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**FISTING, FIRS<sup>T</sup>HAND**  
Why the Fisting  
Scene in Detroit  
Is So Downlow

**SMALL-TOWN TRANSPHOBIA**  
Clarkston Parents  
Lose Minds Over Trans  
Teacher

**A MICHIGAN PREMIERE**  
Jay Kaplan Takes the  
Stage in Ringwald's  
'The Inheritance'

## Lesbians Just Wanna Have Fun

Inclusive Spaces Are Disappearing, But These  
Detroit Women Are Staging a Renaissance

By Layla McMurtrie

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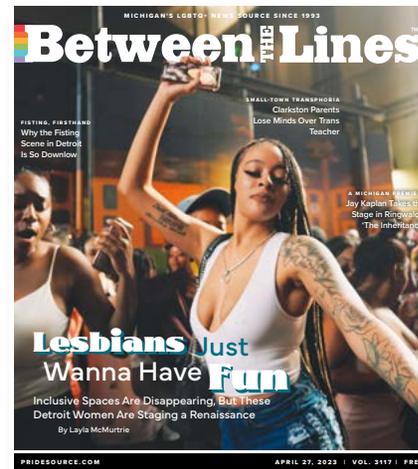


Photo: Chelcea Stowers

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www.pridesource.com  
 Phone 734-263-1476

**PUBLISHERS**  
 Benjamin Jenkins  
 benjamin@pridesource.com

**Publishers Emeritus:** Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

**EDITORIAL**  
**Editorial Director**  
 Chris Azzopardi  
 chris@pridesource.com

**Assistant Editor**  
 Sarah Bricker Hunt  
 sarah@pridesource.com

**Senior Staff Writers**  
 Ellen Shanna Knoppow, Jason A. Michael

**Writers and Columnists**  
 D'Anne Witkowski, Jon King, Gwendolyn Ann Smith,  
 Tim Retzlaff, George Elkind, Eve Kucharski

**CREATIVE**  
**Cartoonists**  
 Paul Berg

**Graphic Designer**  
 Sarah Wolf

**Contributing Photographers**  
 Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen

**ADVERTISING & SALES**  
 sales@pridesource.com

**Director of Sales**  
 Tim Powers  
 734-263-1475  
 tim@pridesource.com

Ann/Andy Cox, 248-613-2513  
 anncox@pridesource.com

**National Advertising Representative**  
 Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Despite what you might have been led to believe, most queer people are up to many things besides discussing Bud Light on TikTok. In fact, Michigan is alive with possibilities for all your queer pleasures in the real world, from lighthearted good times to engaging on issues impacting the community, like a local conference centered on LGBTQ+ suicide. You can also bask in the empowering queer glow of icon Billy Porter when he brings his tour to Detroit, help fund a grassroots Pride organization, learn about adulting with Stand with Trans, or head out for an evening focused on quirky, groundbreaking animation at the Detroit International Festival of Animation.



Billy Porter. Courtesy photo

## Grab Tickets to See Billy Porter in Detroit

Buy your tickets now and prepare to be dazzled when beloved queer multi-hyphenate Billy Porter brings his Black Mona Lisa Tour: Volume One to Detroit May 18. Broadway in Detroit describes the show as a 90-minute "powerhouse event" that will feature chart toppers like "Love Is on the Way" and "Love Yourself," a mix of Broadway-influenced numbers, a nod to Porter's role on "Pose" and new tracks off the singer's new "Black Mona Lisa" album. Porter says in a news release, "It's really the first time that I've been able to fully express myself and who I am through my music. It's like my magnum opus. It's everything to me. You'll really get a glimpse into who I am even deeper with this music." The show has sold out in other cities, so the longer you wait, the slimmer your chances of seeing Porter slip back into a little Pray Tell.

Thursday, May 18, 8 p.m., Fisher Theatre (3011 West Grand Blvd., Detroit). Ticket link at [BroadwayinDetroit.com](https://BroadwayinDetroit.com).



Peppermint. Photo: peppermintonline.com

## Fund a Good Queer Cause

Head over to the Lansing Pride Fundraiser April 28 for a sick night of drag performances hosted by Delicious and DJ Asio Aviance in support of the org's upcoming Pride festival and other programming. The long list of performers includes Trifecta, Ann Amy Grant, Wyonona, Vanessa Voyant, Crystal D'Light and more. Doors open at 7 p.m. at Sir Pizza Grand Cafe in Lansing's Old Town district (201 E. Cesar E Chavez Ave., Lansing). \$10 cover at the door.

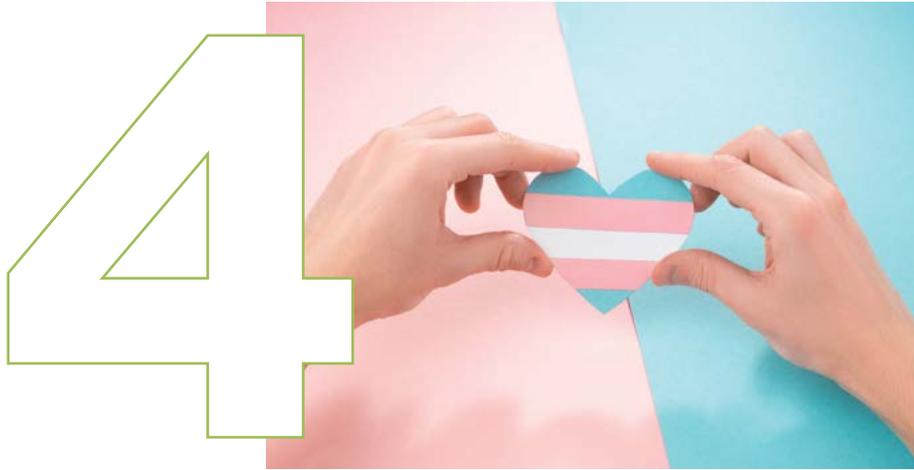
In addition to supporting Lansing Pride, tune in to the Drag Isn't Dangerous telethon May 7 and dial in your donation from home. The star-studded event, emceed by drag performer Peppermint, features celebrities like Ali Wong, Amy Schumer, Charlize Theron, Greyson Chance, Sarah Silverman, Margaret Cho and many more coming together to combat the nationwide wave of recent anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. There will be a mix of live and pre-taped performances and testimonials from drag performers, LGBTQ+ entertainers and celebrities, and a live celebrity phone bank ready to accept your donation. Get tickets and log in at [moment.co/dangerous](https://moment.co/dangerous).



## Help Improve the Stats Related to LGBTQ+ Suicide

The stark realities around LGBTQ+ and mental health are concerning, especially the stubborn statistics related to suicide, which have not significantly decreased in years. LGBTQ+ youth, in particular, face a much higher risk of suicide than their cisgender, heterosexual peers. The Stronger Communities: LGBTQ Suicide Prevention conference, hosted by the Michigan chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, seeks to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ suicide risk and to consider how to improve the statistics locally. National and local experts will be on hand to lead discussions and breakout sessions at the all-day event, set for Saturday, April 29 at Groves High School in Beverly Hills.

Saturday, April 29, Groves High School (20500 W. 13 Mile Road, Beverly Hills). Register at [bit.ly/3AjjYNR](https://bit.ly/3AjjYNR).



### Learn How to Do Life with Stand with Trans

Not everyone gets a primer on adulthood before they need it, but Stand with Trans and executive director and founder Roz Keith are working to fill that gap for local trans teens and young adults (ages 13-24) through the organization's upcoming "How to Do Life" workshops. "Life skills are typically not taught in school and many youth do not have the family foundation that teaches these critical skills," Keith said in a news release. "For trans youth, in particular, learning how to move forward in life and find success is often inaccessible or non-existent. This most marginalized community needs a leg up in all areas of life." The free five-part series takes place April through December on varying dates.

April 29 through December at various Southeast Michigan locations. Sessions include a meal. Register at [standwithtrans.org/how-to-do-life-series](http://standwithtrans.org/how-to-do-life-series).



Still from "Pour Generation" by animator Patrick Smith. Courtesy DIFA

### Delight in the Art of Animation

Celebrate the art of animation at the Detroit International Festival of Animation on May 6, when the historic Senate Theater serves as host for a diverse array of short works from local and international creators. The 90-minute presentation includes animated shorts created by artists near and far, including several with queer themes like Swiss artist Julian Tapprich's charming piece, "The Gift," described by Tapprich as "very short and queer." The range of topics extends from everyday life to the existential. Arrive early for a Wurlitzer Pipe Organ pre-show presented by the Detroit Theater Organ Society — the Senate is home to the world's 8th largest Wurlitzer pipe organ.

Saturday, May 6, Senate Theater (6424 Michigan Ave., Detroit). Doors open at 7 p.m. Pipe organ show at 7:30. Tickets at [difestofanim.com](http://difestofanim.com).

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

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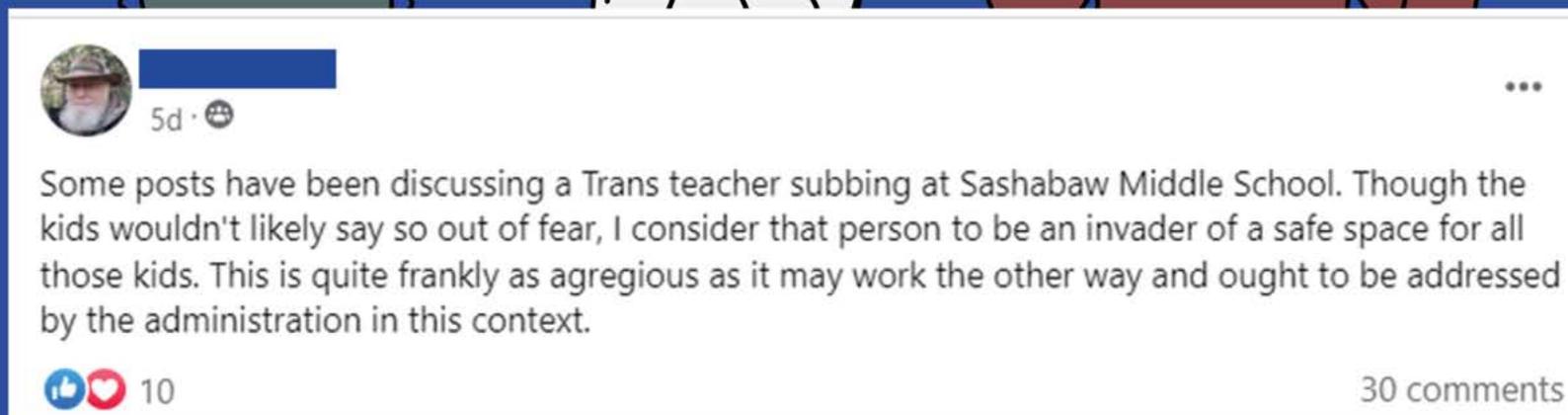
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**PANIC!**



# Clarkston Parents Lose Their Minds Over Existence of Transgender Substitute Teacher

## Inside the Facebook Group Where Parents Expose Their Transphobia

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

While the recent expansion of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act may go a long way toward combating discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in Michigan, the fact remains that genuine respect and civility cannot be legislated. Such is the case in the tiny Oakland County suburb of Clarkston, where certain parents have lost their minds over a transgender substitute teacher at

Sashabaw Middle School.

A middle school parent who wishes to remain anonymous said she learned of the situation from the private Facebook group Clarkston Parents United, which purports to be “a meeting place for concerned parents and community members to discuss issues relevant to our most precious resource; [sic] our children.” Said group consists of 650 members. “Jay” asked that her real name not be used because she has a child at the school.

“It’s really eye-opening to be in this group,” Jay told BTL. It was started by some school board candidates before the 2020 election but devolved from there. “It’s basically just an alt-right hate group in disguise,” she added. In a few threads that originated about a week ago regarding the teacher in question, parents were outraged at the school’s refusal to disclose whether their child would have a particular substitute teacher on a given day. Also discussed were the consequences for a student

who walks out of class: They will be marked absent.

One of the posts that received numerous comments refers to the substitute as “the trans.” Throughout the comments, she is consistently misgendered. There is even a cooked-up story that she shared her journey of transitioning with the students; however, they also say there are no firsthand accounts. Jay believes it’s nothing more than a scurrilous rumor — not that there is anything inherently

wrong with a teacher sharing personal details in an age-appropriate manner.

While there were a few group members who pushed back, most were entirely focused on the manufactured outrage over the existence of a transgender educator.

“I don’t feel safe in Clarkston schools after reading this,” one group member wrote. “To me, this person is mentally unstable. This is ridiculous to keep catering to this illness.” Another calls her a predator. One parent’s reaction to

their daughter having the teacher was to declare an emergency: "I told her to call me immediately if this MAN is her sub again."

Many comments focus on the teacher's clothing.

"It's uncomfortable for our kids to be taught about normal school subjects while the teacher is not dressing in a normal way," one group member commented.

Perhaps most alarming is the following comment, which suggests violence: "What is tolerated today will master you tomorrow. War has been declared on our kids and on morality and Christianity. Time to act like soldiers."

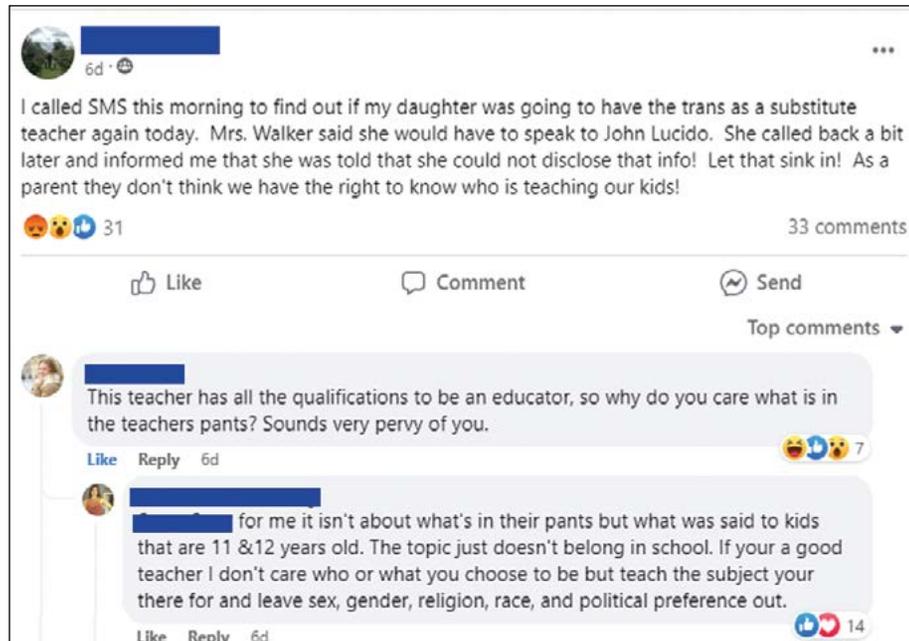
Parents are urged to "pull your kids" from public school. Some say they have instructed

supported." They also included segments from their school board policy regarding public complaints and concerns: "... the Board of Education has a duty to protect its staff from unnecessary harassment."

Jay said the teacher's name and other personal details have been shared by community members on social media.

What's left out of the narrative thus far is the students' perspective. Notably, Jay said her child attends school with several transgender classmates and has been taught by the substitute teacher.

Jay asked her kid what happened in the class. "Well, nothing happened," Jay said her child told her. "I had [a] class. This lady was our



A screenshot of comments made by members of Clarkston Parents United.

their children to walk out of class to the office if they have that teacher in the future. Throughout the comments, private school, homeschooling and virtual learning are encouraged.

Equality Michigan Executive Director Erin Knott believes this "controversy" is just the latest iteration of the nation's culture wars and part of the far-right's attempts to defund public education.

"Sadly, right now, there are individuals that are working to impose a dangerous agenda that includes politicizing classrooms and using students as pawns in culture wars," Knott said. "Michigan schools, the administration, school boards: They're not our enemy." The foe they all share are extremists challenging them who are "well-funded and have utilized bigoted, homo- and transphobic, racist, fear-mongering tactics in an effort to topple our education system."

For their part, the administration of Clarkston Community Schools appears to acknowledge the issue at hand. Their public relation director's response to a BTL email inquiry reads in part:

"Unfortunately, board policy prohibits us from talking about the details of staff matters. However, I can confirm that Clarkston Community Schools embraces all individuals, and we make every effort to ensure members of the LGBTQ+ community are safe and

teacher." The student witnessed no inappropriate behavior. One of their friends asked what they should call the teacher. Jay said her child told their friend, "Well, you should refer to the teacher by she or her if that's what she wants to be called. And if you're not sure, you could always ask the teacher respectfully and say, 'Excuse me, what are you most comfortable with?'"

Hearing that was a proud moment as a parent for Jay, who provides a positive, affirming example to her child. By contrast, the hateful commenters are teaching their children to be transphobic.

Jay is tired of painting a rosy picture of her community. She said she's aware of an uptick in "casual, everyday racism" to the point that the school district is unable to control it. "Sometimes it feels like the 1940s up in here," she said, adding, "If you're prejudiced in one area, you're very likely to be prejudiced in others."

"It's not just one or two people," Jay said. "There's a lot of people, and they're just now finally comfortable being their bigoted self in public."

As if on cue, one group member left the following remark: "Don't be surprised if this gets spun into how transphobic Clarkston is."

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Attendees at a Lesbian Social. Photo: Chelcea Stowers

# The Detroit Women Behind the Michigan Lesbian Renaissance

## Lesbian Spaces Are Dying, But Not If These Community Members Can Help It

BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE

It's not just the beautiful women, craft cocktails and club music attendees get when stepping foot into a Lesbian Social Detroit event — it's a feeling of acceptance.

“When you come to a Lesbian Social, you will see women dancing, singing and laughing,” said Chelcea Stowers, founder of Lesbian Social. “You’ll always see a familiar

face and it starts to feel like a huge family reunion.”

For queer women, that's hard to come by these days, with no lesbian-specific bars in Michigan and a scant number of them nationally. Consequently, many queer women struggle to find community, especially in smaller cities.

As a way to provide an opportunity for lesbian women 21 and older to connect in

Michigan, Stowers began curating pop-up events at different venues throughout Metro Detroit when she launched Lesbian Social Detroit. The company hosts multiple events a month around the city, offering a safe space to and for queer women and a way to promote women- and Black-owned businesses.

Stowers, who had early experience promoting events as a high school promoter at 15 years old for her dance team, said that

the idea for Lesbian Social first blossomed in 2017, but didn't fully bloom.

“My first event ended up, I guess, being a flop; it was actually on the day that my grandmother passed away too,” she said.

Following the initial event, Stowers went back to the drawing board for three years.

Then, at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, Stowers said she reached out to one of her promoter mentors with a goal to

“provide a space for women downtown.” He connected her with Exodos Lounge, a nightclub in Detroit, where she started hosting weekly events, and her long-gestating idea came to fruition.

“After the first one, they loved the concept,” Stowers said. “There was no incidents afterwards; it was just women coming together, having a great time and enjoying themselves.”

Soon, other venues started reaching out to Stowers and she began hosting events at multiple rooftops in

Detroit. “From there, I just started opening myself up to the community with so many people that wanted to collaborate,” she said. Since then, Lesbian Social has continued to expand with pop-ups being held at local spots including Delmar Rooftop, MIX Bricktown, Annex and Magic Stick.

Stowers said that while Lesbian Social events are focused on lesbian women, they are open to allies as well.

“I’ve even had women who don’t identify as lesbian come out to the event and say, ‘Oh my god, you know, I had such a great time, I wasn’t harassed by men and it just felt very empowering,’” she said.

This year, Stowers is working on her goal of making Pride in Detroit bigger and queerer. She has a weekend of Pride events planned in June through Lesbian Social, most notably the annual free block party at The Skip, which had over 800 women in attendance last year.

Apart from her work surrounding Lesbian Social, Stowers is a marketing manager at Meijer and a photographer. These other professional experiences all play into the success of Lesbian Social events, which are created and marketed by Stowers alone, with some help from her mother and girlfriend. She is, however, big on collaborating with other queer women to allow them a platform to grow their passions too, from DJing to catering.

“I definitely have met a few shorties at some of the [Lesbian Social] parties that I’ve been attending and also spinning at... being able to have a place to connect with people close to home at Lesbian Social has been really cool,” said Precious Irechukwu (aka DJ Pressure).

Irechukwu, who left Nigeria when she was 9 and recently moved to Detroit from Ypsilanti, has spun for Lesbian Social events several times. She relishes the welcoming space those events provide, where she can

be herself and meet other queer women, especially given how taboo being queer is in other countries like Nigeria.

“I think more people that are queer from other places want to come here to be free to be themselves,” Irechukwu said. “To be able to come find a place you can just relax and let loose and actually enjoy yourself and be in a space that caters to your culture is very, very crucial.”

While Irechukwu said that being openly queer “wasn’t as hardcore” as it may have

*I think more people that are queer from other places want to come here to be free to be themselves. To be able to come find a place you can just relax and let loose and actually enjoy yourself and be in a space that caters to your culture is very, very crucial.*

been if she were back home in Nigeria, there have still been struggles. For instance, even though her mother reacted calmly when Irechukwu came out as a lesbian, she still remarked, “Oh, it’s just a phase.”

“I think when I do come to her with a woman that I wanna marry, I’m pretty sure she’ll have a real response at that point,” Irechukwu said.

For now, she’s immersing herself in the local queer community through Lesbian Social’s events, which she hopes will grow beyond Michigan.

“There’s a lot of pretty girls there, as expected — a lot of cool people, a lot of style too,” she said. “There’s a lot of confidence. It’s all good energy in the space... I think they have a very special following, and it’s still growing too.”

Amber Chene, a Black nonbinary lesbian, has also attended Lesbian Social events and organizes parties for queer women in Detroit. She said she would love to own a lesbian bar of her own, as she feels there aren’t too many spaces for lesbians in the city, especially for older queer women.

See **Lesbian Social**, page 18

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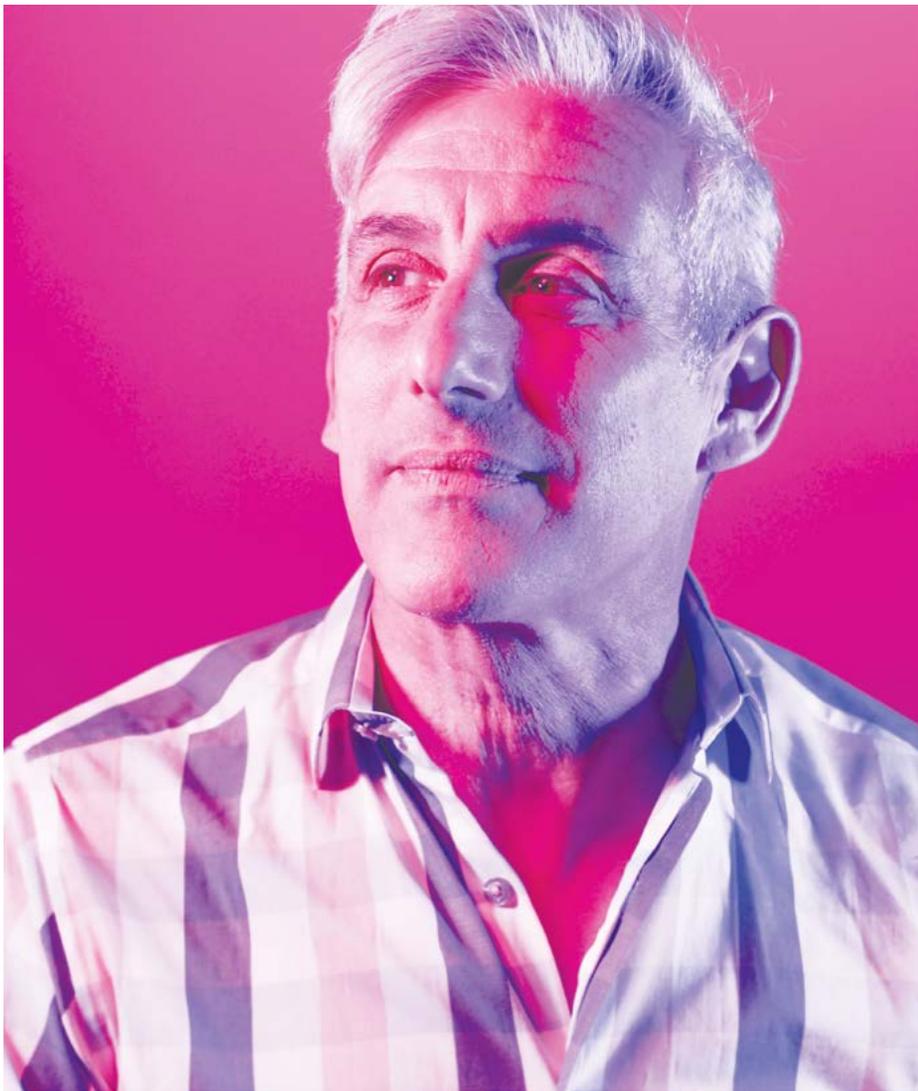
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Jay Kaplan plays two roles in "The Inheritance," his first acting part in nearly two decades. Photo: Brandy Joe Plambeck

# Longtime ACLU Activist Enters a New Role. Two, Actually.

## Jay Kaplan to Appear in Queer Play 'The Inheritance'

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

By day, he is best known in Michigan's queer circles as a tireless advocate for the community and the staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project. But by night — or a few weekends at least — Jay Kaplan will be acting his heart out on the Ringwald Theatre's stage in "The Inheritance," set to debut May 5.

The play, a modern-day reimagining of E.M. Forster's novel "Howards End," which was adapted into a film in 1992, focuses on how different classes of people interact with one another. In the stage version, which hit Broadway in 2019, writer Matthew Lopez tackles that same subject matter except with different generations of gay men living in New York City instead of straight characters. The play won four Tony Awards in 2021, including Best Play.

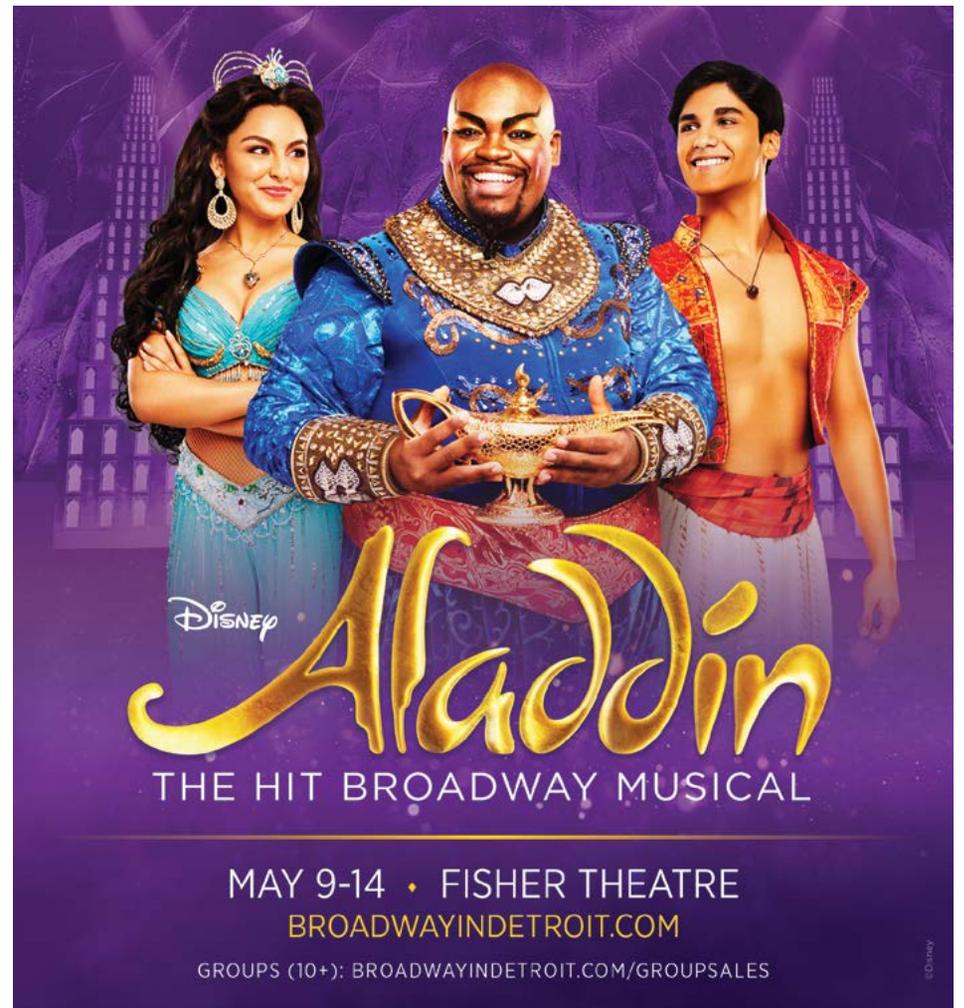
The Ringwald will perform the ambitious

six-hour show in its two parts. Kaplan plays two roles in the show: Morgan, who represents Forster in the show, and Walter Poole, who cared for dying men during the AIDS crisis.

"The significance of this play is it's kind of an epic undertaking, a take on two different plays that look at gay men from the past and in the present and look at how our stories are intertwined," Kaplan told BTL.

The theater has long been in Kaplan's blood — he's been interested in acting as far back as elementary school at Northbrook Elementary in Southfield. Kaplan has been an actor and director with the Birmingham Village Player for more than 20 years. Earlier this year, he directed a production of "Harold & Maude: An Intimate Musical" with the troupe. He's also known around town for his cabaret performances.

See **Jay Kaplan**, page 16



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# Fox News Fires Tucker Carlson As If Nothing Is Even Sacred Anymore



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

It's almost 4 in the morning and I can't sleep. A fun part of getting older. And so I'm up reading about white nationalist Tucker

Carlson being fired from Fox News.

It takes a lot to shock me. But Carlson's firing is pretty shocking. Especially since he would have been fired a long time ago if he had been working for an even marginally legitimate news network.

After all, he's openly racist, misogynist, fascist and really hates LGBTQ+ people, especially transgender people.

Last year Media Matters crowned Carlson Misinformers of the Year, and for very good reason.

"Carlson has demonized and thus endangered the LGBTQ community, elevated pro-Kremlin propaganda as Russia invaded Ukraine, spread conspiracy theories about January 6 as committee hearings took place, and undermined election results ahead of the 2022 midterms," Media Matters explains. "Carlson fomented and perpetuated the right-wing anti-LGBTQ panic, especially by spreading dehumanizing rhetoric against trans individuals and youths. Carlson framed LGBTQ individuals as inherent sexual predators of minors."

Carlson made his obsessive hatred of transgender people very clear on his Fox show.

After the shooting at a Nashville Christian school in March, where six people — three adults and three children — were killed, Carlson fixated on the shooter's gender identity after reports came out that the shooter may have been transgender. He claimed that transgender people were targeting Christians.

"Transgenderists hate Christians above all, because Christians refuse to join every other liar in our society and proclaim that transgenderists are gods with the power to change nature itself," Carlson said on his show.

Except transgender people aren't asking

anyone to worship them. They are asking to be treated like human beings whose lives matter, something Carlson clearly thinks is asking too much.

"For that refusal," he continued, "that unwillingness to bow down and worship a false idol, in this case of transgenderism, they were murdered. We have never seen this battle so starkly set as it is now."

This prompted Faithful America to respond to Carlson's rant: "As grassroots Christians, we reject these evil, malicious lies, and we proclaim Christ-like love and affirmation for the trans community. Trans people and pro-trans theologies aren't just compatible with Christianity, but are at the very heart of our loving and inclusive faith."

There is no evidence of a widespread transgender plan to violently target Christians. On the other hand, right-wing Christians do show up with guns at drag queen events, but I'm sure Carlson would deem them "peaceful protesters" just like he did the Jan. 6 insurrectionists.

After all, according to Media Matters, Carlson did tell his viewers on Oct. 27, 2022 that drag queens were "adult" men "with a fetish for kids" and "people should definitely arm themselves" against drag queens. Carlson also said that children at drag shows is a "huge moral crime that nobody should accept" and "obviously a kind of child molestation."



“

*Carlson being on air — as the most popular Fox host, mind you — was not only a threat to human decency, it was also a threat to democracy itself.*

Carlson's guest list was a rotating who's who of people who have either been deemed Creep of the Week by yours truly, or who are always possibilities: Candace Owens, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Stephen Miller, Matt Gaetz, J.D. Vance, Ron DeSantis, Matt Walsh and so many more.

They weren't always asked to be on the show to talk about how much they hate LGBTQ+ people. Sometimes it was to call Covid a hoax, demonize immigrants, paint Black Lives Matter as a hate group, and tanning your balls. You know, normal stuff.

Honestly, Carlson being on air — as the most popular Fox host, mind you — was not only a threat to human decency, it was also a threat to democracy itself.

His firing comes after Fox News settled for \$787.5 million with Dominion Voting Systems, a company that hosts like Carlson

repeatedly claimed were involved with stealing the election in 2020. There's a reason why your grandparents still believe Trump won (to be clear: he did not). Their favorite "news network" has been telling them that for years.

And what do you know, communications from Fox hosts like Carlson that came out during the discovery phase of the trial showed that they, in fact, did not believe that Trump won. But when they said as much, Fox's ratings went down. Lying made for booming businesses. Until it didn't.

I mean, \$787.5 million is a LOT of money. It's the biggest media settlement in U.S. history. Go big or go home, amirite?

But hey, his firing frees Carlson up to run for president.

Oh, shit. He's going to run for president. I may never sleep again.

# The Year of Opal



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It is with humility, pride and a bit of awe that I celebrate my 24th year with *Between The Lines* and *Pride Source* this month. The traditional theme for a 24th anniversary is opal, for those of you who keep up with these things and would like to send gifts. If you'd rather wait until my silver anniversary to honor me, that's fine, too. For now, just keep reading. That's the best gift you could give.

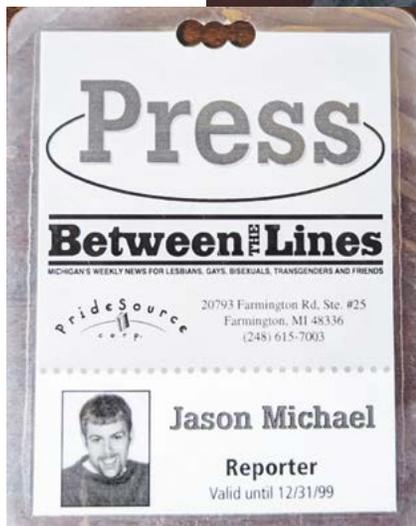
This column is a new endeavor. I'm told you, dear readers, enjoy it when I intertwine current happenings with historical events in my life, the queer community at large and my nearly quarter-of-a-century history with the paper. This is not my first rodeo. I've done columns before. Longtime readers may remember Full-Time Homo, my first, or the scintillating celebrity gossip roundup *Tales from the Camp*.

This one is special to me for several reasons. In 1999, when I first started, sage and raconteur Charles Alexander was already writing his popular *Parting Glances* column. Back in those days, we were all panicking over the possibility of what Armageddon Y2K might bring. At the turn of the new millennium, Charles took the opportunity to reflect on Detroit's queer history as well as his own. His column intertwined the two marvelously. So much so that he kept the *Parting Glances* name long after Y2K came and went. He continued to write his column until shortly before his death last December, some 700-plus columns in all.

While I could never do what he did — wouldn't even dare to try — the name of this column, *Second Glances*,



(Above) Jason A. Michael and the late Charles Alexander at the Affirmations Big Bash in 2005. (Left) The author's first press pass. Photos courtesy of Jason A. Michael



is an homage to Charles. Despite our 36-year age difference, Charles meant more to me than I could say here or in a hundred columns. He was a tremendous blessing to me. My frequent dinner companion who made daily calls to check in on me. My confidant, supporter and inspiration. I could go on, but I can just hear him in my head saying, "Wrap it up, Mary." So, I digress.

Like the artwork he created that I have hanging up all over my house, this column is not only a tribute to Charles, but a way of keeping him alive in my heart. I'll take the tips I learned from his superb commentaries. I'll consider his thoughts and what I think he'd think about a column. I'll take a page out of his book and try to keep my writing interesting and informative, as well as a tad bit cheeky and off-color. Charles would have it no other way.

The title *Second Glances* is also

appropriate for other reasons. In both my life and career, there's a lot to look back on. And I'm prepared to bare it all: the good, the bad, the ugly. When I started with BTL as a cub reporter, I knew nothing. I was as green as Kermit the Frog. I did have the benefit of a great education in journalism from Wayne State University, studying under such gifted instructors as Jack Lessberry and Ruth Seymour. I was still taking classes, however, and didn't even have my degree.

Suddenly I found myself in the thick of it. I covered the retrial of Jonathan Schmitz, aka the Jenny Jones murder. I reported on the death of closeted community activist Harold McCormick and was the first to report that his killer took his life on the 15th anniversary of his first slaying, for which he'd already served time and been released.

I've also, through the years, been blessed to be able to interview some of my favorite celebrity icons, including

Dolly Parton, Dionne Warwick, Patti LaBelle, Melissa Etheridge, Boy George, all the Motown divas, and many, many more. Only a year in I got the chance to interview the late Yolanda King, daughter of civil rights hero Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was coming to town to speak at an HRC dinner. She and I hit it off, and she arranged for me to meet her mother, a civil rights hero in her own right, the late Coretta Scott King, when I was in Atlanta covering *Creating Change*.

Through the years, former BTL and *Pride Source* publishers Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz have been very good to me. And for the past two, publisher Benjamin Jenkins and the whole editorial team have been patient and supportive. When I started, I never could have imagined I'd hang around the BTL newsroom for so long. But I love the community I report on, and I consider that reporting, including through photos I have taken, my biggest contribution to queer Michigan.

Now this column will stand as a contribution of its own, my most personal effort to reach readers and, hopefully, generate some laughs and even touch a few hearts. I'll be sharing my stories but yours as well. I will revisit the best and worst of times in my life and the life of our community.

I've been given few parameters for this column. So how it develops is as much up to you as it is to me. Let me know if you enjoy what you read, or even if you don't. The best writing matters not at all if no one is reading. I certainly enjoyed reading Charles' column. I hope you'll enjoy reading mine.

*Jason A. Michael is senior staff writer for Between The Lines and Pride Source Media Group. He has been writing for the paper since 1999. Jason is also an Essence bestselling author. He may be reached at jason@pridesource.com.*



# The Complicated Reasons Why the Fisting Scene in Detroit Is So Downlow

When Can More of the Motor City Experience What New York Already Does, Firsthand?

BY AARON FOLEY

A few weeks ago, I almost went to my first live fisting show.

A popular tweeter and OnlyFans performer casually announced on Twitter that he'd be fisting a willing participant live at Club Lambda, a Bushwick outpost of the popular Lambda Lounge in Harlem, N.Y. The responses ranged from "can't wait" to a bunch of raised eyebrows, and Lambda itself confirmed it was having the event with a post on its

Instagram.

One thing I've learned after moving from Detroit to New York City is that fisting here in the Big Apple is as common as construction at the dawn of spring in Michigan. That this particular fisting event happened on a Wednesday evening was also unsurprising, as it was just another typical weeknight in Brooklyn. Alas, it was a school night, and even though Lambda was only a \$20 Uber away from my apartment, I decided to tamp my

curiosity and wait for the next show.

Videos surfaced from the event, and people were horrified. Here's why: Club Lambda is a predominately Black gay bar, and both the fister and fistee were Black. While Black queer New Yorkers shrugged — again, just another night in the city that never sleeps — other parts of Black queer Twitter were scandalized. "So y'all just have booty juice in the middle of the club?" "Right in front of my salad?"

There was one tweet that stood

out to me personally, and that was from another OnlyFans performer, this one based in Detroit, who opined whether such an event could happen in the Motor City. And I thought about it. I thought about the image of someone getting fisted while bent over on the molded phallic display at Menjo's, or perhaps on the pool table at Soho. (Yes, The Eagle next to Menjo's would be the prime opportunity here, but c'mon — use your imagination!) And, well...I'm

not sure it could ever happen.

I don't have any statistics, as it's not like any of this data can be found in a U.S. Community Survey or the notes of a city council meeting. But the percentage of people fisting in Metro Detroit has to be pretty low, right? Any time I come back home, or even during the years I lived there, the double-F's on the apps were few, if

See **Fisting**, page 26



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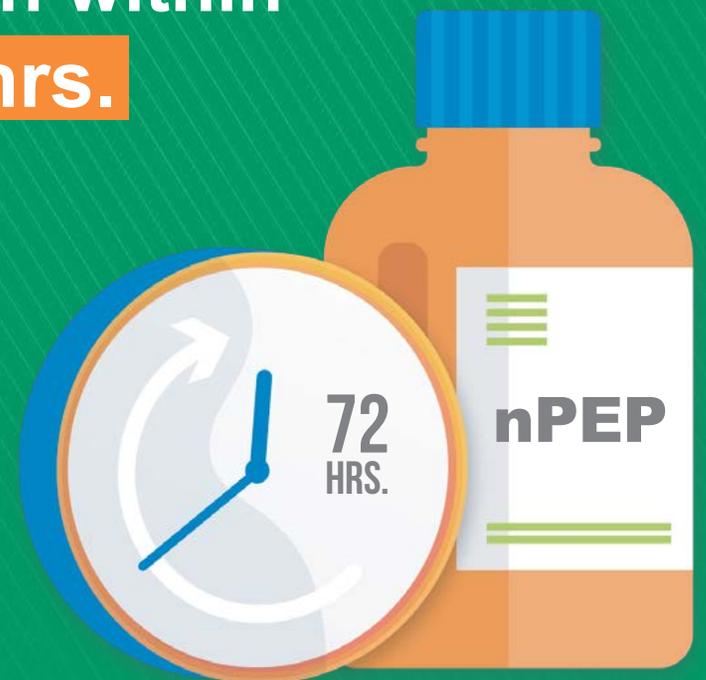


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The NEMCSA – Region 9 Area Agency on Aging will conduct a public hearing on its proposed Annual Implementation Plan for Fiscal Year 2024. The plan outlines the use of funds and services under the Older Americans Act for our 12-county service area. A summary of the plan will be available upon request 15 days prior to the public hearing.

The hearing will be held **Monday, May 22, 2023 at 1:00 pm** at NEMCSA, 2569 US-23 South, Alpena, MI 49707. Contact Connie at **989-258-4661** or **mcquarrie@nemcsa.org** to register.

### Jay Kaplan

Continued from page 11

Recently, Kaplan spoke with BTL about “The Inheritance,” his passion for acting and LGBTQ+ advocacy, and how he maintains a healthy work-personal life balance.

#### You have quite the theatrical resume.

I’ve done a lot of community theater. Recently, I’ve mostly been directing shows. I haven’t actually been in a play for quite some time. It’s been a good 15 to 20 years.

#### What was your first production?

It was in elementary school. My first role was Hansel in “Hansel and Gretel” in the second grade. It was that long ago.

#### Who did you inherit your artistic ability from?

I have no idea. I don’t think my family would say I inherited anything. I’ve just always been interested. It was a way to get out of my own shell and feel less self-conscious by playing somebody else.

#### Shortly after I came out in 1989, I was instructed to read Forster’s “Maurice” by my gay mentor. It was one of the first books with gay characters or a gay storyline that I had ever read. What was your introduction to Forster?

I never read “Maurice,” but I remember when that movie came out. It’s spoken about in the play. He wrote it, but didn’t let it be published for many years. He didn’t want to be known as a gay writer. But later, he wished he hadn’t done that. He realized how important it was for people to read this book.

So that’s one of his regrets, that he didn’t make them publish the book earlier. He lived to 1970 and he waited like 50 years to have the book published. But he felt very strongly about depicting a healthy same-sex

relationship involving two men. It didn’t have an unhappy ending the way that gay relationships were portrayed in the media and in society at that time.

#### Had you read “Howards End” or seen the film before you started work on the production?

I bought the book “Howards End,” and I didn’t read it. I had seen the first part of the play. It’s two parts, Part One and Part Two, and I thought it was wonderful. It’s really all about how our stories are connected to each other from generation to generation and how important it is in the LGBTQ+ community to share our stories. I was really taken by that message.

#### As someone who’s a tireless activist for the ACLU, what does having a creative outlet like the theater mean to you?

When you do work with regards to civil rights or social justice, it’s so important to have a work-life balance or to have an outlet, [especially] when you watch the news and see the attacks on trans people and efforts of book banning.

#### This play is an ambitious undertaking for a community theater. What has it been like to bring this six-hour show to the stage? And to do it with a bunch of other queer community members – how did that feel?

This is a big undertaking to present both of these plays, but our director Joe Bailey’s passion for this play and the message that it conveys has been contagious. I think everybody in the show recognizes how special this play is, how rich the characters and their stories are, and how this play has special significance for the LGBTQ+ community — our history and the legacy and contributions of so many gay men. The cast and the crew for the show are diverse. Many identify as queer and some are straight allies who wanted to be part of this production of this beautiful play and what the playwright has to say.

#### What’s been your experience rehearsing for this play and remembering your many lines?

The task of memorizing so many lines has been a daunting one, but seeing how everybody in the cast, including those who have more to say in the play than myself, dug in and learned their lines, provided a great incentive for me to try to meet that challenge. I’ve been pleasantly surprised so far how much my brain has been able to retain and I really do believe that exercising the brain this way may help stave off future memory loss. Or as I’ve said not so delicately: dementia! [Laughs.]

#### Finally, why do you think people should see “The Inheritance” at The Ringwald?

It’s the Michigan premiere of this play. It’s really an epic look at a particular gay community over generations and the importance of how we relate to each other. We lost a generation from AIDS. A certain age group that had their stories to tell.

I think as we’re coming up on Pride Month, the importance of knowing those stories is clear. They, living their lives and the things that they did, certainly have made things better for new generations, and it’s important that we share those stories and be aware of them. So I think it’s the perfect play to attend during Pride Month. In addition to celebrating ourselves and being our authentic selves, it’s a look at how far we’ve come.

*Part One of “The Inheritance” will open on May 5 and play exclusively for two weekends, at which point Part Two opens on May 19 and plays through May 22. Then both parts will play in repertory from May 26 through June 11 with Part One playing Friday nights at 8 p.m., Part Two playing on Saturday nights at 8 p.m., and both parts playing on Sunday (May 28, June 3 and June 10) with Part One at 2 p.m. and Part Two at 7 p.m. More info at [theringwald.com](http://theringwald.com).*

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Chelcea Stowers, front, with Lesbian Social attendees. Photo: Joe Maroon / Metro Times

## ◀ Lesbian Social

Continued from page 9

Similarly to Stowers, Chene started hosting parties young, at 16. Most recently, she has curated her own party called Press Play, offered monthly at the Marble Bar in Detroit.

“I feel like there’s so many different groups of people that have safe spaces to be themselves, and I think we need that,” Chene said. “I think that in order to grow and to connect, we’re definitely going to have to just stick together and come up with different ways that we can show up for one another.”

Chene says she would love to collaborate with Stowers to create more opportunities for lesbian women, as both of them found ways to create spaces for themselves and others to cultivate a community they wanted to be a part of.

“I’m really just trying to create a safe space, and if anyone has a building or a space where I can operate out of that would be amazing,” Chene said.

At some point, Stowers hopes to get a permanent space too, and said she would definitely be down to collaborate with Chene.

“Amber Chene is an amazing creative who continues to help build the Detroit art community as well as creating spaces for the LGBTQ community,” Stowers said.

Next up for Stowers is securing a dedicated space based on the community gathering places she’s encountered in New York, a space of her own where women can just come and relax, as well as get lit and party.

“When it comes to other major cities, I feel people aren’t afraid to try and bring creative and unique concepts to nightlife,” Stowers said, naming aspirational queer club cities like New York, Atlanta and L.A. “I really want people to say, ‘Hey, Detroit’s Pride is this weekend; we need to travel to Detroit.’”

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# Queen of Her Actions



Shania Twain. Courtesy photo

## Shania Twain on What LGBTQ+ Allyship Means to Her

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

The first time I connected with Shania Twain in 2017, the country-pop music icon didn't pull any punches, saying "equality should be a no-brainer" as she spoke thoughtfully about her relationship with the LGBTQ+ community. Twain stood firm on that throughout our conversation, speaking out against supremacy ("supremacy of any sort is just poison") and pledging to be the kind of ally we hope all gay icons will be.

In Twain's case, she is in the same unique, bridge-building position as someone like fellow country superstar Dolly Parton — they both excite dads and drag queens, but for very different reasons.

If we're speaking about Twain's queer appeal, look no further than "Giddy Up!," the first song off Twain's sixth studio album "Queen of Me." It's a song that would sound right at home in some Texas yeehaw gay bar but, like her hit "Man! I Feel Like a Woman!," could just as easily get some conservative, beer-guzzling dad to loosen up as he bellows the country bop's fun, flirty and frankly very gay hook. (At a Shania Twain show, to which I have been, trust me when I say these things happen.)

Before performing at the 2023 Faster Horses Festival July 14-16 in Brooklyn, Michigan, Twain recently reconnected with me to talk about the new album, which we did. But our interview landed in places Twain herself said she appreciated as she was able to reflect on how her words — not just the ones she writes — matter.

Aside from talking about what the album's title really means to her and admiring the progress the LGBTQ+ community has made, Twain, native to Canada, spoke candidly about how a comment she made to The Guardian in 2018 about Donald Trump — "I

would have voted for him because, even though he was offensive, he seemed honest" — influenced what some LGBTQ+ fans thought of her. When I asked Twain about her Trump remark, her manager requested we avoid political questions. Twain, though, said she would decide for herself whether she was going to answer the question, which she did. The "queen of me" in action.

**So "Queen of Me," let's get right to it. There's definitely a let loose vibe on this album that I think we all can appreciate after the last few years. How would you describe the spirit of this album and how you came into it?**

I'm calling the "Queen of Me" album my happy album because it was literally an exercise during Covid — 'cause I wrote all the songs during Covid. And it was an exercise of just getting myself into a better frame of mind, a more positive frame of mind. Writing lyrics that would make me smile, make me laugh, make me wanna dance. It was like a self-help, wellbeing exercise to write these songs. And they ended up just being very uplifting. That's also how I narrowed down the songs, you know? I wrote three albums worth of songs during Covid 'cause I was just bored and I ended up being very creatively productive. I narrowed it down to songs that took me to that happier place.

**The title itself is so you, Shania, because you are sort of the country queen of empowerment. Like you, LGBTQ+ people really have to become the master of our own universes. So I'm wondering, did the title happen to come out of any conversations that you had over the years with any LGBTQ+ people in your own life that you're close to? Or were you thinking of them in the process of naming this album or working through the songs?**

I'm close to so many LGBTQ+ people. They've been part of my creative teams over the years, and they're just part of my life. You're all part of my life, you know? You're part of my inspiration. The "Queen of Me" title was directly inspired by

self-empowerment. “What am I really the queen of?” I’m just the queen of myself. I’m not the queen of anyone or anything else. I shouldn’t have any control over anyone else; no one should have any control over me either. And so I really felt motivated to express it for myself and to share it.

I’ve had people in my life going through gender confusion and gender change. Just all of the sadness that I’ve seen that’s so unnecessary. I’m just an all-inclusive person. I believe to each his own. And we should all have the right to have that confidence in ourself to be ourself. So, on “Queen of Me,” I’m not what you tell me I am. I’m what I proclaim I am. So, don’t let anyone tell you what you are.

**When I last saw you on tour, there was so much gay energy, from dancers in cowboy hats and chest-baring leopard print to Elijah Wood, the trans person killing it on drums. Your audience is a mix of drag queens and conservative dads, and you are one of those rare artists who can bring polarized political communities together. How intentional on your part is it to bring a certain level of gayness to a Shania Twain show?**

Let’s start with this — when it comes to talent, there’s two things [about] people that I want to be around when I’m in a professional or creative environment. I want people with good character, honesty and talent. And so whoever falls in there is in my circle. And so it’s more about the inclusivity than anything. If I was exclusive I would say, “well, I only want this,” and I think we would all miss out on a lot of exceptional talent. My criteria is good people and talent. And any LGBTQ+ energy or people that are in my environment are there just on merit. And I think that’s more valuable than actually specifically being... I don’t wanna be good “for a woman.” I don’t wanna be respected just ‘cause I’m a woman. I wanna be respected, period. And this is where we really make our mark. And I think it’s very important.

This is why “Queen of Me” is so the song: “I’m not a girl, I’m not a boy, I’m not a baby, I’m not a toy.” These are all the things I’m not, as being my label. And now let me tell you who I am. And that’s personal. I don’t know if everyone will relate to that, but that’s my feeling about it. I don’t want to be strong for a woman; I just want to be considered strong. And that’s even in “Man! I Feel Like a Woman!” It’s an internal thing. It’s how I feel.

**I’m thinking about your message of inclusivity, which is something we talked about at length in 2017. Then, in June 2022, you sent out a message on your socials for Pride Month saying, “I believe in equality. ... And I stand with you forever.” And during our conversation, you really drove that message home. I know you have since apologized for what was perceived as support for Donald Trump when you spoke with The Guardian in 2018 —**

*[Twain’s manager asks that we move on: “We’re not gonna talk about politics on this call.”]*

You can ask the question, and then I can decide if I wanna answer it or not. That’s fair.

**What I’d like to know is how it affected you after that comment was made knowing how upset it made some members of the queer community.**

So what I will say: I’ve always rejected anyone who makes someone feel that they are not worthy or they have to be excluded for some personal judgmental reason. And I’m not a politician. I’m not somebody that follows it well enough to speak on it. I regret speaking on it because by doing that — and this goes for everything as well — in that setting, I wasn’t able to explain why and what elements, the whole picture.

So realizing after how hurtful it was to even say that, I really regretted it. I thought, “Wow. I would never wanna support a policy that would ever do that.” I would never personally do that. I think it’s also good to... let’s just not judge each other, you know? Let’s be open like we’re doing, and honest. And understand each other.

So in the greater understanding of it, anyone that criticizes the importance of the LGBTQ+ community does not belong anywhere in my support system. So no. We need more love. We need less criticism, less judgment. And that means for everything, everyone. And everyone has a right to their own opinion. I regret that anyone felt that I would ever have felt that it was OK to exclude LGBTQ+ [people].

**As a gay person who has been affected by administrations and also has been a fan of yours since I was a kid, I appreciate you answering that question.**

Totally. I so understand that. I think it’s important, though, that we separate... our policies are... it’s its own realm. And I should never have spoken on it. Period.

**It sounds like you don’t go through life thinking about how big your platform is.**

And that was good learning for me, as well. That’s a very good point because as our world expands and our awarenesses expands, the “Queen of Me,” that was a big part of defining myself for myself. Saying, “OK, you’re queen of your successes and you’re queen of your failures. You’re queen of your good judgment and bad judgment.” You gotta take responsibility for yourself. And the way I feel now is probably not the way I’m gonna feel in five years from now about certain things. Because the world is evolving all the time. And it’s changing. And change with the right intentions is only a positive thing. We

See Shania Twain, page 24



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# In the Closet: Stellar Style Pieces for Spring



BY MIKEY ROX

The purge is upon us. Not the one that results in the loss of limbs and life, but rather the return of annual spring cleaning, the collective load-shedding opportunity to rid closets of outdated and unwanted clothing and accessories. Those free spaces won't stay unoccupied for long, however. Update your wardrobe — and your attitude — with these easy-breezy style picks for spring.

## Orttu Lisbon Pants

What would you wear to a boozy, dramatic brunch at the fictional White Lotus resort? Orttu's casual-but-smart woven Lisbon pants in mint and white stripes are a solid choice for all the rich-prick shenanigans you're bound to get up to. \$189, [Orttu.com](https://www.orttu.com)

## Infamous Swim Board Shorts

Put a conch shell up to your ear in Infamous Swim's mid-length Iris trunks — featuring blue dots, lines, shapes and stripes in a printed pattern inspired by the Mediterranean Sea — and you can almost hear Santorini's sirens' songs. \$40, [InfamousSwim.com](https://www.infamousswim.com)



## Duke Dress Sneaker

A minimalist take on the classic crispy sneaker, Ace Marks' Italian leather Duke low-tops — in a light, bright colorway

like champagne — are the perfect pairing for dressed down vacay fits with zero danger of looking underdressed. \$224, [AceMarks.com](https://www.acemarks.com)



## OMHU: x Waykins Watch

You'll make more than one statement sporting Waykins' sunny Recapture watch in audacious yellow (and featuring a vegan leather inlay), which, with the help of Danish beach-cleaning org OMHU, repurposes pollutant sea plastic so compromised marine life can swim another day. \$147, [Trendhim.co.uk](https://www.trendhim.co.uk)

## Lightning Bolt Blazer

Shazam yourself into serving an all-eyes-on-you look in Love Khaos' shimmering, satin-lined lightning bolt blazer, adorned with reversible gold-and-black sequins that change color when touched and complemented with texture-contrasting velvet lapels, elbow pads and front-pocket detailing. \$633, [LoveKhaos.com](https://www.lovekhaos.com)

## Khari Ruby Sunglasses

Seeing the world through literal rose-colored lenses in the Italian-made, Mazzucchelli acetate Khari ruby oversized sunglasses from British-based Kimeze won't change the outcome but it might just improve your outlook. \$305, [Kimeze.us](https://www.kimeze.us)



### Scorpion Brooch

If “I’m the problem, it’s me” were a wearable, it’d be Orttu’s striking scorpion brooch, handmade with gold and silver embroidery thread and silver bugle beads, and officially the least toxic thing about you. \$150, [Orttu.com](http://Orttu.com)

### Grounded People Kicks

There’s a waitlist for Grounded People’s PETA-approved, vegan Jundiai lightweight high-tops, but registering is a no-brainer: the machine-washable, fair-wage kicks are comprised of second-life recycled cotton canvas and laces, come with a five-year warranty, and each sale supports ethical causes. \$229, [GroundedPeople.com](http://GroundedPeople.com)

### Bario Neal Shield Band

Less is more when it comes to warm-weather accessorizing, and Bario Neal’s handmade shield ring with blue enamel relies on centuries-old craft making to produce a graphic, masculine band that transitions from poolside cocktails to patio tapas without looking like you tried too hard. \$570, [Bario-Neal.com](http://Bario-Neal.com)

### Lambskin Bomber Jacket

Swap your go-to denim jacket for the supple Blue Barclay lambskin bomber by Jack Victor, ideal for traveling lighter on a getaway weekend with its perfectly proportioned fit, half-jet side pockets, invisible internal pocket, and sophisticated suede composition. \$1,298, [JackVictor.com](http://JackVictor.com)



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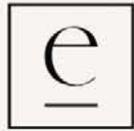
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Shania Twain. Courtesy photo

**◀ Shania Twain**

Continued from page 21

need change. We need to evolve. We need to mature.

And this has been a great... it's been a great eye-opener for me. Understanding too that, yes, it's more important to me as I get older, I care less about people's criticism. But I care more about my effect on others, and that's just being more aware of what that really means. It's great to talk to somebody, one-on-one, about how what one person said, even though not directed in that way at all, affected you and probably so many other people. And then in turn affected me in a very positive way. It's good. Reflection does a lot of good. We learn so much.

**Is there anything else you'd like to say on that note before we move on?**

No, I'm good, and thanks. I'm glad that we got to revisit the question and with a clear objective.

**Let's talk about how Pride is only just around the corner.**

Pride is just around the corner. There's so many wonderful things to be said about that. I mean, so much more freedom to be gained in all realms of society. But the LGBTQ+ [community], I admire the courage because I think that the community has taken strides forward. In my own adult life, period, it's been leaps and bounds. I've got so many friends in the creative world. I mean, [fashion designer] Marc Bouwer is one of them. We've been working together for over 20 years. And there was no such community power and

support then.

It didn't make a difference for our communication, one to one. We were always friends. There were never any barriers there, one to one. But I was so aware of the struggle. It's just good and very rewarding to see so much advancement. I mean, Kim Petras, for example, that's not that long ago, even 15 years ago, even 10 years ago. Would that moment have been possible? Or would it have happened? And Kim is the most — you know, should I say she or they? Correct me so that I get it right.

**Kim uses she.**

I wanna get it right.

Thank you. So Kim is the most angelic person. Genuinely sweet, kind, and I could sense that she was at peace with herself. I hope that that is the case, 'cause that journey has... I haven't asked her about it. But I know it's been difficult. It takes courage. It's difficult. It's challenging. So I just wanna say that Kim is courageous with grace.

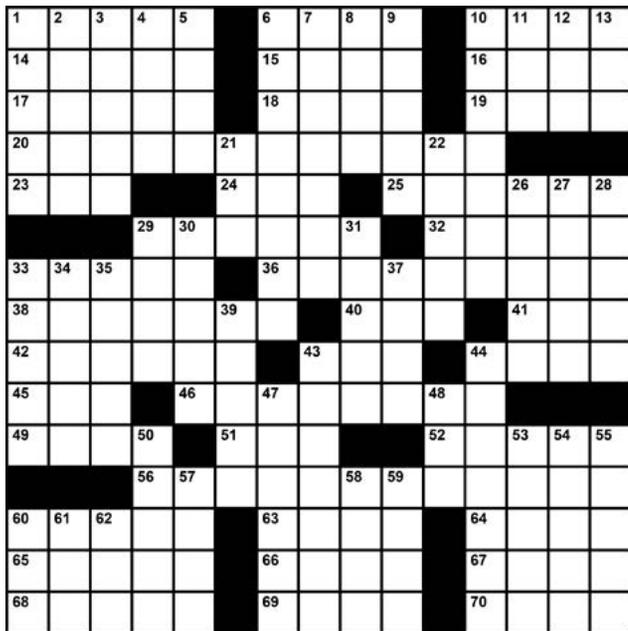
**When you think of your longstanding relationship with the LGBTQ+ community, what does it mean to you to be an LGBTQ+ ally now?**

It's very important. I write music to communicate. I write music to relate to people. And so I'm trying to build relationships through music and friendships through music with people that I can't know in person. It's my avenue. It's my way of reaching out. And so what I say really does matter to me, and what it means to everyone else that's receiving it. And, I mean, mostly through the music, obviously 'cause I do more music than I do talking. That's my real language, you know? Writing, and writing lyrics. Encouraging and inspiring. That's what I look to music for — for inspiration. When I'm on a tour in a show and I've got an audience there, we are on the same page. We're all from very different backgrounds. We're all different ages. We are all coming from different cultures, realities...

**You are the bridge.**

But music is the bridge, not me. So what I say is very important in that sense. You know, it's the music that should do all the talking.

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



36 With 46-Across, 2018 movie of McKinnon  
 38 Instrument that drones  
 40 Drama in the land of Samurai  
 41 Simpson case judge  
 42 Pussycat, perhaps  
 43 The S of RSVP  
 44 Circumcision sound  
 45 Barrie's precipitation  
 46 See 36-Across  
 49 Jane of a 1944 Moorehead flick  
 51 "Love Story" composer  
 52 Some eat it semi-firm  
 56 2016 movie of McKinnon  
 60 Frida's father  
 63 Hollinghurst's "The Folding \_\_\_\_"  
 64 Ball balancers  
 65 Maria's "Do" equivalent  
 66 Enchanted Disney girl  
 67 "Come here often?" is one  
 68 Pup \_\_\_\_ (excited responses)  
 69 "We're here! We're queer!" e.g.  
 70 They may be split

10 Like some kindergarten programs  
 11 "The Name of the Rose" writer  
 12 Oohs' partners  
 13 One of Freddie Mercury's pair  
 21 ASCAP alternative  
 22 Sex appeal  
 26 Stu of early TV  
 27 Christine of "Gross Anatomy"  
 28 Do this after you drop the soap  
 29 "Equal justice under law," to homophobes  
 30 Really queer, to straights  
 31 Skater Sonja  
 33 Cut down to size  
 34 Fran Drescher show, with "The"  
 35 Actress Samantha  
 37 Auction oral outburst  
 39 Saint in Brazil  
 43 Lubricant, at times  
 44 Rosie's "Sleepless in \_\_\_\_"  
 47 Lincoln portrayer Raymond  
 48 Soldier cops  
 50 Everglades wader  
 53 Escort from the door  
 54 Acceptance of LGBT life style, hopefully  
 55 Targets of tops  
 57 Word on either lesbian's towel  
 58 Bouncer for Amelie Mauresmo  
 59 Russian river to the Caspian  
 60 Gentle touch  
 61 Beverage suffix  
 62 Bear lair

## Kiss Me, Kate McKinnon

### Across

1 Long O, on Lesbos  
 6 Porter's fuel?  
 10 What fluffers give  
 14 Has sex alone  
 15 Invitation to a top?  
 16 Dull discomfort  
 17 Proclaims, to King James

18 Future queen of "Star Wars"  
 19 Blow, as a game  
 20 With 33-Across, McKinnon movie in the works  
 23 Language ending  
 24 Word on a lavatory door  
 25 Sings part of "The Lonely Goatherd"  
 29 Wiggle the nose like Samantha  
 32 French Revolution figure  
 33 See 20-Across

## Q Puzzle

### Down

1 Davis of "King"  
 2 Lovemaking responses  
 3 Top  
 4 Postpunk movement  
 5 Straight AIDS victim Arthur  
 6 Toni of "United States of Tara"  
 7 Embarrassingly short  
 8 Infamous Idi  
 9 Like a condom gone bad

See p. 10 for answers

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## ◀ Fisting

Continued from page 14

not totally nonexistent.

(I should probably add a disclaimer: I've never been fisted — and I think it's fine if anyone wants to be on the receiving end of that! But I've been asked to, um, knuckle up, and I'm just not there at that stage of my queer journey, either.)

But I kept going back to the prudish-leaning outrage from the non-New Yorkers who were shocked that a Black man would be fisting another Black man in the middle of a Black gay club. Metro Detroit is obviously home to several Black queers; the city itself is the Blackest in the nation, queer or otherwise. And yet, dare I say it, us queer Black Detroiters can be a bit close-minded to such kinks. Leather and harnesses? Sure — on designated nights, of course. Pig play? Mmm, that might be pushing it. Furrries? I actually happened to be in town staying at my mother's house about a mile from the convention where the Motor City Furry Con was held, and let's just say I didn't see any folks who looked like me on the apps with bunny ears on.

There are reasons for that, in my opinion. It could be as simple as the fact that NYC trends haven't trickled down to the Midwest yet. It could be because some of those kinks are more closely associated with white queer communities. And then there's shame. It's

already built into the gay psyche, regardless of race, but also comes doubly so in some Black communities where we're already raised in the church and under the cross. Too much sexual indulgence — it's called "gluttony" in the Bible — is just too much.

Perhaps it's the lack of a singular space for Black queers in Metro Detroit that prevents those who might be curious about exploring kink from doing so. "Gay bars by and for folks of color are rare and becoming rarer; this explains the special pleasures, for LGBTQ+ people of color, of the occasional parties or monthly events that feature Black or Latin or Bollywood music," writes Greggor Mattson, a professor of sociology at Oberlin College, in his forthcoming book "Who Needs Gay Bars?" "Such queer pop-up parties may seem new to some observers, but they have long been among the only moments of public queer communion for LGBTQ+ people of color. But even in big cities, you're lucky if there's more than one night a month to let loose and let go in a space that feels safe."

This is not to say that there is no fun and debauchery in Black queer Detroit. Prior to the Woodward burning down, I certainly had my fair share of dancing and too many drinks. I love that we've carved out spaces at White Star, Pronto! and Soho as a result. Those spaces are valid and critical. But who will be brave enough to open a space in the Detroit area where, the next time I come home, I can witness someone wrist deep between the cheeks?

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