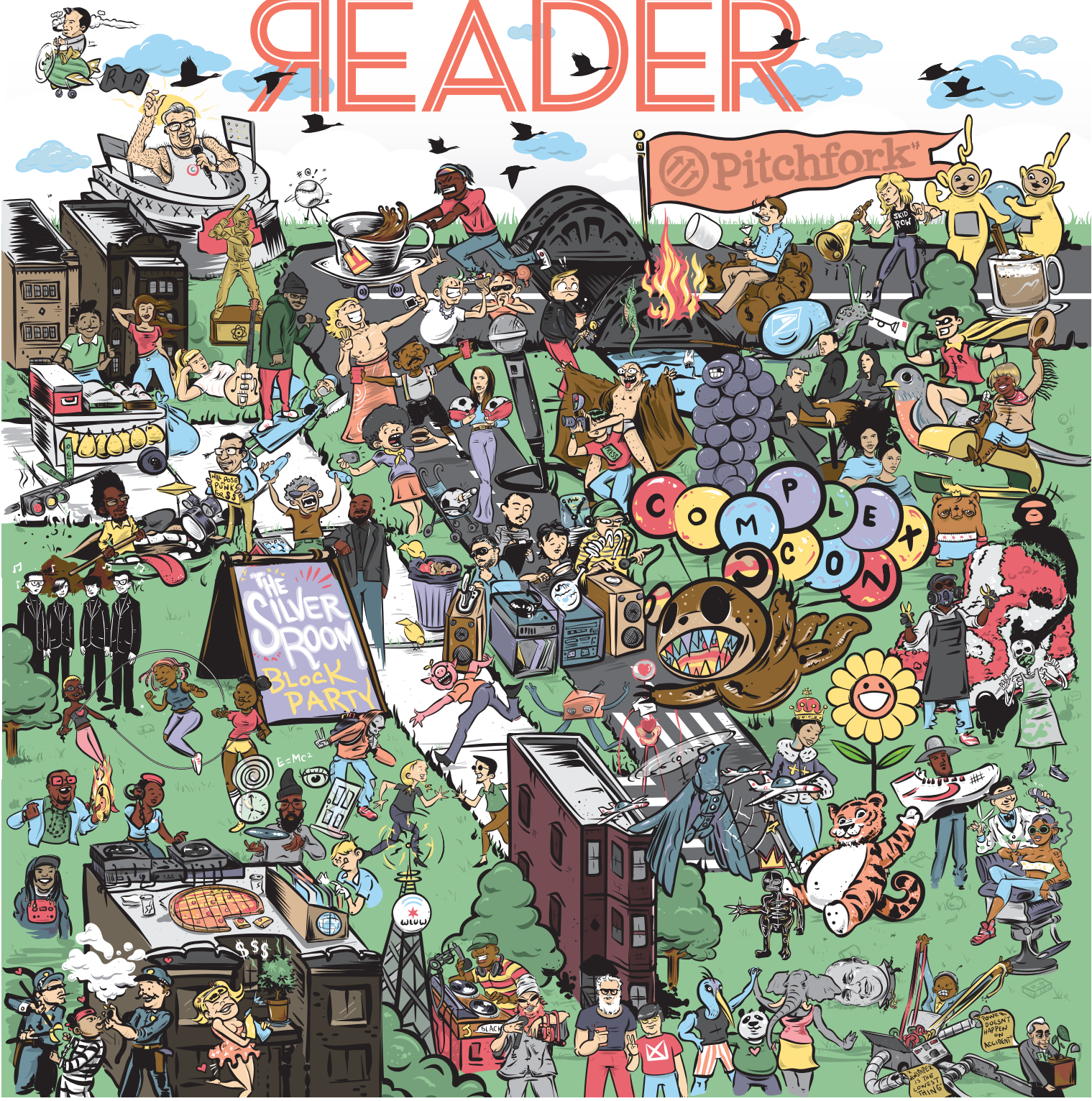


READER



Pitchfork finally makes its own pop moment

Robyn, Sky Ferreira, Haim, and Charli XCX aim a little to the left of the Top 40—and give the Union Park crowd something to dance about.

By **JUSTIN CURTO**

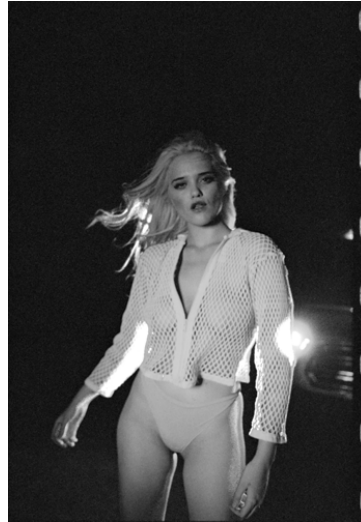
When Robyn first played Pitchfork in 2010, she was the closest thing to a mainstream pop artist the festival had ever booked. That day, her glistening dance music stood out on a stage whose lineup also featured the relatively hard-edged sounds of rapper El-P and rockers Modest Mouse. But her first Pitchfork booking seemed to open the door for the festival to include more pop in that vein: Sky Ferreira in 2013, Grimes in 2014, and most prominently Carly Rae Jepsen in 2016. In some ways this phenomenon mirrors the way Robyn's career has opened doors for pop singers to break out of prescribed cookie-cutter molds. "Robyn has definitely been part of paving the way for pop stars who fall a little to the left of the Top 40 norm," her disciple Charli XCX told the *Guardian* last year.

What began in 2010 culminates in a pop moment at Pitchfork this year—Robyn and sister-pop trio Haim headline Sunday and Friday, respectively, while Charli XCX closes out the Red Stage on Sunday and Ferreira returns Friday to perform much-anticipated new music for the first time. After years of Pitchfork lineups that relied largely on remarkable yet dismal indie rock, with the festival's bookings achieving gender parity for the second year in a row, there couldn't be a better time for the Union Park crowd to dance to music by these women.



Like many pop stars before them, the **HAIM** sisters first gained attention for their ability to condense stories into four catchy minutes. Their 2013 debut, *Days Are Gone*, featured enough brilliant bite-size pop songs to cause rifts among critics: Was "Falling" Haim's best of the year, or was it "If I Could Change Your Mind"? No, it was definitely "The Wire," a polished track on which lead singer Danielle shares vocals with Este and Alana. It's easy to see these Pitchfork newcomers as a rock band—they draw heavily from Fleetwood Mac—but they follow a pop blueprint. It's undeniable once you listen to "Want You Back," a standout from their second album, 2017's *Something to Tell You*—good luck getting its soaring chorus out of your head.

In 2013, the previous time **SKY FERREIRA** played Pitchfork, she was 21 years old and had



Clockwise from upper left: Haim, Sky Ferreira, Charli XCX, Robyn
PHOTOS COURTESY CHUFF MEDIA; COURTESY THE ARTIST; MARCUS COOPER; HEJJI SHIN

SKY FERREIRA
 Fri 7/19, 4:15-5:15 PM,
 Green Stage

HAIM
 Fri 7/19, 8:30-9:50 PM,
 Green Stage

CHARLI XCX
 Sun 7/21, 7:25-8:25 PM,
 Red Stage

ROBYN
 Sun 7/21, 8:30-9:50 PM,
 Green Stage

CHARLI XCX has made her name by pushing the boundaries of pop outward. Her most recent full-length, 2017's aptly titled *Pop 2*, is a mixtape disguised as an album, and its dissonant closer, "Track 10," was the clearest vision at the time of how pop music in the late 2010s could sound. (Her third album, *Charli*, is due in September.) Like Robyn and to some extent Ferreira, Charli XCX leans into the queer fan base that first embraced her club-inspired music. Collaboration defines her approach, and she's given space in her music to a greater number of LGBTQ+ artists—trans and non-binary vocalists, openly HIV-positive artists, drag performers—than most of today's supposed pop allies combined. It all feels natural, never forced, just as her futuristic, innovative pop maintains its humanity.

ROBYN told Caryn Ganz in 2010 that the three central pillars of a pop song are love, the club, and feeling like an outsider. Eight years later, Jayson Greene called it "the Robyn Feeling: sad, exultant, vanquished, triumphant." Regardless of how it's put, Robyn's songs have melancholy hearts, despite the urgency of their push to the dance floor. At a festival that doesn't shy away from sadness—it booked the War on Drugs against Fleet Foxes last year, for instance, and hosted A Tribe Called Quest's first performance without Phife Dog in 2017—she fits right in. But unlike those artists, Robyn is also about the catharsis of dancing.

Not just with Robyn but also with Charli, Ferreira, and Haim, Pitchfork is sending a clear message: it's time we danced about something. **📺**

already released one of the decade's definitive pop songs: "Everything Is Embarrassing," widely praised for the muted feel that makes it stand out from typical pop fare. That fall she released her rough-around-the-edges full-length, *Night Time, My Time*, and then entered more than five years of major-label purgatory with repeated delays to its follow-up, *Masochism*. Earlier this year, she released "Downhill Lullaby," the album's brooding, orchestral lead single, which will surely make its live debut at Pitchfork. Unlike "Everything Is Embarrassing," you can barely dance to it—yet it's possibly one of the best pop songs of the year, not least because Ferreira made it on her terms.