

## DINING OUT



ANDY CROSS — THE DENVER POST

Sap Sua's tau hu ky cuon tom shrimp cake with butter, trout roe and mint on June 24, 2023.

## 3 Colorado restaurants make NYT list of 50 favorites

By Jonathan Shikes  
jshikes@denverpost.com

The New York Times has released its annual list of the best restaurants in the United States, and this year, three Colorado spots took their places alongside foodie destinations in cities like Miami, New Orleans, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Nashville and, of course, New York.

Two of these restaurants are relatively new — and focused on Asian cuisine cooked by second-generation chefs, something that represents the rising influence of AAPI culture in Denver.

The third touts a lesser-known restaurant in Pagosa Springs.

The first selection, Denver Vietnamese restaurant Sap Sua, doubles down on the national media's love for the 15-month-old business at 2550 E. Colfax Ave.

Since the husband-and-wife team Anna and Ni Nguyen opened what they call their 'nontraditional Vietnamese restaurant,' they have been stacking accolades, including ... a James Beard semifinalist nod," the newspaper wrote in part. "All well deserved. Their truong va trung alone would warrant the praise. Described simply as 'soft scrambled egg, brown butter, fish sauce, trout roe, rice,' the dish coaxes the humble egg into an improbably rich, custardy realm."

Bon Appetit named Sap Sua among the best new restaurants in the country just two weeks ago.

The second restaurant to make the list is Yuan Wonton, which opened last year at 2878 Fairfax St. in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood. "After four years as a beloved food truck, chef Penelope Wong's dumping operation found a brick-and-mortar home last year. Part of the joy here is the variety of choices, several of which rotate. There are Hong Kong-style 'YW OG' wontons in Sichuan chile oil, tom kha chicken wontons, Chinese chive pockets and steamed chashu pork bao. All are expertly constructed with hand-made doughs," the New York Times wrote.

And finally, the New York Times noted the enticements of Meander Riverside Eatery, an upscale farm-to-table restaurant in Pagosa Springs.

"Tucked into the southern

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## THEATER REVIEW



JOAN MARCUS, PROVIDED BY THE DENVER CENTER

The original Broadway company of "Kimberly Akimbo," which launches its national tour in Denver.

# ONE — FOR THE — AGES



PROVIDED BY THE DENVER CENTER

Broadway veteran Carolee Carmello portrays the titular star of "Kimberly Akimbo."

## Tony-winning "Kimberly Akimbo" launches national tour in Denver

By Lisa Kennedy  
Special to The Denver Post

The musical "Kimberly Akimbo" wastes no time in staking a claim to both exuberance and the weight of the world — as well as about a thousand other feelings that its titular lead, her teenage friends and, arguably, the rest of us are awash in.

That David Lindsay-Abaire and Jeanine Tesori's musical about a teenager with an extremely rare disease and her dysfunctional parents (less rare but oh-so challenging), can be soul-affirming without losing its edge and ouchy-ness is an achievement, one that speaks to the elasticity of the musical genre. And one that the American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League recognized when they awarded "Kimberly Akimbo" five Tony Awards in 2022. Among that trove were statues for best musical, best leading actress, and best featured actress.

On Thursday, the national tour launched at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, inviting theatergoers to ache and laugh and ache and, yes, laugh again.

The show opens at the Skater Planet in Bergen County, N.J., a haunt that isn't as happening as the town's mall.

Kimberly Levaco (Carolee Carmello), soon-to-be 16 years old, stands by herself, waiting. Although her face is that of an adult, everything about her tentative posture and awkward lonesome screams teenager.

High schooler and ice rink worker

Seth (Miguel Gil) takes the microphone to announce a Zamboni timeout. A quartet of teen friends — Delia, Martin, Teresa and Aaron — chatter with an electric energy and then launch into "Skater Planet." ("It's Saturday night in Bergen County. There are parties everywhere, but we never get invited.") The words are cute-sad, but the ridiculously upbeat tune sets the tone for an infectious glee that permeates so much of "Kimberly Akimbo."

While there is a genetic disorder that ages people prematurely, the show's makers chose not to name Kimberly's ailment. We do know that for every year in her life, her body ages five years, and that her life expectancy is dramatically abbreviated.

At school, Seth tells Kimberly in front of the lockers, "I thought you were the lunch lady." Think of it as a version of kids saying the darndest things. That's before Kim and Seth become lab partners on a biology project about diseases, before they are friends and maybe more. Gil does wonders as the sweetly polite, tuba-playing, anagram-addicted Seth.

For show choir kids Delia, Martin, Teresa and Aaron (the charming ensemble of Grace Capeless, Darion Hayes, Skye Alyssa Friedman and Pierce Wheeler), the vectors of fondness veer hilariously off their mark. For Kimberly and Seth, whatever is gently going on between them is as subtle as it is true.

Carmello takes on the beautifully daunting and tricky work of being 16

going on 70. It's an illusion that one buys into or doesn't quite. I didn't when I saw a very good understudy do the role on Broadway (and still loved the show). I did here.

Certainly, Kimberly's wardrobe (costumes by Sara Laux), a believable mashup of patterns and textures, plaid shirts and combat boots, helps. But it's the three-time Tony nominee Carmello's way of inhabiting Kimberly's fears and yearnings that convinces. Whether she's composing a letter to a social service organization ("Make a Wish") or crushing out on Seth ("Anagram"), her voice bubbles up and out, going from tentative to expectant.

Kimberly's mature for her age, much the way children are forced to be when their parents aren't mature for their ages. Mom Pattie (Dana Steingold) is pregnant, and from the video she's surreptitiously shooting for the anticipated newcomer ("Hello, Darling"), she sees the next child as something of a do-over. But don't judge Pattie too harshly; she follows a reprise of the self-absorbed "Hello Darling" with a ballad of remarkable tenderness about "Father Time."

Dad Buddy (Jim Hogan) acts too much like a pal and not enough like a reliable father. He drinks. He's late. He makes promises he won't keep. His most paternal gesture is worrying that Seth might have a crush on his daughter. He sings "Happy for Her" as he drives Kimberly and Seth to school.

Because Kimberly can be so can-do

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## FREEZE FRAME

# Ice Castles returns with two locations this winter

By Tiney Ricciardi  
ricciardit@denverpost.com

One of many Coloradans' favorite winter attractions returns this year with two locations for double the fun. Ice Castles, the lifesize installation featuring frozen slides, tunnels and more, comes to Cripple Creek for a second season. It also will pop up in Eagle for the first time.

Construction typically begins in October in anticipation of December openings, weather permitting. Tickets will go on sale closer to the opening date. Ice Castles has doubled down

on its presence in Colorado after it missed two winters from 2021 to the start of 2023. The installation lost its longtime home in Dillon and the company searched to find a new location where it could pop up. Ice Castles artisans need specific amenities to build the installations, including access to water, sustainable temperatures, sufficient drainage, and a space large enough to create the venue.

The attraction — known for its towering frozen structures that glow at night — made a grand return to the Centennial State last year in Cripple Creek,

which also hosts an annual ice festival. The next one is scheduled for Feb. 15-23, 2025.

"We are thrilled to add a second location in Colorado this winter where we can create a sense of magic and wonder for our guests," said Ice Castles' CEO Kyle Standiford. "Our team is energized to build an experience in Eagle that complements the stunning natural beauty adjacent to the Eagle River."

The Cripple Creek location returns to 305 S. Fourth St. The one in Eagle will be built at 794 Fairgrounds Road. For more information, visit icecastles.com.



ANDY CROSS — THE DENVER POST

Children enjoy the Ice Castles in Dillon on Dec. 21, 2018. The installation will pop up in two locations for the 2024-25 winter — in Cripple Creek and in Eagle.



## ALBUM REVIEW

# Alan Sparhawk of Low is learning to sing again

By Grayson Haver Currin  
The New York Times

Alan Sparhawk did not think his new song was any good. It was early 2017, and he was working on “Double Negative,” the 12th album by his longtime band, Low. The record would become a late-career breakthrough, the intimate harmonies between Sparhawk and his wife, Mimi Parker, supplanted from their slow, soft acoustic settings into beds of brittle noise.

But at that moment, Sparhawk was still wrestling with “Always Trying to Work It Out,” an elliptical portrait of a faltering friendship. He played it for Parker, whom he forever called “Mim.” When, unbidden, she began singing, he knew he had a keeper.

“That was as much approval as I ever needed. That was the way she communicated,” Sparhawk said during a phone interview, pausing often to cry. “When Mim would sing, that was all I needed to know.”

Sparhawk no longer has that filter or confidant. Parker died in November 2022, two years after learning she had ovarian cancer on Christmas Eve. Across three decades, Sparhawk, Parker and a succession of bassists built Low into one of indie-rock’s most mesmerizing acts, their voices moving in tandem like the blowing wind or a flickering candle. Self-diagnosed with autism and borderline personality disorder, Sparhawk also depended upon Parker as an emotional anchor, the person who could help him understand his frustrations simply by listening.

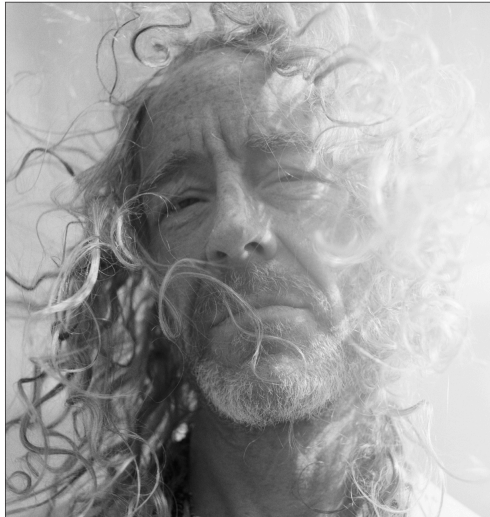
He is now trying to find his voice and language anew, to find ways to move forward in life and music without the person who

guided so much of his past. Made with a drum machine and minimal guitar, his first record since her death — “White Roses, My God,” out Friday — routes his oaken baritone through an effects pedal, rendering him alternately robotic and animalistic. His second, due next year, is a collaboration with the bluegrass band Trampled by Turtles, fellow Minnesotans that Low took on early tours.

“I’m going to wrestle with the universe and generate art, because that’s what I do,” Sparhawk, 56, said several weeks earlier in a Chicago restaurant, chuckling wryly as he swept long curls and two braids of blond hair from his face. “But I’m not great at steering. I am a generator, a good engine, and Mim provided the parameters. So how do I steer this thing coming out of me?”

Low was pretty while also controlling the air, its narcotically paced and library-quiet records seeming to pause the world around them. Sparhawk and Parker evolved, galvanizing their harmonies with rock dynamics after the start of the millennium before delving into the blown-out sonics of hip-hop and the avant-garde a decade later. They finished their third such record, “Hey What,” while Parker underwent chemotherapy. When she seemed to turn a corner in early 2022, they toured.

But by that summer, the cancer had tightened its grip. Sparhawk marveled at Parker’s resilience and constancy. She prepared their finances for when she was gone, often without him knowing, and she was never angry about her situation. The day after she died, however, Sparhawk erupted, as a year of record snowfall



ERIN SPRINGER — THE NEW YORK TIMES

Alan Sparhawk created Low with his wife, Mimi Parker, who died in 2022 from ovarian cancer.

swept into Duluth.

“I was so angry at snow, just grumbling and swearing under my breath,” he said. “And I kept thinking, ‘Who am I talking to? Who am I telling how I feel right now?’ I realized there was nobody. I don’t even know how to process anger anymore. So now what?”

Just three weeks later, Sparhawk returned to the stage, joining Trampled by Turtles to play Low’s “When I Go Deaf.” The performance was desperate and beautiful, a prayer hurled against a gale. A few months later, he asked to

hop on their bus and play guitar during a Willie Nelson tour. Being home was tough. The ritual of walking their dog, Blue, kept him alive, he said; weed, running and his two children helped. Still, he needed a break.

“We were keeping it light — let’s just go play music, hang out, stay up late, have fun,” the Trampled by Turtles singer Dave Simonett said in an interview. “Any of us, in a heartbeat, would sit down and have a good cry with him, but he just wanted to be a musician for a minute.”

Something seemed to shift for Sparhawk. He began building beats with a drum machine and synthesizer, sometimes letting them unspool for an hour. He sang whatever words arrived into a Helicon Voice-Tone pedal, putting space between how he felt and how he sounded.

Those extended improvisations became the core of “White Roses, My God,” a record where his quest to keep his head above grief is mirrored by the way his disembodied voice wriggles atop electronics. His daughter, Hollis, 24, sings on sev-

eral tracks, her voice carrying an uncanny resemblance to her mother’s; his son, Cyrus, 20, plays bass and will soon join his father onstage.

“What’s the border between howling and singing and language?” said Nat Harvie, a longtime family friend who has become an essential collaborator. “It’s not easy listening to hear that question asked, but it’s brave. There’s a record someone is expected to make in this situation, and this is entirely different.”

The improvisational approach of “White Roses” allowed Sparhawk to make songs without writing them, per se, and sing without needing to nail a note. His sessions with Trampled by Turtles afforded an instrumental context far removed from Low’s austerity. He now plays in a funk band with Cyrus and a Neil Young cover band with Minnesota pals. It’s all an outlet, he said, not an escape.

“You think I sing ‘Down by the River’ and don’t think about my wife?” he asked at one point, chuckling ruefully.

Still, Sparhawk suspects that a return to writing more familiar songs — that is, the kind of work he would have taken to Parker — is on the horizon. He had worried that, without her, he’d lost that ability. In early September, he stumbled upon a few lines he liked, the promising start of something new.

“I’m still trying to find my way into the room, having a little trouble with that door,” he said. “But there were five or 10 minutes the other day of standing close to that fire. I had to back off, because it’s a familiar fire. You’ve got to build a tolerance for it, and, sometimes, I get a little scared.”

## Review

FROM PAGE 1

and her parents are often woefully childish, it’s easy to forget that Pattie and Buddy have also been living with the burdens of their daughter’s fleeting life.

There are other dramas, too. For reasons they want to keep hush-hush, they uprooted Kimberly from Lodi to their new town without leaving a forwarding address.

The mystery of that abrupt departure is solved when Kimberly’s aunt Debra (Emily Koch) tracks down her niece at her new school. Debra wheedles information from Kimberly about the location of her sister and brother-in-law’s new home. It becomes clear quickly why the Lavaco family doesn’t want Debra around.

“When life gives you lemons ... you gotta go out and steal some apples,” she sings in “Better,” preaching to the quartet of show choir kids. Think of her as an Artful Dodger by way of the Jersey Turnpike, the Cat in the Hat out on parole.



JOAN MARCUS, PROVIDED BY THE DENVER CENTER

From left: Nina White, Bonnie Milligan, Fernel Hogan, Michael Iskander and Olivia Hardy in the original Broadway company of “Kimberly Akimbo.”

The second act brilliantly balances Seth and Kimberly’s growing fondness for each other with the criminal enterprise

that Debra’s concocted. She’s created an assembly line for check kiting, having enlisted the teen quartet in her scheme. (Hey, they

need money for their costumes!)

When they start to balking she prods them by reminding them that another

school’s show choir would have this funny business down pat. Like Debra’s other song and her constant wisecracking, “How to

### IF YOU GO

“Kimberly Akimbo”: Book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire. Music by Jeanine Tesori. Directed by Jessica Stone. Featuring Carolee Carmello, Miguel Gil, Grace Capelless, Darron Hayes, Skye Alyssa Friedman, Pierce Wheeler, Jim Hogan, Dana Steingold and Emily Koch. At the Buell Theatre at the Denver Performing Arts Complex through Oct. 5. For tickets and info [denvercenter.org](http://denvercenter.org) or 303-893-4100.

Wash a Check” is hilarious. Its darker implications fade in part because her “crew” is so inept at the task, but mostly because Koch’s and director Jessica Stone’s comedic timing is ace.

And the timing here needs to be crisp. Because “Kimberly Akimbo” constantly mixes moods — up and down and sideways. Kimberly knows that time, however sped up, delivers the existential alongside the joyous. She wants us to know that, too.

Lisa Kennedy is a Denver-based freelance writer specializing in theater and film.

## Restaurants

FROM PAGE 1

reaches of the San Juan Mountains, Meander is a gem of a country restaurant. The chef Justin Jacobs spent time in the kitchen at Frasca, in Boulder, among the region’s most renowned restaurants, but has left the white-tablecloth life behind. The menu here is unapologetically eclectic, with quality ingredients, especially produce, and sure-handed cooking keeps it coherent. “A Dutch baby topped with a creamy lump crab meat mixture made a novel twist on breakfast for dinner, while a “patio smoked” bratwurst, made in house, was a deftly spiced version of that quintessential case meat.”



PROVIDED BY YUAN WONTON

The chili wontons at Yuan Wonton are made with shrimp and pork and wrapped in light egg dough, then doused in Szechuan hot chili oil and Chinese black vinegar.

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