

Life!

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026 SECTION B

Travelers ignore pros' advice at their own peril

By Christopher Elliott

SPECIAL TO THE POST

When Sharon von Wolffersdorff booked a flight from Seattle to Rome, she considered ignoring the experts' advice.

The experts -- in her case, her airline and airport -- assured her that she could make a flight connection in Frankfurt in an hour. But she was skeptical.

"I experienced a nerve-wracking transfer in Paris a few years ago," says von Wolffersdorff, a retired Spanish teacher from Seattle. "We didn't want to do that again."

She's one of many travelers who are questioning recommendations from the pros. Travelers have always been contrarians, but never like this. And their timing, just before a summer market by uncertainty, couldn't be worse.

"We're in an age where skepticism is the default setting," says psychologist Frank Niles. "So when a professional says, 'Don't go there' or 'Do it this way,' some travelers instinctively do the opposite."

So why are travelers being more skeptical? When should you be contrarian -- and when shouldn't you? And what is the biggest mistake the skeptics are making when they travel?

Whose advice are travelers ignoring?

There's a reason why travelers are distrustful: The experts are getting it wrong too often.

"I'm always disappointed when I listen to travel experts," says Stephanie Ward, a marketing executive from Dallas. "They give you the tourist experience, which is usually subpar and more expensive."

Who's on the "ignore" list?

- Travel agents who care more about collecting commissions than helping a customer.
- Travel influencers who are getting paid by a destination or hotel to say positive things.
- Travel bloggers who endorse points-earning credit cards and then take a generous kickback from the credit card company while offering misleading

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Trump, Kennedy aim to relax AI healthcare tools safeguards

By Darius Tahir

KFF HEALTH NEWS

Paul Boyer, a psychotherapist for Kaiser Permanente in Oakland, California, is experiencing the AI revolution firsthand. He's a little underwhelmed.

The health giant has rolled out a new suite of note-taking software, made by healthcare AI pioneer Abridge, intended to summarize a patient's visit at supersonic speed. For many clinicians, the technology soothes one of the persistent headaches of their lives -- administration and paperwork.

But the AI scribe caused another headache for Boyer and his colleagues: It is "not super useful." They end up correcting the computer-written notes.

Abridge is "not good at picking up on clinical nuance, at picking up on the emotional tone" that can be critical in the mental health field, Boyer said. For example, for manic patients, what's said is less important than how it's said, Boyer said, and the software struggles with picking up on those cues.

Note-taking software isn't the wave of the future; it's the wave of the present. Hospitals nationwide are implementing it. And researchers are finding some benefits. A year after installation, doctors who used these products the most saved more than half an hour of work daily, according to a study of five hospitals published in April in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Many doctors love the products where they're deployed -- several interview-based studies find overall positive reactions to the scribes.

Nevertheless, as Boyer's example shows, there are persistent questions about the systems' quality.

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« RIDES »

As US car market shrinks, Toyota makes inroads with the steady Corolla XSE

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Cars are really taking a beating.

Ford and GM sell two models between them, while Dodge sells a variety of Charger and Challenger sports cars. If you need a conventional sedan, you have to look to Asia or Europe. Toyota still sells the most recognizable sedan in the world -- the Corolla. You can't get more conventional than this.

Even the Corolla has an SUV variant called the Corolla Cross. There are also a hatchback and hybrid. The sedan soliders on as a compact sedan that seats five and delivers above average fuel economy for

not too bad a price.

The 2026 Corolla sedan comes in three varieties: LE, SE and XSE. All three trims come with a 2.0-liter four cylinder with 169 horsepower and 151 pounds-feet of torque. The transmission is continuously variable.

That amount of horsepower and torque isn't a lot, but it is enough to make the Corolla an OK drive. My version was the XSE, which comes with a sports suspension and sport driving mode. It also came with paddle shifters which is interesting considering the continuously variable transmission. None of those additions were necessary because

this sedan is so far away from being sporty. That doesn't mean it's not likable. It is. No one buying this car would have been disappointed because it's not sporty. That would have been known before the driver's door was opened. This is more of a sensible car to get you from point A to B in a relative amount of comfort. You buy a Corolla for its dependability, stellar service and longevity.

The Corolla has enough pep to get it into and out of traffic without a lot of drama. It accelerates slowly but it's steady enough to get you to make a move. The engine will protest loudly when you

floor it. There will be more noise than motivation, but the engine gets the job done.

The sporty suspension is stiff, but the ride is comfortable on most services. There is a good bit of wind and tire noise intruding into the cabin, but not enough to spoil the ride.

The Corolla has never been known as a handling champ and still isn't unless you get the GR variant, which is in a class by itself. The Corolla XSE handles predictably with no surprises. It's a competent front-wheel drive sedan that handles normal road conditions without problems.

The Corolla is a handsome sedan with a modern



SHUTTERSTOCK

Sheet pan pancakes with strawberry and blueberry.

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JOHN ZOLER

John Zoler, 19, is in a leadership position at Zoler Construction LLC, a Charlotte-based company started by his father.

Charlotte's working stiffs, and proud of it

Even in a tech-driven society, blue collar trades are still necessary

By Joslynn Vorachith

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The labor market needs blue collar workers.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employer compensation costs rose 3.4% over the past year, reflecting increases in both wages and employee benefits, and a possible connection to cost of living increases.

As costs spike, younger workers are searching for careers that provide faster entry and stable income without college education. Nearly half of the U.S. population is middle class, which Pew Research classifies as household income ranging between \$56,600-\$169,800 in 2022.

As rising costs reshape what financial stability looks like, more people are turning toward hands-on industries.

"A lot of these businesses need people... it's everywhere," said Christian Alexander Foster, 25, a line cook at Burton's Grill in Char-

lotte as well as an auto mechanic and studying for certification as a welder. "It's not hard to teach a guy how to cook pasta or time fries. I just walked in, had the interview, got paid \$14 an hour, and started to learn."

Family circumstances led Foster to help provide for his family by working multiple jobs.

"My grandpa died, and then my grandma she got dementia, and then my mom got cancer," he said. "I grew up lower middle class, so in other words, just getting by. I wasn't ready for college."

Foster, who has Asperger's, a condition on the autistic spectrum, said he considers culinary work an art form and the kitchen works best when everything feels synchronized, although the fast-paced and unpredictable environment can sometimes be overwhelming.

Despite the challenges, Foster said he enjoys the job provides as well as relationships

with his co-workers.

Carlos Montalvo, a 20-year-old certified shop technician describes their typical day preparing tools, servicing forklifts, and painting. He says those skills translate to the project car he drives: a 2003 Ford Mustang.

"A really good day at work is probably when we're completely busy and we have multiple forklifts that need to be done in a day," he said.

Montalvo recognizes how skill sets like problem solving and good memory allow him to work efficiently.

"My first preventive maintenance, pretty much you change all of the filters on the forklift -- oil filter, transmission filter, diesel fuel filter, water filter -- and I got it all done in one day," he said. "Half the people who were working there before, it would usually take them three days."

Montalvo understands college

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Charlotte's working stiffs, and proud of it

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isn't for him and he does best when physical tasks are involved. "It's a little bit harder for me to learn when it's through books and reading lessons rather than being hands-on and physically working on it," he said.

Nearly a quarter of Charlotte's workforce is employed in transportation, production, construction, and repair-related industries, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Transportation occupations account for nearly 11% of the workforce, while construction and repair 4%, and food-service industries employ 9%.

Comparatively, white-collar occupations account for roughly a third of Charlotte's workforce. These jobs are typically office-based or professional positions that rely less on manual labor and often provide salaried pay and benefits such as healthcare, retirement plans and paid time off.

John Anthony Zoler, 19, works at Zoler Construction LLC, the company his father started. Five years after joining the firm, the younger Zoler is in a leadership role at the family business, which specializes in "tilt up construction," a type of carpentry involving steel work, warehouses, and commercial properties. The labor is intensive: workers carry 200-pound braces on each panel, and there are hundreds for each building.

"It's not for everybody," Zoler said. ... "Right now, my shoulder is healing, because I had to carry some heavy braces for the panels that we poured today. And I hurt my finger really bad, but it's fine."

Zoler admits there's a physical and mental toll of leadership but eventually discovered his most effective way to manage is "lead by example."

"I feel like [what] I've learned being in this business, and I don't feel like the office job would provide...[is] learning experience," he said. "That's another reason why I chose to do what I do."

A common misconception is blue-collar work means being stuck in the middle class. It's seen as manual labor, but the reality is business, technical and leadership skills are required.

"The only way that you can get out of that mindset is if you do work for your own company" Zoler said. "You're going to earn more than an engineer if you actually put in the work and talk to clients to close deals."

As the child of immigrants, Zoler said expanding the family's business is tied to a larger goal: securing their future.

"That's what keeps me going," he said. "I'm never going to leave my parents' side. They're always going to have my support and everything. I want to see my business boom. I want

to see 15 company trucks, I want to see my projects, expanding my dreams coming true."

Nohe Estala Mojica is an executive chef at Burton's Grill. He previously left the kitchen to work in construction, but his passion for cooking eventually brought him back to the industry.

Mojica said he has no formal culinary education and instead worked his way up through years of hands-on experience in the kitchen.

His biggest challenge is scheduling labor based on the employees' experience in the line and keeping within budget to meet quality standards.

"We get busy at dinner time. That's totally a different game," Mojica said, "so I definitely need two people for one station."

During night shifts, volume is much higher, which requires more than one person per station.

"When I'm short-staffed...I have to do multiple jobs," Mojica said. "I'm in charge of making sure the plates are coming right. But when we're short-staffed... I have to be on the line and wash the dishes at the same time."

On the other side of food service, Shirley Bertha is cafeteria manager at Johnson C. Smith University, where students often refer to her as "Auntie" or "Granny," a reflection of the relationships she's built over 29 years.

Despite her experience, Bertha said she still feels long-term workers do not receive the benefits they deserve.

"A lot of people have been here for years, and they don't get the seniority that they need to get," she said. "I'm here 29 years. I don't have the proper seniority that I'm supposed to have."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, projected blue-collar job growth is 5%, which is faster than average for all occupations with openings of 13,100 projected each year.

"There's a shortage of aircraft mechanics... and the economy is heavily dependent on jobs like these that cannot be replaced by AI," said Christian Varnado, assistant director for career services at JCSU, citing examples such as plumbers and electricians.

"A computer is not going to [help] if you have a clogged toilet," he said. "Good luck putting that in ChatGPT."

There has been an overemphasis on four-year college degrees instead of trade school, leading to stigma against blue-collar work compared to office jobs. Varnado described a growing generational gap in blue-collar industries where experienced workers are approaching retirement while fewer younger workers entering the field.

"There aren't enough people coming behind them to replace what's going to be lost in the future," he said. "It's going to have a true impact on how the economy as a whole is going to be able to survive."

Toyota makes inroads with its steady Corolla XSE sedan

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are paddle shifters for a sports mode, but this has a CVT, so the shifts are simulated.

Otherwise, this is a nice place to be. The digital gauge cluster displays a plethora of information while the 10.5-inch touch screen is bright and responsive. A wireless charging pad is standard, as well as four USB-C ports auto climate control, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, heated front seats, heated mirrors and sunroof.

The base price of the XSE is \$28,440. A JBL audio system with amp and subwoofer, premium paint and black roof were optional. With destination, the as-

tested price came to \$31,519.

That's a whole lot more than my 1980 Corolla cost but all it had only a five speed, keys and a heater - not even air. This 2026 is lots more car and hopefully as reliable.

- Pros:
- Lots of standard equipment
 - Excellent fit and finish
 - Plenty of driver's aides
 - Great fuel economy
 - Handsome exterior
 - Comfortable interior
- Cons:
- Slow to accelerate
 - Noisy highway ride

Fuel breakfasts with nutrition, flavor

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are made with just five ingredients, including protein pancake mix to help fuel the day. The savory combination of turkey sausage and cheddar cheese is complemented by the sweetness of onion, giving them the flavor your family desires.

To find more ways to put a nutritious breakfast on the family table, visit HealthyFamilyProject.com.

Sheet Pan Pancakes
 Recipe courtesy of the Healthy Family Project
 Prep time: 10 minutes
 Cook time: 5 minutes
 Servings: 6
 Nonstick cooking spray
 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
 3 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
 1 tablespoon sugar
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 1/4 cups milk
 1 large egg
 2 tablespoons unsalted

butter, melted
 1/2 cup sliced strawberries
 1/4 cup blueberries
 1/4 cup mini chocolate chips
 Preheat oven to 425 F. Cover baking sheet with parchment paper and spray with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.
 In large bowl, mix flour, baking powder, sugar and salt. Add milk, egg and melted butter; mix until smooth.
 Pour batter onto prepared baking sheet and smooth into even layer that covers pan. Top with strawberries, blueberries and chocolate chips.
 Bake 5-7 minutes, or until cooked and golden brown. Let cool slightly before cutting into squares.

Healthy Sausage Muffins
 Recipe courtesy of the Healthy Family Project
 Prep time: 3 minutes
 Cook time: 23 minutes

Servings: 12
 Nonstick cooking spray
 1 onion, diced
 1 pound turkey sausage
 4 eggs
 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese
 1 cup protein pancake mix
 Preheat oven to 350 F. Spray 12-cup muffin pan with nonstick cooking spray; set aside.
 Spray large skillet with nonstick cooking spray. In prepared skillet over medium heat, cook onion until translucent. Add turkey sausage and cook until no longer pink. Remove from heat.
 In large mixing bowl, lightly beat eggs. Add shredded cheese, pancake mix and sausage and onion mixture; mix well.
 Fill prepared muffin cups about 3/4 full with mixture.
 Bake 18-20 minutes, or until golden brown on top.

Trump, Kennedy aim to relax AI healthcare tools safeguards

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While Boyer and his colleagues spend time correcting notes, safety researchers worry clinicians might not be diligent about catching errors. That might mean future doctors rely on bad information.

Abridge says it evaluates its scribes at every stage of deployment, including with head-to-head tests against previous versions of the software.

"Following deployment of a model, we monitor clinician edits, star ratings, and free-text feedback from clinician users about note quality," the company's director of applied science, Davis Liang, told KFF Health News in a statement.

Artificially intelligent scribe software is part of a swarm of AI-powered tools coming to healthcare. Clinicians and patient-safety advocates say government regulations are not well constructed to guard against the threat that the new technology will miss or obscure important details of patients' conditions, potentially harming them.

"There is currently no safeguard in place" to vet scribe software at the federal level, said Raj Ratwani, a researcher specializing in human factors — that is, how people interact with technology — at MedStar Health, a large hospital system based in Columbia, Maryland.

Ratwani worries that safeguards on health software will relax even further. Proposed rules from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT — the body that regulates electronic health records, the central chronicle of care for patients — could weaken requirements to make medical records understandable, easy to use, and transparent about the use of AI, Ratwani said. And an incomprehensible record could confuse clinicians and lead to errors.

Beginning in the Obama administration, the Health and Human Services Department's IT office encouraged "user-centered design" tests, in which developers try their products on doctors and nurses. Regulators also sought to require more transparency from companies in the surging market in AI tools.

Both of those requirements are axed in the proposed rules from HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s health IT office.

Doctors and other health practitioners consult records for clinical information, such as scribe notes summarizing the history of patient care and lists of drugs and therapies their patients have used. Doctors also input orders for care.

Poor or cluttered design of a records system "might make the list of medications so complicated and confusing that the ordering provider selects the wrong medication," Ratwani said.

Abridge's general counsel, Tim Hwang, said the company "broadly supports" the government's rules as a "necessary modernization" that "accommodates the speed at which AI is evolving."

The old rules "put way too much burden" on electronic health record systems, said Ryan Howells, a principal at Leavitt Partners, which consults for digital health companies. Leavitt supports the proposals.

Dropping requirements, the administration argues, will result in more innovation and competition. The electronic health record market has steadily consolidated, with hospitals and other clinicians choosing from fewer vendors.

A 2022 study found the top two vendors, Epic and Oracle Health, accounted for more than 70% of the hospital market. And Howells argued too many rules burdened providers looking for good record systems. Federal regulations, Howells said, are "the single biggest inhibitor to true clinical innovation."

The Trump administration proposal to remove requirements governing records is overbroad, some critics say. It removes regulations intended to keep records secure. It also eliminates privacy protections for sensitive medical data they safeguard, overhauls standards governing the formats data is sent in, and more. The rule may give clinicians "more health IT choices to meet their needs through increased competition," the government wrote in its proposal.

HHS' health IT office declined comment, noting the proposal is still winding through the regulatory process. Public comment closed in February.

But most concerning to some — even in the hospital and developer sectors — are

proposals to scotch prerequisites to ensure new products are tested on actual users, and to ensure AI tech's decisions are transparent to doctors and nurses.

"Historically, hospitals and health systems have been challenged by the black box nature of certain AI tools and how the algorithms are developed," the American Hospital Association's Jennifer Holloman said. And with more AI tools flooding the market, the association has said, transparency is even more critical.

Complaints about the safety of electronic health records are long-standing, even for seemingly straightforward tasks. Ratwani likes the example of ordering medication for a given condition.

"The physician is trying to order Tylenol, and the medication list can be so confusing that there's 30 different versions of Tylenol all at a different dose and for different purposes, when in reality that could be designed much more simply and make it easier for the physician to actually pick the right type of Tylenol that they're ordering," he said.

Real-world user testing was intended to simplify record design for doctors. But the administration is ending that requirement in a confusing way, said Leigh Burchell, vice president for policy and public affairs at Altera Digital Health, an EHR developer.

In Burchell's interpretation of the rules, which refer to "enforcement discretion," a principle in which the government can opt not to enforce certain rules, companies are still required to do the testing — the part that takes work — but are not mandated to report their results to the feds.

The administration is also ending a Biden-era idea to create AI transparency "model cards." The concept was that clinicians could explore the data used to train AI tools that advise clinicians with a simple mouse click. But few took advantage of the year-old tool, Trump's regulators say.

Still, hospitals and doctors are wary of removing it. The tool "provides information on how a predictive or generative AI application was designed, developed, tested, evaluated and should be used. These data are critical to foster trust in AI tools and ensure patient safety," the AHA wrote in a comment letter to the HHS IT office. The American College of Physicians offered a similar warning, saying a "lack of clarity could undermine clinician trust, increase liability expense, and erode the patient-physician relationship."

Even developers aren't totally sure about the idea. Burchell said the electronic health records trade group she's part of had "a lot of different perspectives" on the issue. "Normally, we tend to be a bit more aligned on our responses."

Still, Burchell's group thought companies should be transparent about the data AI relies on to make decisions and how it comes up with recommendations.

Evidence for AI tools' effectiveness is sparse or contradictory.

A recent study comparing 11 AI scribes for potential use as a pilot in the Veterans Health Administration found the software performed worse than humans across five simulated scenarios. "Although ambient AI scribes can generate complete notes, the overall quality remains broadly below that of human-authored documentation," the authors noted, with the omission of information being particularly concerning, given the potential to affect follow-up care.

The vendors in the VA study weren't identified, for what the authors called "contractual reasons."

And that's just one type of AI tool. A wave of them is coming, each needing its own evaluation, to say nothing of tools that have already been installed.

Boyer said he can mostly ignore his AI scribe, for the moment. But he worries that management will design his job around the expected time savings and schedule more patients — meaning he'd need to spend more time both with patients and correcting the software's errors.

A KP spokesperson, Vincent Staupé, said the company does not require its clinicians to use AI.

"When I am correcting that note, I feel like this is too much work," Boyer said. "This is definitely making this worse, and this is taking up time that I need to not be spending on correcting an AI tool."

The Creatives:
 A podcast about Charlotte's most creative people

On SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts and Spotify

PROD. ROLL SCENE TAKE
 DIRECTOR:
 CAMERA:
 DATE: Day, Night Int Ext Filter

Travelers ignore pros' advice at their own peril

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advice.

Travelers say they're done listening to the nonsense they've been fed.

"The decision to not take advice comes from being burned in the past," explains Alex Beene, a frequent traveler in Nashville who works for the state government. "I've listened to glowing feedback on hotels that were costly, only to discover when I got there it didn't feel worth the hefty price I was paying."

When should you be a skeptic?

A little skepticism is always healthy. (Except for this column, of course. Every word I write is completely true.)

One big mistake travelers make is assuming everything online is worth knowing.

"The top things that come up to do in a foreign city on Google are all part of a tourism engine," says Aaron Nichols, a research specialist in Longmont, Colo., who spent years traveling around the world. "There's a lot of people who have invested a lot of time in making sure that your attention is directed to those things."

You'll even want to put on your contrarian hat when you find information that appears to be helpful.

Just because it's the first search result, or the source declares itself to be an "expert" or "thought leader," doesn't make it true. Dig deeper. Your expert source might be manipulating the search engine results or enriching themselves from poorly disclosed affiliate arrangements, so it's probably best to look elsewhere for people you trust.

And you'll want to listen to yourself when your instincts set off warning flares. "Trust your instinct," says Ron Podmore, a teacher from Seattle who travels extensively. If something is making you nervous, chances are there's a good reason behind it. Doing the opposite of what your instincts tell you may put you in danger. This step is especially important when you're planning a trip. When you hear a little voice in your head that says, "I don't like it," you should listen.

When should you not be a skeptic?

While there are times that healthy skepticism is essential, there are absolutely times when you should listen to the right experts.

When it comes to safety, Dan Richards, CEO of Global Rescue, a security membership organization, says you don't want to be a contrarian when it comes to your personal safety. Listen to the pros. Heed the advice of the U.S. State Department. Yet too many travelers are doing the opposite.

His latest survey of travelers shows 85% of travelers are concerned about

geopolitical instability. "Yet they're proceeding with their plans despite the risks," he says. That might not end well.

If it's time-tested or official advice. If your destination has visa requirements, or if there are official warnings about safety there, don't ignore them. "You risk serious trouble," says Liam Perkins, a marketing executive from Los Angeles who travels frequently. His pet peeve: Contrarians who ignore etiquette advice and end up doing something offensive. Don't dismiss those tips; you'll just end up embarrassing yourself.

In other words, there are some occasions when you don't want to ignore the expert advice. So when should you be skeptical?

Travelers should be cautiously skeptical

Ignoring the advice of professionals isn't necessarily a bad trend. It's only bad when you take it too far.

Cai Glushak, the chief medical officer for AXA Partners US, sees all kinds of travelers who contract serious diseases and traumatic injuries in risky locations. "These circumstances were easily avoidable by following government advisories," he adds.

At the same time, hundreds of thousands of travelers would have been better served if they'd ignored the advice promoted by internet search engines and points-bloggers last summer, and selected a destination that was off the beaten path or less expensive. Or chose a different flight with a more lengthy layover.

That's what von Wolffersdorff, the Spanish teacher, is doing.

"We're definitely looking for a longer connection," she says.

She's right. A few years ago, I had a flight from Lisbon to Doha through Frankfurt. I was worried about the 90-minute connection time, but my airline told me I'd be fine. My flight arrived on time, but I spent almost 45 minutes waiting in an immigration line. I arrived at my gate just as they were closing the door to the flight, and I had to wait for the next one.

So, as you start planning your holiday trip, the best expert advice is to be cautiously skeptical. I've shown you how to find the good advice, but the rest is up to you.

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« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Benjamin Banneker, scientist and surveyor of nation's capitol

BENJAMINBANNEKER.ORG

Benjamin Banneker was born near Baltimore, Maryland in 1731; he was the only child of a free mulatto mother and African father, who purchased his own freedom from slavery.

Banneker lived all his life on his parents' farm on the Patapsco River in Baltimore County. He attended private schools, obtained an eighth-grade education by age 15 and excelled in mathematics. He took over his parents' farm and became an excellent farmer.



Banneker

Josef Levi, a traveling salesman, showed Banneker a pocket watch, something he had never seen before. He became so fascinated over the watch that Levi gave it to him. He took the watch home and spent days taking it apart and putting it together. In 1753, using the watch as a model, Banneker produced the first wooden clock ever built in the United States.

It was made entirely of wood, and each gear was carved by hand. His clock kept perfect time, striking every hour, for more than 40 years. News of the clock created such a sensation that people came from all over to see it, and the genius who made it.

George Ellicot, a neighbor, introduced Banneker to the science of astronomy, which he rapidly mastered. Banneker's aptitude in mathematics and knowledge of astronomy enabled him to predict the solar eclipse that took place on April 14, 1789.

In 1792, Banneker began publishing an almanac that was widely read and became the main reference for farmers in the Mid-Atlantic states. It offered weather data, recipes, medical remedies, poems

and anti-slavery essays. The almanac was the first scientific book written by a Black American, and it was published annually for more than a decade.

Banneker's major reputation stems from his service as a surveyor on the six-man team which helped design the blueprints for Washington, D.C. President Washington had appointed Banneker, making him the first Black presidential appointee in the United States. Banneker helped in selecting the sites for the U.S. Capitol building, the U.S. Treasury building, the White House and other federal buildings.

When the chairman of the civil engineering team, Major L'Enfant, abruptly resigned and returned to France with the plans, Banneker's photographic memory enabled him to reproduce them in their entirety. Washington, D.C., with its grand avenues and buildings, was completed and stands today as a monument to Banneker's genius.

Banneker's preoccupation with scientific matters in no way diminished his concern for the plight of Blacks. In a 12-page letter to Thomas Jefferson, he refuted the statement that "Blacks were inferior to Whites."

Jefferson changed his position and, as a testimonial, sent a copy of Banneker's almanac to the French Academy of Sciences in Paris.

Another was used in Britain's House of Commons to support an argument for the education of Blacks. Banneker was living proof that "the strength of mind is in no way connected with the color of the skin."

Banneker's predictions were consistently accurate, except for that of his own death. Living four years longer than he predicted, Banneker died on Oct. 25, 1806, wrapped in a blanket observing the stars through his telescope.

After the Emergency Room, a web of care

By Medha Nair

UNC MEDIA HUB

Every 15 minutes, certified nurse assistant Lily Menyeshewa would check in on her young patients.

She wasn't working in the intensive care unit, but rather in UNC Medical Center's child and adolescent psychiatry ward. There had to be a plethora of staff members like her to patients to keep track of everyone, because there may be a patient who is an elopement risk.

"Which is terrifying because you don't want someone who is suicidal running away," she said.

The units are constructed differently; there are sliding doors, no machine wires or anything that can be used negatively, since most of the people are coming in with self-harm or suicidal ideation.

Sometimes, the patients she would see in the ward one week would be gone the next, and a new group would come in. But some of them stayed for a long time, even two to three months, she said.

The children would still go to school if they could. They would attend the UNC Hospital School, which is a unique school within the hospital and part of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools district, to allow students receiving medical care access to education.

One day a week, the children would go to the pediatric game room.

There would be therapy groups centered on mindfulness.

The whole experience is to make the space as therapeutic as possible.

According to its goals and mission statement, the inpatient psychiatry ward strives to make its care interdisciplinary, which means children have access to the attending child psychiatrists, psychiatry residents, nurses, occupational therapists, recreation therapists, social workers, teachers and psychologists when consulted.

The care in the psychiatry ward is truly intensive, with the frequency of monitoring and the standard of care. So how does a child with access to this level of care transition to life outside the hospital? How do all the forms of care translate?

"While mental health doesn't discriminate, access to care definitely does," Menyeshewa said.

The next step

Outpatient clinics tend to be a step down from inpatient care, which means the child will visit their mental health support team in a facility for their appointment while staying with their family at home.

As a nurse practitioner serving patients in both inpatient and outpatient clinics in

Charlotte and the Triad, Rahel Ayalew helps adolescents struggling with eating disorders, anxiety and depression with medication management.

While some people may come in already having gone to therapy, Ayalew said that a lot of the time, people wait until the last moment before they receive care, so sometimes they need to go to the hospital if they require more intensive care. However, for patients afterward, the outpatient clinic fits their needs well.

Ayalew said that ideally, for depression treatment, medication starts at a six-month term. With anxiety, sometimes adolescents need therapy help to learn anxiety management before taking medication.

Treatment is not a one-size-fits-all formula, and it can sometimes be a trial-and-error process.

That is why having an encompassing support system becomes important.

Holistic care

Insurance is a recurring issue, said Lindsay Ray, the executive director of clinical operations at Hope Services, a community-based health agency that helps provide therapy for people with all private insurance and those who qualify for Medicaid.

Providers are not always getting reimbursed properly, so it becomes easier for clinics to not accept insurance, and in places where there are already shortages of care, this can prove really difficult, she said. Hope Services originally only accepted Medicaid, but it expanded its coverage to be more inclusive of patients with insurance that may change over time.

"We wanted them to be able to stay put," Ray said.

These financial barriers do more than delay care — they shape what kind of care is possible. Limited options can mean fewer specialists, longer wait times or settling for providers who may not fully meet a child's needs.

A big part of sustained care after hospitalization is affordability. While the therapists at Hope Services might not be receiving as much income as a clinic not accepting insurance, children from all socioeconomic backgrounds have a better chance of accessing important services, Ray said.

For children coming back from hospitalization who may still need more attentive care during the transition process, Hope Services offers a Medicaid-only service in which therapists go into the child's home for two-hour sessions up to five days a week.



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

On May 22 we remember Iryna's birthday to celebrate and honor Iryna Zarutka because the legacy of her kindness to others and love for animals and art live on to inspire others. On this remembrance day wear something Pink, her favorite color.

BIDS

NOTICE TO BIDDERS/ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

Cabarrus County Schools (CCS) is accepting sealed bids for **Fire Alarm Systems Monitoring and Maintenance Services** on **6-10-26 at 10:30 am**. Plans & Specifications are available by calling Jason Irvin, Project Manager at the Facilities Management Department. The specifications will also be available beginning **5-21-26** at www.cabarrus.k12.nc.us, go to "Departments", "Facilities Management", "Upcoming Projects, Bids and RFQ's".

Pre-Bid Conference Location, Date, and Time:

There will be a non-mandatory pre-bid meeting on **6-2-26 at 10:00am**. At 4425 Old Airport Road Concord NC 28025. Proper ID is required to check in.

Bid Opening Location, Date and Time:

Sealed bids will be opened in person beginning at **10:30 am**, and read publicly at Cabarrus County Schools Facilities Management Department, 4425 Old Airport Road, Concord, NC on **6-10-26**. No bids will be accepted after **10:30 am**. Cabarrus County Schools has the right to reject any or all bids.

Sealed, hand-delivered proposals will be received until 2:00 pm EST, on Wednesday, June 24, 2026, in the office of Mecklenburg County Asset & Facility Management Department, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC 28208, for the **Valerie C Woodard Building Deep Energy Retrofit Phase 2 Project**, at which time and place Bids will be opened and read aloud. Single-prime, lump sum bids will be taken for the construction project as indicated in the bidding documents. The project is located at 3205 Freedom Dr. Charlotte, NC 28208 and a mandatory **pre-bid** meeting shall be held there **June 9, 2026 at 10am**. Meeting will begin at Suite 6000. Prime General Contractors wishing to submit a bid must provide a **MANDATORY** written Letter-of-Interest to the County's authorized Design Consultant at least 48 hours in advance of the bid opening in order to be placed on the official Bidders List for automatic distribution of potential addenda and offered consideration by the County as a responsive bidder. **Bid, performance, and payment & material bonds are required.** NC law and applicable regulations of various licensing boards apply. For Drawings with Specifications, please contact both: Julie Jackson and Cameron Sunkel, Gensler, 101 South Tryon St. Suite 2100, Charlotte, NC 28280, Phone: (704)377-2725, julie_jackson@gensler.com, and cameron_sunkel@gensler.com. Mecklenburg County reserves the right to waive technicalities and to reject any or all bids. This information will be made available in an alternative format for persons with disabilities by calling (704)377-2725.

EMPLOYMENT

Arcadis U.S. Inc. seeks **Data Life Cycle Scientist (Environmental) (27992)** in Charlotte, NC to function as data life-cycle management liaison on variety of environmental engineering projects.

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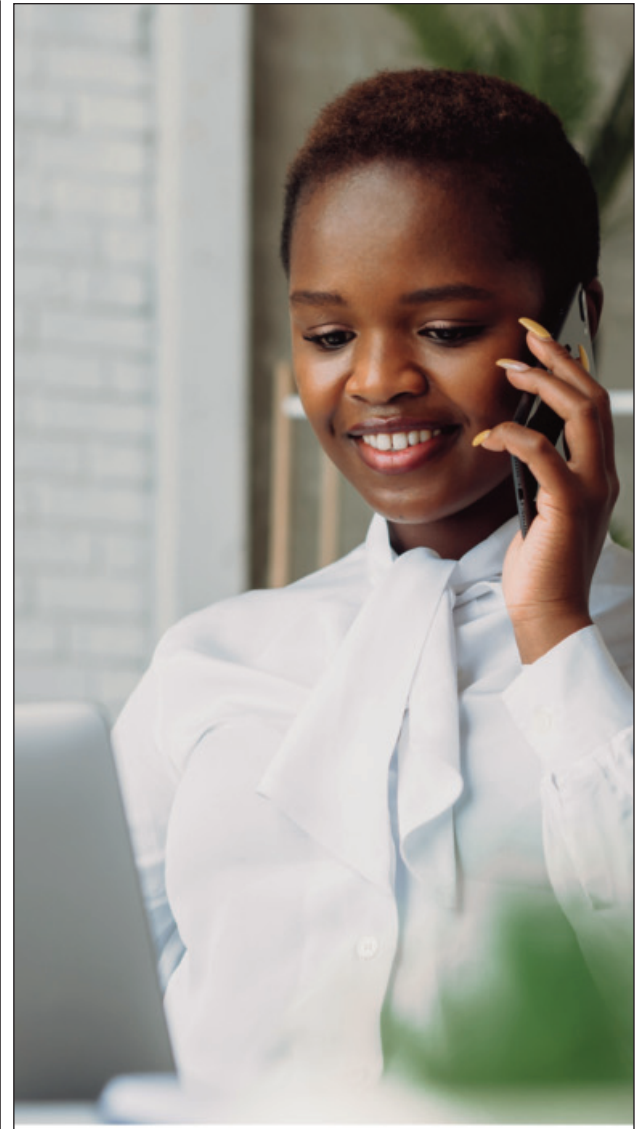
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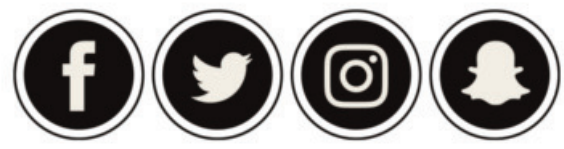
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THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026 PAGE 5B

« ON THE MARQUEE »



CHARLOTTE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra presents "Black Panther in Concert" June 5-6 at Belk Theatre 130 N Tryon St.

SouthPark After 5 ends series run

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

The latest events, productions and exhibits in Charlotte and beyond:

May 21

Captain Mike & The Shipwrecked with *Drew Nathan Duo* close SouthPark After 5, a free evening entertainment series at Symphony Park at the corner of Barclay Downs Drive and Carnegie Boulevard, adjacent to SouthPark Mall.

Live music and free community events run from 5-9 p.m.

May 22-23

Gerald Albright, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. Nine-time Grammy-nominated saxophonist plays some of his greatest hits at 6 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Tickets at www.middlecjazz.com.

May 29-30

Alex Bugnon, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. World-renowned pianist plays Charlotte. sets at 6 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Tickets at www.middlecjazz.com.

May 23

Paisley Puppet Adventures in partnership with *OEL Legacy* present an educational extravaganza, 1-3 p.m., Allegra Westbrooks Regional Library.

Cheer on your favorite teacher, educator or college student as their model their own literary-based hat. Ticket donations are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children 10 and under. No tickets will be sold at the door.

Proceeds go to education initiatives at PPA and OEL Legacy.

For information, call Grace Mayfield at (980) 318-8006 or Sarah Simons at (980) 253-3394.

May 29-30

Sixth Annual One Word Poetry Festival
Please see **USHER** | 6B

'Footloose' at Flat Rock Playhouse

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Flat Rock Playhouse is bringing "Footloose" to the stage.

The 1984 movie gets a musical rethink with shows June 12-July 5 at Flat Rock Playhouse Leiman Mainstage. The music, which includes hits "Holding Out for a Hero," "Let's Hear It for the Boy," "Almost Paradise," and the title tune are well known more than 40 years after the movie's release.

For ticket information, call the Flat Rock Playhouse Box Office at (828) 693-0731 or go online at www.flatrockplayhouse.org

"Footloose" is set in Bomont, Texas, where dancing is frowned upon. When Ren McCormack (J.J. Niemann, "Hamilton," "Back to the Future: The Musical," "The Book of Mormon") shows up, his city swagger, catches the attention of the preacher's daughter. Ren's presence turns Bomont inside out, and youthful rebellion against the status quo transforms into revival, and the town reclaims its rhythm.

"Footloose will be the musical jolt of energy you've been waiting for all year, director Ethan Andersen said. "Whether you know it from the movie, the chart-topping soundtrack, or that one wedding reception line dance you can never escape, Footloose is a story that lives in your bones. At its heart, it's about a community finding its way back to itself — through music, through joy, and especially through dance. That's exactly what I hope our production brings you."

In addition to Niemann, the cast includes Jared Goldsmith ("Dear Evan Hansen"), and Nicole Powell ("Ragtime," "Hairspray"). They will be joined by Saige Smith as Ariel Moore and Scott Treadway as Rev. Shaw Moore. Candi Boyd is the choreographer musical direction by Nathan Trivers is the music director.

On the Net:
NCArts.org



DAVIDSON COMMUNITY PLAYERS

Melissa Lozada plays the title character in Davidson Community Players' production of "Evita" June 17-28 at Duke Performance Hall. Neifert Enrique is Che the narrator and Ron Turner Diaz is Argentinian President Juan Perón.

'Evita' gets a workout in Davidson, then Broadway

Davidson Community Players stage production of hit musical June 17-28

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Davidson Community Players is bringing Andrew Lloyd Webber's acclaimed musical "Evita" to the stage before its 2027 return to Broadway.

The play, scheduled for June 17-28 at the Duke Family Performance Hall, tells the story of Argentina's controversial First Lady Eva Perón from humble beginnings to political powerhouse

which includes music by Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice. The rock opera, which includes hits like "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" and "Buenos Aires," is directed by DCP Executive Director Steve Kaliski, "Evita" as Perón's rise from poverty

to the charismatic pinnacle of national culture in the mid-20th century.

Juan Perón. The creative team includes choreographer Tod Kubo and music director Matthew Primm.

DCP is one of the last U.S. companies to stage "Evita" before it returns to Broadway next year. The Broadway version of "Evita" will be a transfer of the West End show starring Rachel Zegler, who performed the acclaimed balcony number on a London street.

"Eva Perón pioneered the merger between politics and entertainment," Kaliski said. "She showed both the grace and danger of a populism led by a truly charismatic figure, and we look forward to unpacking that in this Lake Norman production."

The play is recommended for ages 10 and up. Ticket prices range from \$20-\$45, plus state taxes and fees.

On The Net
davidsoncommunityplayers.org/shows/evita

'Hamlet' flourishes in the age of TikTok

By Mark Kennedy

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — He's on screen, on stage, on tour, online and in song.

"Hamlet" — William Shakespeare's masterpiece about a moody Danish prince — seems to be having a moment.

A National Theatre production has landed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music starring Hiran Abeysekera. There's a movie version set in London's South Asian community starring Riz Ahmed. Anthony Hopkins, at 88, is delighting fans on TikTok with some of Prince Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. The movie "Hamnet" — the fictionalized story of loss that inspired the creation of "Hamlet" — earned Jessie Buckley an Oscar. Taylor Swift's "The Fate of Ophelia" — that's Hamlet's ex — went to No. 1 on the Billboard singles chart. Eddie Izzard is taking her one-person production of the play on a worldwide tour.

Four hundred years on, "Hamlet" — whose seemingly quite modern antihero is endlessly mulling over what to do after his uncle murdered his father and married his mother — is still giving.

Want even more? There's even a "Hamnet" play, adapted from Maggie O'Farrell's original novel, and the Royal Shakespeare Company is taking it on a U.K. tour. Shakespeare & Company will stage a "Hamlet" this August in the Berkshires. There's a Canadian production of "Hamlet, Sweet Prince," using a queer, contemporary lens. The Acting Company in New York will have a modern-verse version led by a woman, and the Peruvian theater company Teatro La Plaza recently presented a version off-Broadway starring eight Spanish-speaking actors with Down syndrome.

Harvard's Jeffrey R. Wilson, a Shakespeare scholar, says "Hamlet" is perfect for our era, when the crush of bad news has triggered constant, existential check-ins, like: "Hey, how's everyone hanging in there?"

"People are exhausted from the onslaught of awfulness in the world," he says, "and 'Hamlet' gives audiences both permission to 'go there' to explore those emotions and a tool kit of ideas to help us process angst."

A neurodiverse 'Hamlet'

The plethora of works are markedly vibrant and fresh, from the Hamlet in Brooklyn who wears a beanie to the one who enjoys Bollywood-style dances in



SAM TAYLOR | POLK & COMPANY

Hiran Abeysekera in the role of Hamlet at the National Theatre in London on Sept. 25, 2025.

London.

"Great plays survive not because they remain untouched, but because they can continue to be transformed," says director and playwright Chela De Ferrari, from Teatro La Plaza, whose neurodiverse "Hamlet" is a visceral and urgent call from those often excluded from cultural narratives.

"Working with actors with Down syndrome and cognitive disabilities brought me back to something essential in 'Hamlet': that beneath its philosophical brilliance there is an exposed human being asking, in one way or another, how to exist in a world that keeps misreading him," she said.

In one of the show's most potent moments, an actor attempts to imitate Laurence Olivier's delivery of Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy with an image of the famous actor projected on a screen. It takes on a new urgency when spoken by someone whose very right to be in public or artistic spaces is often questioned.

"I like to imagine a kind of continuity between our actors and all the great actors who have carried the play before. I believe Shakespeare lives in all of them," says De Ferrari.

Shakespeare in a BMW
On school trips to see Shakespeare

plays, filmmaker Aneil Karia always felt like they were an arm's length away.

"I felt like I was primarily watching an intellectual experience unfold and I had to use my brain to keep up with the plot and the language and everything like that," he says.

He teamed up with Ahmed and screenwriter Michael Lesslie for a stripped-down, modern-day retelling of "Hamlet" that leans into the title character's unease at being complicit in a corrupt business system.

"That feels so pertinent to the moment we're in politically and everything. It feels like the question a lot of people are asking," says Karia. "It feels like these stories are actually a conversation through time itself."

Hamlet here parties at a neon-drenched nightclub and delivers his soliloquy while hurtling down rain-slicked London streets in a BMW, taking his hands off the wheel as a truck approaches head-on. To be, or not to be, indeed.

"The best best-case scenario here is that it's opening up Shakespeare to audiences who didn't think it was for them, or who struggled with it previously," says Karia, whose film started streaming earlier this month. "This is a

Please see **SHAKESPEARE'S** | 6B



GENESIS SALAZAR

Chris Brown and Usher headline a joint concert stop July 17-18 at Bank of America Sta-

Usher and Chris Brown bring tour to Charlotte

Continued from page 5B

val, Rock Hill, S.C. The lineup includes poetry and spoke word showcases.

May 29: Vibes & Verses Open Mic, Gettys Center Parking Lot, 201 E. Main St., Rock Hill. Poetry, live music and food trucks.

May 30 *One Word Poetry Festival*, one of Rock Hill's top literary events. The showcase founded by Rock Hill Poet Laureate Angelo Geter, includes several events:

- One Word Poetry Slam, Gettys Center, 201 E. Main St. Poetry battle with \$1,500 in cash prizes. Admittance is \$15, \$25 to compete.

- Poetry workshops, Center for the Arts, 121 E. Main St. Free workshops with presenters de'angelo dia (10-11 a.m.) and Angelina Brooks from 11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m. Register at oneword-poetryfestival.com.

- Poetry mixer and showcase, 2 p.m., York County Library, 138 E. Black St. Free showcase featuring poet laureate Carlo Dawson and youth poet laureate Kh'Mani Gilliam.

June 5-6 *Charlotte Symphony Orchestra* presents "Black Panther in Concert," Belk Theater, 130 N Tryon St. T'Challa becomes king and battles Killmonger in the 2018 Marvel film that introduced the cinematic world to Wakanda. Ryan Coogler's feature-length film goes on the big screen as conductor Anthony Parnther and Charlotte Symphony performs Ludwig Göransson's Oscar and Grammy-winning score live on stage. Tickets range from \$39.15 to \$172.93 at tix.blumenthalarts.org/online/mapselect.asp.

June 6 Grammy-nominated R&B singer *Ari Lennox* brings her North American tour to Skyla Credit Union Amphitheatre.

The show is in support of her third studio album *Vacancy*. Tickets at livenation.com.

June 18

"Trouble So Hard - Song & Stories of Slavery, Freedom, & Civil Rights," a live performance at Tyvola Senior Citizen Center, 2225 Tyvola Road. In late October, *Trouble So Hard* was awarded a Mecklenburg County Culture Block Grant by the Arts & Science Council for the three performances. Performances are free, but registration is required at troublesohard.com/reserve.

June 19

Juneteenth Art Fest, 4-8 p.m., Shoppes at University Place 8931 JM Keynes Drive.

Second annual Juneteenth Art Fest celebrates the vibrant culture and history of Juneteenth with art, music, and community. The family-friendly event is free and features local artists, live music, dance performances, and a marketplace showcasing small, minority-owned business.

July 17-18

Usher and Chris Brown, Bank of America Stadium.

Grammy winners Chris Brown and Usher have a pair of Charlotte dates on their North American stadium tour. The tour follows record-breaking accomplishments for both artists. At the end of 2024, the North American leg of Usher: Past, Present, Future sold over 1.1 million tickets.

In October, Brown's *Breezy Bowl XX World Tour* was his highest-grossing and the highest-grossing tour ever by a solo Black American male, earning nearly \$300 million and drawing 2 million fans in North America, Europe, and the United Kingdom.

For tickets: raymondandbrown-tour.com.

Aug. 12

P.J. Morton, Carolina Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

New Orleans-based Morton is a soul singer, songwriter, performer and producer who has earned six Grammy awards and 22 nominations while selling out venues around the world.

Tickets are \$82-\$135 and available at thecarolina.com.

« OUT AND ABOUT »



G. BURKE IMAGES

Proteje performed at Neighborhood Theatre in Charlotte on April 28.



TRUST CHAMPIONSHIP

Charlotte officials and the family of golf pioneer Charlie Sifford participating in the unveiling of a statue honoring the Charlotte native.

Shakespeare's classic 'Hamlet' flourishes in the age of TikTok

Continued from page 5B

big call, but I feel like Shakespeare would approve. I feel his whole thing was like, "Take this stuff and do your thing."

A more clownish prince The "Hamlet" in Brooklyn leans into the humor of the play for one good reason: The guy playing Hamlet is naturally funny.

Abeyskera is manic and mischievous as he pulls out the play's physical humor, addressing the audience directly in his soliloquies, sometimes sitting at the edge of the stage and making eye contact.

"It's a very self-aware play. It sort of really knows that it's a play, if that makes any kind of sense," says director Robert Hastie. "Hamlet knows he's in a play called 'Hamlet,' like *Deadpool* knows he is in a film called *Deadpool*."

Abeyskera tackles his "To be, or not to be" speech as an errant thought, a wisp of an idea, instead of the traditional foot-planted, actor-y, big-thing-coming approach.

"Rather than thinking, 'Oh, here's the big speech coming up and that's freaking me out,' I started thinking, 'It's such a thought that most of us kind of have,'" he says. "Sometimes, in front of the mirror, we just see ourselves and go, 'Oof. Today's a tough day.'"

Hastie believes "Hamlet" is one of those works that reveals something new all the time. Grounded in the human condition, it speaks fresh things to each audience and we discover new things that have always been there.

"One of the reasons I think why we're still talking about Shakespeare, and this

play in particular, is that whenever those words fuse with a new actor or a new group of actors, it becomes a different play," he says. "Maybe that's a good working definition of a classic."

An extremely online bard

Caitlin Cardile is doing her best to keep the 400-year-old playwright alive in the TikTok era. She and her three-person troupe *Mad Spirits Theatre Company* are on virtually every social media platform spreading the word.

"We wanted to bring Shakespeare to a modern audience and make it understandable," Cardile says. "We want people to feel more comfortable with Shakespeare and not think that it's old English and such a hard thing to understand."

They post live readings and commentary of the plays on YouTube but it's on Instagram and TikTok where the true coolness starts. They find trending audio snippets — of everything from dialogue on "The Office" to a Lady Gaga song — and assign a Shakespeare character to say them.

So Kitty Forman's popular line "I may have been a little irrational today" from "That '70s Show" is lipsynced by an actor playing Ophelia. A section of dialogue between Scar and Simba from "The Lion King" is put in the mouths of actors playing Claudius and Hamlet.

"We're like, 'Hey, wouldn't it be funny if we took these silly trending sounds that everybody's doing and what if we put them to Shakespeare characters?'" says Cardile. "This has ended up being so much fun."

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