Arts & Life

Escapees and life-sentences

Who's in, who's out of the Khia Asylum

By LILLIAN CURTIN
Opinion Editor

Have you ever wondered what happened to those "one hit wonders" that you loved back in the day? I know I have, especially with the 2016 renaissance we've entered in 2026.

Don't worry, they're just doing time in the Khia Asylum.

The Khia Asylum, named after "My Neck, My Back" rapper, Khia, is a jail (metaphorical, of course) where formally successful artists go after they flop.

Current residents include singers Bebe Rexha, Daya and Ava Max.

Bebe Rexha may be granted parole, after an appeal. I can honestly see it happening. On Jan. 14, she posted a TikTok running on a treadmill in heels, saying, "I'm here at the Khia Asylum. They said I can't stop until I lose 30 pounds. I'm too fat. Or if I have a hit song."

Rexha is fully aware of her sentence in the asylum. But, like I said, with the 2016 renaissance, she may be granted parole. She has a chance and she may be looking to take it. Luckily for her, though, she said she hates talking about the asylum, she has the unique position of rebranding as a "Khia Asylum escapee." It sounds stupid, but if she uses it to her advantage, she may be successful.

Escaping is not unheard of. "Midnight Sun" singer Zara Larsson did heavy time in the asylum until her rebrand at the end of 2024 and in 2025. Who granted her bail? That famous dolphin meme to her singing "Symphony."

Larsson is proof that miracles can happen in the Khia Asylum.

"Sweet but Psycho" singer Ava Max is currently wishing for a miracle that I just don't think is going to come. In fact, she's been in there so long, she may be going crazy in it.

She posted a video of her saying how happy she is to be out. Where did she even get this idea? I don't know how to break it to her, but she may be serving a life sentence and is absolutely delusional if she thinks she's escaped.

She claimed that she hasn't "been in here that long." Who's going to tell her that she's one of the founding members and there's probably a wing named after her? And with the amount of make-believe in that video, it may very well be the psychiatric unit.

Another artist serving a life-sentence in the asylum is "Sit Still look Pretty" singer Daya. I don't see her escaping any time soon, but I don't think she's trying. Some stars like the asylum, and have made home there.

Certain artists aren't in there yet, but should perhaps start preparing, because I have a feeling they're going to be. Dare I say, a few ex-girl group members?

Former Little Mix member Jesy Nelson is definitely going to be spending some time in the asylum soon. She left the group to do her own thing, and yet, it seems her "own thing" is flopping.

Another one would be former Fifth Harmony members, besides Camilla Cabello. Yes, that includes my girl Normani. While songs like "Motivation," "Dancing with a Stranger" and "Love Lies" are all great, she's yet to have more hits like them.

Similarly, ex-member Ally Brooke dropped the banger "Lowkey" in 2019 and then never dropped another on that level.

Don't worry, there's a men's unit too and Shawn Mendes was just taken into custody. If he wants to only do a little bit of time, he'd better release something soon.

The good thing is, since it's literally Shawn Mendes, anything he drops will probably get him out. His bail's not that high.

The same rules about the ex-girl group members seem to apply to the ex-boy group members too. Don't kill me for this, but I would argue that Zayn Malik is also in the asylum.

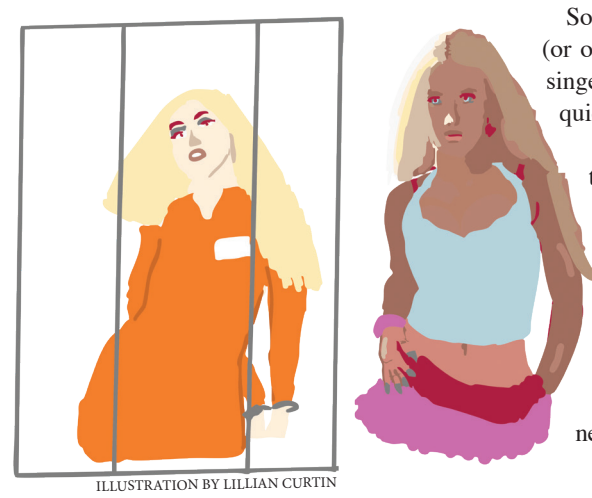

ILLUSTRATION BY LILLIAN CURTIN

I know, I know. It pains me to say it too. But it's true. "I Don't Wanna Live Forever," "Dusk till Dawn" and "PILLOWTALK" were the peak of his solo career, but he just hasn't released anything up to that level.

I almost said Niall Horan too, but I quickly took it back when I remembered he did community service on "The Voice."

"Rush" singer Troye Sivan made an escape, and I hope he stays out, but I don't know how realistic that hope is. He may be joining long-term prisoners, singers Jason Derulo, Alec Benjamin, Khalid and Macklemore, to name a few.

Someone who may not be able to outrun (or outflip) the guards is "Mystical Magical" singer Benson Boone. He's been a little too quiet lately, and may risk an arrest.

It's actually pretty easy to find yourself in the Khia Asylum. One minute your song is on everyone's lips, the next, you're just another song on a "nostalgia" playlist.

I have faith that a lot of our formerly favorite artists will come back. Take Larsson, who took over the charts in the past, present and future.

Who knows, maybe a "flop era" is needed for development. Only time will tell.

Your favorite foods came from immigrants

By SOPHIE MURRAY
Associate Arts & Life Editor

Take a second to think about your favorite foods. Burgers? Hot dogs? Fries? These foods feel as American as it gets, like they've always been part of the culture.

But here's the thing. They didn't actually start here.

During a time when immigration is one of the most debated and polarizing issues in the U.S., with headlines about deportation, border control and ICE, people need to start understanding that much of our everyday life and culture is shaped by immigrants.

Food is one of the clearest, most universal examples of that influence. In fact, many of the foods people associate with the U.S. only exist in their current form because of immigrants who brought their traditions with them and adapted them over time.

Food is something we all share. We need it to survive. But beyond that, it's one of the most powerful ways we connect — with culture, with history and with each other. For as long as people have argued about borders and who belongs where, they've been enjoying certain foods because someone, somewhere, brought it from their home.

And yet, in today's political climate, those same communities are often targeted and reduced to problems that need to be solved, rather than recognized as people who have long contributed to the foundation of this country.

That's why it's so important to recognize them in the most human way: through the foods we eat. Because every bite of what we call "American" tells a story that started somewhere else.

What's more American than a Fourth of July cookout? A burger on the grill topped with pickles, lettuce and tomatoes. Fries on the side dipped in ketchup. It feels like the ultimate symbol of American cuisine. But the story behind it all stretches far beyond the U.S.

The hamburger, often seen as the center of American food culture, traces back to German immigrants. It developed from the "Hamburg steak," a ground meat dish in the 1800s. When this came to the U.S., they adapted the dish by using local ingredients and cooking style. It became what we know today, between a bun topped with cheese, lettuce, tomato and pickles.

Speaking of hamburger toppings, my favorite are definitely pickles. But even something we consider so simple like pickles have deep immigrant roots, especially in Eastern European Jewish culture.

Specifically kosher pickles were popular in countries like Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Russia. Harsh winters meant people needed to find a way to preserve food for a long period of time. Families would often pack vegetables in an acidic liquid or salt water brine to ferment over periods of time. It added flavor to their otherwise simple diets of bread and potatoes.

When Eastern European Jewish immigrants arrived in New York City, they brought these traditions with them. Pickles were sold on pushcarts in the immigrant tenement district of New York City, introducing America to the kosher dill pickle.

And who doesn't love pairing their hamburgers with a side of french fries. However, their roots extend far beyond America, or France for that matter. Most historians trace them back to Belgium, where people living along the Meuse River in the late 1600s loved frying small fish. When winter froze the river and fish weren't available anymore, they cut potatoes into strips and fried them as a substitute.



ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE MURRAY

Even the potatoes themselves traveled far to reach our plates. Potatoes are originally from the Andes Mountains of Peru and were brought to Europe by Spanish explorers, with new varieties cultivated across the continent over centuries. What feels like such a staple food in American culture is actually a product of centuries of migration, trade and adaptation.

Ketchup, perhaps the most popular dipping sauce for fries and burgers, tells a similar story. Found in nearly every American home, its earliest ancestor wasn't even tomato based. In imperial China, as far back as 300 B.C., a fermented fish sauce called "ge-thcup" or "koe-cheup" was made from fish entrails, meat byproducts and soybeans.

British traders discovered it in the early 1700s, bringing it home and inspiring experimental ketchups made from oysters, mushrooms, walnuts, plums and even peaches. By 1812, the tomato based ketchup emerged, eventually becoming the condiment we know today.

Sitting down to enjoy a burger, fries and ketchup, it's easy to forget the long journey these foods have taken to become "American." Recognizing their immigrant roots reminds us that culture is never fixed; it is constantly evolving, shaped by the people who bring their skills, flavors and creativity to new places. What feels familiar and comforting, our favorite cookout meals, backyard barbecues and dinner classics were once introduced by people who sought a better life in this country.

So the next time you enjoy that Fourth of July meal, remember: what we call "American" is really a mix of global tradition. Appreciating that history is more than just knowing a fun fact. It's recognizing the humanity and contributions of the communities that built the culture we celebrate today.

Food, in the end, is one of the most universal ways we connect with the stories and struggles of those who came before us. And if we take the time to notice, every bite can be a small act of gratitude for the people who brought their homes and their recipes to ours.