

## BEST IN THEATER

Our top 10 in Chicago: "Streetcar" storefront bravery and a big comeback for Steppenwolf. Plus, a look at this year's jazz and classical shows that exhilarated and innovated. A+E



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# Chicago

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2024



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## Wheeling, dealing fall short for budget

For Johnson's team, lost political capital has hobbled horse-trading

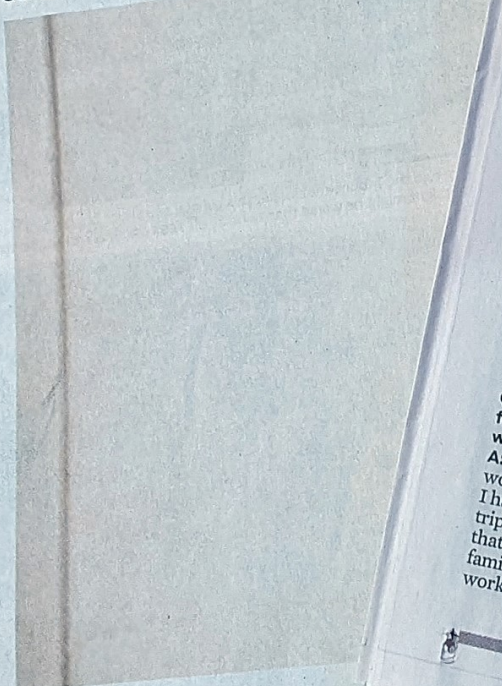
By Alice Yin and A.D. Quig  
Chicago Tribune

Before Mayor Brandon Johnson's latest bid to secure passage of his 2025 budget plan fell apart last week, his team raced to make up for the past year and a half's damage to his relationships with aldermen in just a few days.

The progressive mayor and self-dubbed "collaborator-in-chief" resorted (with mixed results) to the kind of old-school horse-trading for budget support that was a hallmark of Democratic machine predecessors, but fell short of a council majority and canceled the up-or-down budget vote Friday morning rather than suffer a historically embarrassing defeat.

Now, with an end-of-year deadline bearing down on him to pass the \$17.3 billion spending plan, and holdout aldermen further

## CULTURE OF CORRUPTION



## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

## Studdard's best trips are with his family

By Jae-Ha Kim  
Tribune Content Agency

Born in Frankfurt, Germany, and raised in Birmingham, Alabama — where he currently resides — Ruben Studdard won the second season of "American Idol" when he was just 21 years old. Now 46, the Grammy-nominated recording artist — who's also known for his critically acclaimed portrayal of Fats Waller in the musical revue "Ain't Misbehavin'" — is tackling something new: his first Christmas album, "My Favorite Holiday."

"Christmas has always been my favorite holiday, mostly because of the memories I have," Studdard said. "Both sides of my family have big Christmas gatherings and it's always been such a happy time for us all. Now that I'm a father, I look forward to the joy and excitement that surrounds the home when our children open the gifts that Santa has left for them."

This interview with Studdard has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: What are your hopes for 2025?**

**A:** To be the best husband and father that I can be. I also pray that God will allow me the opportunity to continue doing this thing called music.

**Q: If you've ever gone away for the holidays, which was the best trip?**

**A:** I'm usually always working on holidays. So I have to say that my best trips are always the ones that I get to be with my family. I travel so much for work that it's hard to nail

**Q: How have your travels impacted you as an artist?**

**A:** Being able to travel and see how different cultures react to my music is awesome. There's nothing like being in a room with people (who) don't speak English, but they can sing



Ruben Studdard celebrates Christmas with his latest album, "My Favorite Holiday." STUDDARD ENTERTAINMENT

down when or where our next vacation will be. I'm sure this summer will be filled with Mickey Mouse and other theme parks for the kiddos.

**Q: Which childhood trip stands out?**

**A:** When I was 8 years old, I went on a trip to New York City with my aunt. It stands out to me because I went to my first Broadway show. I think that trip showed me what was possible.

**Q: Where are some memorable places you've performed?**

**A:** I've been blessed to perform in so many cities with so many iconic individuals. The one performance that stands out for me is when the late, great Aretha Franklin invited me to her hometown of Detroit to perform for her birthday celebration.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** In the winter, I love Park City, Utah. It's so beautiful and peaceful. In the summer, I love going anywhere in the Caribbean.

your songs. Music is the ultimate unifier!

**Q: Do you work on music when you're on the road?**

**A:** I've never really worked on music (traveling). I feel like the creation of music and its performance are two separate institutions. They both deserve equal attention to detail.

**Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?**

**A:** That people are mostly the same, no matter where you are. I've been to so many places and most people are friendly, kind and interested in having new experiences.

**Q: Where are your favorite weekend getaways?**

**A:** Well, my wife and I love weekend getaways to New Orleans. Great food, music and culture. You just can't beat it.

**Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?**

**A:** I would love to go to Morocco.

**Q: What kind of research do you do before you go away on a trip?**

**A:** I have to know what the locals say are the best places to eat at. Also, I need to find that off-the-beaten path hotel that has a great staff but is low-key.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).