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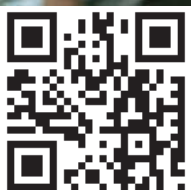
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People hold signs thanking Gov. Andrew Cuomo at the annual Heritage of Pride March, one of the world's oldest and largest gay pride parades, Sunday, June 26, 2011, in New York. AP Photo by Diane Bondareff.

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Publishers

Susan Horowitz
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EDITORIAL

Editor in Chief

Susan Horowitz
susanhorowitz@pridesource.com

News Editor

Tara Cavanaugh
taracavanaugh@pridesource.com

Entertainment Editor

Chris Azzopardi
chrisazzopardi@pridesource.com

Arts & Theater Editor

Donald V. Calamia,
curtaincalls@pridesource.com

Calendar Editor

Benjamin Jenkins
calendar@pridesource.com

CREATIVE

Art Director

David Ano, davidano@pridesource.com

Webmaster & MIS Director

Kevin Bryant, kevinbryant@pridesource.com

Contributing Writers

Charles Alexander, D.A. Blackburn,
Michelle E. Brown, John Corvino, Jack Fertig, Lisa
Keen, Jim Larkin, Anthony Paull,
Andrea Poteet, Crystal Proxmire, Bob Roehr,
Hannah Schwab, Gregg Shapiro, Jody Valley,
D'Anne Witkowski, Rex Wockner, Dan Woog

Cartoonists

Paul Berg, Dave Brousseau, Joan Hilty

Contributing Photographers

Andrew Potter
Emily Locklear

ADVERTISING & SALES

Director of Sales

Jan Stevenson, jan@pridesource.com

Sales Representatives

Ed Bohach, ed@pridesource.com
Ann Cox, anncox@pridesource.com
Greg Flood, gregflood@pridesource.com

National Advertising Representative

Rivendell Media, 212.242.6863

Business Office

Diane Smith, dianesmith@pridesource.com
Nancy Blankenship

Circulation & Distribution

Diane Smith

Pride Source Media Group

11920 Farmington Road
Livonia, Michigan 48150
Phone 734.293.7200 • Fax 734.293.7201

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Between Ourselves

BY TARA CAVANAUGH

Sarah Layton just graduated from the University of Michigan at Dearborn, earning degrees in political science and criminal justice. She also won this year's Political Award at the annual Pride Banquet.



When I hear somebody say something ignorant or uninformed, I correct them just because I can't stop myself.

1 The Pride Banquet Committee gave you the Political Award because you "brought back activism to U-M Dearborn." Can you tell us about that?

This January, I was in the Political Science Association, and we decided we wanted to do something different for an activity to bring awareness about our club. So I proposed that we educate people about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." It was right after the repeal was signed. We got the "Ask Not" documentary. We played it on campus. It got great turnout, and got people really involved with it. Then from there, I started working with Anthony Wagner and Alli Sheppard for an anti-bullying community training day. I took part for the PSA, and we had a table set up to have students sign a petition to their state representatives telling them that they supported an anti-bullying bill. We also registered people to vote and take a pledge to stand up against bullying.

2 Why did you want people to learn more about DADT?

I guess it's a bit of a personal thing. I was looking at joining the military, and I thought there's no way I'm joining because of (DADT). So it's more personal for me. I also have friends who are serving in the military and who have to keep their love life completely secret.

3 Now that you've graduated, what are your career aspirations?

I'm looking at getting involved in law enforcement. Right now I am taking a bunch of tests that I need to do in order to be able to apply to a police academy. There's a bunch of hoops to jump through.

4 What really draws you to law enforcement?

I've always been interested in law enforcement. It goes back to when I was in elementary school. I was kind of a bully. It took me years to realize that I didn't have to behave like that. I feel like by getting into law enforcement, I can be a positive influence, and help people. Being able to help people and serve the community is really something that I want to do.

5 Do you think there's more activism in your future? You already seem like you enjoy helping others.

Yeah, I don't see myself quitting anytime soon. I'm the kind of person, when I hear somebody say something ignorant or uninformed, I correct them just because I can't stop myself. I'm afraid that's not changing.

Between Ourselves is a bi-weekly feature that highlights those who work on behalf of Michigan's LGBT and allied community. To recommend someone for Between Ourselves, email our news editor Tara Cavanaugh at tara@pridesource.com.

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Mayor Michael Bloomberg, with flag, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Governor Andrew Cuomo and Cuomo's girlfriend Sandra Lee, left to right, walk in the annual Heritage of Pride March, one of the world's oldest and largest gay pride parades, Sunday June 26, 2011, in New York. The parade became a victory celebration after New York's historic decision to legalize same-sex marriage last Friday. AP Photo by Diane Bondareff.

New York legalizes same-sex marriage

Long awaited victory for equal rights sparks celebrations across the nation

BY REX WOCKNER

New York state legalized same-sex marriage June 24.

The Senate passed the bill 33-29 at 10:29 p.m. and Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed it into law less than 90 minutes later. Same-sex couples can begin marrying July 24.

"This state, when it is at its finest, is a beacon of justice," Cuomo said.

Twenty-nine of the Senate's 30 Democrats voted for the bill, along with four of the body's 32 Republicans.

Some activists said New York's legalization of same-sex marriage marks the end of the road for the anti-same-sex-marriage movement, which took away gay people's right to marry in California in 2008 and in Maine in 2009, removed from the bench Iowa Supreme Court justices who legalized same-sex marriage there, and persuaded a majority of U.S. states to ban same-sex marriage by law or in their constitutions.

"Game over," said Kate Kendell, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

"Now that we've made it here, we'll make it everywhere," said Freedom to Marry President Evan Wolfson, calling it an "epic win."

"There's no doubt that today will be revered as a major turning point in civil rights history," said American Foundation for Equal Rights

Board President Chad Griffin. "A bipartisan group of legislators have affirmed that equal rights for every citizen is not a partisan issue, but an American value."

AFER is behind the federal lawsuit against California's Proposition 8, via which voters re-banned same-sex marriage in 2008. The state constitutional amendment was struck down as a violation of the U.S. Constitution in 2010, but the ruling is now stalled in the federal appeal process.

"This victory sends a message that marriage equality across the country will be a reality very soon," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey said the legalization of same-sex marriage in New York "honors New York's unique history as being the place where the modern gay rights movement sprang to life 42 years ago this month at the Stonewall Inn in New York City — a place where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people stood up and fought back for their dignity and rightful place in society."

Longtime New York City activist Corey Johnson called it "a watershed moment."

"It's a turning point," he said. "This is a significant and tremendous loss for NOM (the anti-gay activist group National Organization for Marriage). In many ways, it takes the wind out of their sails."

The White House issued a tepid statement saying: "The states should determine for themselves how best to uphold the rights of their own citizens. The process in New York worked just as it should. ... The president has long believed that gay and lesbian couples deserve the same rights and legal protections as straight couples."

"This victory sends a message that marriage equality across the country will be a reality very soon."

—Human Rights Campaign
President Joe Solmonese

President Barack Obama has refused to come out in support of same-sex couples' right to marry, saying he prefers "civil unions." He has said, however, that his views on same-sex marriage are "evolving." In recent days, the media has again highlighted the fact that in 1996, when he was running for the Illinois Senate,

Obama told the Chicago gay newspaper *Outlines*, "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages, and would fight efforts to prohibit such marriages." See tinyurl.com/obama1996.

In New York City, at least 1,000 people took to the streets in celebration outside the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. When police made an early attempt to clear the unauthorized street party, those gathered reportedly chanted, "We're here, we're queer, we're fabulous, don't fuck with us."

New York has no way for voters to undo laws or amend the state constitution. The only ways to re-ban same-sex marriage in New York would be to pass a repeal measure through the Legislature or call a constitutional convention. Both possibilities are extremely unlikely.

Same-sex marriage also is legal in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Washington, D.C. Same-sex marriages from elsewhere are recognized as marriages in Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island and California (if the marriage took place before Proposition 8 passed).

Eleven other nations allow same-sex couples to marry — Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Mexico (where same-sex marriages are allowed only in the capital city but are recognized nationwide).

Community reactions to marriage equality in N.Y.

“Winning the freedom to marry in New York truly is a transformative moment for committed couples and for our country, a triumph for love and equality under the law. Now that we’ve made it here, we’ll make it everywhere – and as Americans’ hearts open and minds continue to change in favor of the freedom to marry, the momentum coming from New York’s giant step forward brings a nationwide end to marriage discrimination closer than ever.”

–Evan Wolfson, founder and president of Freedom to Marry

“Michiganders should take time to celebrate this victory for the LGBTQ community and rejoice in the progressive stance some parts of the country are moving in. At the same time, however, we must be conscious and outraged at the attacks confronting our community here at home. In the same week as the historic legislation was passed in New York, LGBTQ Michigander’s rights are threatened by our own state legislators. Two anti-gay, homophobic bills passed through committee in the Republican-controlled Michigan Congress this past week, one banning public employers from offering partner benefits to unmarried couples, and another stripping unions from having the authority to bargain for these same benefits.

“Additionally, a couple of weeks ago the City Council of Holland, Mich. voted 5-4 against extending civil rights protections in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity for both housing and employment. As our state struggles with financial instability, continued high unemployment, and losing college graduates at a record pace to neighboring states, you would think our elected officials have more important issues to address than to strip the few rights LGBTQ people have in Michigan.”

–Duane Breijak, vice chair of the Michigan Democratic Party’s LGBT & Allies Caucus

“Committed gay and lesbian couples living in our nation’s third largest state will finally have the freedom to marry in

their home state. Respect and security for their love, commitment, and families is what this victory is really all about. A rare coalition of leaders from all walks of life fought together to make this happen.

“This win shows that Americans are ready, more than ever, to treat gay and lesbian couples with full equality. Unfortunately, right-wing forces worked hard to deny this opportunity in Michigan. We hope for the day that gay and lesbian couples achieve the freedom to marry in our own state. It will make our state more welcoming and competitive while honoring our commitment to fairness. While we’re very happy for New Yorkers, we must recognize that Michigan’s lack of policy addressing discrimination, hate crimes and bullying has a devastating impact on many gay and transgender citizens.”

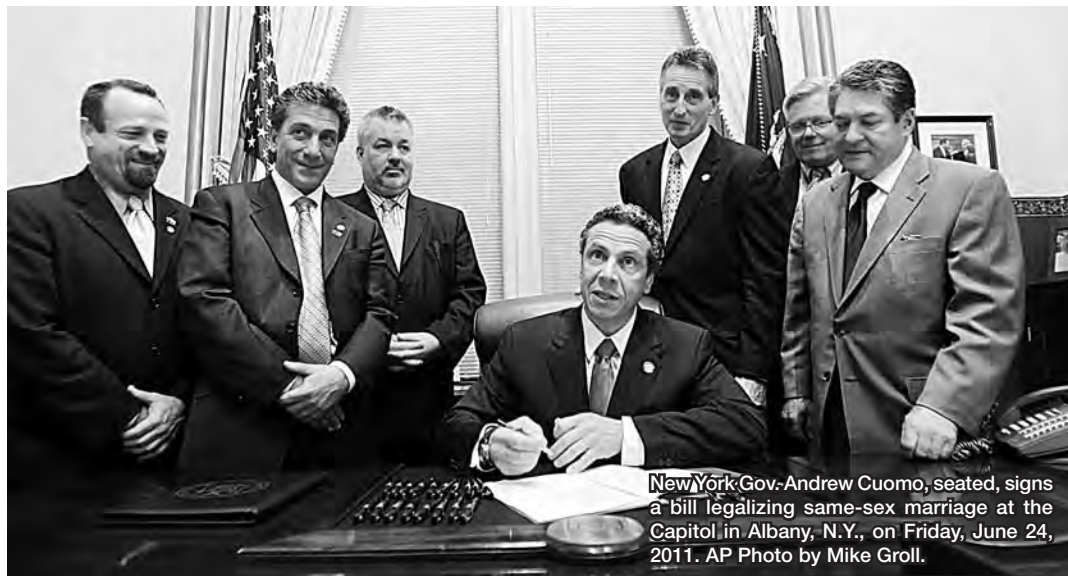
–Denise Brogan-Kator, interim executive director of Equality Michigan

“It’s a resounding victory for justice. This vote means that every man and woman will be treated equally in the county clerks’ offices, the courts, and the administrative agencies of the state of New York. It means that every single New Yorker will have access to the full rights and responsibilities that come with a marriage license.

“At our founding, what made America different from every other country that existed before was a commitment to an ideal that had never been advanced – that all are created equal, endowed by their Creator with the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our history as a nation has been one of striving to make those words ever more true. Today, our state rose to the challenge, and New York, once again, has carried on this great American tradition.

“My deepest thanks and congratulations to all who worked so hard to make this happen: Governor Cuomo, the Legislature, Mayor Bloomberg, Speaker Quinn and the thousands of other advocates. We have made history.”

–New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman



BTL Viewpoint Game changer

BY SUSAN HOROWITZ



When I took to the streets of NYC for my first Pride March in 1972, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was 15 years old. The march was only in its third year and I never could have imagined back then the progress that would be made in my own lifetime. At 19 my

journey began, and I never looked back.

That year, thousands of us marched up Sixth Avenue to the loud chant of antigay epithets and tomatoes thrown at us. Yet the spirit of those gathered could not be broken. We were out of the closet, heads held high and we were not going back, no way, no how. “We are everywhere!” read the banners and soon we would be connected through community all over the country and the world.

Over the years, Pride sprung up across the planet in thousands of cities, large and small. It was word-of-mouth marketing pre-Internet days, connected by rainbow flags waving across state capitols and in the streets.

In each of the decades since Stonewall, the collective abiding principle of coming out – telling our stories at home and at work – has built a movement that, in part, culminated in the signing of New York state’s same-sex marriage equality legislation last Friday. (I am certain that then-15-year-old Cuomo had witnessed many NYC Pride marches go by and never forgot them.)

Fast forward to now-Gov. Cuomo, who not only had the political will, but personal heart to see his campaign promise realized. News reports of the weeks and days leading up to the historic vote in the New York state senate showed Cuomo’s personal signature not only on the final piece of legislation, but on the negotiations behind the scenes.

A true game changer in the New York initiative was his leadership at the top, combined with coordinated strategies that educated New Yorkers about the issues of full equality. Business leaders, entertainment stars and sports stars jumped on the equality bandwagon as did several Republican state senators – yes, Republican. This diverse mix is what it took to push the bill into law.

Back home in Michigan, we can take away a lot from this historic event in New York. First, we should not give in or give up in spite of the current political climate. Get inspired and invigorated by the New York

events and get involved. New York took more than thirty years of work and that also included setbacks from time to time. Right now our political and social agencies here in the state need volunteers. So decide right now to get involved, or re-involved if you haven’t been in a while. All our agencies are seeking out board members and volunteers willing to serve and they need you to step up.

I have never been more hopeful – in fact certain – that with commitment on each of our individual parts, we will achieve full equality here in Michigan in the next decade.

Second, we need all our agencies working toward full equality to put aside “brand identity building” and work together toward a common set of strategic goals – it is essential that you continue to move toward unity in this work. So revealing in the backstory reporting of behind the scenes activity in New York was how Gov. Cuomo called all the LGBT groups into the room and demanded they stop their infighting and work together in a coalition. He blamed them directly for the law failing to be passed in 2009. The time for excuses is long over here in the Michigan, so this is a callout asking our agencies to get with the program.

Third, we need to build stronger alliances with like-minded business and community leaders around the state. It is simply bad business to be non-inclusive and business and communities suffer by allowing Michigan to linger near the bottom of the equality equation.

I have never been more hopeful – in fact certain – that with commitment on each of our individual parts, we will achieve full equality here in Michigan in the next decade. So let’s get to work. Join the ranks. Together in unity!

Susan is co-publisher of BTL newspaper. She has been working for LGBT rights full time since she was 22 years old.

Pride Banquet Awards celebrate 25 years

Awards recognize local activists for commitment to community

BY CRYSTAL A. PROXMIRE

WARREN— No one played the straight man in the comedy routine done by Downriver PFLAG founder Michael Neubecker and Oakland County Commissioner Craig Covey. The two hosted the 25th Annual Pride Banquet on June 23 at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Warren.

Neubecker joked about his son's transformation from a sloppy teenager to a clean and well-dressed gay man who must have "gone to gay boot camp" to pick up his fashion sense. The good-natured upportive father also showed off his "man boobs" and the way his nipples poke through his shirts because he refuses to layer the way his son says he should.

Covey apologized for being late by saying he heard the awards had been moved to Hart Plaza. Mid-presentation he got laughs as he turned to the tall, thin, gray-haired Neubecker and said, "Hey, you're not Leslie Thompson," referring to the former Affirmations director who had co-hosted with him in the past.

The seasoned activists' banter was tempered by the seriousness of the awards, including a surprise "Founder's Award" for Covey for having started the tradition of recognizing heroes in the gay community 25 years ago. Covey, who also founded the advocacy group that is now Michigan AIDS Coalition and has gained fame as the first openly gay mayor in Michigan, said that the key to the community moving forward is keeping the issue of equal rights in the media and on the minds of the public.

Sharing the stories of activism within the community was a strong focus of this year's awards ceremony, and a diverse group of people were honored.

Bill Jefferson came from across the state to accept the Unity Award for his work as the president of the Kalamazoo LGBT Professionals Network and as the Co-Chair of Kalamazoo Pride. Olga Summers, a board member of Detroit Latinos, won the Diversity and Inclusion Award for her work helping at-risk youth in Southwest Detroit.

The Community Spirit Award was given to Dennis and Ren Matveyev, founders of The Boi Club. The gentlemen host a get-together for gay men in Ann Arbor, and run a secure, private dating site at www.boiclubparty.com. The phenomenon started in September 2009 with just four friends getting together and deciding to expand their social circle. Now it connects up to 60 people each week. And after twelve years of coupled bliss, the Matveyevs are confidently helping others find love, friendship and support.

A more business-minded approach to connection has been necessary in the gay community as well. That's why Ties Like Me was given the 2011 Business Award. This networking group was started in 2005 by Robert Lalicki and Reid Beyerlein and has successfully connected gay business professionals across the state.

Dating and business are not the only connections needed in the gay community. Each year the Pride Banquet honors someone for their efforts in bringing people together in sport. Chris Harris started a sports revolution when he began



This year's award winners. Back row from left: Olga Summers, Toby Brock, Ren Matveyev, Chris Harris, Bill Jefferson, Reid Beyerlein, Robert Lalicki, Craig Covey. Front row from left: Jane Kelly, Dennis Matveyev, Angel Carrion, John Di Donato, Sarah Layton, Chris Azzopard. BTL photos: Matthew Paquin.

the Metro Detroit Softball League seven years ago. It started out with six teams, and has now grown to 24 teams with more than 500 players. The league has also raised more than \$10,000 for local charities in the past four years.

Not everything is fun and games though, and the Pride Banquet awards take great care to recognize those who work to overcome prejudice and other harsh circumstances that affect the LGBT community, particularly the youth.

Angel Carrion was recognized with the Rising Star Award. This young man came to Affirmations as a troubled youth who used to beat up other kids in order to distract from being outed. Now he mentors youth at the community center.

Jane Kelley also dedicates her time to helping youth. She is a nurse, a clinical psychologist and a self-described "mother on a mission." She watched her own son face bullying, and she got involved to end bullying through

anti-bias training, organizing two regional youth summits, working on the Detroit Safe Schools Initiative and forming a parent support group. "I needed to feel not so powerless," she said.

Sarah Layton put the power in the hands of her peers through education. A recent graduate in political science and criminal justice, she was honored with the Political Award for "bringing activism back to the University of Michigan at Dearborn." Layton worked to educate her peers about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and the need for anti-bullying legislation in the state.

John Di Donato was given the Lifetime Achievement Award for a life of activism that began with his days in the U.S. Army. "I felt it was my duty to be in the Army. I was not happy that my government put me in a position where I had to lie (about being gay), but lie I did," he said. Later as he recovered in a hospital bed and received a Purple Heart for his injuries, he said "they told me it was from a grateful country, and

I wondered how grateful my nation would be if they knew I was gay." From then on he didn't hide it. Di Donato went on to be one of the founding members of the Forum Foundation and of a network for gay teachers. The 66-year-old activist said he is too young to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award: "I will not be stopping. I will not be sitting on a rocking chair until we have all the rights and responsibilities that go along with being a partner. That goal I hope to see before my baby blues close forever."

And of course, none of the stories would be told if it weren't for the hard working reporters who turn the crazy events of the world into digestible bits of information and inspiration. Between The Lines Entertainment Editor Chris Azzopardi was given the Media Award for his work bringing the community together with insightful news and fun features that connect BTL readers. He has gained national fame as a reporter for Q Syndicate and has shared the stories of American icons like Morgan Fairchild, Angelina Jolie, Natalie Portman, Cher, and most recently Lady Gaga. BTL Co-Publisher Jan Stevenson called him her "personal consultant on what's cool."

The Forum Foundation also presented scholarships to Toby Brock and Trevor Scott to help them with their educational goals.

The Pride Banquet is a collaborative effort of the following local organizations: Affirmations, AI GAMEA, Black Pride Society, Detroit Latin@z, Dignity Detroit, Equality Michigan, Forum Foundation, GLEAM, Just4Us, Motor City Bears and Renaissance Unity.

Find more event photos and speeches online at www.pridesource.com



"I will not be stopping. I will not be sitting on a rocking chair until we have all the rights and responsibilities that go along with being a partner."

—John Di Donato, this year's Lifetime Achievement Award winner

Boycott threatens Holland businesses over failed anti-discrimination ordinance

Until Love Is = uses Facebook, Web to show support for equality

BY JEREMY MARTIN

HOLLAND— A group calling itself “Until Love Is =” has been making a social networking stir in West Michigan. Armed with a Facebook following of more than 2,400 people, the group founded by Erin Wilson of Grand Rapids is attempting to sway Holland area business to take a stand against inequality by showing their support for the LGBT community.

The group was created in opposition to the Holland City Council’s June 15 decision to not amend the current anti-discrimination ordinances. The proposed amendment, brought forth by the Holland Human Relations Commission and struck down by a 5-4 vote, would have added the words “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to the current ordinances governing housing and hiring.

Until Love Is = is also calling for a citywide boycott of business that do not support the amendment. A message on the group’s Facebook page states: “We hope Holland businesses (will) take a strong and immediate stance in opposing that exclusion from protection. We’ll promote patronage of any business that formally and openly opposes that exclusion.”

Wilson hopes this piece of digital civil disobedience opens enough eyes to force the city council to reverse their decision on the proposed amendment.

“We hope to accomplish a re-vote in Holland, and the addition of protections for sexual orientation and gender identity, bottom line. From there – if and when – the possibilities would compound exponentially. If we can do this – this one simple thing, constructively and positively – then the sky’s the limit,” Wilson said.

Steve Depolo, a member of the group, doesn’t necessarily believe that boycotting businesses alone is enough. In a message posted on the group’s page Depolo said, “I never

considered this a boycott against businesses only. There are plenty of cultural, religious, and outdoorsy venues – beaches and parks – that I will not attend or spend my money on because of Holland’s unfortunately un-American decision.”

Though neither the Holland City Council nor the Chamber of Commerce have publicly commented on the group, some believe that a boycott of this nature will do more harm than good the city.

“A boycott is unfortunate,” Council member Myron Trethewey said. “The government is always going to be on the opposite side of somebody.”

Until Love Is = was formed the day after the

vote and has grown rapidly in both membership and scope. Many members have become active on the message board posting notes of support or asking what they can do to help.

Some, like Kimberly Payne-Naik, have created yard signs proclaiming their allegiance; others are wearing custom made t-shirts.

“I didn’t anticipate anything I started would propel to this level; however, I knew the sentiment existed widely,” Wilson said. “The biggest surprise is the way the momentum continues to grow.”

As of now, two area business have formally joined the group; Globe Design and Vision at 49 E. Eighth St. and Blue House Bistro at 220 W. Eighth St.

“We set out our goals for the next week. These include additional partnerships, formalizing ties with leaders, soliciting more businesses to ‘come out’ on this issue within Holland, and coordinating apparel and signage orders. As for next week ... I feel like much depends on the next few days,” Wilson said about how she hopes the group will grow.

The group’s Facebook page can be found at <http://untilloveisequal.com/fb>, and their standard website can be viewed at <http://untilloveisequal.com>.

“We hope to accomplish a re-vote in Holland. From there the possibilities would compound exponentially. If we can do this – this one simple thing, constructively and positively – then the sky’s the limit.”

–Erin Wilson, founder of Until Love Is =

House Republicans attack same-sex benefits

Committee approves bills that strip fringe benefits from public institutions

BY TARA CAVANAUGH

LANSING— A committee in the Michigan House approved two bills last Tuesday that restrict public employee benefits only to married couples. Now the bills will go to the House floor for debate.

The House Oversight, Reform and Ethics Committee held a public hearing on HB-4770 and HB-4771, both sponsored by Rep. Dave Agema, R-Grandville. The first bill prohibits state employers from offering health benefits to anyone who is not married to the employee. The latter bill reiterates that restriction for public schools, which would also include universities.

“The people voted in 2004, that for purposes of benefits, you have to be married,” Agema said in an audio clip on the GOP House website. “So (HB-4770) basically says there are no same-sex unmarried benefits.”

In 2004, Michigan voters approved Proposal 2, which defined marriage as only between a man and a woman. In 2008, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that public institutions that offered “domestic partner benefits” were in violation of state law.

So far, public employers have been able to get around that 2008 ruling and provide health

benefits to unmarried couples. But those benefits aren’t called “domestic partner benefits.” They’re called benefits for “other eligible adults,” and they allow an unrelated adult to access health benefits from a state or university employee. In the bills discussed on the House floor last week, these benefits are referred to as “fringe benefits.”

“Other eligible adult” benefits are set to take effect in October for state employees. The state employee unions negotiated for the benefits in January. State Republicans tried to overturn the benefits, and they needed to muster a two-thirds majority vote in both the House and Senate to do so. They succeeded in the Senate, but not in the House.

After that failure, Republicans inserted language into their budget proposal this spring that penalized universities five percent of their state funding for offering the fringe benefits. But Gov. Rick Snyder’s legal counsel warned in a letter that the penalty was unconstitutional and unenforceable.

“The point of the letter was that universities have a certain autonomy,” said Emily Dievendorf, policy director of Equality Michigan. “That might apply to this as well. The letter didn’t talk about these bills, but they are in the same vein.

That’s a discussion that’s likely going to come up when it gets to the House floor. We can’t assume these will easily fly through the rest of the legislature.”

Dievendorf said that HB-4770 and HB-4771 would be not voted on before the current legislative session breaks for summer. There are no companion bills yet in the Michigan Senate.

“While these benefits are often used by both straight and gay couples, anti-gay lawmakers are specifically trying to deny gay couples the

ability to care for their families,” Dievendorf said. “Hard-working state employees should be compensated appropriately, and that’s why these benefits are offered. Rep. Agema’s radically biased social agenda is out of touch with Michigan values.”

The House Oversight, Reform and Ethics Committee consists of Bradford C. Jacobsen, R-46; Cynthia S. Denby, R-47; Amanda Price, R-89; Timothy Bledsoe, D-1; and Lisa Brown, D-1. Tom McMillin, R-45, is the committee chair.



“Anti-gay lawmakers are specifically trying to deny gay couples the ability to care for their families. Hard-working state employees should be compensated appropriately.”

–Emily Dievendorf, policy director of Equality Michigan

Battle Creek hosts first Pride event

BATTLE CREEK— Battle Creek will hold a first-ever series of Pride events, starting on Tuesday, June 28 with a night of LGBT history and the West Michigan Gay Men's Chorus at First Congregational Church. On Friday, July 8, a White Party will be held at Partners Bar and on Saturday, July 9, a Pride Family Picnic will be held at Willard Beach Park. The events end on Sunday, July 10 with a candlelight memorial vigil. Organizer Larry Dillion, who spent nearly a year organizing the series with the "BC Pride" committee, hopes to have an official Pride festival next year. For more information on dates and locations, check BTL's calendar, email battlecreekpride@yahoo.com or contact Dillion at 269-420-8170.

Dave Garcia to lead Affirmations

Community center finds new executive director after 9 months

BY BENJAMIN JENKINS

FERNDALE— Affirmations community center has chosen a new executive director. Dave Garcia will take over the post as executive director on Aug. 15.

Affirmations' community-based search committee, consisting of Metro Detroit area LGBT and allied members such as Kofi Adoma, Jeff Antaya, Mark Blanke, London Bell, Carolyn Burdi Zip Johnson, Arlene Kish and Kathleen LaTosch, came to the decision after a nearly year-long search.

"It's been a long and committed process - we wanted to make sure we had the best candidate," says Zip Johnson, co-chair of the search committee and vice president of the board of directors at Affirmations. "We were very impressed with Dave and are excited to bring him to Affirmations."

"I'm excited to start this new chapter of advocacy and partnership with the LGBT and allied community throughout Michigan," Garcia said. "Affirmations has and will continue to play a key role for the LGBT community throughout our state and I am looking forward to working with those



"I am looking forward to working with those who support us to create a safer, more welcoming and fair Michigan for all LGBT and allied people."

—Dave Garcia

who support us to create a safer, more welcoming and fair Michigan for all LGBT and allied people."

Garcia began advocacy work for the LGBT community in 2000, after being fired as Community Services Coordinator of Swartz Creek for attempting to start a Gay Straight Alliance in the public schools. Currently Garcia serves as

the executive director of Kalamazoo's Gay and Lesbian Resource Center.

When asked about the fate of Kalamazoo's GLRC, Garcia said, "We've been putting together a transition plan, as the center has known this was a possibility. (The executive committee) will likely have a plan available by the end of the week."

Students lobby for anti-bullying bill

Gutsy teenagers tell lawmakers in state Capitol to protect all students

BY TARA CAVANAUGH

LANSING— More than three dozen students from area high schools took the state capitol by storm last Wednesday, telling their lawmakers they need to be protected.

The students, who take part in who take part in Riot Youth, an LGBTQQA program at Ann Arbor's Neutral Zone, lobbied their representatives and senators to vote for an anti-bullying bill. Michigan is one of only six states that does not have an anti-bullying law.

There are two versions of the anti-bullying bill, one that lists specific classes of students to protect, and another general bill that does not list any classes. The teens want lawmakers to vote for the one "with teeth."

"We just really want to stress how important enumeration is to an anti-bullying bill because without enumeration, these bills pretty much don't do anything, just lip service," said Mishka Repaska, who attends Community High School in Ann Arbor. "We want to talk about how all students are going to be protected under this bill." Repaska and a small group of the students were scheduled to talk with staffers of Sen. Joe Hune, R-22.

Another small group of the students talked with Sen. Rebekah Warren, D-18 and Sen. Randy Richardville, R-17. Sen. Glenn Anderson, D-6, met with the entire group of the students.

Before the students talked with their legislators, they also performed "Gayrilla Theater" in the glass rotunda in the Capitol



Students from area high schools lobbied lawmakers in Lansing on June 22 to pass an anti-bullying bill that would protect all students. Rep. Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor, watched the students perform "Gayrilla Theater" and encouraged them to keep speaking up. BTL photo: Benjamin Jenkins.

building. The performance spells out the difficulties of being an LGBT teen in high school.

One by one, they ended the performance with this demand:

"You've heard some of our stories, but there are many more out there. It is your job to find them. Talk to students. Ask them about their

stories. Help up access resources. Give us your time. Give us your protection. Help make schools safer for us. Help make everywhere safer for us. Help us create a caring community, in our district, in our county, in our state. Do right. Be adults!"

Rep Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor, viewed the performance and thanked the students.

"Sometimes you may feel that you're walking through deep sand and you're not getting a lot of traction. But let me tell you, when you look back in the review mirror you'll realize you've gone quite a distance."

—Rep. Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor

"Keep up your activism, doing what you're doing, speaking up for the things you care about," he said. "Sometimes you may feel that you're walking through deep sand and you're not getting a lot of traction. But let me tell you, when you look back in the review mirror you'll realize you've gone quite a distance."

Check out a video of the teens' "Gayrilla Theater" performance online at pridesource.com

Sparks fly over need for Detroit 'gayborhood'

Town hall meeting draws more than 80 people in debate

BY JAN STEVENSON

DETROIT— Two LGBT community leaders squared off at a feisty town hall meeting in downtown Detroit on June 21. For Joe Posch of SupergayDetroit.com, the need is obvious for a "gayborhood" within the city limits of Detroit. But Detroit City Council President and mayoral aspirant Charles Pugh said that establishing a primarily gay area in Detroit would be counterproductive.

"If you go to the existing neighborhoods in Detroit you will find that gay people are already involved. Neighborhoods are already integrated and should continue that way," said Pugh emphatically. "I am the city council president, and I will be the mayor for everyone!"

Posch shot back that Detroit is a tough place for LGBT to move to because it is hard to find LGBT people. "We need visibility. I didn't move here as a TV personality, and it is a hard city to move to. A little bit here, a little bit there doesn't have much impact," said Posch who was referring to Pugh's celebrity status as a former Fox 2 News anchorman.

"Who here hasn't been asked by visitors, 'Where's the gay neighborhood?'" asked Posch of the mixed crowd of about 80 people at the town hall meeting at the Park Bar in Midtown. "The



Gay Detroit town hall panelists argued whether a "gayborhood" would help or hurt the LGBT cause in Detroit. From left to right; Joe Posch of SupergayDetroit.com, Roland Leggett, field organizer at Equality Michigan, Kirsten Ussery from the Downtown Detroit Partnership and The Villages CDC, Detroit City Council President Charles Pugh and moderator Nick Piotrowski. BTL photo: Jan Stevenson.

gay community is largely invisible in Detroit. We don't need it for protection as much as we did in the 1980s, but we do need it as an entry point. Do we really want to tell people who are new to the area that they have to go to Ferndale to find gay people?"

"I think we need more visibility. I love seeing people be visible in business and politically,"

said panelist Roland Leggett, field organizer at Equality Michigan. "It's not just about the houses in an area. It's about out businesses, and the impact that can have on policies and voting," he said.

"I'm from North Carolina, and now live on Detroit's east side. During Motor City Pride weekend gay and straight neighbors flew the rainbow flag. It was great!" said Kirsten Ussery,

"If you go to the existing neighborhoods in Detroit you will find that gay people are already involved. Neighborhoods are already integrated and should continue that way."

—Charles Pugh, Detroit City Council President

chair of the Downtown Detroit Partnership and the Villages CDC, two neighborhood organizations. "We need to build more community involvement at the neighborhood level," she said.

The Gay Detroit town hall meeting was presented by Model D, WDET FM and Unity Michigan.

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After the success in New York, we're thinking about Michigan. What do you think is the biggest obstacle to marriage equality in our state?

Narrow-minded politicians and the citizens who vote for them. Also, no support from our governor.
–Johnny Rheume

Religious ignorance.
–Amy K. Milligan

Put it on the ballot and get the vote out in Detroit, East Lansing, Flint and East Grand Rapids and you stand a chance.
–Kolleen Wilson

The bad economy and the Republican leadership. Having a bad economy means everyone is more worried about money than they are about queer issues.
–Vanessa Vojinov

The very vocal and well-funded conservative organizations that spread propaganda about the dire consequences. I think the more places that allow marriage equality, the easier it will be to convince the fair-minded people of Michigan to vote for it. I do not believe spending a great deal of money is the answer to changing the minds of people to vote for progressive issues, I think one-on-one conversations are most likely to be successful in changing the inertia to keep things as they are. Propaganda will convince people to vote against change, but is much less successful in persuading them to vote for change.
–Bob Bond

The need for MORE straight allies to show support and unite with our cause.
–Bill Jefferson

Comments may be edited for grammar and length.



Join the conversation ...

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S/he Said

COMPILED BY HOWARD ISRAEL

Marriage equality for New York



Andrew Cuomo

"The story of how same-sex marriage became legal in New York is about shifting public sentiment and individual lawmakers moved by emotional appeals from gay couples who wish to be wed. But, behind the scenes, it was really about a Republican Party reckoning with a profoundly changing power dynamic, where Wall Street donors and gay-rights advocates demonstrated more might and muscle than a Roman Catholic hierarchy and an ineffective opposition. And it was about a Democratic governor, himself a Catholic, who used the force of his personality and relentlessly strategic mind to persuade conflicted lawmakers to take a historic leap."

–In an article titled "Behind N.Y. Gay Marriage, an Unlikely Mix of Forces," nytimes.com, June 25.



Evan Wolfson

"We will continue to grow the number of Americans who support the freedom to marry. Not only is there now majority support for ending discrimination in marriage, but the freedom to marry is riding a demographic wave. Roughly 60 percent of millennials – voters under 30 who represent the largest generation ever – overwhelmingly support marriage rights for loving, committed same-sex couples. Their support ranges across virtually every demographic, including Republicans and even evangelicals. Elected officials looking to the future, let alone history, see voters – Democratic, independent, and increasingly, Republican – who want them to stand for the freedom to marry."

–Evan Wolfson, president of Freedom to Marry, in his column titled "The Freedom To Marry: What's Next After New York?," huffingtonpost.com, June 25. Freedom to Marry is a campaign to win marriage equality nationwide.



Frank Bruni

"(T)he wish and push to be married cast gay men and lesbians in the most benign, conservative light imaginable, not as enemies of tradition but as aspirants to it. In the quest for integration and validation, saying 'I do' to 'I do' is much more effective – not to mention more reflective of the way most gay people live – than strutting in leather on a parade float. We're not trying to undermine the institution of marriage, a task ably handled by the likes of Tiger Woods, Arnold Schwarzenegger, John Edwards and too many other onetime role models to mention. We're paying it an enormous compliment."

–Frank Bruni, in his column titled "To Know Us Is to Let Us Love," nytimes.com, June 25.



James D. Esseks

"The current marriage and relationships landscape is strikingly different from what it was just ten years ago. In 2001, there were no states with marriage, one state (Vermont) with civil unions, and two (California and Hawaii) that had limited state-level domestic partner registries. Today, six states plus D.C. allow same-sex couples to marry, three more respect marriages of same-sex couples validly performed in other states, eight provide civil unions or comprehensive domestic partnerships, and three more have more limited domestic partnership systems. That's 20 states plus D.C. that provide some significant state-level relationship protections, and those states are home to 130 million people."

–James D. Esseks, director of the ACLU National LGBT & AIDS Project, in an email titled "On a Roll – Marriage in New York!," about the NY State Senate's passage of the marriage bill, aclu.org/LGBT, June 24.



Parting Glances Then and Now

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Out life in Life!

For over 50 years Life magazine informed Americans what was happening in the States and abroad. Its photos and content were dramatic, mostly conservative, occasionally controversial, once in awhile shocking.

When Life folded in 1973, circulation was 13 million; readership, ten times that amount. Its sister publication, Time, continues to this day.

Five years before the Stonewall Riots of 1969, Life tackled a little discussed, taboo subject: "Homosexualities in America." An exposé focusing on the "gay underworld" of cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.

Thanks to Life, Middle Americans woke up to the fact that homosexuals were purportedly growing in number. Becoming more visible. Watch out! They're a social threat to be somehow remedied.

In 1964, San Francisco was not the dynamic gay center of Castro/Market Street, clone-look militancy. It hadn't the high-density population complex of the 1970s and pre-AIDS 1980s; but Life's wide-audience article – unintentionally, to be sure – served as a catalyst for early gay migration there.

(My own first visit was in 1975. I was both fascinated and overwhelmed by The Castro. It didn't help that I'd been drinking martinis all the way on American Airlines. First class. Jet lag caught up. I came back three days later. No class. I've been back twice in the mid-90s. Sober.)

Life opened its exposé head on: "Homosexuality shears across the spectrum of American life – the professional, the arts, business and labor. It always has. But today, especially in big cities, homosexuals are discarding their furtive ways and openly admitting, even flaunting, their deviation.

"Homosexuals have their own drinking places, their special assignation streets, even their own organizations. And for every obvious homosexual, there are probably nine nearly impossible to detect. This social disorder, which society tries to suppress, has forced itself into the public eye because it does present a problem – and parents especially are concerned.

"The myth and misconception with which homosexuality has so long been clothed must be cleared away, not to condone it but to cope with it."

Accompanying the 14-page article are a dozen photos. Nameless gay men clustered in dark bars or milling about on dimly lighted streets. A caption reads, "These brawny young men in their leather caps, shirts, jackets and pants are practicing homosexuals, men who turn to other men for affection and sexual satisfaction.

"They are part of what they call the 'gay world,' which is actually a sad and often sordid world."

Gay bars are exposed: "As each new customer walks into the dimly lit room he will lock eyes with a half dozen young men before reaching his place at the bar. Throughout the evening there is a constant turnover of customers as contacts are made and two men slip out together, or individuals move on to other bars in search of better luck.

"As closing time – 2 a.m. – approaches, the atmosphere grows perceptibly more tense. It is the 'frantic hour,' the now-or-never time for making a contact." (Sound familiar?)

Here's the early version of the gay agenda theme: "As part of its anti-homosexual drive the Los Angeles police force has compiled an 'educational' pamphlet for law enforcement officers entitled, 'Some Characteristics of the Homosexual.' The strongly opinionated pamphlet includes the warning that what the homosexuals really want is a 'fruit world.'" (Not a cocktail.)


Gays in the military, 1964: "If we didn't throw them out, we'd be condoning homosexuality. The services' position has to be that homosexual practices prejudice morale and discipline."

Life concludes, "For the first time the Supreme Court has agreed to hear the homosexual case, but no legal procedures are likely to change society's basic repugnance to homosexuality as an immoral and disruptive force that should somehow be removed."

Any suggestions?

Charles@pridesource.com Have a rainbow day.

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BTL Editorial

This is momentum!

You don't need us to tell you how big the New York news is. We're sure you can feel it. This is an enormous success for our national community, and the back story about how the vote took place is truly remarkable. A democratic governor whipped LGBT activists in line, used money from a group of wealthy Republican donors, and convinced the Republican state Senators who were on the fence to vote for equality. This is teamwork at its absolute finest, and its energy is sweeping the nation. So many of us are asking: If New York can do it, can't we, too?

Here in Michigan, we can. Just look around you.

The truth is, people in Michigan are doing wonderful work for our community all of the time. In this very issue of the newspaper, you'll learn about teenagers who went face-to-face with their lawmakers to explain just how important it is for our state to have an anti-bullying law – and not just a general law but one that protects all students. These teenagers, who aren't even out of high school, who may not even be able to drive, have already accomplished one of the most basic civil activities that many adults never achieve: They have told their elected officials what matters. This takes tremendous courage, and we here at BTL are so proud of them.

Another fantastic movement featured in this week's news comes from Holland, Mich. Earlier this month, the Holland City Council voted not to approve job and housing protections for LGBT citizens. The vote was slim – 5-4, with the mayor casting the deciding “no” – and utterly disheartening, especially after the council was overwhelmed by a show of support from the community. But a large group of people in West Michigan are making their disappointment heard: They've formed a group called “Until Love Is =” and they are boycotting any business who didn't support the ordinance. This means that businesses that don't support LGBT protections are going to feel the financial loss of support from a community who truly cares about all of its members. This means that the Holland

City Council won't be able to walk away from its disappointing decision – but will likely be contacted by concerned business owners who are already struggling with our tough economy. This is a fantastic example of people demanding equality and making their voices heard.

Whether it's from the louder and prouder Motor City Pride in Detroit, teenagers demanding change or a community striking back, the momentum is here. So let's keep it going!

On the east side of the state, Affirmations community center has finally found an executive director. This means that the center, which provides our community with wonderful services – from the annual inclusive Youth Prom to affirming counselors – will find itself on even more solid ground. The center has struggled, and thanks to the hard work of Interim Executive Director Kevin Howley and the board, the center is getting back on track. We know the new Executive Director Dave Garcia will do a fabulous job continuing the momentum that Kevin has started.

And as for the rest of us, we can look around and see the momentum coming from New York. More importantly, we can feel it radiating from the work in our own communities. Whether it's from the louder and prouder Motor City Pride in Detroit, teenagers demanding change or a community striking back, the momentum is here. So let's keep it going!



BTL Viewpoint

BY MICHELLE BROWN

An Empire State of mind

BY MICHELLE E. BROWN

Some Friday nights I just have to unplug from my technological world. I turn off the television, turn off the computer, set aside the iPhone and, without a Pandora musical background, spend the evening reading a book old-school style, one page at a time. But Friday, June 24, 2011 was not one of those days.

I was connected online surfing my favorite news sites, getting text updates from HRC and the Huffington Post and staying in contact with friends in New York on Facebook and Twitter. Like the vast majority of the LGBT community, I was sitting on pins and needles praying for a victory for marriage equality in the Empire State.

When the news hit I was on the phone with friends squealing and giggling as we started planning their marriage in Central Park this fall. It was going to happen, one way or the other regardless of the legislation because we WERE going to celebrate their sixteen year union. Thanks to New York's same-sex marriage law, now their commitment will have all the rights and protections afforded any other married couple.

Eva, one of the brides, is a Republican and a friend. We have had many confrontations over politics. Over the years she has attended progressive and/or Democratic events with me and I have reciprocated by going into “Red” territory with her. We have each tried to recruit the other for our respective parties but mostly agree to disagree when it comes to politics. We are friends, good friends whose friendship and opinions have been strengthened by our differing views.

We might disagree on which is the better party, but we both deeply believe in the constitutional truths held “to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” We believe in the promise of America.

After the overwhelming gains by the GOP after the 2010 elections, which I was sure signaled the end of times, I called Eva and asked, Now what? GOP rhetoric suggested that all the gains made, including reproductive rights, immigration reform, environmental protection and LGBT equality, were in the crosshairs and going down.

Fortunately, friendship and shared beliefs will always trump rhetoric and fear. And when the democratic process is practiced without all the current destructive partisanship, the arc of the moral universe continues to be long, but it bends towards justice. We had just seen proof of this in Albany, N.Y.

In a previous vote the decision was made solely along partisan lines – Democrats for, Republicans against. One of the handful of Republicans that voted for same sex marriage

We did it in New York and they say if you can make it there, you'll make it anywhere.

this time around told how he had been torn by his previous vote but followed the party line in voting “No.” This time around Republican State Senator Stephen Saland of Poughkeepsie voted his conscience, saying, “I must define doing the right thing as treating all persons with

equality.” He added that because Republicans were in control the law wouldn't have gotten to the floor if they didn't want it to – to which Senate majority leader Dean Skelos added that he had let it come to the floor because he, Skelos, “believed in democracy.” Equality and freedom have both been identified as important characteristics of democracy, so when given a chance, the arc of the moral universe did its thing and a same-sex-marriage bill passed in New York late last Friday.

For some, a win is a win. Others believe this victory in New York will give a boost to marriage equality across the country. The road ahead will continue to be long and rough. There will challenges and battles to win, but we will win. We did it in New York and they say if you can make it there, you'll make it anywhere.

As a country we don't have to evolve to know that marriage equality is not just the right thing, but the only thing to do. It's in our national DNA. Equality and freedom are the cornerstones of our beliefs. They don't have to evolve, to come forth gradually into being, to develop. We just need to dig out from under the bullshit polluting our vision; we can attain equality and freedom for our unions, our families and our LGBT community.

The reemergence of democracy – now that's an Empire State of mind.

Michelle E. Brown is a public speaker, author and activist. Contact her at <http://www.facebook.com/mychangeiam>



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Pat Robertson

By D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Nothing brings the creeps out of the woodwork like pro marriage equality. The good news out of New York has gotten some people fired up. And by "fire" I mean, of course, Hell-fire.

It comes as no surprise that Pat Robertson is one of the folks shouting that the sky is falling.

On a recent episode of The 700 Club, Robertson said that America was basically becoming Sodom. You know, that little city in the Bible that gays were totally gentrifying and making hip before God destroyed it?

I kid. Folks like Robertson love to point to the story in the Bible about Sodom to prove that God hates homos. It's a misguided interpretation to say the least. If you don't know the story of Sodom, here it is in a nutshell: This dude Lot lives in the city of Sodom and lets a couple of angels crash at his place for the night. His neighbors freak and surround his house because they want to rape the angels. So Lot says, "No dudes, that is way uncool. Take my virgin daughters instead" (Lot was a good host, but maybe not the best dad) but the neighbors are still freaking out. Then God's all like, "WTF?" and gives Lot and his family a head start before he destroys the whole city. Oh, and Lot's wife gets turned into a salt lick for deer.

In any case, this is, in essence, where America's headed according to Robertson. "I think we need to remember the term sodomy came from a town known as Sodom and Sodom was destroyed by God Almighty and the thing that they practiced was homosexual activity," he said, "and even they tried to rape angels who came down there, so that's the kind of people they were."

Thank you, Mr. Robertson, for the linguistics lesson. And I have to agree, angel rapists are the worst! But trying to say that the angel rapists of Sodom are akin to the gay couples of New York who want to get married is a bit of a stretch.

"(God) sent an angel down there and He said to Lot and his family, 'get out now because I'm gonna destroy this whole area.' That's where sodomy came from, we use the term sodomy and it means Sodom. What's it like?" Robertson continued.

Wait, "What's it like?" Is Robertson asking what anal sex is like? Does he know his mic is on?

"We're heading that way as a nation," Robertson declared. "In history there's never been a civilization ever that has embraced homosexuality and turned away from traditional fidelity, traditional marriage, traditional child-rearing, and has survived. There isn't one single civilization that has survived that openly embraced homosexuality. So you say, 'what's going to happen to America?' Well if history is any guide, the same thing's going to happen to us."

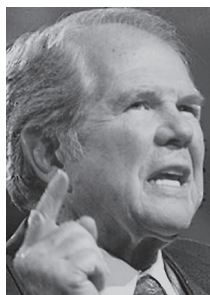
Ah, yes. History as our guide. Just look at all of the civilizations that God put the smack down on after they were all, "We're totally gay. Heterosexuality is for losers." Because that's totally what it means to "embrace" homosexuality. You either have exclusive heterosexuality or you have angel rapists in the street pounding down your door. There is no in between.

"It's not a pretty world we live in right now and we need all of God's help we can get and I don't think we're exactly setting ourselves up for his favor," Robertson said.

And Robertson's no stranger to attributing tragedy to the gays and God's wrath. No doubt the next natural disaster, no matter where in the world, whether it's a hurricane, tornado, tsunami, or a continent-swallowing giant squid, it'll be all New York's fault.

Here's one thing I don't understand about Robertson's God. I'm no theologian, but if God can supposedly lift up the entire ocean and slam it down on a country because he's pissed off, why can't God stop two dudes in Times Square from saying "I do"?

I don't know. Maybe God's priorities and Robertson's differ a bit.



Pat Robertson

Wisconsin DP Registry survives legal challenge

Wisconsin's Domestic Partnership Registry was declared constitutional June 20 by the Dane County Circuit Court Branch 11.

"It is clear," wrote Circuit Judge Daniel Moeser, "that Chapter 770 does not violate the Marriage Amendment because it does not create a legal status for domestic partners that is identical or substantially similar to that of marriage. The state does not recognize domestic partnership in a way that even remotely resembles how the state recognizes marriage. Moreover, domestic partners have far fewer legal rights, duties, and liabilities in comparison to the legal rights, duties, and liabilities of spouses."

Gov. Jim Doyle signed the domestic-partnership measure in June 2009, granting same-sex couples rights in areas such as hospital visitation and family medical leave.

Anti-gay activists filed suit against the law, arguing that it violated a state constitutional amendment that bans same-sex marriage and other legal unions of a "substantially similar" nature.

Lambda sues Oregon over trans operation

Lambda Legal filed suit against Oregon on June 21 on behalf of a state employee who was denied insurance coverage in connection with his being transgender.

Alec Esquivel, 41, a clerk for the Oregon Court of Appeals, was advised by his doctor to have a hysterectomy as part of his treatment for gender-identity disorder. But his insurer refused to pay because it does not cover transition-related health care.

Lambda's lawsuit against the state government and the Public Employees' Benefit Board argues that Oregon law prohibits employers from denying insurance coverage on the basis of gender identity.

Liechtenstein voters uphold gay partnership law

A voter referendum aimed at overturning Liechtenstein's new same-sex partnership law failed June 18 by a landslide of 69 percent to 31 percent.

Anti-gay forces had turned in enough signatures in April to mandate a vote.

The tiny nation, located between Switzerland and Austria, has about 18,500 voters.

Same-sex couples who register under the law, which takes effect Sept. 1, will receive the same rights as married people except in areas such as second-parent adoption, artificial insemination and surrogacy.

LGBTs march in former Eastern Bloc and Tijuana

LGBT people took to the streets for gay pride June 18 in Sofia, Bulgaria; Zagreb, Croatia; Budapest, Hungary; and Tijuana, Mexico.

About 1,000 marched in Sofia, and 2,000 marched in Zagreb and Budapest. All three parades were heavily protected by police because of violence in previous years or threats from extremists this year.

In Budapest, 50 participants who had come on a bus from Austria were detained by police for two hours, and two of the individuals were arrested and held overnight.

According to Homosexual Initiative Vienna (HOSI Wien), the Austrian LGBTs were harassed as they headed back to their bus by 15 anti-gay "neo-Nazis," who attacked them with "terribly smelly sprays."

According to HOSI, the attackers then told nearby police that the LGBTs were the ones who had done the attacking.

"The police then brutally dragged all 50 of us out of the bus, we had to hand over our passports, and were put, one by one, in front of the group of neo-Nazis so that they could 'identify' those who had allegedly attacked them," said HOSI's Judith Götz. "The neo-Nazis then picked randomly two of us as having attacked them."

HOSI's secretary general, Kurt Krickler, said the organization was "appalled" by the incident and expects it will have "some sort of diplomatic sequel."

In Mexico, meanwhile, about 1,000 people joined in Tijuana's 16th GLBTI Pride parade June 18.

Many rode on the beds of semi trucks blasting Mexican and American dance tunes.

The colorful, rowdy procession was well-received by onlookers who swelled to a throng at Second Street and Constitution Avenue.

Afterward, drag queens performed on an open-air stage in Plaza Santa Cecilia, the city's gayest block, which slants from First Street to Second Street between Revolution and Constitution avenues.

Serbian gay magazine launched

The Gay Lesbian Info Center in Belgrade, Serbia, has launched a 64-page, full-color magazine called Optimism.

It is distributed free at gay bars and clubs, cultural and drop-in centers, and gay-friendly venues in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Nis, Leskovac, Zrenjanin and Subotica.

The first issue looks at the legislative and legal situation of LGBT Serbians, concluding that gays and lesbians have legal protection only when they are single. Gay couples and transgender people are not recognized under law, the editors said.

GLIC seeks funding to keep the magazine in print. The editors can be reached at gayecho@gmail.com or via gayecho.com.

Beijing Queer Film Festival goes guerrilla

The fifth Beijing Queer Film Festival wrapped up June 19 after five days of guerrilla-style screenings around the city.

Three days before the opening, the authorities ordered the festival canceled and threatened "harsh consequences" if the order was disobeyed.

Organizers quickly lined up alternate screening locations in bars and coffeehouses, and implemented "strict safety measures surrounding the publication of screening times and places ... to stay out of the hands of the authorities for the duration of the festival," they said.

More than 500 people, including 23 Chinese and foreign queer filmmakers, attended. Thirty films were shown, and many of the filmmakers held talks and discussions.

"Despite, and perhaps even thanks to, the ban imposed by the authorities, the Beijing Queer Film Festival succeeded in what it set out to do: celebrate queer film and celebrate the necessity of showing queer films in a society where nonmainstream voices are stifled all too often," the organizers said.

The entities that banned the festival were the Beijing Xicheng District Public Security Bureau, the Culture Bureau, and the Bureau of Industry and Trade, festival organizers said.

"While it is unfortunate that we had to be guerrilla-warriors once again in order to hold this festival, we feel empowered and invigorated by the reactions of the audience and the filmmakers, and we're ready to continue with our goal of spreading queer films and queer culture in Chinese society," said festival chairwoman Yang Yang.

"Our biggest enemy consists of a small number of authoritarian organizations that are using the powerful national propaganda machine to subtly construct mainstream ideology," she added. "And our biggest worth, our ultimate goal as a queer film festival, is to challenge and oppose this mainstream ideology."

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Pride ralliers arrested in St. Petersburg, Russia

Ralliers held overnight, now facing up to 15 days in jail for illegal public action

BY REX WOCKNER

Fourteen activists were jailed overnight after police broke up the second gay pride march in St. Petersburg, Russia, just two minutes after it started June 25.

The detainees said their jail cell was tiny and suffocatingly hot, and that police gave them no water.

In court appearances the following day, they received small fines (the biggest was \$35) for organizing an illegal public action.

However, they face an additional charge of disobeying police orders, which can carry a penalty of up to 15 days in jail.

The "march" consisted of a boat on the Neva River carrying a huge rainbow flag, which was executed by one group of activists, and an attempt by a second group to begin marching from the statue of Peter the Great, carrying flags and banners, and a similar demonstration nearby on the stairs of the Constitutional Court.

The whole thing lasted only two minutes before police swooped in and put an end to it.

The crackdown follows a nearly identical

one on Moscow's sixth gay pride attempt in May.

Both police actions violated a recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that Russia cannot ban gay pride events. The court found that previous bans in Moscow violated the European Convention on Human Rights in the areas of freedom of assembly and association, the right to an effective remedy and prohibition of discrimination.

European gay activists have responded to Russia's flouting of the ruling by calling on the Council of Europe to suspend Russia's voting rights in the association.

Later on June 25, about 100 activists in Germany protested at Russia's embassy in Berlin, including openly gay Bundestag member Volker Beck.

"Russian LGBT activists, today in St. Petersburg, and in May in Moscow are heroes that we can be proud of," Beck said. "The actions of the police are completely unacceptable and I expect from our government to explicitly address this issue in bilateral discussions with the Russian government."



Police in St. Petersburg, Russia, broke up the second gay pride parade on June 25 and arrested the participants, who took this cell-phone photo in their jail cell. Photo courtesy of Nikolai Alekseev.

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Jennifer Nettles Gives the Gays Some Sugar(land)

Country superstar speaks out on homophobia and girl crushes

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

As the lovable lady half of supergroup Sugarland, Jennifer Nettles is country's answer to the contemporary diva – she can belt like the best of 'em. And though she has one hell of a voice, as does bandmate Kristian Bush, she doesn't just use it to sing the arena rock-inspired songs from their fourth and latest album, "The Incredible Machine." She uses it to speak to the duo's gay fans – even though so few country artists do.

In this rare sit-down with the singer, a powerhouse since "Stay" stormed the charts and nabbed a Grammy in 2009, Nettles talks coming out in country music, how she still loves her lesbians even if one of them – a former Sugarland band member – sued her, and why Adam Lambert turns her on.

With all of its arena rock and pop influences, "The Incredible Machine" is a departure from your country roots. Does Sugarland still consider itself a country act?

You know, I'm so grateful that country music found us first. I love all kinds of music, and clearly not only can you tell from "The Incredible Machine" but even from songs on past albums or our cover choices. I just love to sing all kinds of music. That being said, I consider myself country if you like country, and if you don't like country but you like what we do – awesome! I love that, too. I think it's really what speaks to the human spirit.

As an artist, it always feels a little bit squishy to try to answer that question – because you never want to be pinned in one way or another, while at the same time I feel very proud to be called country. Obviously I'm so grateful that they play us on country radio and that country fans love it, and I'm grateful that pop fans love it as well. So what do I call it? I call it good.

Considering your cover choices, from Beyoncé's "Irreplaceable" to "Love Shack" and even "Stayin' Alive," I'm starting to think that maybe Jennifer Nettles has the musical taste of a gay man.

(Laughs) Yes, absolutely! What's not to love about that? And you would definitely think that if you saw our current show, because we've been closing with "Like a Prayer" by Madonna.

See, it's so true. I called it here first.

I will totally credit you with it. If people ask me, "What are your musical tastes?" from now on I will say that of a gay man. (Laughs)

Around the time the album was released, there was a higher reporting of suicides among gay youth – and the song "Stand Up" from "The Incredible Machine" felt particularly relevant. What was on your mind when you wrote it?

There wasn't one specific event that inspired it. It's really a song about finding one's own voice wherever you feel unseen or wherever it is you feel you need to be empowered. Just as you're saying it resonated with you regarding the bullying and gay teen suicides, if the song can be a place of healing and a place of inspiration – man, I mean, that's why we do what we do as artists. So there wasn't one specific event that inspired that song as much as it is, I guess I should say both fortunately and unfortunately, a message that people need to hear and have needed to hear throughout the ages.

Do you get much feedback from gay people who are inspired by your music?

People sometimes will reach out with their personal stories. I did Nate Berkus' television show a number of months ago when we were about to release "The Incredible Machine," and in the

See Sugarland, page 25

Photos: Dana Tynan

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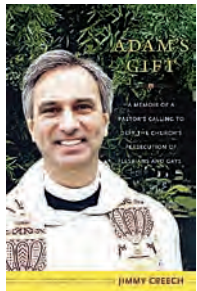


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Local author's 'Love/Imperfect' casts him as short story virtuoso



"Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays," by Jimmy Creech. Duke University Press, 368 pages, \$29.95 hardcover.

In 1984, a young United Methodist pastor's life was transformed when one of his parishioners, a closeted, middle-aged gay man, told him he was leaving the church because it would not accept his sexuality. Taken aback – Creech writes that, up to that point, he was mostly oblivious to either the presence or the plight of lesbians and gay men – the pastor set out to challenge both the misreading of Bible scripture by religious homophobes and his own church's hidebound oppression of queers. Creech reached out to the gay community, became involved in AIDS work and performed same-sex commitment ceremonies well before "gay marriage" was an activist whisper. Because of those ceremonies, he was put on ecclesiastical trial twice by his church for disobeying its directives, and was finally defrocked in 1999. There are times when this otherwise riveting, inspirational memoir bogs down in the minutiae of parishioner squabbles. But Creech's detailed dissection of deep-rooted anti-gay attitudes, intensely personal and spiritually impassioned, honors a remarkable straight ally.

"Love/Imperfect," by Christopher T. Leland. Wayne State University Press, 184 pages, \$18.95 paper.

As in real life, gay mingles with straight in Leland's first collection (after five novels), 17 shimmering, sensual short stories linked by the thematic threads of intimacy and love. Among the queer stories: "A Mother's Love," in which a young man's mother agonizes over the "primal and terrible" truth that her son is gay; "Memento Mori," in which two male American friends, safely in a foreign land, hesitate on the boundary between unacknowledged desire and sexual release; "Fellatio," which belies its coarse title by relating the tender story of a father-of-five mill-worker's romance with a well-bred British lad who picks up the older man when he is 16, and who is a World War casualty at 18; and, bridging the divide between homo and hetero, "As If in Time of War," in which a gay man reflects on the imperfections of love and family while passing an asexual yet intimate weekend with his former wife. Leland's supple, succinct prose marks him as a short story virtuoso.

"Fair Play," by Tove Jansson, translated by Thomas Teal. New York Review Books Classics, 120 pages, \$14 paper.

Finnish author Jansson, who died in 2001, is best known in the U.S. – if at all – as the author of comic strips and children's picture books featuring Moomins, best described as marshmallow hippos. But she stopped writing those books in 1970; in later years, she published 11 novels and story collections for grown-ups, including this gem, centered on the lives of two

Featured Excerpt



All these years later, I think of him: naked and fair, sprawled on that rooming house bed, inviting me, teasing me, telling me – who never thought a thing about himself – that I am manly

and handsome and worthy. Alice, of course, in her way, has told me the same. But it was Harry – all his richness and his naughty mouth and his endless ideas of what we could do – that I remember, and that brings him before me, under a railroad bridge: fresh as an apple, green as an emerald, sure as a prophet. My Harry. My own.

– from "Fellatio," in "Love/Imperfect," by Christopher T. Leland

quote from novelist Ali Smith's gracious, and grateful, introduction. This is a sublime novel about how fierce independence and eccentric love can commingle.

"Black Fire: Gay African-American Erotica," edited by Shane Allison. Bold Strokes Books, 216 pages, \$16.95 paper.

For the past several years, Allison has been a prolific contributor of erotic short stories to dozens of anthologies, producing much of the genre's most distinctive prose. More recently, he's turned to editing anthologies himself – and he has an eye for talent. Several stories in this collection are standouts: "Tomorrow," by Garland Cheffield, opens with a break-dance battle between two B-boys destined for bed; "'B.E.," by D. Fostalove, is set at an exclusive sex party; "Mutinous Chocolate," by Tom Cardamone, depicts the relentless deterioration of a man's life after his lover leaves him; and "The Awakening," by Andre March, in which a brother's Turkish bath visit with his white girlfriend opens him to the kind of sex he really wants. Allison's canny mix of stories by both African-American and white writers, and of black-on-black and black-on-white couplings, makes for a wide-ranging collection despite its focused theme. That's the case, too, with another Allison-edited anthology, "Afternoon Pleasures: Erotica for Gay Couples," from Cleis Press, which includes another stellar story by Fostalove – "Queen Intrigue," a tender tale about seduction and sex.

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► **Sugarland**

Continued from p. 21

audience was a woman who was a huge fan. She spoke to how our music really helped to empower her when she was coming out.

So I do get stories like that at times. Sometimes people share them out and openly and say “this was my specific experience as a gay person”; sometimes people just say, “Hey, you helped me through a hard time,” and they don’t go into specifics. But we’ve had coming out stories, and I feel honored to be able to help someone through that part of their life, for sure. All one really wants is to be seen as who we are, and to be able to be a part of that and be associated with someone who is coming into themselves – regardless of it being coming out, or figuring out what you want to do in your life – that’s a beautiful time and a beautiful thing.

There’s always a risk too, though, when someone comes out. I read that after country artist Chely Wright came out, she lost a considerable chunk of her fan base because she’s living openly as a lesbian now. Do you think a country artist coming out really has a big affect on their fan base?

I don’t know. People would tend to, I’m sure, stereotype quote-unquote country fans as being either more conservative or less tolerant or more close-minded. I don’t know when I look out at my audience. I am sure there are people who may be intolerant that are in the audience, but when I look out there, I see such a wide demographic that it’s hard for me to speak specifically. And I definitely can’t speak for all country artists – nor could I speak to all country fans as to whether there would be an affect. One would think stereotypically that there would be. I would like to think not. But at the end of the day, the reality is in many ways, as a culture in this country, we still have far to go as far as people understanding, being educated and being comfortable with different lifestyles, whatever that may be.

Many country stars have actually addressed gay issues in the press, including Martina McBride, Rascal Flatts and Dolly Parton. And yet we still don’t have a major country artist who’s out. Why do you think that is?

I don’t know why that is. Let’s discuss here for a moment, because clearly there are gay country fans. I can’t even speak as to why. Why do you think? Maybe we might come up with something here.

My guess is that they’re putting their career on the line; it’s scary for a country artist to come out in such a conservative arena, as you said.

But isn’t it scary for any artist to come out? Even in mainstream pop it is. I mean, thank god – and I’ve said this before – for Adam Lambert. Thank god for eyeliner. I have needed a sexy man to wear eyeliner since The Cure. Since



Robert Smith no one has really been able to do it for me in that way.

We need a country artist who’d wear eyeliner.

Right! But then, well, when you look at that we don’t even allow – come on. We will allow eyeliner on the girls, that’s for sure, but as far as image maybe it’s not conducive to – I don’t know why. But someone needs to.

Let’s talk about the legal battles that you had with ex-member Kristen Hall, who sued you last year for profits she said she was owed. Did it leave a bad taste in your mouth for lesbians?

(Laughs) Ba-dum-ch! Well, obviously, I’m not allowed to speak about the legal battles, but I love lesbians. Come on, let’s be honest. It doesn’t matter. Whatever. How hypocritical of me would that be to say I had a bad experience with this one individual or a good experience with this other individual and it totally makes me think that everyone is like that? Oh, please. It doesn’t. But I love the way you asked the question.

Who’s your girl crush?

There are so many wonderful women out there. As far as actresses go, I love Meryl Streep.

You really are a gay man.

Maybe this will continue the whole idea that I’m actually a gay man: I have this thing for British women. I love Judi Dench. I love Helen Mirren. I love these women, and I definitely do have big girl crushes on them. I’m trying to think as far as musicians go. I mean, what’s not to love about Beyoncé?

“Isn’t it scary for any artist to come out?”

– Jennifer Nettles

I read that you want to be on “Glee.”

I would love to be on “Glee,” thus furthering the myth that I’m a gay man. (Laughs)

I was thinking they could work you in as Kurt’s mom in flashbacks. What do you think of being the dead mother of a gay son?

I would love it! Anyway they could work me in – I would be the janitor sweeping the hallway of the school and cleaning out lockers, I don’t care.

Based on your music videos, you’re actually a really great actress. You’re so convincing in the “Stay” video, but then “Stuck Like Glue” just reinforces how great of an actress you really are.

(Laughs) Or how great of a stalker I am.

Do you have any interest in acting?

I do! And I actually love it. Theater is definitely something that, through the course of my childhood and even in college, I enjoyed participating in. I would love to do theater, or as far as movies or television goes, if the right thing came along I would definitely entertain it. Right now everything has been so focused on my music career, and obviously music is my first love, so I’ve been focused there. But if

the right thing came along, absolutely! I mean obviously I love doing it; I have a lot of fun in the videos. I would definitely be open to that.

So just when I thought you couldn’t get any more adorable, you dance around in your pajamas in Sara Bareilles’ “Uncharted” video. How did that come about?

Sara just reached out and said, “Hey, I’m doing this video and asking all my friends to be a part of it. Would you consider doing it?” I was like, “Sure, just tell me when you need it.” She wrote: “I need it tomorrow!” And I was like, OK, I’m just going to do something casual. So when I got up that morning, I said, “Hey, I’m going to do that in my pajamas – that’s casual enough.” And that’s what I did. It was fun!

In the spirit of “The Incredible Machine,” what are some of your favorite incredible machines?

Ooh, I hate to say it, and I’m a bit of a “Luddite,” but I would say that if I did not have my Blackberry it would be a challenging time. It keeps me connected. Unfortunately – maybe people will gasp – I don’t get into a lot of toys and games, like the apps. I wish I loved them, because I feel like there’s a club out there that I’m not a part of. (Laughs)

I also think, as I’m sitting in my dressing room right now looking around, for me as a singer, a humidifier is a pretty friggin’ incredible machine. And I just got a new place and I actually have a dishwasher, and that’s an incredible machine. I didn’t have one for years. I took it out to put a wine refrigerator in – because I have my priorities!

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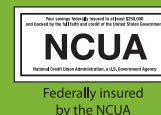
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All That Glitters Is (Sorta) Gay

Taylor Mac talks being queer, Lady Gaga and dialoguing through drag

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Back when Taylor Mac was wearing khakis and button-downs, people would tune him out. When the drag performer slipped into something that fit his offbeat personality—long flowing dresses that demand attention—they didn't have a choice.

"If you're an oddball and you're dressed in those clothes, then people don't want to listen to you because you seem weird—like you're trying too hard, even if you aren't," he says. "But if you suddenly expose the truth of who you are with your personal style, people can listen to it because they're not overwhelmed by the contradiction."

Now people call him a Ziggy Stardust-meets-Tiny Tim type, an oft-comparison that the ukulele-playing gender bender found a use for—his latest show, "Comparison is Violence," playing at 8 p.m. July 2 at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre as part of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival. Mac's show is said to be a thought-provoking commentary that's searingly satirical, poignantly honest and very, very glittery.

"This is a big part of our lives," he says. "Comparison is really how we define people nowadays. We tend to only describe things in relation to other things. That's how we're defining our world, so I thought, 'This is a really interesting dialogue to be having with the audience.' That's what I'm trying to inspire—for them to go out into the world and think about comparison more."

So, in jest, we just had to ask: Who would you compare yourself to?

"I'm not going to answer that," Mac says, through a laughing fit. "That's, like, the show. I

Taylor Mac

8 p.m. July 2
Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre
911 N. University Ave., Ann Arbor
\$25 general admission
www.annarborsummerfestival.org

definitely talk about the people who I feel like have influenced me in my work, so you'll be clued in. But I guarantee you it's not Lady Gaga!"

After a long, meditative pause, he reconsiders, "I say that now, and in 10 years I'll probably look back at my life and be like, 'Oh, the work she was doing was kind of influencing me to some degree'—even though she saw me before I saw her."

Gaga, he says, used to hang at the same New York City clubs as Mac. And now she's the benchmark of late, even though, Mac says, she's part of a lineage that includes Alexander McQueen and Lee Bowery.

"It's about amnesia," he says. "We're not very good at remembering our history and educating ourselves on our history. So, Lady Gaga is the newest thing that's of the lot; she's the one that everyone thinks is creating it. It's not to say that she's not creating pieces of it, but I think she's continuing the story, not inventing the story."

Mac's story goes something like this: Suburban Cali kid who doesn't have many options does drag later in life. Produces heralded shows like "The Be(A)st of Taylor Mac" and "Dilating." Acts in other people's plays and takes

TV roles on MTV and the then-Sci-Fi Channel.

"I used to think drag was all vagina jokes and lip-syncing, so I had no interest in it," he says. "But there's this whole history to it and a long history of squishing the low- and high-brow together, and I just kind of got floored by that history and that legacy."

Part of that history was wiped out in the '80s AIDS epidemic that swept through the gay community—and many of the "drag mothers" passed on, leaving the most famous survivors to represent an era.

"There was this whole generation that disappeared," he says. "We see it from the lenses of Dame Edna and now RuPaul, but there were way more interesting queens—not that they're not interesting, they're unbelievably interesting, but there was more variation out there."

Mac's performances start with an idea—something conceptual that he jots down and builds on. His designer friend, Machine Dazzle, takes it from there, making something out of almost nothing. "I say to Machine, 'This is how I'm feeling about this. I know I want the outfit to do these things.' And then I let him go at it, and he comes up with something so much more interesting than I ever would."

It used to be all Mac, who was very DIY about his costumes. But then, "I kind of got a little more successful in the world and realized I don't have to do it all," he laughs.

What he wears is radically out-there, including a dress made of latex gloves that expressed his feelings on the war on terror. He says, "It was really effective—affectionate and effective—because it made

me the oddest thing in the room."

But he doesn't do it to shock.

"I don't think that that's communicating," he says. "I think it's important to communicate responsibly. I try to surprise the audience; I try to get them to feel, which gets them to recognize their humanity a bit more. The only time you feel anything is when you're surprised. If you shock them, they shut down."

And if they collapse, they're not learning a thing.

"My whole job as an artist is to try to get the audience to relate to me," he says. "If they can relate to the strangest person in the room, then I've opened up something in them. If they can see themselves in me—the oddest person in the room—then there should be never no reason to be afraid of Muslims or whatever you're afraid of."

Which brings us back to Tiny Tim, who wasn't just the oddest person in the room—but, at one time, the oddest person living. Was he queer? Gay? Mac's friend explained to him that "queer is not a gay or a straight, but a person who is ostracized to such a degree as a young person that they could never possibly ostracize anyone else. Tiny Tim was the ultimate geek, and the ultimate geek lets everyone hang out at the table. You can't say that about David Bowie, because he was the ultimate cool kid. I would say that David Bowie, even though he slept with men, wasn't a queer. Tiny Tim was."

So again, we ask Mac for a comparison: Which are you? This time we almost get an answer.

"I'm somewhere in between, right? I think of myself of a queer," he says, laughing, "and every so often, I slip up and become a gay or a straight."

Tibbits Theatre puts on the Ritz with season opener

BY DONALD V. CALAMIA

Anyone who has ever worked in children's theater knows all too well that young people are the most honest – and sometimes the most brutal – audience an actor has ever faced. I kept that in mind at the opening night of Tibbits Summer Theatre's production of "On Broadway Too: An Irving Berlin Songbook" as a bubbly 6-year-old girl arrived with her mother and grandmother and sat two seats away. Was I in for the experience from hell, I wondered? After all, how attention grabbing can a musical revue of tunes by one of America's greatest (and long-dead) songwriters be for one so young – especially when the world she lives in is filled with popular music Berlin wouldn't recognize? Or likely care for?

To be honest, I figured young Marissa would last about 15 minutes, and then either get cranky or fall asleep. (I prayed for the latter.) So imagine my surprise when she immediately started swaying to the beat – and then jumping to her feet to dance along with the cast. Yes, Marissa knows a good show when she sees one, and for the next 100 minutes, she sat transfixed by the world unfolding before her. And so too did many of us older folk who often hummed along and tapped our toes to many of the tunes that defined America throughout the 20th century.

Devised and compiled by Trinity Bird and Charles Burr, "On Broadway Too" is a follow-up to last season's successful trek through the modern songbook. In this case, however, it's a quick romp through approximately four-dozen of Berlin's estimated 1,500 tunes, some of which you'll recognize the instant you hear the first few notes. Others, though, may be familiar only to die-hard Berlin aficionados. But nonetheless, the selection offers a broad representation of Berlin's six decades as a songwriter. Upon his death in 1989 at the age of 101, The New York Times wrote, "Irving Berlin set the tone and the tempo for the tunes America played and sang and danced to for much of the 20th century." And that's true. From Tin Pan Alley to the movies, with stops along the way on Broadway, Berlin's work sparked an international dance craze, built patriotism among the citizenry of two world wars, and delivered a classic holiday tune that became one of the most recorded songs in history. All told, it's a marvelous catalogue of work that even a modern-day 6-year-old can appreciate – and in the hands of director Bird, the fun begins with the opening note and ends at the curtain call.

Trimming approximately 50 songs to fit a 100-minute revue (including a 12-minute intermission) is not an easy feat, but one Bird and Burr accomplished quite well. Each clip tells a short story, which seamlessly morphs into the next, creating a thematic flow without interruption. And delivering those gorgeous melodies are six young and talented performers who make their hard work look rather effortless.

Evident throughout the performance are the cast's uniformly strong voices and movement skills. Whether together or as duos, trios or solos, Dick Baker, Amy Lamberti, Ryan McDonald, Katie Quigley, Lindsey Spencer and Ricky Wenthen approach the numbers with high energy that never falters, and each brings to the show a unique trait that endears him or her to the audience.

Lamberti's sweet, delicate voice is perfect for "You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake On



Back row: Ricky Wenthen, Dick Baker and Ryan McDonald; Front row: Katie Quigley, Amy Lamberti and Lindsey Spencer.

REVIEW

On Broadway Too: An Irving Berlin Songbook

Tibbits Summer Theatre, 14 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater. Thursday-Saturday through July 2. \$24-\$26. 517-278-6029.

www.tibbits.org

Tea" and "All Alone." McDonald has a confident swagger first seen in the show's opening number ("I Love A Piano") that continues to serve him well into the show in "Anything You Can Do" with Spencer. (It was one of the audience favorites on opening night.) The two also shine in the equally popular "I Want To Go Back To Michigan (Down On The Farm)."

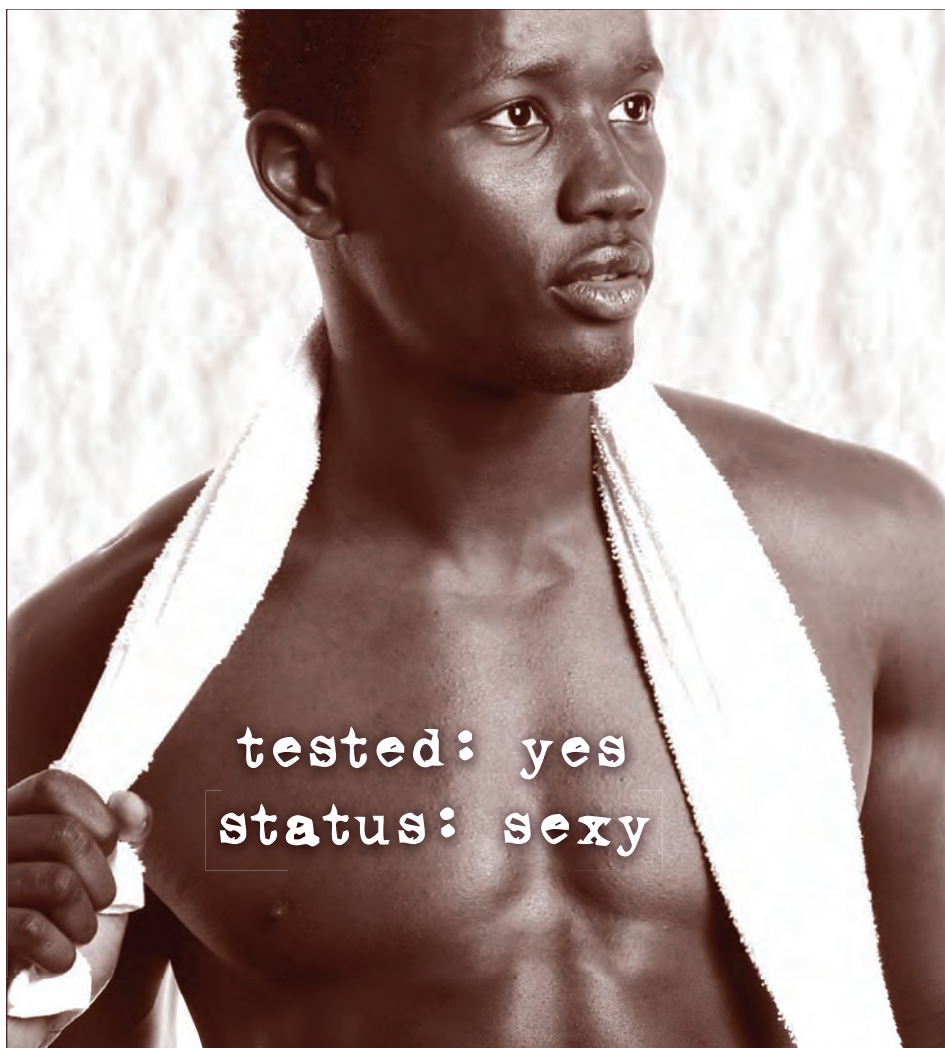
Quigley sizzles in "Say It Isn't So" and gives off plenty of heat in both "Heat Wave" and "Change Partners" with Lamberti and Spencer. (In fact, the three women are delightful in every number they perform together.)

Wenthen, a musical theater student at SUNY Cortland, makes his Tibbits debut in "On Broadway," and I suspect the handsome performer has a long and productive career ahead of him. Of all the cast members, he seems most comfortable with Annali Fuchs' choreography, and he slickly delivers it with an ease and confidence not often seen by performers his age. His solos, "Easter Parade" and "I Used To Be Colorblind," are fine examples of this young man's talent.

The show's standout, however, is Baker. Armed with a degree in theater and working in regional theaters around the country, the lanky actor exudes personality. Whether soloing in the excellent "Let's Have Another Cup O' Coffee" or with other performers in numbers such as "Everybody Step," Baker uses his entire body and face to passionately tell each song's story. He's fascinating to watch from beginning to end.

Most noteworthy, though, is this: None of the performers wear microphones. Tibbits Opera House, built in 1882, was once named one of the "10 great places to see the lights way off Broadway" by USA Today. Because of its excellent acoustics, every word can be heard, and you can tell which performers are singing and which aren't – which often isn't the case in today's growing overreliance on electronics. Plus, voices don't fade in and out thanks to dying batteries and technical snafus.

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Mother of pearl! 'Oyster' shines!

BY JOHN QUINN

"Consider the Oyster," a thoughtful comedy by Detroit-born playwright David MacGregor, is receiving a robust world premiere at the Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea. We frequently run across "I did not know that" moments in theater, but who knew a mollusk was good for anything but a slimy slide down your gullet or furnishing the perfect accessories to a little black dress?

It seems the nacre, or "mother of pearl" for you W. C. Fields fans, is powered and used in bone reconstructive surgery. Or, as one research paper puts it, "The experiments show that nacre, a type of natural nano-bioceramic material, when used as bone implant for reconstruction of bone defects, is not only biocompatible and biodegradable, but also osteoconductive and osteoinductive." Indeed.

While the science is real, "Consider the Oyster" is fantasy. Michiganders will realize that immediately, because, as the play opens, the Detroit Lions are playing in the Super Bowl. Two die-hard fans, Gene (Michal Brian Ogden) and Eliot (Matthew David), are watching the final seconds of the game when, caught up in the exuberance, Gene impulsively proposes to his girl, Marisa (Stacie Hadgikosti). He then proceeds to break a leg. A few titanium pins, a little powdered nacre, eight weeks healing and Gene should be good to go. Ah, but there are unintended consequences. Oysters are all born male and become female as they mature. A blending of DNA produces a metamorphosis in Gene

REVIEW

Consider the Oyster

The Purple Rose Theatre Company, 137 Park St., Chelsea. Wednesday-Sunday through Sept. 3. \$25-\$40. 734-433-7673.

www.purplerosetheatre.org

less gruesome than Kafka, but no less disturbing.

MacGregor's script is a fine-crafted piece of comedy. It's funny, sometimes outrageous, yet the humor is never forced and flows naturally from the plot. "Consider the Oyster" is a fresh, unique rendition of an ageless theme: love's triumph over adversity. Yet there are deep philosophical undertones here. "You go through life thinking you know who you are," says Gene. Who are we, down in our core? Can a man ever understand a woman if he's never walked a mile in her Manolo Blahniks? Can anybody walk a mile in Manolo Blahniks?

At the helm of "Consider the Oyster" is Artistic Director Guy Sanville, who presents us with the quality work we've come to associate with The Purple Rose company over the last two decades. The tempo is just right to highlight MacGregor's witty lines. Michael Brian Ogden, Matthew David and Stacie Hadgikosti hit all the right notes and work as a tight ensemble in their scenes. Ogden is particularly adept at some very physical comedy. Toss into the mix the incomparable Sarab Kamoo, who brings bark as well as bite to her portrayal of Marisa's mother Kay, an ambulance-chasing, pit bull of an injury attorney.



The world premiere of "Consider the Oyster" continues at The Purple Rose Theatre through Sept. 3. Photo: Danna Segrest

Dennis G. Crawley gives us a remarkable set – Gene and Eliot's gritty loading dock/loft/living space. The attention to detail is outstanding. Glass block, ceramic-faced cinder block and dirty glass windows achieve a realism that anchors an otherwise surrealistic play.

Forgive me if I give too much away – I hate spoilers. But Rhiannon Ragland needs recognition for her fine-tuned performance. Not only is the role intensely physical, she also plays a wealth of conflicting emotions with grace and ease. MacGregor has given her some of the best lines in the script, including a touching second act monologue that kept the audience hanging on every word. Ragland nailed it.

Am I being a little too coy? Well, if you're looking for pearls of wisdom, you'll have to open your own oysters.

It's a crime how 'Chicago' lures in audiences

BY SUE MERRELL

Roxie rocks Saugatuck as Mason Street Warehouse opens its ninth season with John Kander and Fred Ebb's naughty classic, "Chicago."

The joint – Saugatuck Center for the Arts – was definitely jumping Saturday with a horn-heavy eight-piece band stationed on stage above the pair of jail cells that create the setting for this Prohibition Era tale of murder, corruption, greed and all that jazz.

Although the set and all the costumes are black, and the subject sounds inherently dark, the infectious beat of the score chases away any shred of somber and weaves a spell that is much more seductive.

Told in a style that is somewhere between vaudeville (a series of spotlight solos), circus (acrobatic dance moves and singers hanging from ladders) and cabaret (barely there costumes), this show is all about using a little razzle-dazzle to cover up crime and even turn criminals into celebrities.

Chorus girl Roxie (Robyn Hurder) kills her lover and is jailed with a bevy of other beautiful killers, including Velma (Charissa Bertels), a vaudeville star who murdered her husband and sister. (Don't worry. They had it coming.) With the help of prison matron Mama Morton (Mary Robin Roth) and smarmy attorney Billy Flynn (Christopher Carl), the killers become stars

REVIEW

Chicago

Mason Street Warehouse, 400 Culver St., Saugatuck. Tuesday-Sunday through July 17. \$26-\$39.75. 269-857-4898.

www.masonstreetwarehouse.org

in the newspaper headlines, at least until an even bigger crime steals the limelight.

As Roxie, Hurder is charmingly seductive. She can be so sweet when praising her husband's love ("Funny Honey"), and then turn vicious in an instant. But when she's dancing with her boys in "Roxie," and giggling coquettishly as they show off their sexy moves, she seals the deal. She's luring us in and having a ball doing it.

Carl is the perfect slimeball as Flynn, singing "All I Care About" with practiced nasal arrogance and all-about-me bravado. But when he's pulling Roxie's strings in "We Both Reached for the Gun," he wisely resists the urge to mug and lets his "dummy" steal the show.

Bertels has the vocal power to lead the opening number, "All that Jazz," and can turn on the humor for the rapid-fire antics of "I Can't Do It Alone." Roth has that down-and-dirty guttural belt of a



"Chicago" continues Tuesday-Sunday through July 17. Photo: Mason Street Warehouse.

much larger mama, such as Sophie Tucker. Bertels and Roth blend nicely on "Class."

G.M. Toles does a convincing job as the sob-sister journalist, Mary Sunshine, flirting with Billy and raising the roof with lingering high notes on "A Little Bit of Good." Although nothing in this play should be taken too seriously, I thought Toles' overly red-rouged cheeks were a little clownish and distracting.

To read the complete review, log on to www.EncoreMichigan.com or www.pridesource.com.

To read the complete review, log on to www.EncoreMichigan.com or www.PrideSource.com

July 7 - August 14, 2011

AND THE CREEK DON'T RISE

BY JOSEPH ZETTELMAIER

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- Between the Lines

RTM Happenings

Editor's Picks

Outings



Rainbow Families Great Lakes, a non-profit organization dedicated to developing, promoting and supporting LGBT parents, children, families and their allies, will hold Family Week 2011 from July 9-15 in Saugatuck.

Family Week provides a week of family-oriented vacation and recreation events for Michigan LGBT families. The week includes picnics, BBQs, family crafts, pool parties, beach parties and a community celebration parade through downtown Douglas.

Registration for RFGL's Family Week 2011 Saugatuck is \$275 or \$80 per day. For a registration form and a complete list of all activities, visit rfgl.org.

Music & More

Warped Tour returns to Detroit this July 8 at Comerica Park, bringing performers such as Less Than Jake, The Devil Wears Prada, Hellogoodbye and Attack Attack!

Initially a showcase of solely skate punk and ska music and extreme sports, Warped Tour today presents musicians from many genres, including punk rock, ska, alternative, indie, pop punk and metalcore. The tour travels internationally, bringing not only music and sports but sponsors and musicians' merchandise to fans.

Warped Tour 2011 is July 8 at Comerica Park, 2100 Woodward Ave., in Detroit. Tickets are \$45 and can be purchased at ticketmaster.com. For more information, visit vanswarpedtour.com.

Theater

The much anticipated world premiere of "Posing" by Jason Sebacher comes to The New Theatre Project stage July 5-24. Pay-what-you-can preview performances take place at 8 p.m. July 5-7; regular performances play at 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through July 24.

"Posing" is the story of two men meeting: each running from his past, each escaping his present, and each keeping an impossible secret. They are bound together for days with the mutual goal of using each other for sex and drugs, until they confront the consequences of trying to stay young forever.

"Posing" contains strong language, simulated sex, drug use and nudity. No one under the age of 18 will be admitted without a parent or guardian. Tickets, \$15, can be reserved by calling or texting The New Theatre Project box office at 734-645-9776.

The New Theatre Project is located at 220 Felch St., Ann Arbor, Unit 5 Upstairs Studio.



OUTINGS

Wednesday, June 29

LGBTQ Affirming Discussion, 5 p.m. Looking at passages of the Bible using the word "natural" in relation to sexuality and how these verses do not condemn LGBTQ people. Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ-Welcoming And Affirming Church, 125 S. Pennsylvania Ave., **Lansing**. 5174847434. PilgrimUCC.com

LGBTQ Support Group, 7 p.m. An inclusive environment for all gender who are healing from domestic and/or sexual assault. YWCA of KGLRC, 629 Pioneer St., **Kalamazoo**. 269-349-4234.

Friday, July 1

Womyn's Film Night, 7 p.m. Film-Kathleen Madigan: Gone Madigan. Kathleen Madigan of "Last Comic Standing" busts her comedy moves in this special filmed at the Gramercy Theater in New York. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, **Ferndale**. 248-398-7105. goaffirmations.org

Drag Queen Bingo, 8 p.m. "This ain't your grandma's bingo." Hosts Sabin, Trixie Deluxe or September Murphy. Open to all 18+. Refreshments and bingo food fare. Reservations available by phone. Five15, 515 S. Washington, **Royal Oak**. 248-515-2551. five15.net

Saturday, July 2

Fourth of July Festival, 1 p.m. Pool party, food booths, games, raffle baskets, music and dancing. Reservations made online or via phone. Windover Womens Resort, 3596 Blakely Road, **Owendale**. 989-375-2586. windoverwomensresort.com

Thursday, July 7

Jewish Gay Network Family & Friends, 7 p.m. LGBT group discussing issues impacting the LGBT and allied community. Meets 1st Thursday of every month. The Jewish Gay Network, 6600 West Maple Road, **West Bloomfield**. 248-432-5661. jgnmi.org

Friday, July 8

Older Lesbians Organizing, 7 p.m. Provides older Lesbians with the chance to meet like minded women in their common struggles, to share mutual interests and to play and work together. Meets the 2nd Friday of every month. Older Lesbians Organizing, 319 Braun Court, **Ann Arbor**. 734-678-2478. jasmithers@sbcglobal.net

Womyn's Film Night, 7 p.m. Film-Girls Kissing. Barbara Lee's fast-paced documentary explores lesbianism from a variety of angles, including how pop culture is changing society's outlook on the subject. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, **Ferndale**. 248-398-7105. goaffirmations.org

SUNDAY, JULY 10

Family Week Saugatuck, 8 a.m. Vacation week for LGBT families. Six days of family activities such as picnics, crafts, pool parties, etc. Families are responsible for meals and accommodations. Information about lodging and individual events provided at rfgl.org. Rainbow Families Great Lakes, Various Addresses, **Saugatuck**. rfgl.org

PFLAG Detroit Meeting, 2 p.m. Support groups, social gathering, community announcements, program presentations, guest speakers, and dinner. Every 2nd Sunday of the month. PFLAG, 3333 Coolidge Hwy, **Troy**. 248-656-2875. pflagdetroit.org

Rainbow Book Club, 4:30 p.m. Book club dedicated to reading and discussing classic and contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer literature. Meeting since before 1998,

every second Sunday of the month. Rainbow Book Club, 319 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor**. 734-678-2478. catherine.herne@gmail.com

HARC HIV/AIDS Testing, 5 p.m. HARC provides anonymous and free HIV counseling, testing and referral services through its outreach at the Jim Toy Community Center. HARC, 319 Braun Court, **Ann Arbor**. 734-678-2478. hivaidresource.org/hiv-testing

Monday, July 11

LGBT Adoptive Parent Support Group, 7 p.m. Meet with other LGBT families and be supported in your adoption process or adoptive parenting. Hands Across The Water Adoption and Social Services Agency, 2890 Carpenter Road, Suite 600, **Ann Arbor**. 734-477-0135. hatw.org

Wednesday, July 13

Situation Discussions, 5:15 p.m. Discussing "What would you do if you were fired for being gay?" LGBT in the Park, 620 W. Woodward Heights, **Hazel Park**. 248-460-3251. jffryoliver@yahoo.com

Thursday, July 14

Meet 'n Greet, 7 p.m. Meet new people, socialize and discuss age-relevant issues. Dinner at local restaurant afterwards. Ages 18-33. Metro Detroit LGBT 20Somethings, 222 E. Nine Mile Road, **Ferndale**. det20somethings@gmail.com the20somethings.org

MUSIC & MORE



Louis Nagel

CLASSICAL

Kerrytown Concert House Louis Nagel performing Franz Schubert. Tickets: \$30-15, \$5 students. Kerrytown Concert House, 415 N. Fourth Ave., **Ann Arbor**. July 7-July 10, 734-769-2999. kerrytownconcerthouse.com

MSU College of Music Trevor Workman in the Summer Carillon Series, established in 1996 through generosity of Dr. Milton Muelder. MSU Beaumont Tower, 102 Music Building, East Lansing. 6 p.m. June 29. 517-353-9958. music.msu.edu

MSU College of Music Ulla Laage in the Summer Carillon Series, established in 1996 through generosity of Dr. Milton Muelder. MSU Beaumont Tower, 102 Music Building, East Lansing. 6 p.m. July 13. 517-353-9958. music.msu.edu

MSU College of Music Eddy Marien and Tom Lee" Native to Belgium. Summer Carillon Series, established in 1996 through generosity of Dr. Milton Muelder. MSU Beaumont Tower, 102 Music Building, East Lansing. 6 p.m. July 13. 517-353-9958. music.msu.edu



A Perfect Circle

CONCERTS

Farmington Downtown Development Authority "Rhythmicz in Riley Park" Friday night concerts in downtown Farmington. Walter E. Sundquist Pavilion, 33113 Grand River Ave., Farmington. June 10-Aug. 26. 248-473-7276. downtownfarmington.org

Fox Theatre R. Kelly with special guest Marsha Ambrosius. Tickets: \$49-105. Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., **Detroit**. July 9-July 10. 313-471-6611. r-kelly.com

Kerrytown Concert House "Hard Road Trio" Featuring Steve Smith, Chris Sandes and Anne Luna. Tickets: \$25-10, \$5 students. Kerrytown Concert House, 415 N. Fourth Ave., **Ann Arbor**. 8 p.m. July 12. 734-769-2999. kerrytownconcerthouse.com

MOCAD "Hunting Lodge/Apetechnology" With special guests Lichens and Michael Dec. Marking the first time the group shared a stage in over 20 years, Hunting Lodge is joined by Apetechnology to provide both electronics and mechanical rhythm to the performance. Admission: \$7. Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, 4454 Woodward Ave., **Detroit**. 8 p.m. July 1. 313-832-6622. mocadetroit.org

Olympia Entertainment "A Perfect Circle" Tickets:\$35-59.50. Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., **Detroit**. July 8-July 8. 313-471-6611. olympiaentertainment.com

Olympia Entertainment "Maze" Featuring Frankie Beverly with special guest T.K. Kirkland. Tickets: \$68-93. Sound Board Theater, 2901 Grand River Ave., **Detroit**. July 7-July 8. 866-752-9622. olympiaentertainment.com

Royal Oak Music Theater "Cut Copy" Tickets: \$20 in advance, \$24 door. Royal Oak Music Theatre, 318 W. Fourth St., **Royal Oak**. 8 p.m. July 9. 248-399-2980. royaloakmusictheatre.com

The Ark Boulder Acoustic Society. Tickets: \$15. The Ark, 316 S. Main St., **Ann Arbor**. 8 p.m. July 6. 734-761-1800. theark.org

The Ark Dave Alvin & The Guilty Ones. Tickets: \$22. The Ark, 316 S. Main St., **Ann Arbor**. 8 p.m. July 2. 734-761-1800. theark.org

The Ark Stewart Francke. Tickets: \$15. The Ark, 316 S. Main St., **Ann Arbor**. 8 p.m. June 30. 313-761-1818. theark.org

The Ark Zoe Muth and the Lost High Rollers. Tickets: \$13.50. The Ark, 316 S. Main, **Ann Arbor**. 8 p.m. July 7. 734-761-1800. theark.org

The Ark Terrance Simien. Tickets: \$15. The Ark, 316 S. Main, **Ann Arbor**. 8 p.m. July 12. 734-761-1800. theark.org

FESTIVALS

Comerica Park "Vans Warped Tour 2011" Punk rock extravaganza. Tickets: \$34-37. Comerica Park, Comerica Park parking lot, **Detroit**. 11 a.m. July 8. 313-471-6611. OlympiaEntertainment.com

OTHER

The Leaven Center "Spittin' Politics: Poetry, Performance, and Political Activism" Weekend retreat led by spoken word artist Ami Mattison. Includes writing

and performance workshops. Cost: \$200 (meals, lodging included). Scholarships available. The Leaven Center, Lyons. 7 p.m. July 1. 989-855-2606. leaven.org

Warren/Conner Development Coalition "Eastside Farmers Market" Fresh produce, healthy foods, and unique artisan items. Everything locally made and sold directly by the growers and producers. Accepts cash, Bridge Card, Double Up Food Bucks, WIC, Project Fresh, credit, and debit. Weekly music and entertainment. Mack Alter Square, 14820 Mack Ave., Detroit. June 11-Oct. 1. 313-571-8200. facebook.com/eastsidefarmersmarket

Windover Women's Resort "1st Annual W.I.N.D. Cares 5k Walk" 5K walk to support your cause, whether it's breast cancer, leukemia or the human race. Call for more information. Windover Women's Resort, 3596 Blakely Road, Owendale. 1 p.m. July 9. 989-375-2586. windoverwomensresort.com

THEATER

CIVIC/COMMUNITY THEATER

Reasons to be Pretty Readings from the Second Stage presentation. Free; donations accepted. Center Stage Jackson at The Fourth Wall, 701 Page Ave., Jackson. 8 p.m. July 9. 517-817-9974. centerstagejackson.org

PROFESSIONAL

1964...The Tribute \$20 pavilion, \$10 lawn. Meadow Brook Music Festival, 3554 Walton Blvd., Rochester Hills. 8 p.m. July 8. 1-800-745-3000. palacenet.com

And The Creek Don't Rise A world premiere by Joseph Zettelmaier. Previews July 7-10 & 14. (\$15) \$18-\$24. Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam Road, Williamston. July 7-Aug. 14. 517-655-7469. williamstontheatre.org

Chicago \$26-\$39.75. Mason Street Warehouse, 400 Culver St., Saugatuck. Through July 17. 269-857-4898. masonstreetwarehouse.org

Children of Eden Plays in rotating repertory. Hope Summer Repertory Theatre at DeWitt Theatre, 141 E. 12th St., Holland. Through Aug. 12. 616-395-7890. hope.edu/hsrt

Consider the Oyster \$25-\$40. The Purple Rose Theatre Company, 137 Park St., Chelsea. Through Sep. 3. 734-433-7673. purplerosetheatre.org

Ernie \$20-\$25. City Theatre, 2301 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Through July 31. 313-471-6611. olympiaentertainment.com

Fridays and Saturdays at Go Comedy! Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. gocomedy.net



Marsha Ambrosius, performing with R. Kelly at the Fox Theatre.

Man of La Mancha \$34. Barn Theatre, 13351 W. M-96, Augusta. June 28-July 10. 269-731-4121. barntheatre.com

Next Fall \$22-\$41. Performance Network Theatre, 120 E. Huron St., Ann Arbor. Through July 10. 734-663-0681. performancenetwork.org

On Broadway Too An Irving Berlin Songbook \$24-\$26. Tibbits Summer Theatre, 14 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater. Through July 2. 517-278-6029. tibbits.org

Posing Contains strong language, simulated sex, drug use and nudity. No one under the age of 18 will be admitted without a parent or guardian. Previews July 5-7 (pay-what-you-can). \$15. The New Theatre Project, 220 Felch St., Unit 5, Ann Arbor. July 5-24. 734-645-9776. thenewtheatreproject.org

Return to the Forbidden Planet Plays in rotating repertory. \$10-\$26. Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, DeWitt Theatre, 141 E. 12th St., Holland. July 8-Aug. 11. 616-395-7890. hope.edu/hsrt

Sundays at Go Comedy! \$7 for the night. Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. gocomedy.net

Taking Steps Plays in rotating repertory. \$8-\$19. Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, DeWitt Theatre, 141 E. 12th St., Holland. Through July 26. 616-395-7890. hope.edu/hsrt

The Capitol Steps \$40 reserved. Saugatuck Center for the Arts, 400 Culver St., Saugatuck. 8 p.m. July 3. 269-857-2399. sc4a.org

The Full Monty Adult themes, language. \$24-\$26. Tibbits Summer Theatre, 14 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater. July 7-16. 517-278-6029. tibbits.org

The Music Man Previews July 7. \$28. The Encore Musical Theatre, 3126 Broad St., Dexter. July 7-31. 734-268-6200. theencoretheatre.org

Thursdays at Go Comedy! Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. gocomedy.net

Wednesdays at Go Comedy! Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. gocomedy.net

YOUNG AUDIENCES

Back When the Animals Talked \$7. Tibbits Summer Theatre, 15 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater. July 1-9. 517-278-6029. tibbits.org

Charlotte's Web \$8 adult, \$5 children. Hilberry Theatre, 4743 Cass Ave., Detroit. Through July 8. 313-577-2972. hilberry.com

How I Became a Pirate Plays in repertory. \$10. Hope Summer Repertory Theatre at Studio Theatre in the DeWitt Center, 141 E. 12th St., Holland. Through Aug. 12. 616-395-7890. hope.edu/hsrt

Kolobok \$10 adult, \$5 children. PuppetART, 25 E. Grand River, Detroit. Saturdays July 9-30. 313-961-7777. puppetart.org

ART 'N' AROUND

Craig Mitchell Smith Glass Gallery "Glass in the Garden" Display of larger than life glass art in the garden. Admission: \$5. Dow Gardens, Midland MI, 1809 Eastman Ave., Midland. May 22-July 31. 800-362-4874. dowgardens.org

Cranbrook Art Museum "Saarinen House and Garden" rare integration of art, architecture, design and nature's total work of art. Designed in the late 1920s, Saarinen House served as the home and studio of the Finnish-American designer Eliel Saarinen and Loja Saarinen from 1930 through 1950. Cranbrook Art Museum, 39221 Woodward Ave.,

Bloomfield Hills. May 2-Sep. 30. 877-462-7262. cranbrookart.edu

Detroit Institute of Arts "It's A Zoo In Here" Countless creatures of many species fill the galleries in this exhibition of more than 150 prints and drawings drawn entirely from the museum's holdings and designed with fun in mind for everyone. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2100 Woodward, Detroit. April 1-July 24. 313-833-7900. dia.org

Downriver Council for the Arts "Jured Photography Exhibit" The DCA is accepting entries for a jured photography exhibit at the Wyandotte Arts Center. Professional and amateur photographers can submit up to four entries. A non-refundable \$15 entry fee is required for all entries. Exhibit begins Sept. 8. Wyandotte Arts Center, 2306 4th St., Wyandotte. May 1-Aug. 31. 734-324-7278.

Farmington Downtown Development Authority "Farmington Farmers & Artisans Market" Each Saturday. Fresh Michigan produce, baked goods, locally-produced honey, hand-crafted soaps and emollients, fine art and jewelry, photography and a variety of unique, artisan-made products. Walter E. Sundquist Pavilion, 33113 Grand River Ave., Farmington. May 28-Oct. 29. 248-473-7276. downtownfarmington.org

Flint Institute of Arts "Something Waits Beneath It" Early work by Andrew Wyeth, 1939-1969 is an intimate exhibition of early and seldom seen works by the young Andrew Wyeth, including watercolors of Maine and Pennsylvania made from 1939 through the 1960s. Flint Institute of Arts, 1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint. June 1-Aug. 7. 810-234-1695. flintarts.org

Flint Institute of Arts "Edmund Lewandowski: Precisionism and Beyond" This is the first retrospective exhibition of Milwaukee-born artist Edmund Lewandowski (1914-98), the preeminent second-generation Precisionist, who achieved recognition for extending the style of Precisionism beyond the East Coast and into the Midwest, making it a national style. Flint Institute of Arts, 1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint. June 1-Aug. 7. 810-234-1695. flintarts.org

Henry Ford Museum "Discovering the Civil War" Tickets: \$15 adults, \$11 youth. Henry Ford Museum, 20900 Oakwood Blvd., Dearborn. May 21-Sep. 5. 313-982-6001. thehenryford.org

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts "Portrait and Presence" Contemporary portraiture pursues a complex and personal approach to the genre's traditional representation of the subject's visage and social identity. Admission: Free. Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, 314 S. Park, Kalamazoo. May 1-July 20. 269-349-7775. kiarts.org

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts "The Chinese Scholar's Brush" Works from the Albert and Betty Chang Collection. Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, 314 S. Park, Kalamazoo. May 7-Aug. 27. 269-349-7775. kiarts.org

Kerrytown Concert House "A Matter of Light and Depth" Photography by Angela and Jim George, using light to give depth. Kerrytown Concert House, 415 N. Fourth Ave., Ann Arbor. July 1-Aug. 12. 734-769-2999. kerrytownconcerthouse.com

Kresge Art Museum "Hiraki Sawa: Other Dwellings" Sawa's videos are intimate, sometimes hermetic meditations on place and the wonderfully odd activities that can occur in imaginative dimensions. MSU, Auditorium & Physics Road, East Lansing. April 30-July 21. artmuseum.msu.edu. 517-884-0659



Patrice Erickson's "Standing Watch," of the Lawrence Street Gallery's "Summer Invitational" art exhibit.

Kresge Art Museum "Visualizing Sound" Harry Bertoia's sound-producing, beryllium copper sculpture, Sound Piece, 1978, will interact with a digital visualizer in this performative sculpture experience. MSU, Auditorium & Physics Road, East Lansing. April 30-July 21. artmuseum.msu.edu. 517-884-0659

Lawrence Street Gallery "Summer Invitational" Annual exhibit featuring newest work by local artists. Showcases over 50 works in two and three dimensional media. The Lawrence Street Gallery, 22620 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. June 29-July 30. 248-544-0394. lawrencestreetgallery.com

MOCAD "barely there" Group exhibition featuring James Lee Byars, Luis Camnitzer, Jason Dodge, Pable Helguera, Christoph Keller, Lee Loazio, Rivane and Sergio, Neuenschwander, Wilfredo Prieto, Pascale Marthine Tayou and Adolf Wolfli. Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, 4454 Woodward Ave., Detroit. May 27-July 31. 313-832-6622. mocadetroit.org

MOCAD "Sound in Context: A History of Noise" Provides an understanding of the history and context of the music that today's culture has deemed "noise." Free. Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, 4454 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 7 p.m. June 30. 313-832-6622. mocadetroit.org

Scrab Club Benefit 2011, "A Harmonious Time at the Scarab Club" SC's second annual daytime event featuring Chamber Music performers and the Joybox Express Quartet, four musicians touring the state on bicycles with instruments in tow. The series benefited by this performance, Tiny Scarabs, responds to a need that parents/caregivers have to expose their children to the arts and culture at an early age. Tickets: \$15 adult, \$5 children. Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, Detroit. 12 p.m. July 14. 313-831-1250. scarabclub.org

University of Michigan "Amalia Pica" London-based Argentinian artist's investigations into perception, time, and memory, as well as a desire to explore how particular gestures read in different cultural contexts, pursued across a diverse body of work in sculpture, photography, film, and installation, as well as temporary interventions on buildings, monuments, and objects. University of Michigan Museum of Art, 525 S. State St., Ann Arbor. May 28-Sep. 18. 734-763-4186.



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Between THE Lines™

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From Stork to Finish



BTL
Dear Jody

BY JODY VALLEY

Stop bringing me down

Q: I've lived in this city for four years. I came here from a small town Up North. I really like it here and have lots of friends, but for some reason I just keep feeling depressed and unhappy.

I've worked for a car dealership since I moved here. I'm a sales person; the only female sales person. This place is a real macho place; you know, guys strutting around trying to outdo one another in their crudeness, and trying to prove who can be the biggest stud. They aren't so much this way around customers but when the sales floor room is empty, it's disgusting. Some of the guys treat me OK; most of them just ignore me. I made it really clear early to them that I wouldn't put up with sexual harassment, so most just don't talk to me. I know they make fun of me behind my back, but I pretty much ignore them. Obviously I haven't come out in this atmosphere, nor would I. It wouldn't feel safe. I couldn't say anything to my boss about this as he is the worst offender. Despite the difficulties working there, I'm a good car salesperson and like doing this job.

I live in a two bedroom apartment that I share with a roommate. We moved in together last year. I was having trouble making ends meet living by myself, and this has been a perfect solution, financially. "Sara," my roommate, has different values, interests and sees things so differently than I do. But the big problem that I have with her is that she's so negative about everything and everyone; it drives me nuts. (She does have some good qualities, like she's clean and neat and likes to cook.)

Don't tell me that I should move; our lease isn't up for a year, so we are stuck together and, as I said, she isn't all bad.

I have a good support group of friends. I belong to the Catholic Church and attend pretty much every week. I get a lot of strength from my church. I am, of course, not out at church – gay is not cool. And, I don't want to be out there, as I don't want to have to deal with anything negative in my quest for spirituality.

So as you can see, I pretty much have a good life, not perfect, but neither is anyone

else's. I just don't know why I have a hard time staying upbeat and excited in life.

Feeling Down When Things Are Good

A: You are surrounded by people who give off toxic energy. Other than your friends, the contacts in your life are either negative, unaccepting of you or your sexuality, and not supportive of you.

These kinds of people can wear your psychic down without you realizing what's going on. Since you can't or don't want to change your job, your church or your roommate, you will need to come up with some strategies to deflect all the negative energy that's around you. And, there are some other things you can do:

For instance, talk to your roommate. Let her know about the things you like about her, but also let her know that her negativity is wearing, and you'd appreciate her not being so negative around you. If she starts being negative and won't stop, you could go into your room and listen to some soothing music. Show her that you won't be around her when she's being negative.

At work or other places of negativity, try imagining yourself wrapped in a bubble of positive energy; this bubble doesn't allow in any amount of crudeness or inappropriate or negative behavior or words. When things start getting too bad, make a phone call to a friend whom you can talk to – someone who builds you up, not wears you down. Go for a walk, listen to inspirational music, or do whatever it is that rejuvenates and calms you.

Finally, let your friends know what you are trying to do, and ask for their support.

For more information on dealing with negativity, go to Dear Jody Valley on Facebook and click on the article "How to Heal Toxic Energy."

Jody Valley spent 12 years as a clinical social worker. She worked with the LGBT community both as a counselor and a workshop leader in the areas of coming out, self-esteem and relationship issues. Reach Jody at DearJodyValley@hotmail.com. The "Dear Jody" column appears weekly.

BTL
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BTT Horoscopes

Don't worry, Virgo!

BY JACK FERTIG

With the Sun making a T-square to Uranus and Pluto, big scary changes can lead us to take ourselves too seriously. Venus is in Gemini to remind you that playful flirtations can open up creativity and solutions.

ARIES (March 20 – April 19): Stress at home can make you explode on all fronts. A sibling or neighbor can help you alleviate the problem. At least have someone you can talk with. Take time out as you need it and count to 10 before reacting.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 20): Friends' efforts to assuage your financial worries may backfire, but could provoke you to think more constructively. New ideas can be very helpful but need careful consideration. Don't jump onto anything impulsively.

GEMINI (May 21- June 20): Properly played, charm and beauty – now your strong card – are still best used to highlight more enduring assets. A little self-promotion can go a long way. Overplaying it makes you look slutty. There could be a time and a place for that, too.

CANCER (June 21- July 22): Your best inspirations are the ones that are most challenging and rebellious. Huge changes are necessary and you can show others the way. If your bosses can't see you offering the key to their survival you may need to relocate.

LEO (July 23 – August 22): If you can work more behind-the-scenes and in committee with others your personality and accomplishments will shine through more strongly. An open mind will get you a lot further than an open mouth.

VIRGO (August 23 – September 22): Don't worry about getting the notice you deserve; are you so sure you even want it? Count on your friends to support you as you have supported them. Trying to be clever and creative will ruin everything. Trust your partner's advice.

LIBRA (September 23 – October 22): Your partner's ideas to help you get ahead are sure to create more troubles than solutions. Still, those notions can be a springboard to some helpful strategies. A colleague

or assistant can help you put that fertilizer to good use.

SCORPIO (October 23 – November 21): Sudden outspokenness can get you into big trouble. Having a safe, playful outlet where you can get away with being nasty and mean could open up some useful, constructive ideas. Just remember: There's a time and a place for everything!

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 – December 20): Retail is not therapy. Connecting to community or examining your roots is. You are acutely feeling the global crisis of values and can offer a lot of insight. Get creative. Your best resource is your connectedness, not your money or what it can buy.

CAPRICORN (December 21 – January 19): If you need to choose between your partner and your family you need to reevaluate all relationships involved. A sibling or close friend would have helpful insight. Work also helps to lend perspective.

AQUARIUS (January 20 – February 18): Some secrets need revealing, but think and speak carefully to get the right ones! An artistic, mythological telling may be more effective than a literal exposure. The most important consideration: What's most important and effective?

PISCES (February 19 – March 19): Too many friends? It's about quality, not quantity. Some are just a drag on your resources. Spend time with the few who are really helpful and healing to your spirit. If in doubt, ask yourself who you really enjoy playing with.

Jack Fertig, a professional astrologer since 1977, is available for personal and business consultations in person in San Francisco, or online everywhere. He can be reached at 415-864-8302, through his website at www.starjack.com, and by email at QScopes@qsyndicate.com.



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Solution to puzzle from page 34

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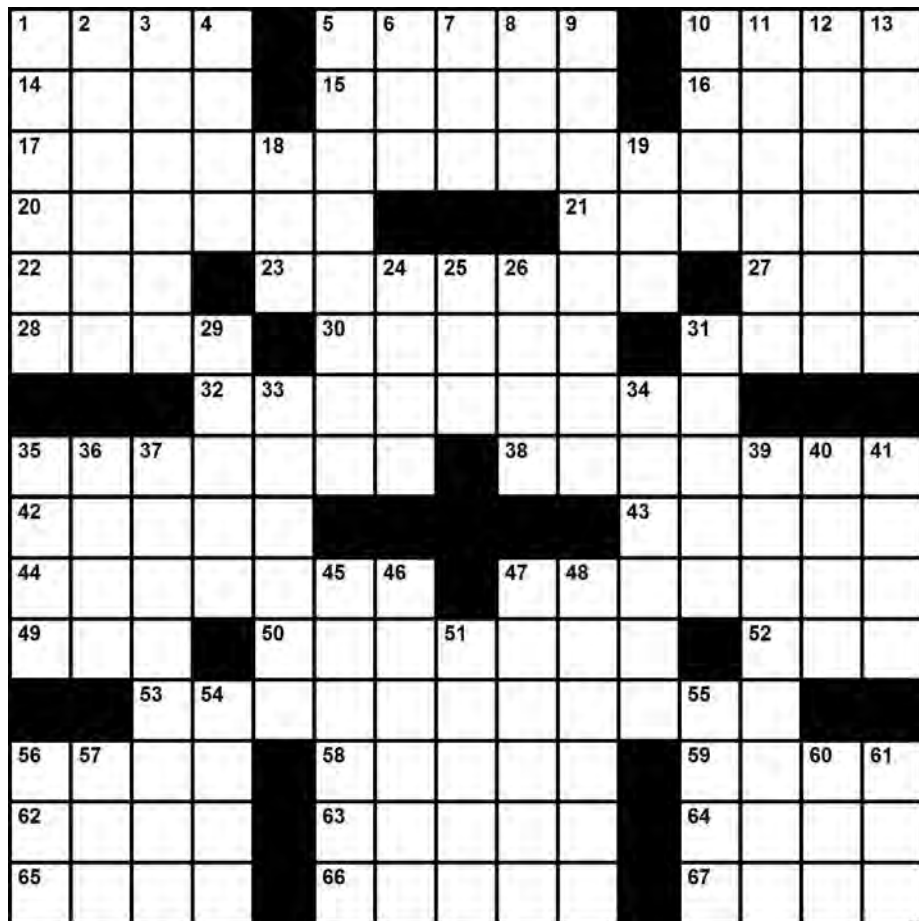
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Hunting for the Lonely Heart

Across

- 1 Huge opening?
- 5 "My Fair Lady" composer
- 10 Sitcom with a cross-dressing corporal
- 14 Airline to Ben Gurion
- 15 Out in front
- 16 Online intro
- 17 Start of the title of a Broadway show
- 20 Artificially enhanced man
- 21 "Keep your pants on!"
- 22 Request of Vanna
- 23 Queen of Latin Pop Gloria
- 27 Hero's ending
- 28 One in bondage
- 30 Hair color, e.g.
- 31 Circle of life for "The Lion King"?
- 32 End of the title
- 35 Pen for talking animals
- 38 Indication of a used rubber
- 42 Puppeteer Lewis

- 43 Thespians should know them
- 44 9 inches, e.g.
- 47 Exhausting
- 49 "... a ___ of troubles" ("Hamlet")
- 50 Where queens park their butts
- 52 Hosp. worker
- 53 Portrayer of the show's title character
- 56 ID for Sandra Scoppettone
- 58 Bone to pick
- 59 Pound of verse
- 62 Tight group
- 63 Fruity-smelling compound
- 64 Kind of beer
- 65 Toy that does tricks
- 66 Skip it
- 67 Adam's apple location

- 3 Victor of "Life with Judy Garland: Me and My Shadows"
- 4 On top of that
- 5 "Shakespeare in Harlem" poet Hughes
- 6 Bit of resistance on the circuit
- 7 Old market letters
- 8 Forerunner of Col. Cammermeyer
- 9 One who engages in pedagogy
- 10 Dog in "The Mask"
- 11 Mauresmo of the courts
- 12 Pilgrim's goal
- 13 Where young travelers sleep together
- 18 Prospector's find
- 19 Contemporary of Bela
- 24 Stephen McCauley's "___ Enough"
- 25 Enjoy orally
- 26 Manicurist's tool
- 29 Laissez-___
- 31 Woody secretion
- 33 Fruit-filled pancake
- 34 Porter's burden

- 35 Label on a lemon that isn't a fruit
- 36 Words of woe
- 37 Namby-pamby
- 39 Like some donuts
- 40 Go for another tour
- 41 Sister company of ABC
- 45 Triangles, e.g.
- 46 "The Importance of Being ___"
- 47 Hit-or-miss
- 48 Hard
- 51 The ___ beat (masochistic partner?)
- 54 Golden Rule preposition
- 55 Type of pool
- 56 Hardly hospitable
- 57 Road warning
- 60 Charlotte of "Facts of Life"
- 61 Cartoon prince's son

Down

- 1 South Beach and P'town, to many
- 2 Comedienne Boosler

Solution on 33

Pet of the Week

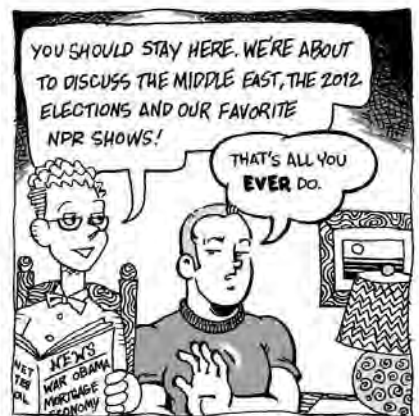


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Bloomfield Hills-Thursday

7:00 pm, Sobriety in The Hills Gay AA, Kirk in The Hills Church, 1340 W. Long Lake Rd. Closed/Discussion.

Detroit-Tuesday / Friday

8:00 pm, Downtown Gay AA, Fort Street Presbyterian Church, 631 West Fort St. Closed/Discussion (Open 1st Friday of every month).

Farmington Hills-Monday

8:00 pm, Suburban West Gay AA, Universalist Unitarian Church, 25301 Halstead (Between 10 & 11 Mile Roads) Closed / Discussion.

**Ferndale-Monday /
Wednesday / Friday**

11:30 a.m., Brown Baggers Gay AA, Affirmations, 290 West 9 Mile Rd. Closed/Discussion.

Ferndale-Wednesday

8 p.m., Diversity Wednesday Gay AA, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 540 W. Lewiston @ Livernois. Closed/Discussion.

Ferndale-Saturday

1 p.m. Brown Baggers Gay AA, Affirmations, 290 West 9 Mile Rd. Closed/Discussion.

8 p.m. Go After Your Sobriety Gay AA, Drayton Ave Presbyterian Church, 2441 Pinecrest. Closed/Discussion.

Livonia-Friday

8 p.m., West Side Story's Gay AA, Providence Medical Center, 7 Mile & Newburgh. Closed/Discussion.

**Pontiac-Tuesday /
Thursday / Sunday**

8 p.m., Pontiac Gay AA, Shrine of St. Joseph, 400 West South Blvd. Closed/Discussion.

Warren-Monday

7:30 p.m., Eastside Serenity Gay AA, Faith-Trinity United Church of Christ, 12221 Martin Rd. East of Hoover. Closed/Discussion.

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RTM Queeries

BY STEVEN PETROW

Talking about HIV and other STDs with a new partner

Q: I've gotten pretty confused about when to talk with new partners or boyfriends about STDs and HIV status. Some of my friends say that as long as you're having safer sex, there's no need to have "the talk." Others say – vehemently, I might add – that I must have that conversation. What do you think? By the way, I'm HIV-positive.

A: All of us who are sexually active need to be responsible for considering the risks of spreading STDs and for taking steps to protect our partners and ourselves. Whether positive or negative (or, unknowing), we owe it to everyone involved to talk about our sexual health before having sex. I've long said that if you're intimate enough to have sex with someone, you're intimate enough to talk about HIV status.

It's usually easier to do this before you find yourself in the heat of the moment, where folks sometimes get carried away by the throes of passion and take risks they might not otherwise. "The talk" needn't be involved or lengthy – although, admittedly, it can be hard to make this particular topic romantic. Be truthful and direct, saying, for instance: "I just want you to know that as far as I know, I'm (fill in the blank). What about you?" Sometimes it's easier if you volunteer your health status first, as a way to open the door. If humor comes to you naturally, by all means try that; but remember, you're not giving a public health lecture.

Since you mentioned that you're HIV-positive, let me give you some more advice to chew on. Even if you've hinted at your seropositive status, don't assume your partner knows. The subtle signals of human interaction – especially sex-charged interaction – are easily misinterpreted. By the way, even if you discover that both of you are poz, you'll still want to talk about other potential bugs on board (Hepatitis B/C, gonorrhea, etc.) to avoid any co-infections.

Similarly, it's smart for HIV-negative people to tell their partners that information, too. This may well help a poz partner disclose his status or help both of you gauge where you'll play on the safer-sex spectrum. Or, the HIV-positive fellow may decide to pass on having sex, having previously decided not to date or have sex with HIV-negative guys (and vice versa).

When a daughter changes her gender, does she become a son?

Q: A friend's daughter now says she's transgender and had surgery to remove her breasts last week. I guess I should have written my friend's "son." Anyway, "he" seems thrilled with his results, but he is still a girl where it counts, so it is very confusing.

A: With all the news about Chaz Bono being transgender, your question provides a timely reminder of how complex the topic of gender identity can be. As for your friend's

offspring, yes, he is indeed her son; no need for quotation marks around the word. One of the basic concepts of gender identity is that you are the gender you think and say you are. The external genitalia that make a doctor proclaim, "It's a girl!" in the delivery room are not the sum total of that individual's gender identity. Chaz summed it up perfectly by saying recently that gender identity is "between your ears, not between your legs."

Someone who makes the decision to transition from one gender to another is choosing to live as the gender that feels right to that person. For some that may simply mean changing their name and the way they dress; for others, it means taking hormones that produce physical characteristics that feel right. Others have sex-reassignment surgery, and, as you note, there are "upper" and "lower" elements to that. Most transgender people go through years of therapy and counseling as they try to determine which options are best for them, and they may take different transitional steps as time goes by. But when it comes to figuring out what to call your friend's son, the truth is that all this matters little. Wherever your friend's son falls along the continuum of transition, since he now calls himself a man, he is a man.

The important thing to remember is that individuals who are transitioning can experience tremendous pain and confusion. By some estimates, 20 to 30 percent of transgender people have attempted or committed suicide. The support of those who love them can mean the world to them; it can, in fact, literally be the difference between life and death.



All about my new book

Thanks to so many of you for sending in your "Queeries" over the past couple of years. Now you'll find them, plus hundreds of other questions, in my new book, "Steven Petrow's Complete Gay & Lesbian Manners." The book, really a guide to your best LGBT life, covers it all – from coming out to making friends, dating and sex etiquette, long-term relationships and same-sex ceremonies, not to mention, raising our kids, entertaining, dealing with homophobia, and much more. Please check it out.

Steven Petrow is the author of "Steven Petrow's Complete Gay & Lesbian Manners: The Definitive Guide to LGBT Life" and can be found online at www.gaymanners.com.



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RTT Deep Inside Hollywood



Cyndi Lauper. Photo: Downtown Records

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Weinsteins pick up Madonna's 'W.E.'

The Weinstein Company has picked up Madonna's second feature as a director, "W.E.," for American distribution later this year. You might not remember it, but yes, Madonna did direct a 2008 feature film titled "Filth and Wisdom" that approximately 11 people paid money to see, so it wouldn't be a surprise if she wanted to forget it and make this new one her do-over. Based on the lives and relationship of Wallis Simpson and King Edward VIII, the film stars Abbie Cornish, Andrea Riseborough and James D'Arcy. Also, it couldn't have come along at a better time; the characters were a relevant subplot in last year's "The King's Speech" – Edward abdicated the throne to be with American divorcee Simpson – and recently Madonna's pal Gwyneth Paltrow did a wickedly funny history-teacher-substitute impersonation of Simpson on an episode of "Glee." So there's a chance this one will attract more of a ticket-buying audience than the director's last movie. Better news? Ms. Ciccone isn't acting in it.

Roland Emmerich to direct 'Asteroids'?

Roland Emmerich, the gay director responsible for the biggest, baddest, earth-endingest disaster movies of the past 15 years ("Independence Day," "The Day After Tomorrow," "2012") now finds himself courted by Universal to direct the movie adaptation of the retro video game "Asteroids." That's the one where the big letter "A" floats in space shooting little blips at big rocks and spaceships, which means that, clearly, it's going to be an amazing film. And it's obvious why they want the man: he's the king of this kind of stuff even though Emmerich has said he no longer wants to make big end-of-the-world films. He could still sign on, though, when he learns that this wouldn't be one of those kinds of projects. That's because it'll be set after the end of the world and the aliens have already won. See? Totally not the same thing. Next up? Film versions of Metroid, Centipede, Frogger, Burger Time and Pong.

'American Idiot': the Movie of the Broadway Show of the Concept Album

These days, as far as movie musicals go, everybody wants to be "Mamma Mia!" Not that you can blame any producer for wanting a global smash despite possible critical bashings (and "Mamma Mia!" had plenty), but the already proven formula seems most likely to succeed at the multiplex. Enter Tom Hanks and his PlayTone Productions' adaptation of the Broadway hit, "American Idiot." Based on the concept album by post-punk band Green Day, the film strings together Green Day hits of the '90s and '00s into a narrative about modern life in an increasingly chaotic United States. A refreshing change-up from Neanderthal rock attitudes, Green Day was, alongside Nirvana, responsible for aiming progressive, pro-gay messages at its young audience and the band's frontman, Billie Joe Armstrong, will reprise his role of St. Jimmy in the film version. The project is still in development but is looking to smarten up theaters sometime in 2013. Look, as long as it beats "Jersey Boys: The Movie" into the multiplex, the world can continue to turn on its axis.

Cyndi Lauper doesn't miss a 'Beat'

Cyndi Lauper's gay diva status in the 1980s was always somewhat overshadowed by the towering presence of Madonna, but in recent years with her ongoing activism and musical shift toward more dance-oriented tracks (including queer-specific personalities like former gay porn star-turned-singer Colton Ford in her videos), Lauper has more than reminded her fans where her loyalties lie. And now she's going to remind you that she can act by taking a role in the independent feature "The Last Beat." The cast includes French film star Virginie Ledoyen and Oscar nominee Seymour Cassel and is the story of a rock star who goes to Paris in search of a more artistic existence. For Lauper, it'll be the first reasonably high-profile feature project since she followed up her cameo in 1985's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" with the psychic romantic comedy (and box-office bomb) "Vibes." So welcome back, Cyndi.

Romeo San Vicente still just wants to have fun. He can be reached care of this publication or at DeepInsideHollywood@qsyndicate.com.

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