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# Between THE Lines™

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Issue



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Must-See Film About  
Trans Sex Workers

Op-Ed: Where's the  
Respect for Queer  
Kinksters?

The NSFW  
Michigan Men of  
OnlyFans



# Advice to Be Well

From Dr. Mark Bornstein and Dr. Paul Benson



**My friend told me about a new strain of gonorrhea that is difficult to treat. I have not heard of this. Is it true? – M.B.**

Dear MB,

Gonorrhea is the second most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Chlamydia is the most commonly reported. Gonorrhea can be contracted vaginally, rectally, orally, and in the urethra. It may or may not be associated with symptoms. These symptoms can include, discharges, pain, difficulty urinating, and others. Sometimes, if left untreated or incompletely treated, it can progress to arthritis symptoms, and in women pelvic inflammatory disease. It is not unusual that symptoms are mild or absent; If so, the person infected is a carrier of the infection without knowing it. Risk reduction can be accomplished with condom usage.

Two cases in the United States have recently been identified as being a new strain of gonorrhea. This new strain has developed at least some resistance to several accepted antibiotic treatments for Gonorrhea. Currently, the standard of care treatment for gonorrhea is injectable ceftriaxone (Rocephin). It has enough sensitivity to treat this strain. The standard of care since 2012 is to treat Gonorrhea with both

ceftriaxone and azithromycin. This would then be acceptable treatment for Chlamydia, if it was co-existing with Gonorrhea, and give an additional boost to the ceftriaxone. Treatment for Gonorrhea has changed over the years due to emerging resistance. In the late 1990's we were using an oral one-time dose of Ampicillin. We don't use that any longer due to Gonorrhea's resistance to Ampicillin.

Antimicrobial-resistance to Gonorrhea is a public threat both nationally and internationally too. New drugs to combat emerging resistance are being developed. Vaccinations for Gonorrhea are in development. The Be Well Medical Center, was preparing to be a site for this investigation, however that study was put on hold for the time being. Timely identification and treatment are essential in reducing transmission. All sexually active people are advised to be tested regularly for sexually transmitted infections.

**Hi Doctor, my partner just tested positive for mycoplasma genitalium. I've never heard of this before. Is it a sexually transmitted infection (STI)? What should I do? – JB**

This is a great question. Mycoplasma genitalium (Mgen) can be confusing as it is a

bacteria that many people have never heard of. In fact, many clinics do not even test for this bacterium in routine STI testing. It is important to know if your clinic tests for this.

Mgen is a bacteria that folks can get during sex. It is considered an STI in the sense that if it goes untreated, it can cause urethritis (painful urination, discharge, etc.) and pelvic inflammatory disease in folks with a uterus. Just like other STIs, one can get have this colonize at any body part that they use for sex including your throat, genitals, and anus. That being said, many folks can test positive for Mgen and have zero symptoms. This is actually quite common. If one does have symptoms, they usually consist of either burning with urination or discharge.

Traditionally, Mgen has been difficult to treat. It commonly is resistant to certain antibiotics and if you and your partner are not treated at the same time, you can continue to pass it back and forth after you had been successfully treated. This is why it is essential to know if you and your partners clinic tests for this bacteria. Furthermore, it is important to know if your clinic runs resistance testing if one tests positive. Mgen used to be treated with azithromycin although now the guidelines have changed due to resistance towards this antibiotic and is now treated with two different antibiotics.

If resistance testing is done and the infection is sensitive to azithromycin, it is treated with doxycycline for 1 week and then azithromycin for 3 days. If resistance testing is done and it shows that it is resistant to azithromycin, it is treated with doxycycline for 1 week and then moxifloxacin for 1 week. This is a lot of antibiotics for your system, so many providers will choose to treat with only moxifloxacin for 1 week which typically works as well.

Please reach out if you have any more questions on Mgen. At Be Well Medical Center, not only do we test for Mgen on all routine STI screenings, but we also test for resistance to antibiotics. Sex is a very important part of your health and we are committed to helping you do this in a safe way.

Since 1980 Dr. Paul Benson's Be Well Medical Center has been an inclusive medical center celebrating diversity. Do you have a health related question for Dr. Paul Benson and Dr. Mark Bornstein? Submit your questions to [bewelladvice@pridesource.com](mailto:bewelladvice@pridesource.com). This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Be Well Medical Center. Between The Lines's journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Be Well. Learn more about Be Well from their ad below.



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# 5 **Queer** Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

February is Black History Month, a time to honor Black lives and culture. This month, bask in the undefinable opulence that is the artist Dion, watch a documentary about trailblazing queer comic artists like Rupert Kinnard and pour out some love for Noelle Scaggs, the Fitz and The Tantrums singer and diversity evangelist.



Artwork by Dion (center). Courtesy photo

## Check Out Gender-Defying Art

Artist Darryl DeAngelo Terrell, aka Dion, will challenge your perceptions about what it means to be fat, Black, queer and femme at a free gallery show, "I Owe You Nothing, This Is For Me," on display now through Feb. 18 at Galerie Camille in Detroit. As their alter ego Dion, the Detroit native examines the Black urban aesthetic, including wigs, luscious fur coats, opulent jewelry, peacock wicker chairs and other items that allude to "Black queer opulence," according to a news release. "Being a big bitch, in a world of small hoes, I exude an energy and identity that don't completely fit into the binary," Dion says in the release. "I exist in a void... I explore what it means to be desired, more than to just fit in, but to feel fucking included, to exist in a place where my body in all of its Blackness, queerness, fatness and femme-ness is the norm."

Through Feb. 18 at Galerie Camille, 4130 Cass Ave., Detroit. Learn more about the exhibit at [galeriecamille.com](http://galeriecamille.com).



## You Got Jokes? Good. Bring Them to Stand-Up Class.

Has anyone ever suggested you should have your own standup routine? Here's your chance to give it a try in a safe space. "The Femme, Them & Queer Experience" stand-up comedy workshop, set for Feb. 12 at Planet Ant Theatre in Hamtramck, is an open mic boot camp where you'll learn about the basics of the art of stand-up, techniques for slaying on stage and how to stay safe along the way. Local stand-up veteran Hailey Zureich, the self-proclaimed Posh Spice of the local comedy scene, will lead the three-hour workshop. The workshop is limited to people who identify as femme, them and/or queer.

Feb. 12, 1-4 p.m., Ant Hall, 2320 Caniff St., Hamtramck. Visit [t.ly/hpZK](https://t.ly/hpZK) to learn more and buy tickets.

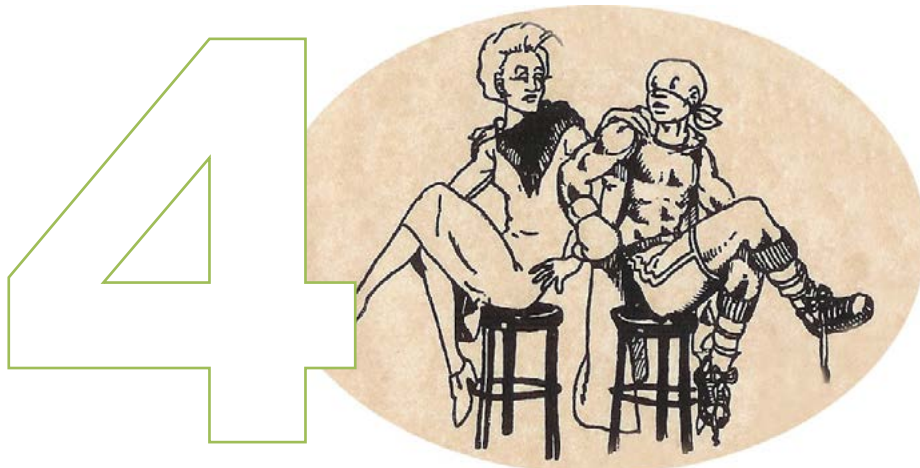


Noelle Scaggs and Michael Fitzpatrick of Fitz and The Tantrums. Photo: Facebook (Fitz and The Tantrums)

## Don't Miss Fitz (and The Tantrums, Too)

Come for the ridiculously infectious tunes when Fitz and The Tantrums plays St. Andrews Hall in Detroit Feb. 4, stay in support of the behind-the-scenes work band member Noelle Scaggs has been doing to promote real diversity throughout the concert industry. In 2020, the musician sent an open letter to the music industry that read in part, "As an artist and a Black woman of color, I can and will no longer accept being the only like me in any room or any stage." Soon after came Diversify the Stage, a non-profit with a mission to promote more inclusive hiring practices and greater access to equitable opportunities for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, female-identifying, gender-nonconforming individuals and disabled persons. In addition to supporting artists who support important causes, you're in for a rambunctious, wholesomely fun time.

Feb. 4, St. Andrews Hall, 431 E. Congress St., Detroit. Tickets at [livenation.com](https://livenation.com).



Rupert Kinnard's characters, the Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé. Photo: Facebook (Rupert Kinnard)

### Learn About Influential Queer Comic Artists

"No Straight Lines," a new documentary airing on PBS, explores five queer comic book artists who have journeyed from the underground comix scene to more mainstream acceptance. Featured in the doc is artist Alison Bechdel, whose 1985 comic, "Dykes to Watch Out For," launched the Bechdel test, which measures representation of women in media. The film also features Black queer comic artist Rupert Kinnard, who created the first ongoing LGBTQ+ Black comic strip characters (the Brown Bomber, modeled in part after Detroit's Joe Louis, and Diva Touché Flambé).

Streaming now at [pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/no-straight-lines](https://pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/no-straight-lines).



### Celebrate Black History Month by Supporting a Great Queer Cause

Southeast Michigan is unique to many other regions in that there are multiple ways to support the Black queer community. Consider donating or volunteering for one of these local causes:

- **LGBT Detroit**, host of the events Hotter Than July and Cold as Hell. The organization's mission is "to increase awareness of and support Detroit's dynamic LGBT culture through education and advocacy with integrity and pride." [lgbtdetroit.org](https://lgbtdetroit.org)
- **Ruth Ellis Center**, named in honor of an early Black, open lesbian entrepreneur, performs outreach in many predominately Black Detroit area communities, including its new Clairmount Center, a supportive living community that provides trauma-informed services for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults of color. [ruthelliscenter.org](https://ruthelliscenter.org)
- **TG Detroit**, an organization focused on transgender supportive services throughout Southeast Michigan. The annual TransFusion conference brings together hundreds of transgender women each year for an event that changes lives and promotes trans joy. [tgdetroit.com](https://tgdetroit.com)

Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.


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# What's at Stake When Extremists Dissolve the County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office?

In Ottawa County and Beyond, Queer Residents and Their Allies Are Fighting Back

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Last year's highly publicized grassroots movement to defund the Patmos Library in Jamestown Township was just the start of a larger conservative push in West Michigan.

That effort, spearheaded by a group known as Jamestown Conservatives,

focused on the availability of queer books at Patmos, the community's only public library. The library millage failed during the November election, and the library is set to close in early 2025, once private donations dry up.

Separately, and around the same time, a shadowy group calling

itself Ottawa Impact that has been plotting to advance its socially conservative agenda for two years has emerged. The group endorsed several far right county commissioner candidates, who sailed to victory in this reliably red district. With eight commissioners endorsed by Ottawa Impact out of 11 total, they

wasted no time at the Jan. 3 meeting making drastic moves like dissolving the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Office.

Elsewhere, three Ottawa Impact "parent-approved" candidates won seats on the six-member Patmos Library board. Numerous endorsed and parent-approved candidates won

their races for school board as well. Kate Leighton-Colburn, executive director of Out On The Lakeshore, says LGBTQ+ community members are on alert.

"I think folks are scared, and rightfully so," Leighton-Colburn said. "I think we're waiting to see what happens. But as we do, Out On The

Lakeshore is trying to provide a space for folks to grieve any changes that are being made and to come together in a place of safety, to support each other through this time. I think folks are just scared about the future.”

Not only was the DEI office dissolved, the Trump-endorsed losing congressional candidate John Gibbs was installed as the new Ottawa County Administrator. Concerning as well, the county’s legal counsel has been replaced with Kallman Legal Group, PLLC, notorious for fighting anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination policies (but also for losing the Rouch World case). It’s worth noting that a nephew of David Kallman is the business partner of Joe Moss, president of Ottawa Impact and the county board’s new chair.

The incoming commissioners changed the county motto to “Where Freedom Rings” from the original, more inclusive “Where You Belong,” which, commissioners said, was “used to promote the divisive, Marxist ideology of the race equity movement.”

Doug Zylstra is the solitary Democrat on the county’s board. His district comprises the city of Holland, home to Out On The Lakeshore. “The talks [to fund a DEI office] had been started just before I came on in 2019,” Zylstra said, “and one of my first votes in 2019 was to fund the [DEI] office on a six-year funding plan.”

Ottawa Impact started rallying against the DEI office a year-and-a-half ago. In its first annual report, the organization highlighted events like a diversity book challenge among 40 members of the Cultural Intelligence Committee and a day of professional development at the 58th District Court focused on procedural fairness and ensuring equal access for all.

“A lot of the existing commissioners lost their races, commissioners who had supported the department in the past. And a lot of the incoming commissioners signaled that they weren’t comfortable with what the department was doing,” Zylstra said. Months ahead, the board approved a severance package for the director of the office.

Zylstra described what the county has lost. He said the DEI office’s purpose was “making sure that we at the county and county government were doing the best we could to make sure that, across the spectrum, folks felt welcomed to come to our community, to be in our community, to work in our community and to recreate in our community as well. So obviously in the short-term, there is no work being done at that level from the county side, which I think is obviously a big negative.”

Zylstra said it’s been left to residents of Ottawa County to make sure it’s welcoming.

“There’s been a community response and engagement,” he said. He added that although the DEI office had been dissolved, the community in Ottawa County had not abandoned its work. As an example, he pointed to Holland’s nondiscrimination ordinance. “There’s a hole that happened on January 3rd and this [DEI] office is gone,” Zylstra said, “but we can fill it ourselves in the short-term and work hard to make sure our LGBT folks as well as everybody else — whether it’s race or what have you across the spectrum of difference — knows that they’re welcome in Ottawa County.”

Community members are organizing. Vote Common Good: West Michigan announced it would join with the PAC Ottawa Integrity to launch and steer a new movement called the Unifying Coalition of Ottawa County to

oppose Ottawa Impact and vote them out in 2024. In support of the cause, “Still where you belong” merchandise is available for order.

The Grand Haven City Council drafted a statement on Jan. 17 in support of diversity, equity and inclusion that they

directed the human relations commission to send to the Ottawa County Commission. And in Hudsonville, as a preemptive measure, the school board has pledged to act transparently after several Ottawa Impact-affiliated members were elected.

Still, business leaders are questioning the county’s ability to attract and retain talent in an environment hostile to what DEI represents. Last year, Ottawa was the fastest growing county in the state, and the Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce has expressed concern about the impact recent changes will have on the business community.

Meanwhile, in Allegan County, just west of Ottawa, lesbian artist and Allendale alumnus Ruth Crowe discovered the effects of Ottawa Impact reach beyond county borders. Two Allendale Public Schools board of education trustees affiliated with Ottawa Impact voted against allowing Crowe to bring parts of her work, The Journal Project, to Allendale high school, which includes Crowe in its athletic hall of fame, for an educational program when her exhibit shows at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts (SCA) this month.

Crowe said there was pushback from the schools. “I think the number one reason was because of the gay issue, but I also think the mental health issue is part of it.”

“Before you know it, all these people that didn’t vote are going, ‘Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute. We don’t want that. We want that.’ And guess what? It’s too late.”

— artist Ruth Crowe





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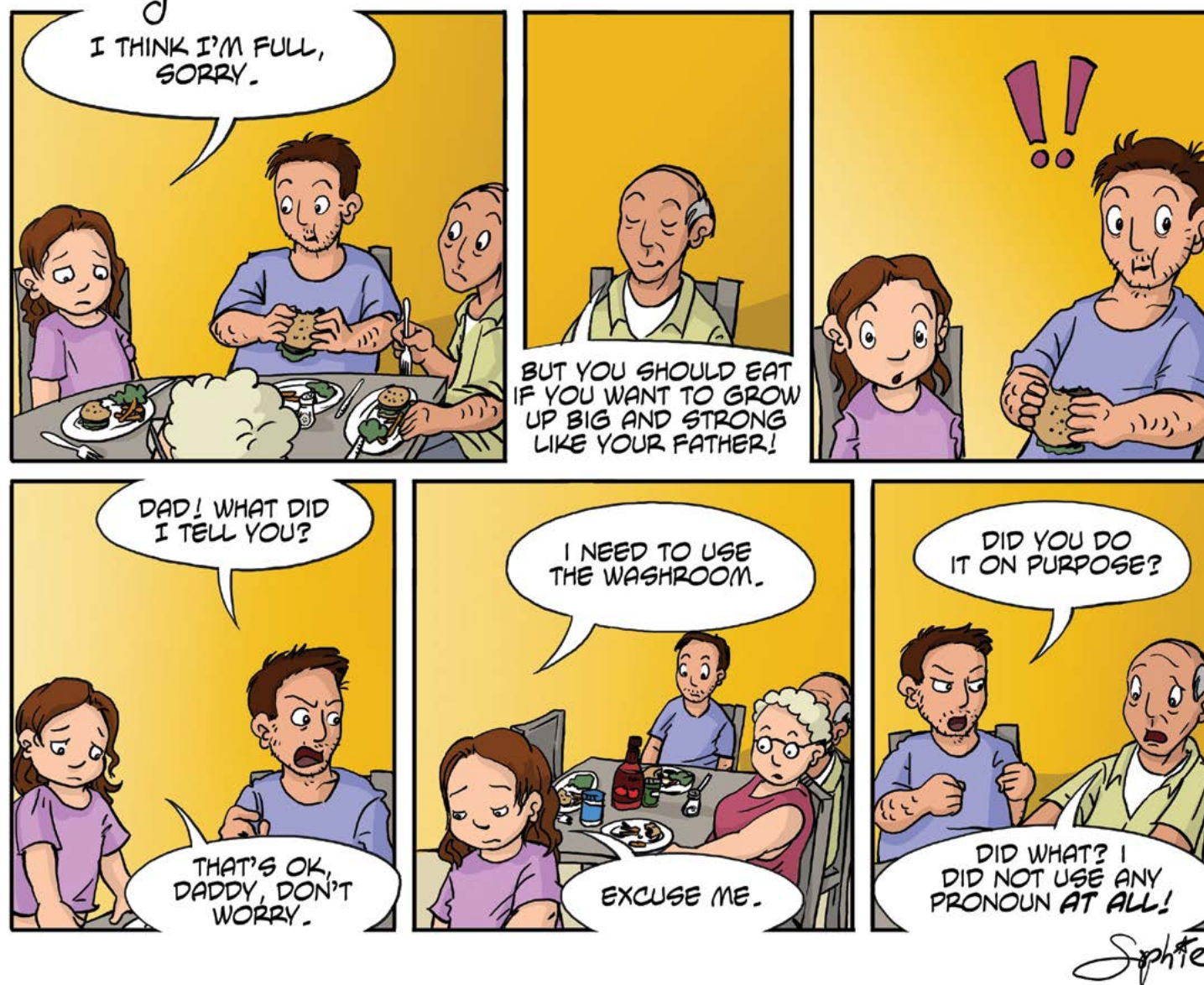
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# Assigned Male

#111



told us.” The adult, distressed, responds that this will surely confuse the child.

The sitter responds, “The most confusing part of it is actually the amount of strangers who feel entitled to ask what’s in that kid’s pants.” This shuts the adult right up.

Other comics are more stark. In one single panel strip we see a kid tied to a tree, pitchforks rising up all around. The kid is saying to the mob, “If your binary view of gender is so natural, biological and immutable, then why is the simple existence of trans kids such a threat to it?”

It is, unfortunately, an accurate depiction of the harassment and threats Labelle receives online simply for creating art that speaks to transgender readers and allies without apology or preamble.

“I’ve been targeted by different hate groups several times in the past decades,” she says. “They even forced me to move at one point because they published my address online.”

Labelle says she gets death threats on a daily basis, which she points out is something most trans people who are very visible online have to deal with.

“It’s not getting better. We can tell that we’re currently living through some type of backlash. It wasn’t like that back in 2016 when my work first went viral.” The anti-trans backlash, Labelle says, is “a very slippery slope.”

“I am very conscious of how quickly this could devolve into full scale violence against trans people,” she says. “And it’s not new in our society. Every century there is a moral panic against trans people, against gender non-conforming people. It leads me to believe that progress isn’t linear, it comes in cycles, and we shouldn’t take anything for granted, and that really helps me get some perspective [and] helps me keep hope for the betterment of trans people everywhere.”

Labelle has had people show up to her events to disrupt and protest. Though it hasn’t always gone like one might expect.

“It did happen a few times that some of my harassers came to my events with the intent of crashing and disrupting and ended up staying and buying my books at the end because they were surprised to see that I wasn’t as the [online]

## Changing Minds One Panel at a Time

### Author Sophie Labelle Headed to Ann Arbor on Her Trans Agenda Tour

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

Sophie Labelle has been drawing comic since she was a kid. As a young trans activist and student at the Université du Québec à Montréal, she wanted to create something that would be relatable to her trans friends at school that dealt with situations she and they encountered every day. In 2014, she drafted the first rendition of “Assigned Male,” a comic that has led to worldwide attention — for good and bad.

Labelle, who currently lives in

Finland and grew up in a region near Montreal, quit school to pursue drawing comics full time. She has been traveling the world ever since, promoting her work, speaking to schools and meeting fans.

“Assigned Male,” which Labelle describes as “the adventures of a bunch of sarcastic trans and queer teenagers,” began as a web comic. Labelle has since published over a dozen books which have been translated into multiple languages. As part of her Midwest trek, called The Trans Agenda Tour, Labelle will

stop by Booksweet in Ann Arbor at 7 p.m. Feb. 7 and at Bettie’s Pages in Lowell at 6 p.m. Feb. 6.

When Labelle speaks to BTL by phone, she is on a brief break during her tour.

“Broadway musicals have been my guiding light all of my life,” she says. “I’m very happy because I’ve got a few days off and I’m in New York City right now, so I’m just seeing all the musicals.” She names “Little Shop of Horrors,” “Hadestown,” “Six” and “Moulin Rouge!”

“Musicals [are] to theater what

comics are to literature,” she says. “Literature on a sugar rush with something for all the senses.”

“Sugar rush” is an apt description of the look of Labelle’s comics. Colorful and engaging with adorable characters, at first glance you might not expect to find declarations of trans empowerment and selfhood.

A recent comic depicts an adult and two kids in a park — an older kid babysitting a younger kid. The adult asks if the younger child is a boy or a girl. The sitter responds, “We don’t know yet, they haven’t

See **Sophie Labelle**, page 10

# 'Bigotry Is Bad for Business'

## Gov. Whitmer Addresses LGBTQ+ Rights Head on in State of the State Speech

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's 2023 State of the State speech hit all the expected highlights — the economy, education and infrastructure, in particular, but it was her hard-hitting comments on LGBTQ+ rights that came as a welcome surprise.

The governor's Jan. 25 speech was something of a victory lap. Not only is she overseeing a state where her party holds power at both the executive and legislative levels — Democrats took over both chambers of the house for the first time in four decades in November — but many of the newly elected are making history. Whitmer gave a shout out to newly elected Speaker of the House Rep. Joe Tate (D-Detroit), the first Black man to hold the speaker role and Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks (D-Grand Rapids), the first woman to hold the majority leader role.

Whitmer vowed to work with the legislature on a wish list of Democratic-influenced issues impacting inflation, education (though she notably did not touch on recent culture war issues impacting Michigan schools) and economic growth. As expected, she reiterated her frequent campaign promise to repeal the 1931 state law banning abortions, which was overruled by Proposal 3 in November.

The governor was equally consistent on her call for expanding the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. "Let's repeal outdated laws

restricting who you can marry," she said. "Let's expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act so you can't be fired or evicted for who you are or how you identify or who you love. That's your business."

Luke Londo, the first out LGBTQ+ Michigan Civil Rights Commissioner, cheered the governor's comments on Twitter, echoing



Gov. Whitmer. Photo: Twitter

*"I'll go to any state that restricts people's freedoms and win business and hardworking people from them."*

Whitmer's comment on this issue — "Bigotry is bad for business."

Protecting freedoms through the civil rights act is "good economics," she added.

Whitmer wasn't vague on how she might capitalize on

the potential positive economic impact of branding the state as inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community. "I'll go to any state that restricts people's freedoms and win business and hardworking people from them," she said. "I'm looking at you, Ohio and Indiana."

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# The Internet Can't Decide If It Wants to See Madonna in Concert or Not

## Does Michigan Still Cherish the Material Girl?

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Detroit's own Material Girl is coming home. That's right, Madonna's Celebration Tour is set for Aug. 5 at Little Caesars Arena with general public tickets available now. The nationwide tour and the NSFW, star-studded video announcement have triggered both enthusiasm and full-on anger all along the interwebs.

### Some local fans are overwhelmed with joy and excitement!

Twitter user @dom\_msmsm tweeted, "Never underestimate how well Italian Americans from metro Detroit (me and Madonna) age ... she's gonna kill this tour I can feel it."

Radio station 96.3 WDVD tweeted,

"OMG....MADONNA. It's a party at @LCArena\_Detroit on Aug. 5th!!"

Admittedly, Steven Harper's positive comment is hidden among a sea of disparagement that is the comments section under a Detroit Fox2 Facebook post announcing the event, but it is positive. Harper posted, "Honestly I'm thinking I'll take the opportunity to see her. Regardless of what anyone thinks of her, she is an icon and an important part of pop culture history. I'm down!"

@wxyzalicia (WXYZ's Alicia Smith) tweeted, "The 'Queen of Pop' — metro Detroit's own @Madonna — is bringing her 'The Celebration Tour' to Little Caesars Arena in Detroit on August 5th! What's your favorite Madonna song? Mine is 'Holiday!'"

### Other local reactions are a bit... skeptical.

In reply to 104.3 WOMC's tweet announcing the show, Twitter user @archivist1968 simply posted a modern classic gif response — an "EWWWWW" from David Rose of "Schitt's Creek."

Several Facebook users replied to the Detroit Free Press announcement about the concert. Gloria Huffman wants to know why this is news, while a few commenters had negative viewpoints about their last Detroit experience with Madonna. "I saw her 3x back in her prime. I wouldn't go see her now if you gave me a free ticket She's a complete train wreck," posted Shannon King. Karen Timmons concurred. "Her last concert in Detroit was the worst



Madonna. Photo: Ricardo Gomes

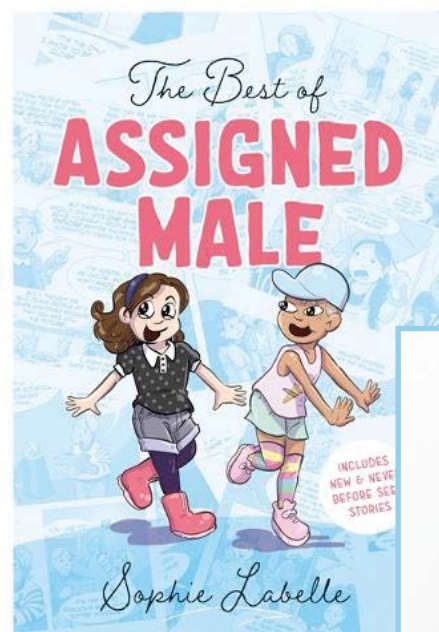
concert I've ever seen!," Timmons posted.

Twitter user @jeff\_nidiffer seems surprised to learn that Madge is still kicking it at all, tweeting, "Oh, wow... Madonna's still around Who knew?"

Twitter user (troll?) @DetroitConcert1, perhaps the edgiest edgelord in the bunch — or at least the most creative — posted, "Madonna is going on tour! If I want to watch a washed up drag queen

with venereal disease and dentures soiling her diaper, I'll save \$200 and go see @LADYBUNNY77." Let's hope this poster scrounges up the cash for that not-to-be-missed show.

As for the Queen of Pop herself, she is ready to finally give the gays what they want. "I am excited to explore as many songs as possible in hopes to give my fans the show they have been waiting for," Madonna said in a news release.



### ◀ Sophie Labelle

Continued from page 8

hate forms painted me," she says. "It's always interesting to hear their perspective about how they get dragged into a mob mentality against



trans people."

She adds, "I'm happy to create change in that regard."

Booksweet co-owners and married couple Truly Render and Shaun Manning are excited to be hosting Labelle at the store.

"I've been a fan of Sophie's work for a while," Manning says. "[Labelle's comics are] really sweet and charming, and they're talking about issues important to trans people in ways that anyone can understand."

Her work "welcomes people who might be hearing some of this for the first time," he continues. "I feel like I've learned a lot from her work."

The parents of a transgender child themselves, Render and Manning want to make sure that Labelle's visit is a positive

experience for everyone involved.

Render says they are aware of the possibility for protesters but are prepared. "When we were thinking about this [event] we were like, 'Oh my gosh, how do we offer not only safety measures but also a continuation of what we want to offer every day in the shop — a welcoming and affirming presence?'" she says.

One area of concern? The bookshop's huge windows facing outside.

"We've been in touch with Free Mom Hugs, the Michigan chapter, and we will have volunteers who will be inside our shop windows with messages of love blocking out any protest signs that might be outside the shop. Best case scenario, there are no protesters and it's just an extra affirmation of friendship

and love."

They also chose to require tickets for added accountability. All proceeds from the sliding scale tickets will go to Stand With Trans.

Labelle says that people attending the event can expect "something that aims to be empowering and a positive experience for trans and queer people."

"Especially lately, it's been kind of stressful for a lot of queer people, especially in the United States with the different political challenges to our existence in our society and also the violence that's on the rise," she says. "So they should expect something that is a more positive experience."

Find more about Labelle at [serioustransvibes.com](http://serioustransvibes.com).

When the project was presented to the board by the SCA, nothing was said of Crowe's sexuality. "The Journal Project is not just about me as a gay person," Crowe said. "It's about what I went through and what I experienced as a gay person, but it's really about all the different things: our relationships with our parents, with the world at large — with ourselves, really more than anything."

As a distinguished alum, Crowe said she was "appalled" that two members voted against her project. "I really had a hard time with that," she said. "So it just really bothered me, and I let it go at the time, but the more I thought about it, and then when this whole thing started happening with the Ottawa County commissioners, I knew that I had to do something."

Crowe has decided to speak at the Feb. 13 meeting. When they met Jan. 9, the school board voted to hire the Kallman Legal Group as counsel for the district, just as the county did.

The reaction by some members of the board to Crowe and her art is proof of why her work is needed, she says. Where Crowe lives, in Saugatuck-Douglas, "a lot of the people around here, they just think life's easy for gay people, like everything is fine; nobody cares anymore. And I'm like, 'Yeah, no, that's not true.'"

Crowe said folks in her area are paying attention. But she believes the original takeover by Ottawa Impact was due to low voter turnout. Just 34.3 percent of eligible voters participated in the August primary. And while the turnout for the general election was record-breaking, the Ottawa Impact-aligned candidates were heavily favored to win in a district that hasn't voted for a Democrat for president since 1864.

"Before you know it, all these people that didn't vote are going, 'Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute. We don't want that. We want that.' And guess what? It's too late. You weren't paying attention and they snuck in there and they have a lot of money."

Crowe said Trump and his cast of characters were bad enough. She thought maybe once he — the big dog — was gone, it would be over. But she was wrong. Now she is fighting against the "little dogs."

"You just have to keep fighting back," Crowe said. "And that's why I'm going in front of the school board. I want them to look me in the eye and see everything and be able to see everything that I've done in my life, which I'm very proud of. I'm very proud of who I am, and I'm very proud of what I had to go through to get here."

"I'm not gonna change their mind," she added. "I'm not trying to change their mind. I'm just trying to get other people to look at that and go, 'Yeah, she's right.'"



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## Homeschool Movement Saves Kids From 'Woke' Schools by Teaching Them to Be Nazis



It's 4:00 in the morning and I have to admit, I would much rather be sleeping than writing this column. But sometimes sleep is elusive. Too often, for me, which is not great.

Also not great? The word "great." Conservatives have made great into a four-letter word. Most noticeably in disgraced former president Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan, though MAGA wasn't new to Trump. President Ronald Reagan also used this phrase. At the 1980 Republican convention, Reagan called for "a great national crusade to make America great again."

Spoiler alert: Reagan didn't make America great, he made it worse. And the intertwining of white Christian conservatism and politics really took a firm hold under Reagan.

Right now the conservatives' hate de jour is transgender people, a culture war battle Republicans are more than willing to fight. Of course, the fact that transgender people are largely without political power in this country and are a relatively tiny group when compared to the U.S. population as a whole makes them attractive targets.

I read somewhere that Republicans are at war with pronouns, which at first I found humorous because it's wild to say something like, "We will not use their woke pronouns!" Because there are literally two pronouns in that sentence. But in truth, it's not funny, it's very sad. Because when we're talking about the fight against pronouns, we're actually talking about the fight against people.

Thankfully, there's at least two places where children won't be subjected to "woke" education. One of those places is Florida. The other is Dissident Homeschool, a network of parents standing firm against "woke" indoctrination by homeschooling their children to... become Nazis?

Yep. The Dissident Homeschool

movement uses "Nazi-approved material" to make sure that their kids become "wonderful Nazis."

According to the Huffington Post, Dissident Homeschool teaches that Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee is a "grand role model for young, white men" and Martin Luther King Jr. is "the antithesis of our civilization and our people."

I'd like to think that there's a time in my life when the news of a Nazi homeschool movement would shock me. But that time certainly isn't now.

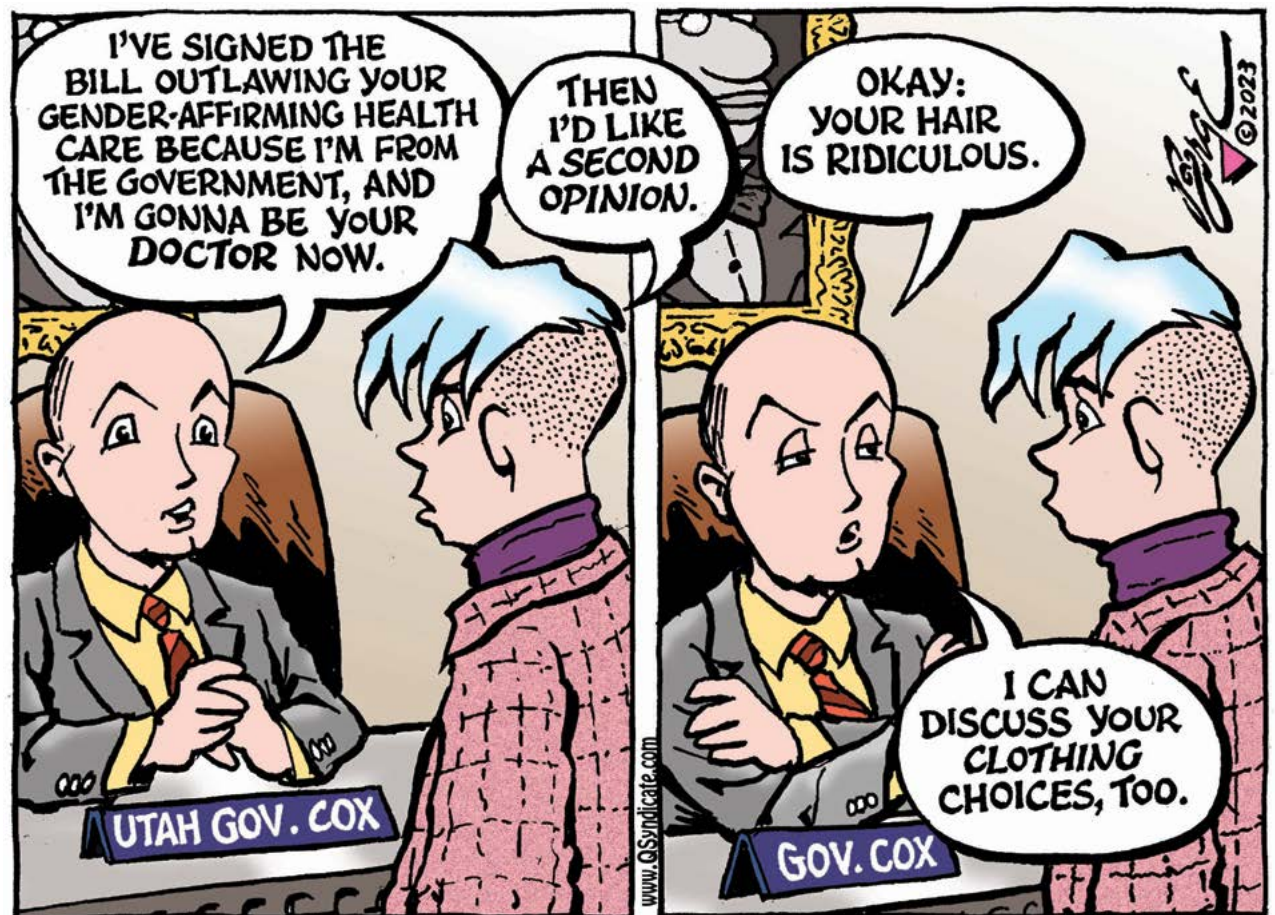
And if you're thinking, "Is this even legal?" The answer is, probably.

"A concerted, decades-long campaign by right-wing Christian groups to deregulate home schooling has afforded parents wide latitude in how they teach their kids — even if that means indoctrinating them with explicit fascism," according to the Huffington Post.

And do you know when homeschooling surged? After the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which banned segregation.

The Post continues, "Meanwhile major right-wing figures are increasingly promoting home schooling as a way to save children from alleged 'wokeness' — or liberal ideas about race and gender — in public and private schools."

Now, many parents who experienced the "joy" of homeschooling when schools were



“

*I'd like to think that there's a time in my life when the news of a Nazi homeschool movement would shock me. But that time certainly isn't now.*

closed due to Covid (a virus for which there was no vaccine at the time and people were dying left and right. Something important to remember when you hear a conservative claim that kids were out of school for no reason). And this made a lot of people big fans of public schools and gave teachers a bump in respect (it was short lived, alas). But homeschooling is truly the dream if you don't want your child exposed to Black history or know that LGBTQ+ people exist.

"Without homeschooling our children," one of the founders of Dissident wrote, "our children are left defenseless to the schools and the Gay Afro Zionist scum that run them."

Hoo boy. But as the Huffington Post points out, "As extreme as the Dissident Homeschool channel is, the propaganda it shares targeting the American education

system is just a more explicit and crass articulation of talking points made by Fox News hosts or by major figures in the Republican Party."

Both sad and true! We live in a time when Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis basically banned books in classrooms across the state in order to keep books about racial justice and LGBTQ+ people away from students so as to not "indoctrinate" them. When extreme right-wing candidates are running for school boards across the country. When teachers are being called "groomers" as if advocating for, or even just not hating, LGBTQ+ students is tantamount to child abuse.

Dissident Homeschool might not be a huge movement, but it is a dangerous one. It's also an example of what indoctrination actually looks like.

# The Queer Lives She Has Changed

## Why Madonna Still Matters to LGBTQ+ People

BY MATTHEW RETTENMUND

On January 17, Madonna announced her first retrospective hits tour, with the first tickets going on sale a whole three hours later. “Take my money!” gays often say when their divas pull up with fresh product. But nobody is happier to take it than Madonna, our favorite ’80s capitalist turned ’90s kabbalist turned ’20s TikTokateur.

For many Madonna fans — we were stans before stans were stans — confirmation of The Celebration Tour represents a long-awaited movement from Madonna toward unapologetically embracing her feel-good musical legacy. It’s a huge change for an artist whose

concessions on the dance floor have been many, but whose approach to touring has been to focus on what’s new and to dole out what’s the opposite of new judiciously, even stingily. Sometimes with unexpected bagpipes and guitar riffs.

On her Madame X Tour in 2019, she told one audience her manager wanted her to do more hits, saying this as if he’d suggested she take Guy Ritchie back. But while icy in her convictions, Madonna is a sucker for timing, and in the 40th year since the release of her self-titled debut album, a victory lap must have struck her as not just potentially lucrative, but an organically good idea.

Is she ready to be a legacy act? The phrase is dismissive, yet their supremacy in arenas means legacy acts are nothing if not relevant, even if they are not driving the culture forward.

While ready to acknowledge her legacy, Madonna is still always in that pop cultural driver’s seat, and no, you can’t take away her license, kids. Her notoriety is evergreen, fueled by her brilliant grasp on how to trigger the world and her disdain for convention.

In her tour announcement video — a black-and-white homage to “Truth or Dare” — when participant Eric Andre deems the proceedings “sad and gross,” Madonna cheerfully replies, “Sad and gross is very popular right now.” She couldn’t have come up with a better explanation for how social media works, or a more apt updating of the old adage, “No publicity is bad publicity.”

Unlike with other artists, Madonna singing her back catalog is not selling out. Her songs, with very few exceptions, are not guilty

pleasures; they’re classics that defined (and defied) multiple eras and genres.

Madonna’s diehards know what we were doing when she behaved un-“Like a Virgin” on MTV; when she warbled about being great with child on “Papa Don’t Preach,” giving Tipper Gore hysterical morning sickness; when “Like a Prayer” first blessed the radio; when she rapped (it is a rap) all our favorite movie stars on “Vogue”; when she stepped out onto that balcony to command “Don’t Cry for Me Argentina”; when she let loose with that primal scream in “Ray of Light”; when she stalked her catwalk, a Leo in a leotard, to “Hung Up”; and even when she went upside down during “Human Nature” on her Madame X Tour, making it harder to hang your shit on her.

There are examples of divas before Madonna who seemed aware of their LGBTQ+ audience, but Madonna was the first in the trenches with us. Contrary to popular belief, queering her work did not usurp anything. Had she winked at us at arm’s length, as many gay-household-name divas have since, her already incredible career would have been all the more monumental. She lost countless fans when she began openly inviting speculation about her sexual orientation over 30 years ago, culminating with her book “Sex.” She not only ate with that, she ate ass with that.

Last year, Madonna took part in a silly TikTok video in which she tossed her panties at a wastebasket. The “if I miss, I’m gay” challenge ended with Madonna missing and shrugging — and with everyone missing the point. She wasn’t coming out as gay — she was saying, “Think what you want.”

If Madonna’s gay antics feel tired, instead of dragging her, thank her for that — her goal from the beginning has been to inform the world, often by tweaking its inhabitants with cheeky scandals, that being gay should be a non-issue.

“I don’t think it’s relevant,” she said in a 1992 interview of gay rumors about herself. “If people say, ‘Oh, she sleeps with women,’ I don’t bother to

deny it because I don’t think it matters. Who cares?”

Now, unfortunately, some in the LGBTQ+ community are saying, “Who cares?” to Madonna, taking her for granted and even at times trying to erase or demonize her past efforts. This is largely because the culture has become so permissive that concerns about appropriation have taken over, a fight that could distract us from keeping an eye on why drag is suddenly casually being likened to grooming children for sex. And it’s a shame Madonna is so frequently rejected, because the path she forged in the very middle of the mainstream helped allow us to be in a place where she could be seen as old hat.

Probably “old” is the operative word there. Madonna, always the kind of girl unembarrassed to say she deserved that “Evita” Oscar (she did) and to call herself a revolutionary (she is) and to sing “You’re just jealous ‘cause you can’t be me” (you are), got away with being aggressively user-unfriendly for over 30 years because she was young, and then looked young. Now that she is older, her sass is less tolerable to a society conditioned to value youth over most things and convention over all. Especially from women. And especially from women past 60.

Maybe that is why Madonna still matters so much to so many. Yes, she is a legacy artist — and what a legacy! What she has accomplished cannot be taken away, cannot be diminished by others or herself, and will never be eclipsed by new artists thanks to her talent and timing.

But legacy artist or not, she continues to be more of a touchstone than ever by forcing us to confront the fact that aging gracefully is probably a bullshit, paternal, corporate construct, and really isn’t very fun. And while it is OK for some artists to go all gray and demure, it should be equally OK, even encouraged, when Madonna vamps like Mae West (another maligned sex bomb with a killer body of work) or swears like a sailor, French kisses Jack Black (as she did in her tour announcement video) or forgets to wear anything but a gap-toothed grin.

I would never argue that Madonna is above criticism. She has said and done dumb things — nobody scrutinized for 40 years, let alone an artist committed to chaos agency, fails to fuck up.

Still, I think queer people who aren’t under Madonna’s spell should always remember two equally important things: You absolutely don’t have to be a fan, and you absolutely don’t have to be a hater.

God help me for writing it, but Madonna is a metaphorical load-bearing wall for more people than you know. When you tear her down, we feel it. We know she is not perfect, but she gives us strength, and if we react viscerally to your demolition efforts, it’s because we know there are cracks in the wall, but we’re so very tired of waking up to the wrecking ball every day.

In response to Madonna’s The Celebration Tour confirmation, @heyjaeee wrote on Twitter, “I might actually cry seeing Madonna live and sharing the space with older gay men who grew up with her and who also lived through the AIDS crisis and are still here.”

This tweet touched me, even if the “older gay men” part had me contemplating a lower blepharoplasty. Because Madonna was there, and because she made the most of her time there, and because she shows every sign of trying to keep doing so until someone is rolling around on her grave like she did on her mom’s in “Truth or Dare,” the truth is that Madonna, like all icons, means a lot to so many of us, sometimes for reasons beyond her own doing, sometimes for reasons even she dares not guess.

And when someone gives you joy and strength and inspiration, let alone for 40 years, that is always worth celebrating.

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*Matthew Rettenmund blogs at BoyCulture.com and is the author of the brand new edition of “Encyclopedia Madonnica.” He grew up in Flushing, Michigan, and now lives in NYC.*



Photo: Alberto Tolot



Still from "Kokomo City." Courtesy of Sundance Institute | Photo by D. Smith.

# Sex Wins at Sundance

## Homeless After the Music Business Rejected Her, This Trans Director Is Making a Comeback

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

The same music industry that initially embraced D. Smith when she was presenting as a man turned against her when she transitioned. She lost her house, her car and her music studio. This was 2014, the year Smith, who has produced songs for Lil Wayne, Keri Hilson and Ciara, says she was “forced out of the music industry.”

Just seven years after exiting that industry, Smith is making a splash with her directorial film debut at one of the world’s preeminent film festivals. The achievement is even more remarkable considering the director who discovered a passion for filmmaking during the pandemic decided to go DIY for her first film, “Kokomo City.”

The film is an uninhibited, fearlessly sexual documentary that explores what life is like for four Black transgender sex

workers — a true watershed moment in trans-centric filmmaking.

And this is where Smith’s story gets especially emancipatory: “Kokomo City” just premiered as an official selection of the NEXT section at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival to early critical acclaim, winning the NEXT Innovator Award and Audience Award.

“One of the most exciting non-fiction entries to this year’s Sundance is a radical, on-the-ground pulp from which four Black trans sex workers talk their shit,” wrote Jacob Oller for Paste Magazine. The site BlackGirlNerds.com called it “transcendent genius.”

And to the music industry folks who turned against her — Smith recently completed work on a new song, “Man’s World,” for an album Katy Perry is currently recording.

As for her directorial debut, Smith described the experience of being at Sundance with the film as

“literally a comeback.”

**What happened to you during the era in which you were shut out of the music industry for being transgender?**

I was pretty busy as a producer. I was working with a lot of people, and it’s so crazy. I’ve done a lot of hip-hop, and people see me dressed [as a man] one day, and then the next day I’m wearing eyeshadow. And guys, people just didn’t know how to handle it, or they didn’t want to handle it. They were embarrassed. And I was pushed to the side. Phone calls weren’t returned, emails weren’t returned, and I just stopped working. And in less than two years, I completely went broke.

**Do you feel there’s an undercurrent of internalized homophobia in the hip-hop world? Even outside that world, there’s a lot of homophobia and**

**transphobia, period. And it sounds like you experienced that.**

Oh yeah. Firsthand. But what’s so crazy is that your music has nothing to do with how you present yourself. So the fact that people stopped working with me musically because of the way I started to look as if it affected my music... it actually enhanced my music, because I started to feel more like myself. And it backfired. People literally just stopped calling me for work and caused me to be homeless. So [I’m] kind of getting on my feet now.

**And now you’re here at Sundance with your directorial debut. What’re you feeling right now?**

Oh, I feel... and this sounds cliché, but I feel tremendously empowered. I also am very aware of my position and I respect it, but I’ve also worked very hard for it. But I just want to use

this energy, this moment where I am, to just keep telling great stories and creating music.

**When you say position, what do you mean? Because to me, it seems like even with this movie, you being at Sundance, this was not an easy film to get made.**

No, no. I mean, I made it by myself. By position, I mean, I’m being acknowledged for my work. How can I say this without sounding arrogant? I did it by myself, most of it. And that took a lot of my life, my time. And nothing’s guaranteed, right?

So to be acknowledged for something that I’ve done with my talent, my God-given talent... that’s what I mean by my position. I don’t take it for granted, and I understand where I am right now in my life. So I just want to maximize the opportunity and inspire people.

**This being your directorial debut, I was curious about the first time that you picked up a camera and what that experience was like for you?**

Someone purchased the camera for me and that in and of itself was very moving for me, because this wasn't a rich person. This is someone that really made a sacrifice to make that happen. And when I got the camera in my hand, I knew something good was going to come out of it.

During the pandemic, I was walking around the city with my phone just taking pictures of different elements or angles in the city, shooting in black and white. And I was inspired to shoot with this technique and movement. And the documentary came to me. I'm thinking, here I am shooting photographs, but I'm broke. It's like, how can I make this work for me? And also, how can this be something impactful?

**How did the idea of spotlighting Black trans sex workers come to you?**

Well, I've never had to do sex work, but what inspired me was when I was homeless, sleeping on people's couches for two years. I'm thinking, "Gosh, I have a lot to show for myself. And it's still not good enough. I have great music to show for myself and a great reputation in the music industry. And it still wasn't enough." People judged me and disconnected from me because of my identity. And I started to think about trans women and how difficult it is for them that don't even have the amount of talent that I have? And I'm still in a worse position than they are. At least they have their own house, they have their own vehicles. But it inspired me to tell their story.



D. Smith at Sundance. Courtesy photo

**How did you decide to make some of the artistic decisions that you did for the film? For instance, shooting it in black and white, the music and the overall edgy tone. There's nothing shy about this work. It's like, if we're going to talk about sex, we're going to talk about sex.**

That's right. But that's what we do in real life in person. We do that, even if it's in the privacy of our own homes. So when we go into documentary form, why is it watered down when we're all doing it in private? It just seems really reductive and it doesn't feel fulfilling.

And the black and white, I shot it because it represents truth. It's just simple, but it's also classy, classic and timeless, and it looks really elevated. And I thought that dichotomy with the girls, with their street personas and their lingo, that it'd be great to have these girls in a raw form shot in black and white.

**What do you think is something that has been historically left out of the conversation regarding**

**sex workers that made it even more important to include in this film?**

Well, the fact that they're doing it. And there's a lot of trans girls that are public figures or celebrities that are still having to do sex work because it's hard for them to get jobs.

**I don't think most people would assume or know that.**

Oh yeah, it's the truth. So these girls are really breaking that old narrative that we are OK, or we are fine because we dress in gowns, or we have a great wig. But the truth is, a lot of girls, a lot of trans women, have to subject themselves to sex work, and that's the reality.

**I mentioned the rich storytelling in "Kokomo City," and there are some really great moments but also some devastatingly real-talk moments. What's something that is said during the doc that has stuck with you?**

The fact that during some of their calls, some of the sex workers tried to blackmail the clients, or rob them, and that was a shocker. But I'm not surprised because sometimes girls feel like they're not getting paid enough, or maybe they feel like the guy is going to gyp them from pay.

So it's all these details and possibilities that can happen when a trans woman puts herself in these situations or in the hands of these men. It's unsettling.

**What do you hope this doc conveys about the perception of Black trans women sex workers?**

This film is about Black trans women, but it's also about Black people. How we treat each other and the lack of love for each other. So I hope that it's a awakening for Black people as a community.

And I hope there's a level of shame that comes with this film for some Black people that feel like they could have done or should do more to get to know trans people or be kind to trans people.

**Are you finding that these women are being accepted more than you expected them to be?**

Yeah. Because a lot of times people, especially in the media, like to create this narrative that trans women are against Black women, and Black women don't like trans women. And it's been more Black women who are championing this film than anything. I'm so shocked, to be honest with you. They're so supportive and like, "Oh my god, I love this film. This has to go." And so, yeah, this is thrilling.

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

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# WHERE'S THE RESPECT FOR QUEER KINKSTERS IN METRO DETROIT?

## Why I've Been In and Out of the Michigan Kink Scene



BY JEM ZERO

Kink has been a part of my adult life for so long I don't remember when I developed the desire to learn more about it. However, taking action to become part of the kink community began in 2012. I started an account on Fetlife, a social networking website focused on BDSM, fetishism and kink, and then punched in some sordid details and set sail.

At first, I made many beginner mistakes. I expected it would be easier than it was to find a dominant woman, and I threw myself at strangers rather than taking my time to learn the culture.

Eventually, I found a welcoming community in Deviations, a Metro Detroit kinkster gathering. I became a familiar face and gained regular friends; the monthly event, where I got to hang out with people of similar interests, was the highlight of each month. At Deviations there was space to play, but nothing sexually explicit. It was a safe and comfortable space.

Not all my experiences were as positive as my experience with Deviations, however.

At that time, I was navigating kink space as a submissive lesbian. I learned quickly that many people weren't interested in respecting that — kinksters of all genders would approach me for play that involved men, which was alienating and made me feel unsafe. I also

experienced disrespect from more than one Domme (dominant woman), which surprised me. There are stereotypes about bad behavior from kinky men, and I mistakenly assumed woman Dominants would be different.

Feeling mistreated by Dominants wasn't my only problem. I withdrew from both public and private parties, though I still tried to remain active in my personal life and on Fetlife. Unfortunately, my biggest stressor seemed to be the worst online.

Queer people in kink are often forgotten. Outside of specifically queer kink spaces — and sometimes even within them — there were constant heteronormative microaggressions.

Every time I saw “a sub and her

Dom” used to generalize, my teeth ground together. I identified as a switch, but my interest at that time was mostly being submissive to a dominant woman. Yet everywhere I went, people assumed being submissive meant I was looking for a dominant man. I also was lumped in with submissive women, even though I made it clear that I don't identify as any gender.

No matter how many times I attempted to bring attention to this within Metro Detroit kink spaces, it never seemed to get better. LGBTQ+ kinksters just didn't get the respect we were owed.

People's attitudes about non-heteronormative play further alienated me. I stopped participating in submissive spaces, because they were mostly full of women, and

there was some weird judgment stuff. For example, many submissive women thought poorly of brats, a type of submissive that likes to test boundaries instead of obeying without question. I rather liked bratting. The intention was that a brat's submission had to be earned, requiring Dominants to get creative, but these subs claimed that no true submissive would resist a command from their Dominant. Insinuating that subs are never allowed to push back, along with the assumption that most submissives are women, seemed awfully misogynist to me. Those spaces felt like they were enforcing '50s gender roles rather than empowering people to view sexual norms in unique ways.

See **Respect for Kinksters**, page 23

# Inside the 'Daddyhole'

## Popular Attraction Returns to Detroit's Dirty Show

BY JOHN BESCHE

Attention sexual citizens of Michigan: For the 23rd time, "Detroit's cavalcade of carnality" promises to turn Motor City mad — for sexual freedom, that is. The Dirty Show is back at the Russell Exhibition Center where, for a limited time, visitors can engage with hundreds of pieces of erotic art ranging from "grandma safe" to "someone is gonna burn in hell for this."

Arguably one of the centerpieces of the exhibition — the largest of its kind in North America — is the Daddyhole, an immersive tribute to the hardcore leather bars of the 1970s and '80s where visitors answer to none other than Tom of Finland.

"Since its initial unveiling a few years ago, it has remained as part of the overall event as a fun diversion and has added more kinky diversity to the exhibition," curator Jerry Vile told BTL. "It transports you while paying homage to an important underground phenom that has had an enormous impact on world culture, music and fashion. It also is and has been the only area where patrons can dance, as the Dirty Show has had a strict no dancing policy since our inception."

Within the enormity of the Dirty Show, which has hosted guest artists like John Waters, the Daddyhole has been able to survive in large part due to leather, Vile said. He believes that the leather brings a more "intense erotic feel."

Still, Vile likes to keep it fresh by commissioning different faces to helm the Daddyhole. This time around, DJ Darryl G Gunter will help conduct the bacchanal.

"I still believe that the Daddyhole exhibit is in its infancy and has a lot of room to grow," Gunter said. "I started working the Daddyhole as the DJ, and a few years later I began to help organize it. Each year I try to bring in a new element of the leather and kink culture to the Daddyhole."

Gunter says he tries to include local leather groups like ICON, ONX, Mavericks and The Motor City Bears. "This year we are happy to include a few more puppies into the mix," he said, adding that he is working on a live performance act which, if things come together, "should be very thought-provoking."



A daddy at the Daddyhole. Courtesy photo

As for the intended takeaways, Gunter said that he doesn't have any.

"When I go to the DIA, there is no one there telling me what to take away from the painting on the wall," Gunter explained. "It is there for my interpretation. I get to see it and feel all the emotions that it evokes without being told what I'm supposed to think. However, I really hope people come into the Daddyhole and have fun, embrace the vibe of the exhibit and let their inner kinkster out for a little fun."

Vile is adamant about maintaining the

interactive element of the exhibition — it's the people who make the show, after all. Guests willing to go the extra mile are even able to coordinate details ahead of time on the Daddyhole Facebook group page.

A warning from Jerry Vile — tickets often sell out before opening day.

*The Dirty Show takes place over two weekends — Feb. 10 and 11 and Feb. 17 and 18. Learn more and buy tickets at [dirtydetroit.com](http://dirtydetroit.com).*

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Paula on What She Does

Puzzle on page 25

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From "Flaming Ears." Photo: Kino Lorber

# A Punkish Lesbian Sci-Fi Flick, Revived

## 1992's 'Flaming Ears' Is a Futuristic, Dystopian Romp in Pleather

BY GEORGE ELKIND

In the second week of 2023, "Skinamarink," a shoestring-budget independent horror work shot in Edmonton, Alberta, opened to wide release and found an American audience. Directed and written by queer filmmaker Kyle Edward Ball, the film's domestic horror/found-footage trappings may feel familiar, but to most, its textures will feel alien and oppositional.

By overwhelming its frames with

a blizzard of near-blinding digitized grain, the film forces viewers to fumble through its textures to visually locate characters, objects and, ultimately, its story. This sense of friction, through which the film resists easy comprehension, proves more than an unconventional experience — it's very much the point.

More queer work — stuff made scrappily and on the margins of society — used to look like this, embracing jagged textures in a

manner owing to some mixture of necessity and taste. Thankfully, some portion of that history's been preserved and maintained, allowing for renewed or belated encounters with a broader audience.

Such is the case with 1992's "Flaming Ears," a queer German-language dystopian film set in A.D. 2700. The movie will play Hamtramck's Outer Limits Lounge Feb. 16 as part of Cinema Lamont's Skin City erotic film series.

Punkish, imaginative and rough-

hewn, the film presents its lesbian-dominated world without the forms of gloss it can't afford. Vigorously directed by (and featuring starring performances from) A. Hans Scheirl, Dietmar Schipek and Ursula Puerrer, the film assails its viewers with forms and textures as angular and expressive as those in "Skinamarink." Shot on 8mm film and then blown up to a larger format, the low-lit look and rough surfaces of "Ears" makes for an urban world that feels depopulated and dangerous; here,

queer characters embrace precarity as a fact of life.

Elements of the premise and sentiment seem liberating — as much for the artists involved as for the characters in play. Prizing an oppositional sensibility and taste for blunt lyricism throughout, its textures are always and often eerily personalized, bearing the handmade markers of the underground. With models, cut-outs and animation effects interspersing the film's live-action, "Ears" heightens the sense of its fictional city, Asche, as an alternate, deliberately constructed world. Hailing from a time in which queerness reliably meant being outside — and even against — the dominant currents of society, the film also plays as a kind of fantasia in which queerness remains the prevailing force behind the look and feel of its world.

While its plot mechanics could be easier to track, the film centers on three characters (each played by one actor) named Spy, Volley and Nun. Respectively a comic artist, an irrepressible pyromaniac and a humanoid alien clad in a pleather jumpsuit, the film's underdogs come together together in a loose collaboration that never feels quite settled. The film's narrative is less the draw than its style and riot of textures — or its characters' rich sense of solidaristic intimacy, which never seems to merit or require explaining. Even when its vibrant characters clash with one another, they still seem to be connected by some underlying bond.

While many films depict lesbian women as aestheticized and ornamental, making for a non-threatening presentation that seems to keep desirous male viewers in mind, "Flaming Ears" makes little space for such tendencies. Populated with characters who exist for themselves over anyone who might be watching — and to some degree for each other — there's no sense that the film's women are catering to anything but their own creative impulses in their presentation. Pleather jumpsuits, bowcuts and bluntly drawn eyebrows, along with a mishmash of vintage and handmade fashion signifiers, color the film's characters as distinct from one another and, beyond the film's period setting, the mainstream of the film's own time.

The film's kink-friendly treatment of sex and intimacy, too, proves likewise unrestrained, embracing the same sort of blunt self-presentation that characterizes the film more

broadly. At home with a certain grubbiness too rarely captured in screen depictions of sex (Jane Campion's 2003 film "In the Cut" gets it, too), the film's erotic scenes seem as naturally suited to its characters as its actual duct-taped set dressing.

For the film's trio of directors, even when engaged together in a low-budget feat of speculative fiction, it's their (or perhaps their characters') personalities and predilections which seem to come to the fore. Far from being lost in the machinery of science fiction's overtrumped "world-building" imperatives, all that's done here stems from the filmmakers' tastes and personality above all else, with their confrontational approach to dystopia bending to a theatrical sensibility that at moments evokes the dislocating period films of Derek Jarman.



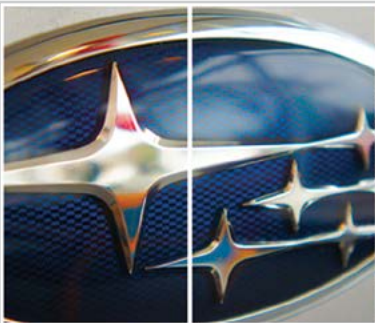
Even given the chance to construct a frictionless alternate reality, though — always an opportunity in science fiction — it's notable that the film's directors refuse to imagine

the characters' queerness as anything but oppositional. Treating its characters as outsiders even as they make up the film's main cast, this framing suggests that queerness without a sense of resistance isn't just missing something — it's unimaginable.


While "Flaming Ears" presents a dystopia, a world one ostensibly wouldn't want to live in (even as we basically all do), it's a fantasy space, too, of loud, brash and deeply personalized expressions arising from the atmosphere of the film's vast-seeming queer underground. It's an imaginative zone improbably realized in the film's making, too: not through the possibilities for acceptance or assimilation that have arisen in the time since its release, as some might guess, but through the fact a film this angular, personal and defiantly strange not only exists, but endures.

*The Skin City film series runs through Feb. 23 at Cinema Lamont in Hamtramck. Visit [cinemalamont.com](http://cinemalamont.com) for more information.*






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Wolf Pup Saturn. Courtesy photo

## Where Kinksters and Community Meet

### Cold as Hell 2023 Set to Burn Down Stereotypes

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Ignore that thermometer — it's about to get hot out there!

LGBT Detroit's fourth annual "Cold as Hell: Fetish Fusion" series is set to premiere Feb. 13 as a virtual presentation on the ColdAsHell.org website.

The Cold as Hell (CAH) series is the "marquee jewel" of LGBT Detroit's Togethr campaign, an eight-part, multi-faceted HIV anti-stigma campaign. The event shines a spotlight on the queer kink and fetish community with

a special focus on promoting safer, positive q u e e r s e x u a l i t y among Black and Latinx L G B T Q + individuals vulnerable to HIV.

CAH co-host Wolf Pup Saturn says the event is "powerful



Bobby the Fire Marshal. Courtesy photo

and important because it centers the marginalized — those being Black bodies and other people of color. It invites communities most disproportionately affected by things like HIV, HIV stigma, sexual and mental health to learn from the kink and leather community."

Wolf Pup Saturn, whose bio indicates he is a "service pup, gear enthusiast, community builder and 'gaymer,'" believes there is potential for healing within the kink experience and that it is enormously important to create safe spaces for people of color, especially Black-identifying people. Wolf Pup Saturn's blog, "Black Men in Gear," celebrates Black men around the world who love their gear.

Wolf Pup Saturn will co-host the free CAH event, which features live demonstrations, panel discussions, interactive experiences and an educational "gear show." In other words, there's something for everyone intrigued by the kink community, from newbies to veterans.

The 2023 CAH event will mark co-host Bobby the Fire Marshal's third year working the event. "[Putting together] this year's event was special to me," the Detroit native told BTL. "I had a chance to sit on the stage with elders to discuss our personal relations to being a dominant within the leather lifestyle, I got to do some shopping, some good eating, had many laughs, hugs, number exchanges, saw some old friends, and even some cherry popping!"

"Cold as Hell elevates our voices as Black people, as kinksters, as leather people and as community," Wolf Pup Saturn added. "Cold as Hell not only shines light on the stigma of HIV, but also kink shame, sexual exploration, consent, awareness, and being true to you! Cold as Hell is hot AF."

*Check out coldashell.org for more information and to view the series on Feb. 13.*

# #MeToo Through a Queer, Racially Diverse Lens

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

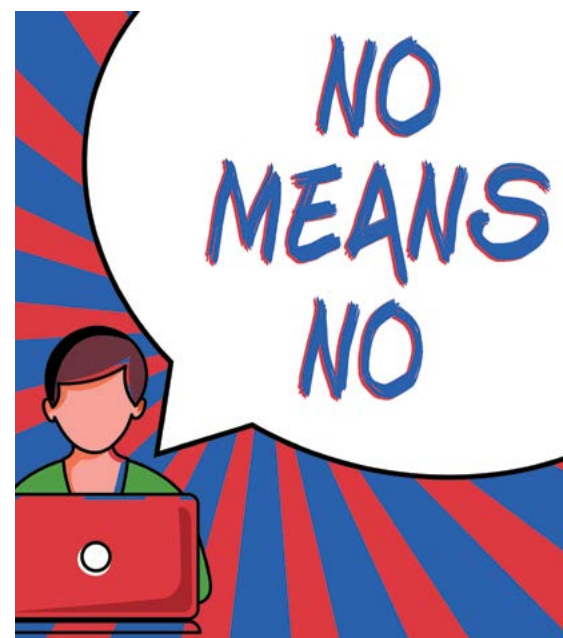
The #MeToo era was a turning point in a larger, much-needed conversation about consent, but a new book is challenging some of the basic assumptions around that conversation — namely, the fact that a large swath of people impacted by consent issues have often been left out entirely.

"Unsafe Words," co-edited by professors Shantel Gabriael Buggs and University of Michigan alum Trevor Hoppe, author of "Punishing Disease: HIV and the Criminalization of Sickness," is a collection of 13 provocative essays that stare down hard-hitting questions about sex, power, consent and harm from the writers' lived experiences as members of the Black, Latino, Asian, nonbinary, transgender, gay, lesbian and sex worker communities. The essayists are queer academics, activists, artists and advocates.

"The #MeToo debate over the past five years has almost exclusively focused on relationships between powerful straight white men and women. This excludes many marginalized communities. Forcing concepts of consent built for straight people onto queer people actually causes harm," says co-editor Trevor Hoppe.

At the heart of it all is sex, which, the authors implore us, must always be consensual and mutually pleasurable. All too often, however,

the #MeToo movement has been framed with a heteronormative viewpoint rife with class norms and racial privilege. "Unsafe Words" reveals the tools queer communities have had to develop by themselves to practice ethical sex — a sex worker negotiating with her client to a gay man having anonymous sex in the



back room of a bar, for example.

"If we want to have real discussions about consent, we have to talk about racial equity, we need to include perspectives of sex workers, and we must have queer voices at the table being heard," says Buggs.

The conversation here doesn't shy away from the toughest questions, like how queer communities could better prevent and respond to sexual violence within an overarching system where all too many police forces include rank-and-file members who are subtly (and often proudly) racist, homophobic and transphobic.

*"Unsafe Words" is set for release on Feb. 10 through Rutgers University Press.*



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Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan in "Ammonite." Photo: NEON

# *Queer Love Onscreen, In All its Weird and Wonderful Forms*

**BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT**

"Of an Age" lingers languidly over a hot summer day in Melbourne, where practically nothing of consequence happens, except the complete implosion of main character Kol's (Elias Anton) entire worldview and self-identity. Australian filmmaker Goran Stolevski is already winning prizes in his home country for the film, set for a U.S. release Feb. 10, and it's easy to see why.

The movie focuses mostly on just a handful of hours, as we see 17-year-old,

Serbian-native Kol (short for Nikola) meet and fall — hard — for his terrible bestie's older brother, the more worldly Adam. It's not much of a surprise twist for anyone but Kol; many of the film's secondary characters assume he's gay, and Adam clearly has an inkling from the start. But Kol hasn't faced the facts yet, for a host of reasons, not the least of which is his deep-rooted, anti-queer immigrant family. By the end of their day and night together, he's "come of age," as they say. Love from this point forward will never be the same again. "Of an Age" is a little sad and quite

beautiful, like many such tales.

Before seeing this latest entry in cinematic queer love stories, consider this mix of other movies focused on moments that follow queer characters as they navigate what love means to them.

## **'The Perks of Being a Wallflower'**

Even the current woes of actor Ezra Miller can't overshadow the

enduring message of 2012's "The Perks of Being a Wallflower." The film focuses primarily on Logan Lerman's Charlie, a teenager experiencing post-traumatic stress related to childhood molestation. But it's a subplot involving Miller's character, Patrick, that makes this film one of the best queer coming-of-age movies.

Gorgeous, painfully earnest Patrick loves Brad, the closeted football hero. When Patrick's father beats him after finding the two entangled in a loving embrace, Brad turns cold, Patrick suffers further physical assault from

Brad's teammates and Charlie jumps in to protect him. Ultimately, "Perks" is a story focused not just on the all-too-familiar pain of adolescent rejection within a homophobic high school culture, but on the importance of true, love-based friendship and reclaiming and actually loving the parts of ourselves that can be lost to trauma inflicted by people who are also in pain. As Charlie's English teacher Mr. Anderson (Paul Rudd)

See **Queer Love in Film**, page 24

## ◀ Respect for Kinksters

Continued from page 16

After a difficult handful of years, I ended up with nowhere I felt safe. Few people responded to my requests not to generalize all subs as women looking for dominant men. The Dommies I was interested in disrespected my boundaries a few too many times.

I finally became too tired to keep going. I was no longer interested in trying.

As if my body was responding to my disappointment in the Metro Detroit kink community, I became very ill. After years of visits to the doctor, I was given a diagnosis of fibromyalgia. This manifested pain in every part of my body, every minute of every day. When I was active, impact play was my main focus. With fibromyalgia, no paddle or crop was going to introduce an enjoyable kind of pain.

So I broke up with kink altogether.

It stayed that way for years. When I did have sex, it was pretty vanilla, but I wasn't very sexually active either.

Until recently, I haven't missed kink. What changed my mind happened during the 2020 quarantine, when I came to some realizations about my gender and sexuality.

I no longer identify as a lesbian, for starters. Today, I am happily a pansexual transmasculine person, which has helped me unclench and release a lot of accrued sexual fear. I also came to the conclusion that despite being willing to

switch to a non-dominant role during emotional or sexual encounters, I'm no longer interested in being submissive. I've returned to roots I put down early in my adult life, when I identified as a stone butch lesbian.

If I make another kink connection, it'll be from the other side of the playing field. I'll be focusing on topping with gentle dominance — deliberately contrasting with the entitled and demanding attitudes I encountered during my rocky journey as a sapphic sub. Under no circumstances will I make a submissive like my younger self feel unwelcome in a space I occupy.

I hope there are more queer-inclusive kink spaces in Metro Detroit now, though who knows what effects the continued pandemic has had on gatherings like Deviations. Most kinksters are resourceful and social, so I'm sure they've figured something out.

Ultimately, I don't want to be disrespected again. I have no intention of going to another kink party or rejoining Fetlife — those days are fully behind me, and I don't expect that to change. However, giving myself the chance to be the Dominant I always wanted to find has a lot of appeal.

*jem zero (ze/zir) is a disabled transmasculine author with nonfiction personal essays, short fiction, award-winning erotica and poetry published in the Thinx Blog, The New Smut Project and Gertrude Press, among others. Check out jem's website ([www.jemzero.com](http://www.jemzero.com)) or explore zir social media at <https://jemzero.carrrd.co>.*

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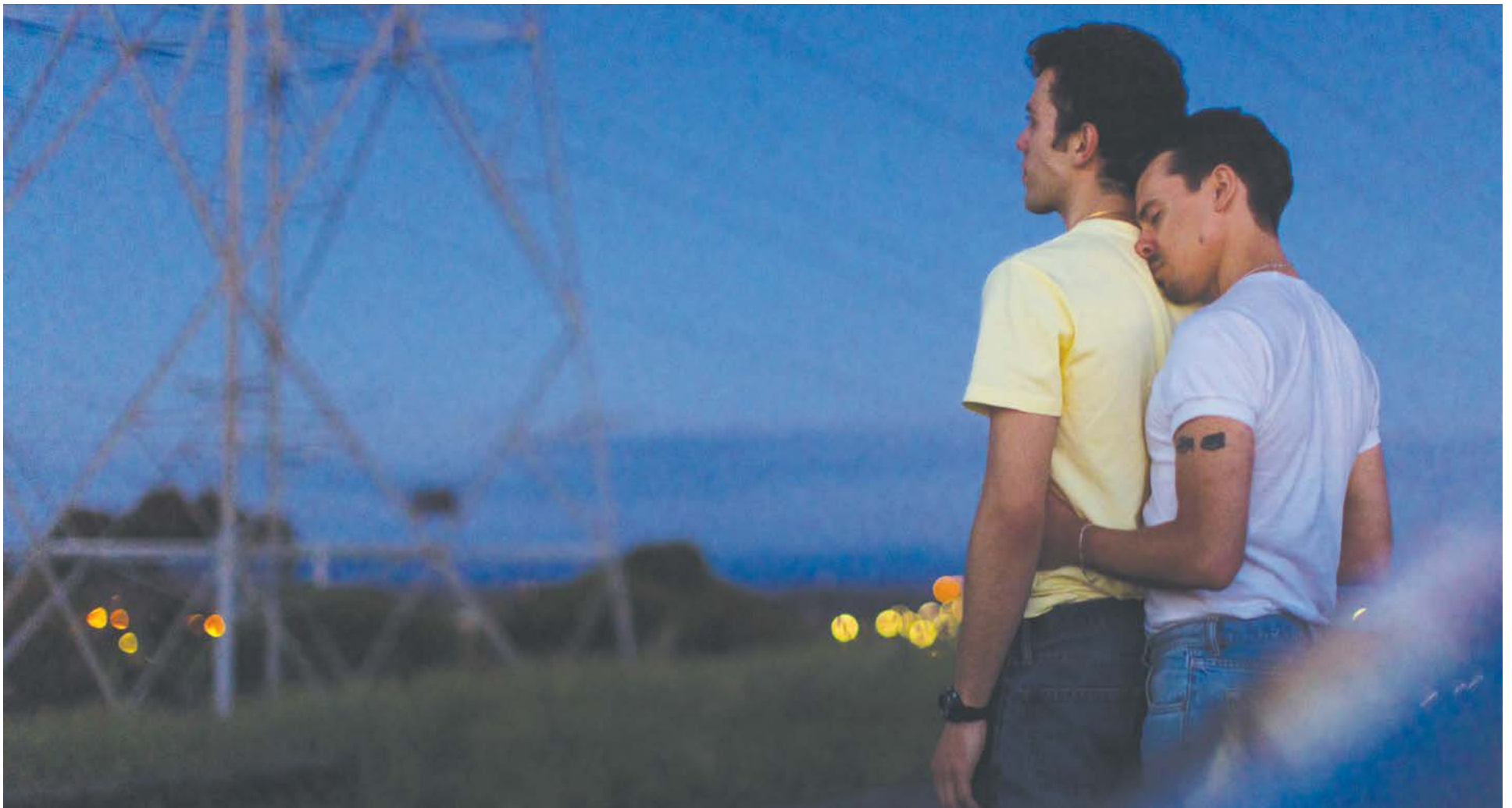
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Elias Anton stars as Kol and Thom Green as Adam in director Goran Stolevski's "Of an Age," a Focus Features release. Photo: Focus Features

## ◀ Queer Love in Film

Continued from page 22

tells him, "We accept the love we think we deserve."

### 'Moonlight'

Few films so clearly frame the distinct eras marking a single character's life as definitively as "Moonlight." The film, oft-cited as one of the best films of the 21st century (period — not just in the "queer film" category), explores the main character's life in three stages: Little (his childhood, portrayed by Alex Hibbert), Chiron (his adolescence, played by Ashton Sanders) and Black (his adulthood, portrayed by Trevante Rhodes). Throughout each stage, we see Little/Chiron/Black wrestle with the very real repercussions of being a queer Black boy and, later, man. Love looks an awful lot like pain throughout.

Still, at the heart of it is his true self, which exists no matter how far he tries to run from it. In Act 2, Chiron has a sexual encounter with Kevin,

who later hurts him immeasurably (physically and emotionally), but love, as it so often does, endures, even when we try to wish it away. When Kevin reappears in Act 3, everything has changed, but as is so often the case in life, "wherever you go, there you are." Black reveals that he's never touched another man aside from Kevin and while Kevin is shocked to learn about Black's life experiences, it's clear that the love between the two has only grown during their years apart.

### 'Love, Simon'

"Love, Simon" broke new ground as the first mainstream queer-centered rom-com to hit the big screen. By most accounts, the movie managed to maintain its charm while ticking all the expected rom and com boxes — we all knew what would probably happen within the first 15 minutes, but you couldn't help but root for sweet Simon Spier, played by Nick Robinson. Simon is a high schooler living in the closet but, in a distinctly modern twist, has fallen in love with an anonymous

stranger online.

When a fellow classmate outs Simon, the moment pulls the audience out of its rom-com coma for a moment, and it's that unexpected jolt of awkwardness that saves "Love, Simon" from fading into formulaic obscurity. Instead of playing it safe and keeping Simon's pain on the surface, the film gets unexpectedly dark for a minute, forcing the audience to remember that this is a queer romance with accompanying challenges that just didn't pop up in your typical '90s Meg Ryan vehicle. Simon's true despair in the moment when he realizes he won't have control over his own outing makes his big kiss on the Ferris wheel that much sweeter.

### 'Booksmart'

In some ways, "Booksmart" may be the polar opposite of "Of an Age." While the leads are whip-smart teens headed for the Ivy League, the film is more Judd Apatow than Ingmar Bergman, brimming with high school hijinks, binge drinking (and

the ensuing ill-timed, iller-placed vomit) and random make-out sessions. But there's substance here, too, and it's Kaitlyn Dever's lesbian character Amy that turns this one into a meaningful story about queer love between best friends.

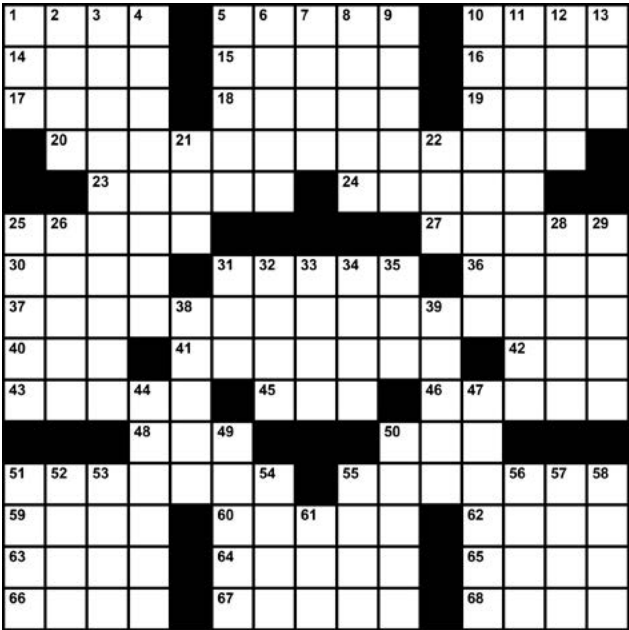
Amy's queerness is baked into the plot, a refreshing and realistic portrayal against a seemingly modern high school backdrop. No one's screaming "dyke" at her in the hall, but at the same time, no one seems to really know her, either. Partly, it's because she's been living in the shadow of her boisterously loving straight bestie, Beanie Feldstein's Molly. The exploration of this relationship is at the heart of the film. Sometimes, the most loving thing to do for yourself and, even for the one you love the most, is to break free from what's comfortable and familiar to make space to discover who you really are.

### 'Ammonite'

You could consider "Ammonite," loosely based on historical fact, a kind of later-in-life coming-of-age

story. After all, the leads, brilliantly portrayed by powerhouse actors Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan, are full-grown women, but for Ronan's character, Charlotte, a queer romance is altogether new. In fact, it's not something she likely ever expected to experience in the 1840s, when the film is set. It's certainly not what her husband, geologist Roderick Murchison (played by James McArdele) expects when he delivers Charlotte, who is suffering from "melancholy," to the doorstep of a fellow geologist, Winslet's Mary Anning. Perhaps Anning can perk up Charlotte's mood with some time in the fresh air...

As the two women enjoy a whole lot more than fresh air and digging up old rocks, Charlotte comes alive, as we all tend to do when offered the chance to live as our full, real selves. Did Roderick suspect, all along? Perhaps not, but maybe his most loving act was giving Charlotte the freedom to truly live, if only for a moment in time.



Paula on What She Does

Across

- 1 Suck air
- 5 Leggings at a gay rodeo
- 10 Like a generation, to Stein
- 14 Sundance's gal
- 15 Talk show host O'Donnell
- 16 Frasier's response to a client
- 17 Some E.R. cases for Dr. Callie Torres
- 18 Like the space around Uranus
- 19 Trojans' org.

- 20 Start of a comment by Paula Vogel about her craft
- 23 "I Dream of Jeannie"'s Barbara, et al.
- 24 Entangled
- 25 Edna and others
- 27 Marner, of a female writer named George
- 30 Persian Gulf land
- 31 "The Celluloid Closet" author Vito
- 36 Children's caretaker

Q Puzzle

Down

- 1 H.S. proficiency test
- 2 Lying on
- 3 Partners that are tired of each other?
- 4 Rose Bowl city
- 5 It tops a queen
- 6 Nicole Kidman film of 2002, with "The"
- 7 Italian wine center
- 8 Mother-and-son piece
- 9 Curlicue on a Q
- 10 Pasta name that means "little

- tongues"
- 11 Kissed back and forth between two mouths?
- 12 Salty bodies
- 13 Some like it hot
- 21 "Let's do it!"
- 22 69 and more (abbr.)
- 25 Shore of Palm Springs
- 26 It arouses two body openings
- 28 "West Side Story" girl
- 29 Full of lip
- 31 Hauled ass
- 32 Bone in a limp wrist
- 33 You might ride one in Aspen
- 34 Poses for Mapplethorpe
- 35 "Xtra"'s prov.
- 38 Italian resort isle
- 39 Eat at
- 44 Gets ready to whip it out
- 47 Wilde with a statuette?
- 49 Silly little trick
- 50 Response to "How do you know?"
- 51 Von Trapp family escape route
- 52 Peter Pan's foe
- 53 Navy rival
- 54 Put out
- 55 Gomer's loaf
- 56 Like McKellen's Magneto
- 57 "And \_\_\_ bed"
- 58 Move the ball between your legs
- 61 Was in bed with

See p. 17 for answers

# Prism of Possibilities

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# The NSFW Michigan Men of OnlyFans

## These Queer Creators Offer a Little Something Extra for Everyone



Clockwise, left to right: Dom King, Teesaddy Master Daddy and Christian Styles. Courtesy photos

explicit content featuring the bisexual, power-vers otter himself and his cub boyfriend. The creator got started on the site in early 2021 and though he told BTL that year that he was worried about a proposed ban by OnlyFans to block explicit content, his career still seems to be going strong two years in.

**Christian Styles**  
@ChristianStyles1

This “Middle Eastern Pig” has really hit the big time. Boasting 1.2 million followers on his NSFW Twitter and 105K likes on OnlyFans, Michigan native Christian Styles, originally from Canton, dials up the sexiness every day on his channel and frequently updates his Twitter and Instagram feeds with lots of free, sexy content. Styles recently won the fan-voted award for Favorite All-Male Creator Collab at the GayVN Awards for a scene with Chris Damned.

**Zaddy Tony**  
@\_ZaddyTony

“America’s Favorite Zaddy” paid part of his way through college via his OnlyFans and has said that he

hopes for a future where sex work is normalized. Through OnlyFans, the self-proclaimed “thick boy” believes that people will start to see sex workers as human, possibly leading to a future with more job security. He’s amassed an incredible half million followers on Twitter.

Zaddy Tony told BTL in 2021 that he planned to leave OnlyFans after his 2022 graduation, but luckily for his followers, he’s still creating content for all of your Zaddy needs.

**Teesaddy Master Daddy**  
@teesaddy

Teesaddy Master Daddy is delivering just what his name implies — some good ol’ Master Daddy content. Into feet or extreme closeups of hairy butts? You’ll find both on his ass-filled Twitter. Obviously, the Michigan-based content creator and Wayne Underwear model knows what brings all the boys to his yard, and it’s more than a milkshake — it’s flexing pics, XXX vids and even Bible verses.

**King of Detroit**  
@XplicitlyDom.tv

The “King of Detroit,” as he calls himself on Instagram, is a multimedia creator with a presence on several platforms. He posts about business ventures, Detroit happenings and Black Neo-expressionism-era artist Jean-Michel Basquiat.

**Ari Avanti**  
@avantialt

This Midwestern power bottom is, as his OnlyFans account says, “born to take it.” Ari, a Detroiter, collabs with all kinds of creators (including a couple on this list) and offers over 60 videos on his OF channel. Head on over to his Twitter (@avantialt) for a sneak preview.

BY JOHN BESCHE

No, not all queer OnlyFans creators live in Puerto Vallarta. Out of the more than 1.5 million OnlyFans creators, a sizable chunk of hotties are from right here in the Mitten, including some who are in the top one percent of all content creators.

And they’re damn proud of it.

Meet seven steamy creators who have a few things in common: They’re all LGBTQ+, they all have a Michigan connection and they all have an OnlyFans following filled with fans thirsty for their next post or live feed.

**Dom King**  
@DomKing91

Five years ago, Andrew Lyon worked in executive support for high-end retailers in Detroit. Now, @DomKing91, or “Dom King,” has, as of this reporting, over 36K followers on Instagram, nearly 124K followers on Twitter, and 24K likes on OnlyFans. It’s been a journey.

“This is a high school dream come true,” Dom told BTL. Since he launched his OnlyFans a year ago, his self-managed media empire has become his full-time gig, and he says he draws on various parts of his personal and

professional identities, from fitness to fucking, to make it happen.

Now, Dom’s media business is more than just OnlyFans. He’s also a studio porn actor for industry king Michael Lucas’ Lucas Entertainment and an underwear model for Wayne Underwear, a Detroit-based company. Soon, he’ll be the lustful face on a romance novel.

**PopChampagne**  
@PopChampagne

By PopChampagne’s own definition, his porn is “natural, raw, amateur” material. Look to his account for



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