadelphia filmmaker and co-director of the QFlixPhiladelphia-debuted film, "Be Who You Are." Handout Art / Jon Ristaino

Occupation: Filmmaker, owner of FarmCat Media

Age: 25

How he's making his mark: Ristaino, a Temple alumnus, taps into the strengths of being a filmmaker in Philadelphia. Because he's staying local – not easy for a filmmaker pressured to head westward -- he gets his pick of true Philadelphia stories to tell. "Philly has the potential to do a lot with film and multimedia, and I like to think we can one day hang with 'the big guys' – L.A. and New York," he told PhillyVoice. "I'd love to be part of that." Now that he's finished his first feature film ("Be Who You Are," a true road-trip tale that he debuted at QFlixPhiladelphia), he's working on turning a short film called "Corey's Story" into a full-length feature. The documentary tells the story of a Chester County teen's traumatic brain injury through the lens of her mother and sister. "What's awesome about this story is we've been filming for four years," he said. "We'll get to see what time does to Corey and her family."

Corey's Story- Traumatic Brain Injury (Corey Beattie)



"Corey's Story," a short documentary that Ristaino plans to turn into a full-length film.

Challenges: Being resourceful enough to overcome obstacles that ask for more than his skill set allows for. "I work from home a lot, which is great but also difficult sometimes," he said. "There's no one there to bounce an idea off of or help problem-solve. But thank goodness for the Internet – in many ways, it's like a coworker."

Mantra: Two words his father used to tell him as a child -- words he's since had tattooed on his body: "Slow down."

Angela Antoinette Bey



Angela Bey is a 17-year-old playwright and theater artist who's written plays shown at Asian Arts Initiative, Interact Theatre Company and the National Constitution Center. She testified before City Council earlier this year to advocate for arts funding.

Handout Art / Angela Bey

Occupation: Theater artist and playwright

Age: 17

How she's making her mark: Bey, who won the National Constitution Center's Founding Freedom's Playwriting Competition with "Com[promising] the Future," remembers feeling like an outcast in public school -- bullied or dismissed for her interest in the arts. And because the arts budget at her school, she said, was practically zilch, no one knew how to guide her. So, she joined a private art school Friends Select, where life finally started to look up. "After [that], I felt a giant weight lifted," she told PhillyVoice. "There, I was given the opportunity to pursue writing even further, as well as perform in professional productions, dance ballet, sing and so much more. This point in my life was integral to the rebuilding of my self-confidence and development as an artist and as a human being." It's because of the role the arts had in boosting her confidence, she said, that she felt compelled to testify before City Council earlier this year to advocate for funding of the Philadelphia Cultural Fund,

which at the time was in danger of facing a cut of 40 percent. "It's easy to undermine the impact of the arts," she said. "It's not easy when someone stands before you as undeniable proof that the arts do matter."

Challenges: Being critical of herself. "Self-doubt has always been one of my biggest challenges -- whether I'm performing or writing a piece," she said. "I believe it's because I often pull from experiences that are very personal to me. As a writer, I often feel that I am putting my diary onstage to be theatrical, which is terrifying to even think about."

Mantra: "You are enough."

Cassandra Lina Reffner

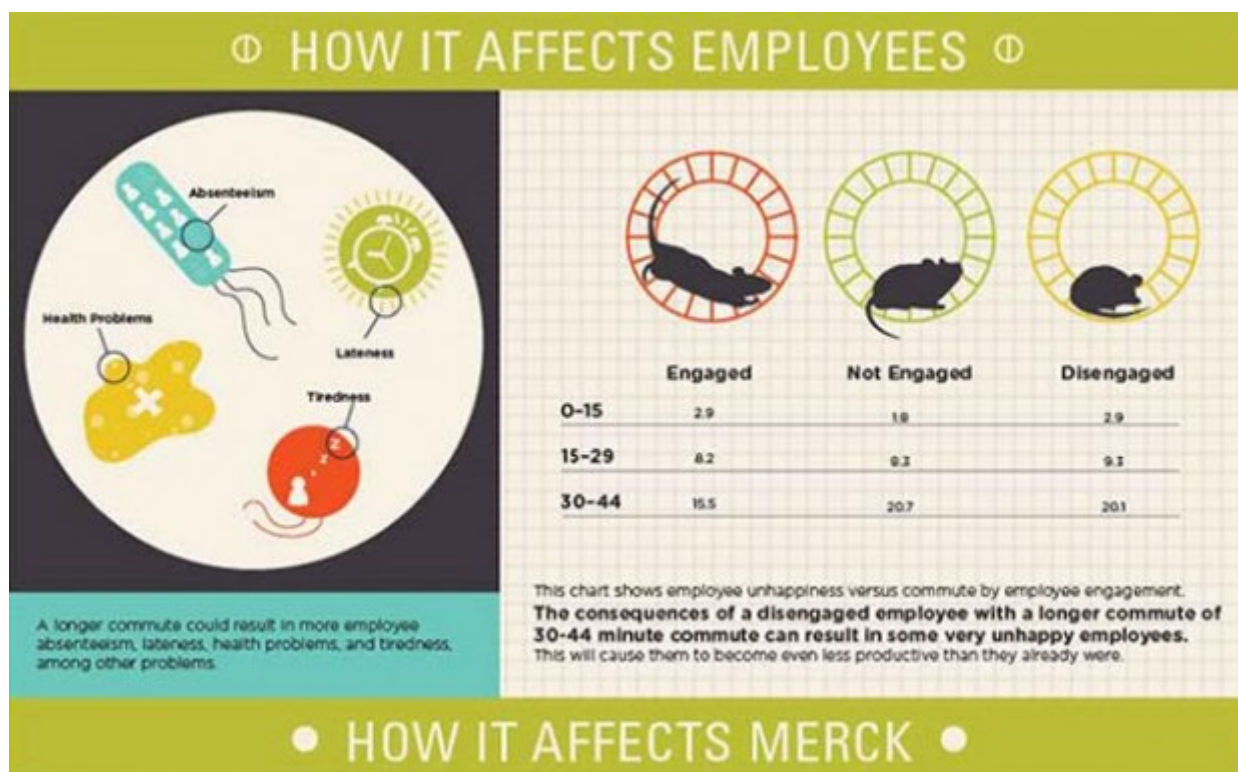


Cassandra Reffner is a Philadelphia-based graphic designer and student at Temple University's Tyler School of Art. Handout Art / Cassandra Reffner

Occupation: Graphic designer

Age: 21

How she's making her mark on Philly: Though still a student at Temple's Tyler School of Art, Reffner is focused on making information -- everything from city maps to lessons plans in the classroom -- more digestible for visual learners. In short: She marries data analytics with her graphic design talent. "When I'd look in a textbook in high school I'd see so many words, and thought, 'You could easily understand this with a drawing, an illustration or a GIF,'" she told PhillyVoice. "I think the visualization of information is something that's going to really be pushed moving forward." Reffner won the Temple Fox School of Business's Infographic Competition in February, judged by representatives from QVC, RJMetrics and Campbell's Soup Co. Her hope, she said, is that companies might start to consider hiring data artists rather than a marketing board for some of their advertising pushes. "It could bring a whole different eye to their projects," she said.



Reffner's award-winning infographic visually broke down how Merck's relocation of its office would impact employees. Cassandra Reffner / Fox School of Business

Challenges: Designing in a way that allows a message to be understood without eliminating key data. "Just the other day I saw a graphic designer trying to minimize a chart and make it more aesthetically pleasing, but they took out certain aspects of the graph that made it incomprehensible for anyone looking for actual data. That's a big step to overcome: What you can take out, and what you can't."

Mantra: "Life is an adventure, and you don't know where you'll go, but as long as you're having fun it doesn't quite matter."

Jasmine Combs



Photo courtesy of Jasmine Combs.

Occupation: Poet and student at Temple University, working toward a dual degree with a bachelor's in English with a Creative Writing focus and a master's in Secondary Education.

Age: 21

How she's making her mark: Competing in poetry slams with The Pigeon and The Fuze and performing with The Babel Poetry Collective. She hopes to someday launch her own Philly publishing company that highlights women authors of color and teach literature and creative writing to young adults. Combs won The Pigeon's Grand Slam this year and competing with Pigeon at the National Poetry Slam this August. "I view slams more so as a fun opportunity to share my work," Combs said. "I was pretty confident that I was going to make the team for nationals, but being the Grand Slam Champion? I still can't believe that happened." She also won the Apiary magazine STUNG writing competition. Her prize? Having her submission, the poem "Night Child," being made into a short film by Marie Alarcon.

Challenges: “One challenge that I face in writing is that because my poetry is typically very personal and direct, I often have to ask myself, “Is this a poem or is this a glorified Facebook status?” As a performance poet another challenge that I face is emoting when I’m performing my pieces. Often my face and body language is void of emotion when I’m performing emotional pieces and that creates a disconnect between me, my piece, and my audience,” Combs said.

Mantra: “Observation, Comprehension, Motivation. I stole this from my dad and it actually pains me to admit how much truth this succession of words hold.”

Diana Bader and Lindsay Leichner



Diana Bader, left, and Lindsay Leichner of Black Wednesday. Photo courtesy Diana Bader.

Occupation: Co-founders of fashion label Black Wednesday

Age: Diana is 26 and Lindsay is 27.

How they're making their mark: After bonding sophomore year over their celeb crush, the Drexel graduates teamed up to launch a line of locally-made goth-glam apparel in 2010. In 2014 they were selected for the Philadelphia Magazine Fashion Project, and they've also sold their line at multiple online retailers as well as Philly's own Ritual Ritual and The Geisha House. Their fall/winter collection will debut in September. "We've gone a little bit sportier, while still focusing on clean lines and details with our seductive, figure-hugging silhouettes," Bader said. Plus, they're already working on swimwear for next spring and summer.

Challenges: "Our first manufacturer really took advantage of us, because she knew we were new to the industry. Lindsay and I learned very quickly how to protect ourselves in the future. After months of searching, we now work with the best, in Philadelphia, as far as manufacturing goes," said Bader.

Mantra: "Save Your Soul."

Christopher Gray



Occupation: Founder of Scholly

Age: 23

How he's making his mark: After struggling through the scholarship application process and eventually receiving \$1 million for his efforts, Gray had a great idea. He began Scholly, a mobile app and website that helps high school students find and apply for scholarships,

while studying at Drexel University. He took his business onto ABC's "Shark Tank" and, after sparking one of the most heated debates in the show's history, came away with \$40,000 and support from Lori Greiner and Daymond John. The app shot to number one in the Apple and Android app stores and Gray soon negotiated a deal with Saxbys Coffee, in which they'll pay for all current and future Science Leadership Academy seniors to use Scholly. Since then, the My Brother's Keeper Alliance has purchased the app for 275,000 black and Latino students and the Memphis City Council arranged to put Scholly in the hands of every junior and senior in the city.

Challenges: "Well, growing a company at 23 is definitely a learning curve, so I have been spending a lot of time learning," Gray said. "Regardless, I have hired an experienced team and surrounded myself with great mentors to help out!"

Mantra: "My will shall shape the future. Whether I fail or succeed shall be no man's doing but my own. I am the force. I can clear any obstacle before me or I can be lost in the maze. My choice, my responsibility. Win or lose, only I hold the key to my destiny."

Amanda Wagner



Photo by Danielle Darden.

Occupation: Co-founder of Curate This

Age: 24

How she's making her mark: She and co-founder Julius Ferraro are launching Curate This (@curatethisart), a platform for local artists to drive the discussion of the arts in Philadelphia, in the fall. Rather than letting critics and writers have all the say, Curate This aims to engage artists themselves in a more critical conversation. "We're in the age where we're questioning the role of a critic too," Wagner said. "There's a difference between creating critical conversation and assuming a position of authority." The platform will provide prompts to artists that they will interpret and respond to. While Wagner, who has written for VICE and Philly.com among others, will be editing the content, it will be largely a collaborative project. In anticipation of their launch, Wagner and Ferraro have been spreading the word through the local arts scene. In the future they'll be holding their own events and teaming up with cooperative working art spaces and artists for special projects.

Challenges: "It's actually been a pretty great process," Wagner said. "People see the need for this and have been coming to us! I guess the challenge is the workload. It's mainly two people doing all the work, but we both are passionate about the process, so none of it feel like a burden. The challenge is getting something off the ground."

Mantra: "Find your voice and use it."

Keith Hartwig



Photo courtesy of Keith Hartwig.

Occupation: Designer and project manager at Veyko, a design and fabrication firm in Northern Liberties.

Age: 27

How he's making his mark: Most recently, Hartwig's work could be seen alongside Paula Scher's in the Temple University Tyler School of Art Contemporary Gallery as a collaboration with the famed graphic designer. In addition to creating metal and architectural installations for groups around the country with Veyko, Hartwig recently spent nearly a month in Bolivia with non-profit International Design Clinic. While there, he was the studio lead on the 'mobile maker- space' project, which allowed the non-profit Teatro Trono to teach students in El Alto fabrication and craftsmanship. Hartwig is also on one of several teams taking on the Design Philadelphia Pearl St. Passage Project. "Without giving too much away we are creating a participatory installation that allows users to modify and enhance the sculpture through physical engagement," he said.

Challenges: Promoting civic engagement and user participation in his work. "Work that premises itself upon such a dialogue is only successful if it can learn from and build off of engagement with the audience," Hartwig said. "I have been pushing myself and those I

collaborate with to reconsider how public art can address cultural needs and create direct participation with communities."

Mantra: "Challenge convention."

Josh Berg, Tobi Hahn and August Polite



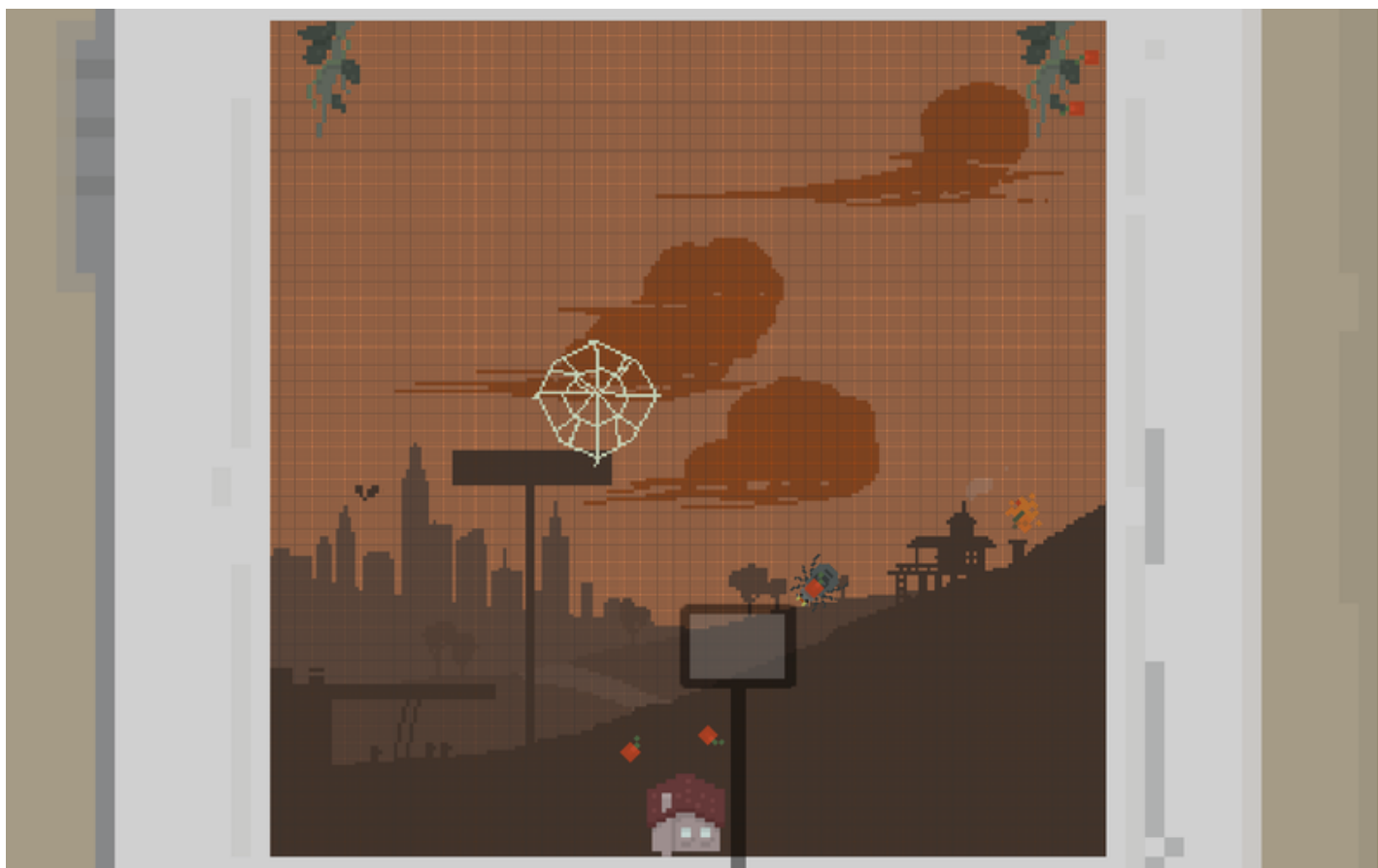
From left to right, Tobi Hahn, Josh Berg and August Polite look on as Philly Tech Week attendees play "Swat Team." Photo courtesy Paisley Games.

Occupation: Seniors at Science Leadership Academy and the founders of Paisley Games. (Hahn writes the code and handles administrative tasks, Polite makes the art and Berg creates the soundtracks.)

Age: 17

How they're making their mark: This teen trio founded Paisley Games and are looking to release their first video game, "Swat Team," this year. They created the game, where one player is a bug and the other is a flyswatter, in a three-day competition. They then had the pleasure of watching others play it in Dilworth Park during Philly Tech Week. "We were very

pleasantly surprised when hundreds of people ... greatly enjoyed it! It also let us find problems in the game that we hadn't found before because we had never tested it for so long and with so many different people," Hahn said. Now they're hoping to get enough votes on gaming platform Steam to have it released. (Vote here!) Once "Swat Team" is out, the boys have plenty of ideas for new projects. "Our dream project is a side-scrolling superhero action game that forces you to make tough moral choices," Hahn said. "We don't have the time or resources to make this game right now, but we'd love to make it someday." Though they'll head to college soon, the friends plan to keep up their work online if working in person is no longer possible.



A screenshot of "Swat Team" by Paisley Games.

Challenges: Creating their game *and* going to school at the same time. They built the original version of "Swat Team" in a 72-hour competition called Ludum Dare. It started at 9 p.m. on a Friday and the trio worked through the weekend to get it done - until they had to get to class! "We worked as much as we could during school, and then crammed to get it ready to submit by 9 p.m. Monday," Hahn said.

Mantra: "We've found ourselves saying that "our game is bad" a lot," Hahn said. "While this may not sound good from a commercial standpoint, we've found that it motivates us to improve our game."

Dawn McDougall





Dawn McDougall, Executive Director of Code for Philly.

Occupation: Executive Director, Code for Philly

How she's making her mark: Drexel graduate Dawn McDougall is the first Executive Director of Code for Philly, an organization that applies open source technology to governments and communities to make Philadelphia work better. Code for Philly host a weekly meet-up for interested participants.

"When you meet a group of people working together to make Philly a better place — and doing it today, not tomorrow — it's an indescribable feeling," McDougall told PhillyVoice.com. "Anything is possible. The most gratifying part of working with Code for Philly is making that shared experience for people by empowering them to make an impact on their City. The power to create change is there — don't wait for permission to make it happen."

Challenges: How can we encourage and include all types of contributors and bring their voices to the table when we're talking about civic tech projects? Even more, how do we get the most out of those interactions? Often there is excitement about collaborating but we're still exploring the best way of achieving common goals.

Mantra: Balance, authenticity, and growth.

DJ Brady "SYLO" Ettinger



Occupation: DJ, music and events producer

Age: Almost 24

How he's making his mark: Brady "Sylo" Ettinger is one of Philadelphia's most eclectic party starters, bringing a fresh perspective to a nightlife scene that could use a little pick-me-up . His epic Pizza raves at Alessandro's on Broad St. have been covered by Vice Magazine and his weekly STUNTLOCO party at the 700 Club is one of the most popular in the city.

For Sylo, these events aren't purely about partying. It's about bringing people together for a moment of lightheartedness in a sometimes confusing world.

"It's about the youth, we're all a little scared right now. We're just learning about the world and the world is going insane. But together it seems a lot more awesome and manageable," Ettinger told PhillyVoice.com.

Challenges: Watching enough cartoons but not too [many] cartoons

Mantra: I don't do drugs I am drugs

BRANDON BAKER, AUBREY NAGLE AND LEAH KAUFFMAN

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