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Elodie Nowodazkij, a Glen Burnie writer, turned to self-publishing after her first novel was rejected by traditional publishers.

# Turning the page

Through self-publishing, local authors are taking control of their literary fate

BY BRITTANY BRITTO | The Baltimore Sun

**T**raveling from her home in Mainz, Germany, to work in Frankfurt meant a two-hour train commute for multilingual writer Elodie Nowodazkij. But the 34-year-old used her time wisely, typing page upon page about young adults falling in and out of love and finding themselves in the process.

Her work resulted in more than 200 pages that she'd later try to publish, submitting the work to more than 30 agents in 2013, only to wait months before receiving stacks of "kind" rejection letters. That's when Nowodazkij decided to take matters into her own hands.

"I decided to choose my own magic and publish my book," said Nowo-

dazkij, who self-published her first romance novel "One, Two, Three" in 2014. Since then, Nowodazkij, now a Glen Burnie resident, has published four more romance novels using Amazon's CreateSpace and Kindle Direct Publishing, which produce both e-books and physical copies, nearly all of them translated into at least two languages.

Her latest, "Love in B Minor," was released March 15 and sold 220 copies in the first month. The French translation has sold more than 750 copies — the most she has ever sold in a month.

More writers are ditching the idea of working with big publishing houses and opting for the self-publishing route in a bid for more creative control and flexibility when it comes to the publishing process and their book's fate and design.

But despite being able to create their own schedules, where and how a book will be published, and deciding on a book cover look, self-publishing isn't easy. Editors, copy editors and, in most cases, graphic

See **SELF-PUBLISHING**, page 5

# Blondie still facing forward, 40 years on

1970s punk stars will play at Merriweather on Saturday

BY CHRIS KALTENBACH  
 The Baltimore Sun

Blondie is still a group. Back in the group's '70s heyday, when it was one of the biggest (and most popular) things to come out of New York's punk movement, buttons with that slogan were a reminder that the band was more than Debbie Harry, its powerful and arrestingly photogenic lead singer.

Maybe it's time those buttons made a comeback, to remind people that Blondie is not only a band that's been around for more than 40 years, but one that's determined to make music as fresh and vital as ever.

Blondie is not, Harry insists, an oldies band. When the group, which still includes founders Harry and Chris Stein and longtime drummer Clem Burke, plays the Sweetlife Festival at Columbia's Merriweather Post Pavilion on Saturday, audiences will get the songs they've known for years — hits like "Call Me," "Heart of Glass" and "Rapture." (Baltimoreans also have a fond connection to Harry since she played conniving TV producer Velma Von Tussle in the 1988 original film version of John Waters' "Hairspray").

But they'll hear a lot more than those three-decade-old chestnuts, promises Harry, 70.

"It's sort of a little bit of a problem for us, See **BLONDIE**, page 5



ALEXANDER THOMPSON

Debbie Harry still rocks at age 70.

# There's the media, in the lobby of Trump Tower



SCREENGRAAB

Lester Holt of "NBC Nightly News" with Donald Trump in the Trump Tower lobby.

'NBC Nightly News' setting last week should give pause

**T**V news anchors and talk-show hosts have embarrassed themselves so often in covering Donald Trump that I stopped counting.

From Joe Scarborough letting Trump control the conversation on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" day after day with live call-ins, to Bill O'Reilly begging Trump to participate in a prime-time Fox News debate, there has been no shortage of media members on bended knees before the bombastic businessman who calls the press "scum."

But Wednesday night, on the heels of Trump becoming the presumptive nominee of the Republican Party, TV news went to a place even I thought it wouldn't go when Lester Holt anchored "NBC Nightly News" from the lobby of Trump Tower.

The symbolism alone of a major net-



David Zurawik  
 Z on TV

work's flagship newscast and its anchorman coming to this gilded monument to Trump's ego should have been enough to give serious pause to anyone with any sense of TV news' place in the journalistic ecosystem.

Sure, network news doesn't hold the kind of national agenda-setting function that it once did, such as when CBS or NBC cameras covering police abusing peaceful civil rights marchers could help ignite a national movement. But evening network news

is still the largest tent in real-time American media, and you don't betray that audience and sell that history cheap by doing your whole newscast in Trump's lobby when he is only a few blocks away from your own newsroom.

As the website TVNewser tweeted: See **ZURAWIK**, page 4



# Blondie plays past hits, keeps facing the future

**BLONDIE**, *From page 1*

and I think for a lot of bands that have been around for a while," Harry says over the phone from her home in New Jersey. "Audiences want to hear the songs that they love, they want to hear the classics. But since we've been playing them so long, we want to play something different."

Not, Harry stresses, that the hits — and there were plenty of them, including four songs that reached the top of the Billboard singles charts between 1978 and 1981 — are going to disappear from the band's playlist anytime soon.

"The reward of doing something that is 40 years old and having the audience go crazy — there's nothing better than that," she says. "But I also want to feel creative and in-the-moment. Which is not always easy."

So expect to hear songs from albums like 2011's "Panic of Girls" and 2014's "Ghosts of Download." Neither made much noise on the charts, but both portrayed a band that's a lot feistier than some might expect. Blondie just finished recording another album, Harry says, that should be available by the end of the year.

"Hopefully, we'll put a couple of those songs in the show," she says.

As the band's longtime fans know, one of Blondie's strengths has always been its ability to straddle genres. In the early years, that meant going from the punk aesthetic of "X Offender" to the disco rhythms of "Heart of Glass" to the pioneering hip-hop of "Rapture," which in 1981 became the first song featuring rap to top the U.S. charts.



DANIELLE ST. LAURENT

Blondie, which has been making music for over 40 years — and has seen four of its songs reach the top of the Billboard singles charts — expects to release its latest album this year.

Harry says Blondie still cherishes its eclecticism. The good news is that audiences seem to have caught up with the group, she says, and are no longer as hesitant to embrace music outside their immediate comfort zone.

"Audiences actually are much more sophisticated now, tastes are broader," she says. "You'll find people ... that really like a lot of different kinds of pop music, or rock or hip-hop or whatever. There's more spread to it."

## If you go

Blondie will be among the acts playing Saturday's Sweetlife Festival at Merriweather Post Pavilion, 10475 Little Patuxent Parkway in Columbia. Other acts on the bill include The 1975, Halsey, Flume, Grimes, PartyNextDoor, Eagles of Death Metal and Mac DeMarco. Doors open at noon; tickets are \$100-\$150. merriweathermusic.com.

Still, Harry acknowledges, it's sometimes hard to believe that Blondie has been making music for more than 40 years. And the group's fans have stuck with them, enduring a 15-year layoff that stretched from 1982 to 1997, as well as lineup changes that have left only her and Stein remaining from the group that came storming out of such legendary New York venues as CBGB and Max's Kansas City in the mid-'70s.

"It's amazing to me," she says. "You imagine yourself as being a gigantic rock star, but you don't expect such longevity. Especially since we took that long hiatus in the middle — to come back and have people loving us and wanting to hear the music ..."

"There's no comparison to anything," Harry says after pausing for a moment. "It's almost a miracle, really. How could I ask for anything more?"

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# Writers are taking control of their literary fate

**SELF-PUBLISHING**, *From page 1*

designers must be hired to make sure the book is publication-ready. Marketing begins before the book is released, and the books don't always, or in some cases ever, make a profit.

Still, according to the most recent figures — a 2014 report from Bowker, the official International Standard Book Number agency for the United States — more than 480,000 books were self-published in 2013, a 17 percent increase over the previous year. And Penny C. Sansevieri, the CEO of book promotion company Author Marketing Experts Inc., said the trend is only growing.

"There's a lot more opportunity in independent publishing," said Sansevieri, also a 16-time self-published author. "That's why you're seeing these numbers rising so much."

With publications services like CreateSpace, Lulu Enterprises Inc. and Smashwords — the top three producers of self-published books and e-books, according to Bowker — self-publishing is getting easier.

"It's a growing phenomenon, and it's a maturing phenomenon," said Beat Barblan of Bowker. "There's a better understanding on the part of authors that just because you decide to self-publish, it doesn't mean all of those things that publishers do go away. It's not just a matter of writing and shipping it out."

Authors looking to publish their own book must hire their own editors and copy editors to revise and refine their work, a graphic designer to create the book's cover and a person to format the book for its print and digital forms, Nowodazkij said. Lastly, they must find a place to print or publish their book.

"For people, and those folks who sort of consider themselves savvy self-publishers, you can also create relationships with bookstores, distributors and airport stores, but it's all about: 'Do you want to and do you have time, or do you want to hire someone to do it for you?'" Sansevieri said.

For independent urban fiction author Vince Smith, 41, of Gwynn Oak, who goes by the pen name Vince D'Writer, it was one bad experience with a publishing company that led him to self-publish.

"They told me lies in reference to the support that they would give ... and giving me the necessities I needed to make the project a success," Smith said.

He began to publish his own books soon after, hiring editors and a graphic designer to design his book covers. He printed his books through 48 Hour Press and used Kindle Direct Publishing to sell e-book version and the CreateSpace platform for people interested in ordering paperback versions of his book.

"The process can be stretched out by months if you attempt to go through a publishing company," Smith said.

Eighteen months is the typical amount of time a publisher takes to release a book after receiving the final manuscript, Sansevieri said, which can be inconvenient for people publishing time-sensitive information. But now, Smith sets his own timetable.

He wrote his three-part e-book series "Do As I Say," about a man who falls victim to domestic abuse, in a year and released the series over an 18-month span, selling around 15,000 copies via Kindle. His latest book, "The Cheating Games," a story about three characters who have bouts of infidelity, sold 1,000 copies in its first week after being published online April 8, he said. The print version will be available June 3.

The success of a self-published book, as with any book, can vary depending on any number of factors, including timing, topic and genre, Sansevieri said.

"Fiction is still king of [digital and self-] publishing ... Romance is still one of the big ones. It probably accounts for close to half," Barblan said.

Self-published romance novelist Patty Sroka, 52, of Woodbine, who goes by the pen name P.J. O'Dwyer, said she had always wanted to be an author but found the search for a publisher frustrating.



KIM HAIRSTON/BALTIMORE SUN

"I decided to choose my own magic and publish my book," says Elodie Nowodazkij, a Glen Burnie writer.

"You're kind of left out there thinking, 'Are they interested or are they not?' It was the not knowing that was driving me crazy," said Sroka.

She decided to use CreateSpace, which enables authors to sell their books in e-book form and to order physical copies of their books to sell on their own. Sroka, who has been writing for eight years, published her first book in 2012, releasing her romance-suspense series "The Fallon Sisters Trilogy." Her fifth book, "Linger" is set for a May 15 release.

Sroka has gone on to use her experiences in self-publishing to teach courses at Howard Community College. At the University of Baltimore's creative writing and publishing master's program, learning the ins and outs of self-publishing is a crucial tool for writers, said Kendra Kopelke, associate professor at the university's Klein Family School of Communications Design.

"The whole process, from the first word you put on the page ... it's all creative. None of it is prescribed," said Kopelke, who is also a publisher of Passager Books, a small press for writers over 50. "We believe that by making the book yourself, you learn a lot about who you are as a writer. It sharpens you. It teaches you a lot."

Most writers are shocked to learn that marketing and public relations are essential parts of self-publishing, according to public relations consultant Cherrie Woods.

Woods, a self-published poet and author of "Where Do I Start? 10 PR Questions and Answers to Guide Self-Published," represents self-published authors and hosts workshops (some free, some at a cost) on public relations for independent authors. She advises them on how to increase sales, suggesting social media tactics, like using social networks that are popular with the book's readership, and acquiring testimonials and reviews from noteworthy people before a book's release to build credibility.

"With a lot of self-published authors ... there is an 'American Idol' expectation across the board. There's this idea of instant gratification," Woods said, noting that only a small percentage of independently published books become best-sellers.

"I say to clients, 'Think of the self-published book as a business. Give it three to five years,'" she said. "Successful authors, they've been doing this a really long time."

With plans to publish at least three books over the course of the next two years, Nowodazkij wants to build her book sales by releasing more books in a shorter time frame, a tactic that Woods and Sansevieri say can help.

"These readers like consistency. ... It's fine to have one book, but unless you really want to write one book, like a memoir, you

need to start thinking about multiple book titles," Sansevieri said.

Aside from the amount of time that goes into writing and marketing the book, the cost — which is normally covered in full by a publishing house — can be daunting.

Self-publishing a book can cost upward of \$2,000 without printing costs, Woods said. Prices vary, but the editor alone can cost anywhere from \$300 to \$350, depending on the number of pages.

Graphic designers can cost between \$350 to \$450, and then there's the formatting of the book's text, headers and titles to fit both print and e-book editions, which can cost around \$250.

There's also \$120 for the International Standard Book Number and \$40 for the copyright, according to Woods.

Nowodazkij, who typically spends around \$3,000 to self-publish each book (she spends \$550 for a translator alone), has learned how to cut costs by learning to format her book and design the covers using Adobe Photoshop.

"I save a lot of money, and I also enjoy the process of creating my own covers. It's a

win-win for me," she said.

Woods said there are other options. Vanity presses, which work like publishing houses but without a stringent vetting process, will publish books for anyone, typically costing \$2,000 or more, but many people complain that royalties are low and there is minimal promotion, Woods said.

The profit on self-published books is also not likely enough to immediately make a living, Nowodazkij said.

On Amazon, authors who list their book's price for under \$2.99 or greater than \$9.99 get 35 percent of the royalties, while authors who price their books between \$2.99 and \$9.99 get 70 percent of the royalties. Other conditions, such as the number of megabytes for a digital book, can factor into pricing. For CreateSpace, the royalties vary depending on list price and the number of chosen distributors.

"It's tough. Don't expect to get rich. Expect to work really hard. If you love writing, and it's your passion, you're going to do it, no matter what," Sroka said.

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Nate Larson in Conversation with Cara Ober

Nate Larson creates still photographs, books and digital video. His images have been featured in *Wired*, *The Guardian*, *The Picture Show* from NPR, *Slate* and CNN.

Cara Ober is a Baltimore-based artist, writer, curator and the founding editor of *BmoreArt*.

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