

OVER YONDER

Interviewed by **The Silver Age**, June 19th, 2024

Over Yonder is a DIY music venue located in North Philadelphia. In this interview, founders Ariel, Vivian, and Merritt detail the venue's history, highlights, lowlights, and technical features. For information about Over Yonder's shows, follow @overyonder.phl on Instagram.

[Sadly, the first few minutes of the interview were not recorded.]

ALICIA LOPEZ: How did you all meet?

ARIEL: So, we [Ariel and Vivian] met at the first DIY Super Bowl on July 8th.

ARIEL: It was Guitar Fight from Fooly Cooly, Blue Deputy, Oolong,

VIVIAN: and Carly Cosgrove.

ARIEL: There was a fifth band, but I forget.¹

VIVIAN: There was a fifth band, okay. [to Merritt] And we met...

MERRITT: We met because I needed a roommate.

VIVIAN: But I found you as a roommate for everyone before that.

MERRITT: I don't remember how I met you though.

VIVIAN: We just saw each other.

MERRITT: That's true.

VIVIAN: I thought that you didn't like me for the first couple of times that we met. But it wasn't true.

MERRITT: No, we met because I was at Crawlspace.

¹ Editor's note: the fifth band was Ogbert The Nerd

VIVIAN: Wait, I remember when we met. In the bathroom line at a show.

MERRITT: Oh, yeah. And then we met again outside PhilaMOCA.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

MERRITT: And you still didn't think that I liked you.

VIVIAN: It was just a year later.

MERRITT: It was. And then in spring of 2022 at another show I was talking to you about my really shitty roommate situation and you're like "do you want to move out?"

VIVIAN: "because there's a house that I'm building. I don't live in it though"

MERRITT: and then I talked to you and then it was like 10 million years for me to get out of my lease.

VIVIAN: But now you're here.

MERRITT: Now I'm here.

COLE GABORIAULT: So, when did the venue start?

VIVIAN: This venue started... the first show was August 26th, 2022, however we ran a venue together before Over Yonder.

A.L.: Blacklight?

VIVIAN: Blacklight, yeah.

C.G.: I saw that show there once.

VIVIAN: Oh wow, awesome.

ARIEL: Damn, y'all know the history.

MERRITT: I played the first ever Blacklight show.

VIVIAN: Yeah, Mer played the first ever Blacklight show.

MERRITT: It was a cover band.

VIVIAN: Yeah, and Attack Dog when there were only two of them at our first ever show, yeah. And then I moved, and so did you [Ariel]. Or no, you moved, and we found a better place to have shows, and so then Over Yonder started. And we renamed it because we figured, new place, new name.

ARIEL: Yeah, we sought out this place specifically. I was looking for places specifically with the intention of it being a house venue.

C.G.: This was a good pick.

MERRITT: And apparently it was a venue forever and ever ago.

ARIEL: Like 10 years ago, yeah.

VIVIAN: In the 2010s.

ARIEL: The biggest reasons that I always list are an entrance through the backyard on a non-resident-facing street so that people aren't going to be crowding the street and bothering people, multiple chillable spaces, like the backyard, here [the living room], the dining room, the music side of the basement is on the non-street side, so less sound bleed, and the stairs come down in the non-music side of the basement.

MERRITT: That's the most important one. I hate turning into music, like when I go downstairs in a basement and I'm facing people. It's scary.

A.L.: We have a "why did you decide to make a venue?" question. So, starting with Blacklight, why did you guys want to get involved in the scene?

VIVIAN: Well, I was like, "I want to throw a party" because I had come out of COVID and finally met people and was partying with them. I was like, "I want to do this." I want to throw a party. I knew that Ariel had two PA speakers, so I asked you [Ariel], "hey, can I borrow your PA's so I can throw a party" and you're like, "you should just do a house show." And I was like, "um, I don't know if I'm comfortable with that." And then we did a house show and it went really well. And then we just kept doing it because I realized it was awesome. But Ariel, you wanted to do shows for a while.

ARIEL: Oh yeah, I also had an answer to the question, but I don't know what the question was.

A.L.: Why did you decide to make a venue?

ARIEL: I really wanted to be in it. In my freshman year of college in 2018, I had never even heard of house shows, because I grew up in a place that doesn't – it's just not economically feasible to have house shows and my friend took me to a house show on French Street or something – one of those streets – and I was like “whoa this is crazy” I never even considered that you could DIY music like that and I immediately was like “I want to do this so badly” and then, not long after, and you know, coronavirus, you know, whatever, world shut down. Then afterwards, I was like, “alright, for real this time, it is my life mission to deeply involve myself in the DIY scene.”

VIVIAN: And then on the same night that I was like, “oh, I don't know if I'm comfortable with that,” you basically convinced me to be comfortable with it. And I was like, “actually, that'd be awesome,” and we started brainstorming, name ideas and yada yada.

MERRITT: And I just kind of got swept up in it.

VIVIAN: Once Over Yonder started

MERRITT: I was just like, “okay”

VIVIAN: I mean you live here, and you do music.

MERRITT: So I was just like, “alright.” That's kind of just my DIY story in general. It just happened to me. I didn't actively try to do that.

VIVIAN: No, yeah, I didn't know DIY existed at all.

MERRITT: Me either.

VIVIAN: Because I just come from a suburb that doesn't have anything going on at all.

MERRITT: And I come from rural Pennsylvania, so even less of anything.

A.L.: So, clarifying question: August 26, 2022, that's the start of Blacklight or Over Yonder?

VIVIAN: The first Blacklight show was November 13th, 2021

A.L.: Thank you. How did you come up with the names for your venues?

ARIEL: Well, for Blacklight, I think it was just like...

VIVIAN: I was like, “well, if we’re gonna do this and it’s at my house, then I want my name to be in it.”

MERRITT: Oh, wait!

VIVIAN: Yeah, because I’m Vivian Black.

MERRITT: That’s so funny.

VIVIAN: That’s the most self-centered way to come up with a DIY name.

ARIEL: We just came up with a list of names, and it was really funny. The pressure was on because we were like “okay we’ll do a house show” less than two weeks before the first show. The final two name contenders I believe were Blacklight and the Nether Fortress or Nether Portal or something like that.

MERRITT: Oh my god, Minecraft.

ARIEL: Over Yonder was a very long process. We had a whole list that we were sitting on for months and months.

VIVIAN: And it was very very close before the show that we were at a friend’s house and we’re talking they’re like “what are you gonna name the venue” and we’re like “we still don’t know” and then we’re just reading off names on the list and I think I just was like “oh what about Over Yonder” and then someone there was like “I don’t like that” and then I was like “wait, I like that” and then I think there was a date and I was just like “guys we need like we need a name” I don’t know how long away the show was, but we had to post it [the flyer].

ARIEL: We had to get the flyer made.

VIVIAN: But it was all so incredibly last minute I think I put my foot down and I was just like, “we need a name, it should just be this.” And then it was.

MERRITT: And the branding for that name is very good.

ARIEL: Oh, yeah, the OY,

C.G.: The OY is phenomenal, yeah.

ARIEL: Which is also an homage to our Jewish background. It's OY as in Over Yonder and also OY as in OY.

C.G.: So the sound here is really good. I've noticed on multiple occasions.

ARIEL: Wait, really?

C.G.: I guess I'm curious, to the extent that you don't have trade secrets or anything, what's your strategy for that, what kind of equipment are you using, how do you put this together?

Is it just learning over time?

VIVIAN: Facebook marketplace.

ARIEL: That is a better answer than I was thinking. Honestly, I am a hawk on Facebook Marketplace.

Vivan: Scrolling before bed, scrolling when you wake up.

ARIEL: I do attribute a lot of the success in the sound to the good deals I've gotten on high level PA equipment. So one, we have some light acoustic dampening down there. The walls are all lined with moving blankets, which is great for a bunch of things. One, it doesn't have the basement crusty, crumbling brick and mortar look. It also really does a lot to stem echoes and reflections, especially any frequencies above 800 to 1,000 hertz, which is good, because that's the intelligibility range. Also, we use mic and mixing practices that quote-unquote "real venues" use. We mic up the drums, we mic up amplifiers. Many would say that it's not necessary for sound quality because it's a basement and the sound doesn't need to be projected in the same way, which is technically true in a sense, but what happens a lot of time with amplifiers on the floors is that because they're on the floor, the people in the audience act as acoustic baffles, which prevents it [the sound] from being heard clearly. When it's a mic going through the PAs, sound can travel over the heads of the people in the crowd so that everyone can hear it more clearly.

C.G.: That's good to know. I guess that applies to the drums as well then. Even the kick would get babbled because it's so low to the ground. If you raise up the sound, it's going to project better to the back of the room.

MERRITT: We also have kick and bass going through a subwoofer.

C.G.: It's good to know. We have basically just humbly...

A.L.: ...and very respectfully

C.G.: ...stolen the idea to use moving blankets as acoustic dampening.

ARIEL: You guys are not the first.

C.G.: The moment I first saw the basement I was like, “we’re doing that, that’s a phenomenal idea.”

VIVIAN: That and the fact that everything’s fully carpeted down there with carpets we were given/found.

ARIEL: Yeah and I don’t know how closely you guys looked at the basement – I guess probably not that closely because it’s all dark during shows and stuff – but it’s like a patchwork of a bunch of different carpets. Basically, we got a bunch of carpets for very cheap or free on -

MERRITT: or we’re given them to us, people were like “hey you want a carpet?”

ARIEL: yeah and there was one that we got from the guy in New Jersey, the 14 by 16 roll of carpet that I spent an entire day just cutting up and filling in all the gaps so there’s no uncovered spots

MERRITT: It’s so cozy. It sounds pretty good and it’s so comfortable

VIVIAN: and it’s vacuumable.

MERRITT: And it just makes being down there during a not show time – it’s somewhere I actually want to be down there.

ARIEL: Dude, did you ever go down there before any of that stuff was there?

MERRITT: Yeah.

ARIEL: There was a fucking PvP-enabled zone down there.

MERRITT: Ariel, I helped you vacuum all of the dirt out like two days before the show

VIVIAN: It was just a bunch of literal rocks from the floor to the ceiling. It was just like the wall.

MERRITT: We took a shop vac to that for a whole day

ARIEL: We use it like every second or third show because when people mosh into the walls more bits of the concrete crumble.

VIVIAN: The moving blankets prevent that from going everywhere.

MERRITT: Yeah, trying to breathe down there was really difficult.

ARIEL: Oh my god, it was awful.

VIVIAN: Initially, yeah. Now it's better.

MERRITT: It was a scary basement.

C.G.: I noticed you guys have got fans all over there keeping the air circulation going.

VIVIAN: And we also have a Corsi-Rosenthal box, which is the best air filter you can build.

C.G.: Yeah, the filters in a box and a fan blowing into it. I saw that at one of the shows and I was like, "this is a good idea."

ARIEL: Yeah, it's like, you know,

MERRITT: Cost effective

ARIEL: Yeah, and better than other air filters. Yeah, don't want to have the oxygen levels dropping to 5%.

MERRITT: Yeah, that would be part of an uncomfortable night.

ARIEL: Dude, I mean, I've definitely been at some house venues where I'm like, "the oxygen concentration is incompatible with life."

VIVIAN: Yeah, like everyone's getting stupider just standing here.

ARIEL: Literally, yeah.

MERRITT: Remember that one time someone set off a smoke bomb, Ariel?

ARIEL: What?

MERRITT: At a show we were at? You don't remember?

ARIEL: When?

MERRITT: In Tom Kuntz's basement

ARIEL: What the fuck?

MERRITT: Yeah. It was the night you took me to Ukie Club on your bike trailer.

ARIEL: Dude, January of 2023.

MERRITT: Yeah someone set off a smoke bomb. It was no fun. That's all. That's all I have to say.

A.L.: Okay. Are your shows on any kind of a schedule or do you do them whenever you want?

VIVIAN: I think the most regimented our schedule has been has been like "we'll do it two times a month," "we'll do it three times a month" or like "not on the weekdays" typically, but just we just had a weekday show for the first time ever last Tuesday. But no, more than that just whenever we can book people/whenever people reach out and they're like "hey can you can do a show?"

C.G.: What kinds of music do you generally host?

MERRITT: Like everything. We've done hardcore stuff, we've done metal, we've done raves, we've done indie, we have folk this weekend.

VIVIAN: Folk pop.

MERRITT: We've done Midwest emo, experimental –

ARIEL: Yeah, experimental noise stuff.

VIVIAN: Mathy stuff.

MERRITT: Yeah, pretty much everything. We don't have a niche and I kind of like that.

VIVIAN: I mean, there's also multiple genres we haven't done, but typically if people approach us, if there's multiple people doing a genre, it kind of just ends up here eventually.

C.G.: And related to that, how do you usually proceed with booking? How should bands contact you if they're curious about that?

ARIEL: Through the DMs is what we do. Oh, my god.

VIVIAN: We get so many.

MERRITT: We get so many.

ARIEL: We get so many.

VIVIAN: It's kind of hard to respond to everything.

ARIEL: Literally, my daily boulder. Unfortunately, there are people who are languishing away in our DMs.

VIVIAN: Unfortunately, yeah. We don't have an email, because I honestly don't think an email would make anything better. It's kind of just a volume thing.

A.L.: Okay. Personal favorite feature of the venue?

MERRITT: I was just gonna say the basement.

VIVIAN: It exists.

MERRITT: I'll pick a real one. I mean the PA system is pretty good.

VIVIAN: I like the lighting setup, which I think is an important and underrated portion of the Over Yonder experience upstairs and downstairs.

MERRITT: Upstairs lighting is really awesome.

VIVIAN: And I like the bar a lot.

MERRITT: I like doing bar.

VIVIAN: Yeah, I like bartending.

MERRITT: I also like doing door. I like all of it actually. I really like doing door and being able to sit on the washing machine when I do door because it makes me feel really cool. That's it.

VIVIAN: I like how colorful our lights are and how present they are. And that we don't have overhead lights. Every room is a different color.

ARIEL: I'm going to say the Maryland flag in the bathroom.

VIVIAN: I like that the bathroom is purple and that's the only thing that's purple because I can tell people when they ask me where the bathroom is "it's the purple room over there," and then they'll always know

A.L.: [to Ariel] Are you from Maryland?

ARIEL: No.

VIVIAN: It was just such a good deal at Goodwill we couldn't pass it up. I guess another feature that is a favorite of our patrons is the Obitchen.

MERRITT: I've never heard you call it that.

VIVIAN: I call it that. The Obama kitchen, yeah.

C.G.: There's enough there to occupy you reading it between sets. You can stand there and be like, "wow, that's a lot of information about Obama."

ARIEL: There's actually interesting stuff in there. My favorite one is the one where it's like a who's who of Obama's inner circle.

A.L.: Okay, any particularly memorably great, terrible, funny shows that you've done?

MERRITT: I've got a terrible one for you.

VIVIAN: That wasn't booked at Over Yonder, but it still happened here.

ARIEL: Yeah, you can start with that one.

VIVIAN: Yeah, this is bad.

MERRITT: January of this year, I had a thing where I was throwing raves and stuff, and a bunch of shit went wrong with locations for one of them. I had an original location booked, or not booked, obviously, because it wasn't there, and then found out that I couldn't have it there, so I was going to have it at this place in the middle of the woods. I didn't have time to scout it, but we couldn't find the way there. Ariel got lost in the woods so like two hours before showtime we were like "we're gonna move it to Over Yonder." So we booked it back to the

house and set everything up and then everyone that was coming was there for a really big rave and not a house rave so they were probably like 150 people here

VIVIAN: There were more than that. Also someone put the location publicly somewhere without our permission

MERRITT: Yeah, someone did do that. And other than Ariel, no one else who said they would help me showed up to help me so it was just crazy. And that was the worst show.

VIVIAN: Yeah that wasn't booked through here but it ended up happening here. We've had multiple very good shows.

ARIEL: Yeah October whatever it was 2022. The one we did with 4333.

VIVIAN: That was a good one.

ARIEL: That was just an awesome show. Dude, fucking Kerosene Heights played here, Cali Cousins. Those are two like...

VIVIAN: This is all the same bill

MERRITT: We can go look at the bill wall.

VIVIAN: The one that we did with The Machine with Foreland Basin.

MERRITT: I was thinking that. That was probably my favorite.

ARIEL: What an unbelievably well-behaved crowd at that show, too.

MERRITT: Those folk people.

A.L.: How do you fit all of Foreland Basin in your basement?

ARIEL: With...

VIVIAN: Panash and Strategy

MERRITT: How many people are in Kingfisher?

VIVIAN: So many

ARIEL: Seven

MERRITT: Seven people will be on our stage this Saturday.

VIVIAN: I feel like I'm going to cheat on another show if I say one show is my favorite. I liked our 2023 Day Patrick's Day show. I liked that one a lot.

MERRITT: That one was perfect.

VIVIAN: It was really fun. It was a big home-y show.

MERRITT: It was.

A.L.: Okay. Last question: is there anything we should be asking you about?

MERRITT: Can I just talk about stuff with the scene in general and the North Philadelphia community stuff?

VIVIAN & ARIEL: Yeah

MERRITT: Okay, so a big thing that me, or not just me, but my friend Gio who also lives here have been talking about is what is the DIY scene, specifically the North Philadelphia DIY scene's place in the North Philadelphia community? Because it's a fact that most of the people that are doing this stuff are not from here, myself included and a big thing that the Temple DIY scene does is take things away from the North Philadelphia community, especially in the sense of big block parties or big shows or just people out on the street disrupting the community. And that coming from a bunch of people that aren't from here is not the best thing in the world. So one thing that I've been trying to do specifically is give back to the community. We just did a community cleanup. We're gonna start doing food drives and I think it's just a conversation that should be had and people should be more aware of the fact that we are transplants and we are coming and we are using this community for our own benefit without really thinking about what we're doing.

VIVIAN: I think the questions are pretty thorough as far as aspects of the venue. I think focusing on safety in the venue – safety as in physical safety but also actually feeling safe because you can *be* safe and not *feel* safe. I think people feeling comfortable here is something that we all think about a lot. Cause you know, everyone has a story of going to a show or going anywhere and being like, “oh, this place felt bad. I don't wanna come back. I didn't feel good there.” And I think we try to make it welcoming to bands who play here, and also just welcoming and chill for patrons. There's two sides of people who show up and can have a good or bad time. We want to think about both of those groups of people and what they would need or want. So a second bathroom

for bands, them [bands] getting drinks for free, telling people who are coming up to the bar multiple times, “hey, our water’s over there, it’s free, you can serve yourself.” Getting water or snacks for people if they need it.

MERRITT: I’ve fed people toast on multiple occasions.

VIVIAN: Yeah, sometimes people need salt or sugar. Just stuff like that.

MERRITT: Making sure that this is a place people want to come back to.

VIVIAN: If it’s loud, sometimes it’s too loud, and it’s like “this is too loud.”

MERRITT: Sometimes the smoke machine doesn’t stop going off.

VIVIAN: Oh my god, the fucking smoke machine.

MERRITT: We’ve accidentally hot boxed our house more than once.

ARIEL: Yeah, that thing is a piece of shit.

VIVIAN: It’s your fault. It’s your smoke machine. You should turn that shit off.

ARIEL: Broken sensor. Broken tank sensor.

C.G.: I have a question to pop in with. We’ve talked a little bit about the interior decor. What are your inspirations for the interior decor?

MERRITT: Thunderbird salvage. Thunderbird salvage.

VIVIAN: And seltzer.

ARIEL: And of course.

MERRITT: No, no, no. And what’s her name? That old lady?

ARIEL: Dude, fucking Mary Elizabeth Grigg.

MERRITT: Mary Elizabeth Grigg!

VIVIAN: May her name live on.

ARIEL: We spontaneously worked on an estate cleanout one time for a woman named Mary Elizabeth Grigg.

ARIEL: Every single thing, magazine or whatever she ever owned.

VIVIAN: Just meticulously organized.

ARIEL: There's just so much put-on-the-wallable stuff.

MERRITT: That's where the Obama kitchen comes from.

VIVIAN: That's where the horse wall comes from.

ARIEL: That's where I think everything on these walls is from.

VIVIAN: And all of this, yeah.

MERRITT: Well, all of the magazine papers.

VIVIAN: Yeah, a lot of the maps come from her. Those maps are there too. So our inspirations have been Mary Elizabeth Grigg, Thunderbird Salvage, Seltzer, and good lighting in general.

MERRITT: And just not being too serious I guess.