

MICHIGAN'S LGBT NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993



Church Drops Conversion Therapy Workshop Fee

Hussain Alqattan On the Cost of Coming Out

Ruling: Title VII Bars Anti-Gay Workplace Discrimination



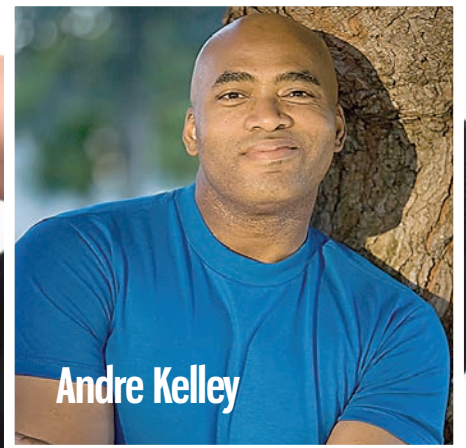
PUNCHY, FIERY & HONEST HILARITY

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Suzanne Westenhoefer



Pat Regan



Andre Kelley



Julia Scotti



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Ricky Ian Gordon, composer
Royce Vavrek, Librettist

27

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Sat. Mar. 3 at 7:30 p.m.

Macomb Center for the Performing Arts
Sat. Mar. 10 at 7:30 p.m.
Sun. Mar. 11 at 2:30 p.m.

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This project is supported in part, by an award from:



Borderline Company Wang Ramirez

Honji Wang and Sébastien Ramirez,
dancers and choreographers
Original music by Jean-Philippe Barrios
(aka Lacrymoby)

Friday, March 9 // 8 pm
Saturday, March 10 // 8 pm
Power Center

Funded in part by: National Endowment for the Arts and
the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Endowment Fund
Media Partners: Ann Arbor's 107one and WDET 101.9 FM

Borderline features a cast of six performers hooked up to an aerial rigging system, allowing them to defy gravity. Nuanced choreography explores visual metaphors of flight, struggle, freedom, constraint, and the forces that connect us and tear us apart. "The contemporary dance revolution is taking place. And dancers like Sébastien Ramirez and Honji Wang are on the frontlines." (*L'Indépendant*)



Nederlands Dans Theater

Paul Lightfoot, artistic director

PROGRAM

Lightfoot/León Shoot the Moon
Pite The Statement
Lightfoot/León Singulière Odyssee

Friday, March 23 // 8 pm
Saturday, March 24 // 8 pm
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"Think ballet line and virtuosity fused with modern dance weight and power. Think a commitment to the deepest European art-making traditions with no pandering to pop culture. Above all, think a super-ensemble: dancers who can form a superb corps one moment and perform just as superbly as principals the next." (*Los Angeles Times*)



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COVER

16 ComedyFest This Weekend

NEWS:

- 4 Metro City Church Drops Conversion Therapy Workshop Fee
- 5 Ruth Ellis Day Celebrated at Ruth Ellis Center
- 9 Tim Sneller: Changing Tides
- 10 2nd Circuit Rules Title VII Bars Anti-Gay Workplace Discrimination
- 14 Hussain Alqattan On the Cost of Coming Out

OPINION

- 12 Parting Glances
- 12 Viewpoint
- 13 Creep of the Week

LIFE

- 16 Punchy, Fiery and Honest Hilarity
- 20 Love Lessons With Calum Scott
- 31 Deep Inside Hollywood

MARRIAGE

- 34 BTL Celebrates 25 years of LGBTQ Publishing with Kick-Off Event at March 11 Expo

COOL CITIES: ANN ARBOR

- 23 Theatre NOVA Presents Michigan Premiere of 'The Devil's Music: the Life and Blues of Bessie Smith'
- 24 'Me, The Other,' a Documentary Featuring Washtenaw County College Students, Returns to Ann Arbor
- 26 Happenings
- 32 Classifieds
- 33 Puzzle and Crossword

FILM



24 'Me, The Other,' a Documentary Featuring Washtenaw County College Students, Returns to Ann Arbor

ENTERTAINMENT



20 British Crooner Calum Scott, Talks Coming Out, Falling For Straight Men & Learning to Love Himself

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



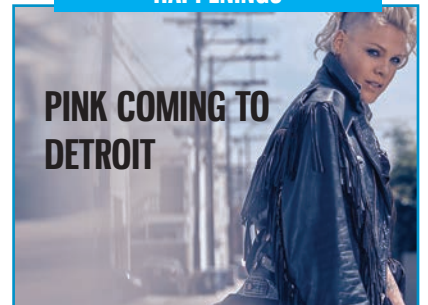
- 28 Shannonloren Named LGBT Chamber of Commerce's Newest Gold Member
- 28 The Colorful World of Simon Black
- 30 #MuteRKelly Protestors at LCA: 'Black Girls Lives Matter'
- 30 ICON Detroit Reaches 25-Year Milestone

MARRIAGE



34 Gearing Up for Expo 2018

HAPPENINGS



PINK COMING TO DETROIT

27 Best of LGBT Events



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Metro City Church Drops Conversion Therapy Workshop Fee

Congregation May Avoid Investigation for Violation of Michigan Consumer Protection Act

BY DREW HOWARD

Leaders at Metro City Church and FORGE Ministries – the organizations at the center of backlash for offering what many call a conversion therapy class – may have escaped a government investigation into their church for consumer fraud.

Several weeks ago, Metro City Church advertised a \$200 “Unashamed Identity Workshop” run through FORGE Ministries for girls (by birth) ages 12-16 struggling with thoughts that they are “Bi-Trans-Gay or other.” Thousands of community members have since denounced the workshop as conversion therapy, a pseudoscientific practice of trying to change an individual’s orientation using psychological or spiritual interventions.

In response to the workshop, five state representatives co-signed a letter to Attorney General Bill Schuette on Feb. 8 demanding an investigation be made into the church for consumer fraud. Representatives say Metro City Church could be found guilty of consumer fraud if they accepted money for the course, as many forms of conversion therapy have been proven to do more harm than good to its subjects.

But one crucial element of the investigation has now changed: the price tag. At a press conference in Lansing on Feb. 15, Pastor Jeremy Schossau said social media backlash prompted the church to make the course completely free.

In an interview with BTL, Schossau confirmed the class will be free, but he claims that the church’s change of mind was not prompted in any way by the potential investigation.

“We removed it well before we heard the investigation and before the investigation was filed,” he said. “We have a video we put out before the investigation confirming this.”

Schossau directed BTL to its YouTube channel “We Are Metro,” where he says he published a video confirming the class would be charged at no cost before the investigation was announced on Feb. 8. BTL could find no such video before or after representatives accused the church of consumer fraud.

Rep. Adam Zemke (D-Ann Arbor) said he wasn’t aware Metro City Church made the class free and would respond to BTL once he consults with legal counsel. While he was unable to comment on the direction of the investigation, Zemke agreed that the price tag



Nearly 300 protestors gathered at Metro City Church’s Riverview campus to protest its “Unashamed Identity Workshop,” which many are calling “conversion therapy.”

was a key component.

Schossau said he is not concerned about the investigation as he believes the classes will ultimately benefit those who sign up.

“It’s silly to call anything fraud - are they going to call Weight Watchers fraud?” he said.

Despite his confidence, Schossau is one of many Michigan pastors supporting a new petition from the Family Research Council aimed at preventing government overreach into churches.

The petition, titled “Help Pastors Stand Against Government Overreach,” has nearly 16,000 actions with a goal of 20,000. It reads: “It is alarming that legislators, who have sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution, have attacked the free speech rights and free exercise of religion by a local church congregation, in direct violation of the First Amendment. Moreover, as government officials, for you



Metro City Church pastor Jeremy Schossau addresses the Church’s YouTube audience about its alleged ‘conversion therapy’ classes.

to dictate what a local church must teach regarding its theology is totalitarian in nature, and is at the heart of what the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment was meant to prevent.”

Family Research Council is an American conservative Christian group and lobbying organization. On its website, the organization describes homosexuality as “harmful to the

persons who engage in it and to society at large” and “by definition unnatural.”

Both during the Lansing press conference and in his interview with BTL, Schossau insists that the girls signing up for his class are being “bullied by the LGBTQ community.”

“Kids all over are saying, ‘Look, all my friends are gay and they want me to experiment and express myself in this way and telling me I’m gay,’” Schossau said. “It’s a constant mantra that’s going on out there.”

“They are being bullied by the LGBTQ community to explore all things sexual,” he continued. “That needs to stop – the LGBTQ community needs to hold themselves to higher standards.”

Roz Keith, founder and president of Stand With Trans, opposes the Metro City Church workshop. She told BTL that Schossau’s comments about bullies in the LGBTQ community are false and backwards.

“My experience and intuition tells me that’s absolutely untrue, and the likelihood of that happening ever is slim to none,” Keith said. “If anything it’s the kids who identify under the umbrella of LGBTQ who are harassed and feel unsafe every day.”

Royal Oak therapist Nicholas Zielke specializes in gender identity. He spoke specifically on the effects the church’s workshop will have on transgender youth.

“It is emotionally and mentally damaging for a person who is transgender to attend conversion therapy because it does not allow them to be their authentic self and teaches young people during a critical period of development that they should suppress who they feel they are,” Zielke said, adding “The kids who thrive and can survive the cruelties and lack of understanding they face as they learn and try to live as who they feel they truly are, are the ones who have an open and supportive family around them. Without this kind of unconditional love and understanding, these same kids struggle with depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation, among other things.”

Peaceful protests have been held by the Metro-Detroit Political Action Network at the Metro City Church Riverview Campus on Thursday nights and will continue each week from 6-8 p.m. when the workshop is underway. For more information, visit the organization’s website.

Ruth Ellis Day Celebrated at Ruth Ellis Center

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

A small crowd of about 15 passed by the Ruth Ellis Center Drop-In Center in Highland Park Sunday for the annual Ruth Ellis Day celebration. The Ruth Ellis Day tradition actually began a few years before Ellis died in her sleep at age 101 in 2000.

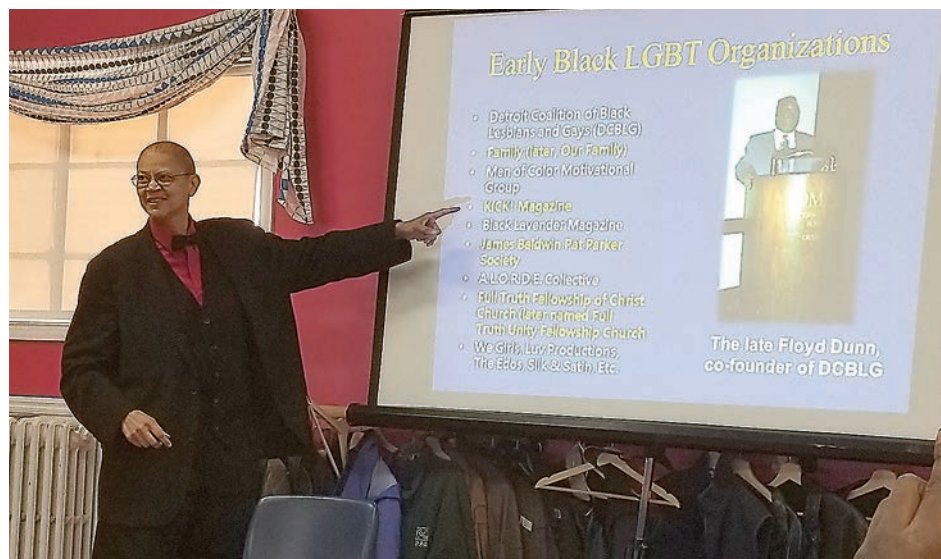
“A few years before Ruth passed we knew that we wanted to celebrate her while she was here,” said Kofi Adoma, a co-founder of the Ruth Ellis Center and a friend of Ellis’s. “We didn’t wait until she died. [But since she passed] this is a tradition that we have kept going.”

Ruth Ellis Day takes place each year in February.

“We hold Ruth Ellis Day during Black History/Herstory month because we considered Ms. Ruth to be a part of black history,” Adoma said. “In fact, I still think we need to put her on a stamp.”

Adoma admitted that the event draws a small crowd and that numbers have been dwindling.

“I think we should have about 50 people here but because it doesn’t get marketed out there and it doesn’t get promoted out there ... I think the biggest we had was at Full Truth Church.”



Kofi Adoma, a co-founder of the Ruth Ellis Center, gave a tutorial on African-American LGBT history. BTL photo: Jason A. Michael

Adoma called on the youth at the event to keep it going.

“We really need to have a standing committee to present it each year,” she said. “Dr. Kofi is getting old and I have a lot on my plate. So I did what I could to hold it down. I’ve been holding a lot of things down for a long time.”

Adoma gave attendees a brief quiz on

African-American LGBT history and a tutorial on African-American LGBT history in Detroit. But, mostly, she talked about her friend Ruth. She was born in 1899 in Springfield, Ill. She moved to Detroit in 1937 with her partner Cecilene “Babe” Franklin. The two were known for hosting parties for the city’s underground black LGBT community in their home, which also served as headquarters

for Ellis’s small printing business. Ellis was also known to take in strays in the LGBT community and let them stay in her home during times of trouble.

“She welcome people to come [into her home],” said Adoma. “A lot of them were young people and she helped them to go school and gave them whatever money she had.”

When a group of community activists got together in 1999 and set out with the mission to build a shelter for homeless LGBT youth, Adoma suggested the name Ruth Ellis Center. Ellis, herself, was on hand for the dedication of the first drop-in center, which was located near the corner of Woodward Avenue and Six Mile Road. A month later, she was gone.

“She went in peace knowing that something was going to happen ... that we were going to open up and give young people a place,” Adoma said.

Today, the Ruth Ellis Center Drop-In Center services about 500 youth a year. There is also the Ruth Ellis Health and Wellness Center on premises and off-site there is Ruth’s House, an Intensive Treatment Unit (ITU) that is a licensed and contracted 9-bed residential care facility specifically for self-identifying LGBT youth between the ages 12-17 who are under guardianship of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services’ child abuse/neglect or juvenile justice divisions.

For more information, visit www.ruthelliscenter.org.

Pride Night
at Little Caesars Arena
Friday March 9, 7 p.m.,
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The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the Detroit Pistons to bring you Pistons Pride Night at Little Caesars Arena with support from PNC Bank. Grab your friends and family to see the Pistons take on the Chicago Bulls for an exciting night of Detroit Basketball. Join us in the PRIVATE GONDOLA AREA WHERE ATTENDEES WILL HAVE EXCLUSIVE ACCESS.

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What is TRUVADA for PrEP?

TRUVADA for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a prescription medicine that is used together with safer sex practices to help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 through sex. This use is only for HIV-negative adults who are at high risk of getting HIV-1. To help determine your risk of getting HIV-1, talk openly with your healthcare provider about your sexual health.

Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions about how to prevent getting HIV. Always practice safer sex and use condoms to lower the chance of sexual contact with body fluids. Never reuse or share needles or other items that have body fluids on them.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA for PrEP?

Before taking TRUVADA for PrEP:

- ◆ **You must be HIV-negative before you start taking TRUVADA for PrEP.** You must get tested to make sure that you do not already have HIV-1. Do not take TRUVADA to reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 unless you are confirmed to be HIV-negative.
- ◆ **Many HIV-1 tests can miss HIV-1 infection in a person who has recently become infected.** If you have flu-like symptoms, you could have recently become infected with HIV-1. Tell your healthcare provider if you had a flu-like illness within the last month before starting or at any time while taking TRUVADA for PrEP. Symptoms of new HIV-1 infection include tiredness, fever, joint or muscle aches, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, night sweats, and/or enlarged lymph nodes in the neck or groin.

While taking TRUVADA for PrEP:

- ◆ **You must continue to use safer sex practices. Just taking TRUVADA for PrEP may not keep you from getting HIV-1.**
- ◆ **You must stay HIV-negative to keep taking TRUVADA for PrEP:**
 - ◆ Get tested for HIV-1 at least every 3 months.
 - ◆ If you think you were exposed to HIV-1, tell your healthcare provider right away.
- ◆ **To further help reduce your risk of getting HIV-1:**
 - ◆ Know your HIV status and the HIV status of your partners.
 - ◆ Get tested for other sexually transmitted infections. Other infections make it easier for HIV to infect you.
 - ◆ Get information and support to help reduce risky sexual behavior, such as having fewer sex partners.
 - ◆ Do not miss any doses of TRUVADA. Missing doses may increase your risk of getting HIV-1 infection.
- ◆ **If you do become HIV-1 positive, you need more medicine than TRUVADA alone to treat HIV-1.** TRUVADA by itself is not a complete treatment for HIV-1. If you have HIV-1 and take only TRUVADA, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat over time.

TRUVADA can cause serious side effects:

- ◆ **Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection.** TRUVADA is not approved to treat HBV. If you have HBV and stop taking TRUVADA, your HBV may suddenly get worse. Do not stop taking TRUVADA without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to monitor your health.

Who should not take TRUVADA for PrEP?

Do not take TRUVADA for PrEP if you:

- ◆ **Already have HIV-1 infection or if you do not know your HIV-1 status.** If you are HIV-1 positive, you need to take other medicines with TRUVADA to treat HIV-1. TRUVADA by itself is not a complete treatment for HIV-1. If you have HIV-1 and take only TRUVADA, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat over time.
- ◆ **Also take certain medicines to treat hepatitis B infection.**

What are the other possible side effects of TRUVADA for PrEP?

Serious side effects of TRUVADA may also include:

- ◆ **Kidney problems, including kidney failure.** Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your kidneys before and during treatment with TRUVADA. If you develop kidney problems, your healthcare provider may tell you to stop taking TRUVADA.
- ◆ **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis),** which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- ◆ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- ◆ **Bone problems,** including bone pain, softening, or thinning, which may lead to fractures. Your healthcare provider may do tests to check your bones.

Common side effects in people taking TRUVADA for PrEP are stomach-area (abdomen) pain, headache, and decreased weight. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effects that bother you or do not go away.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking TRUVADA for PrEP?

- ◆ **All your health problems.** Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if you have or have had any kidney, bone, or liver problems, including hepatitis.
- ◆ **If you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.** It is not known if TRUVADA can harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant while taking TRUVADA for PrEP, talk to your healthcare provider to decide if you should keep taking TRUVADA.
- ◆ **If you are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed.** Do not breastfeed. If you become HIV-positive, HIV can be passed to the baby in breast milk.
- ◆ **All the medicines you take,** including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. TRUVADA may interact with other medicines. Keep a list of all your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.
- ◆ **If you take certain other medicines with TRUVADA,** your healthcare provider may need to check you more often or change your dose. These medicines include certain medicines to treat hepatitis C (HCV) infection.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Please see Important Facts about TRUVADA for PrEP including important warnings on the following page.

A photograph of two men with beards and short hair, both wearing black leather vests. They are smiling and looking towards each other. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with buildings and greenery.

We're adventurous, not reckless.

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TRUVADA for PrEP™ is a once-daily prescription medicine that can help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 when taken every day and used together with safer sex practices.

- ◆ TRUVADA for PrEP is only for adults who are at high risk of getting HIV through sex.
- ◆ You must be HIV-negative before you start taking TRUVADA for PrEP.

Ask your doctor about your risk of getting HIV-1 infection and if TRUVADA for PrEP may be right for you.

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(tru-VAH-dah)

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT TRUVADA FOR PrEP

Before starting TRUVADA for PrEP:

- **You must be HIV-1 negative.** You must get tested to make sure that you do not already have HIV-1. Do not take TRUVADA for PrEP to reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 unless you are confirmed to be HIV-1 negative.
- **Many HIV-1 tests can miss HIV-1 infection in a person who has recently become infected.** Symptoms of new HIV-1 infection include flu-like symptoms, tiredness, fever, joint or muscle aches, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, night sweats, and/or enlarged lymph nodes in the neck or groin. Tell your healthcare provider if you have had a flu-like illness within the last month before starting TRUVADA for PrEP.

While taking TRUVADA for PrEP:

- **You must continue to use safer sex practices. Just taking TRUVADA for PrEP may not keep you from getting HIV-1.**
- **You must stay HIV-negative to keep taking TRUVADA for PrEP.** Get tested for HIV-1 at least every 3 months while taking TRUVADA for PrEP. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you think you were exposed to HIV-1 or have a flu-like illness while taking TRUVADA for PrEP.
- **If you do become HIV-1 positive, you need more medicine than TRUVADA alone to treat HIV-1.** If you have HIV-1 and take only TRUVADA, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat over time.
- See the "How To Further Reduce Your Risk" section for more information.

TRUVADA may cause serious side effects, including:

- **Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection.** TRUVADA is not approved to treat HBV. If you have HBV, your HBV may suddenly get worse if you stop taking TRUVADA. Do not stop taking TRUVADA without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check your health regularly for several months.

ABOUT TRUVADA FOR PrEP

TRUVADA for PrEP is a prescription medicine used together with safer sex practices to help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 through sex. This use is only for HIV-negative adults who are at high risk of getting HIV-1.

- To help determine your risk of getting HIV-1, talk openly with your healthcare provider about your sexual health.

Do NOT take TRUVADA for PrEP if you:

- **Already have HIV-1 infection or if you do not know your HIV-1 status.**
- Take certain medicines to treat hepatitis B infection.

HOW TO TAKE TRUVADA FOR PrEP

- **Take 1 tablet once a day, every day,** not just when you think you have been exposed to HIV-1.
- Do not miss any doses. Missing doses may increase your risk of getting HIV-1 infection.
- Use TRUVADA for PrEP together with condoms and safer sex practices.
- Get tested for HIV-1 at least every 3 months. You must stay HIV-negative to keep taking TRUVADA for PrEP.

IMPORTANT FACTS

This is only a brief summary of important information about taking TRUVADA for PrEP™ (pre-exposure prophylaxis) to help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 infection. This does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your medicine.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF TRUVADA FOR PrEP

TRUVADA can cause serious side effects, including:

- Those in the "Most Important Information About TRUVADA for PrEP" section.
- New or worse kidney problems, including kidney failure.
- Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- Severe liver problems, which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- Bone problems.

Common side effects in people taking TRUVADA for PrEP include stomach-area (abdomen) pain, headache, and decreased weight.

These are not all the possible side effects of TRUVADA. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking TRUVADA for PrEP.

Your healthcare provider will need to do tests to monitor your health before and during treatment with TRUVADA for PrEP.

BEFORE TAKING TRUVADA FOR PrEP

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- Have or have had any kidney, bone, or liver problems, including hepatitis.
- Have any other medical conditions.
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed. If you become HIV-positive, HIV can pass to the baby in breast milk.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

- Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
- Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines that should not be taken with TRUVADA for PrEP.

HOW TO FURTHER REDUCE YOUR RISK

- Know your HIV status and the HIV status of your partners.
- Get tested for other sexually transmitted infections. Other infections make it easier for HIV to infect you.
- Get information and support to help reduce risky sexual behavior, such as having fewer sex partners.
- Do not share needles or personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- This is only a brief summary of important information about TRUVADA for PrEP. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more, including how to prevent HIV infection.
- Go to start.truvada.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
- If you need help paying for your medicine, visit start.truvada.com for program information.



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Tim Sneller: Changing Tides

BY JONATHAN W. THURSTON

When supporting candidates for political offices, experience is usually a major factor in the decision-making process. Tim Sneller is a Democrat from Flint running for the State House, District 50, and experience is something he has plenty of. Sneller has lived in Genessee County all his life and has worked to represent the county for much of that time. “Prior to being a state representative last year,” Sneller said, “I was a staffer for various representatives and senators for 34 years.”

Sneller prides himself on being an LGBT candidate, connecting himself with other such candidates, Jon Hoadley, Robert Van Kirk and Jeremy Moss, who Sneller says worked to prohibit discrimination in adoption laws.

“We’re the civil rights package,” Sneller said. “I introduced a bill to add sexual orientation into the state hate crime.”

Civil rights have been at the core of Sneller’s platform, though he has worked on some labor rights as well. Much of his concern for the everyday man comes from his educational background at University of Michigan, with a bachelor’s degree in political science and a secondary teaching certificate in 2002.

Sneller takes pride in just completing his first year in the State House. One of his goals in this role was to communicate effectively and represent fairly his district, which encompassed the city of Burton, Grand Blanc, the Township of Grand Blanc and Mundy, altogether around 90,000 residents, he estimates. One way that Sneller works to achieve better representation in his district is by having regular coffee meets.

“One thing I’ve prided myself in is my 38th coffee hour,” Sneller said.

At these meets, he allows people to come and just talk, sharing their concerns and suggestions for improving the area. And altogether, this is just one way that Sneller has worked to connect with the people he is tasked with representing. Some of his other methods

of reaching have included, “Lots of meetings around the district this past year.”

“(I) Did a lot of door-knocking through the summer and legislative walks. Surveys on what people’s top priorities are,” he said. “And my first bill passed the house this fall.”

Sneller has high hopes for LGBTQ diversity in the future of politics and is pleased to see the high success rate of LGBTQ candidates this year.

“It’s a great way to move forward,” he said. However, in order to continue that success,

he encourages citizens to shift their actions as well.

“We need to become more active. You see what’s going on in the federal level,” Sneller said. “Look at the tax thing Trump just did!”

Sneller looks back on his years of working for the government and notes the high presence of Republicans in Michigan seats. However, a change is on the rise, according to him.

“And people are now getting more involved,” Sneller

said. “I see this happening with the LGBTQ community and even with women. People have to get active and get involved in the political process – (that’s the) only way you’re going to change things.”

To members of the community, Sneller suggests that people communicate with each other and have these important conversations.

“Go out and have meetings. Get people to understand these issues. I hear all the time there are five or six major issues, especially health care and infrastructure,” he said. “People should be outraged at all of this, at what’s going on in the state and in the nation. We gotta work hard.”

Despite the mostly Republican past, however, Sneller sees Democrats increasing in energy. The once mostly red state has become what Sneller calls a now “purple state.” And the increased energy of the Democrats is responsible for that shift.

“The tide,” Sneller said, “is changing.”

Connect with Tim Sneller online at housedems.com/sneller.



Tim Sneller

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2nd Circuit Rules Title VII Bars Anti-Gay Workplace Discrimination

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

In a major ruling affirming protections for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers, a federal appeals court in New York City ruled Monday employment discrimination based on sexual orientation is unlawful under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In a 69-page “en banc” decision from the full court, the Second Circuit finds Donald Zarda, a now deceased skydiver who alleges he was fired from Altitude Express for being gay, can sue under existing civil rights law because sexual orientation discrimination is a form of sex discrimination.

Writing for the court in the 10-3 decision, U.S. Chief Circuit Judge Robert Katzmann, a Clinton appointee, concludes Zarda’s estate is “entitled to bring a Title VII claim for discrimination based on sexual orientation.”

“Zarda has alleged that, by ‘honestly referr[ing] to his sexual orientation,’ he failed to ‘conform to the straight male macho stereotype,’” Katzmann writes. “For this reason, he has alleged a claim of discrimination of the kind we now hold cognizable under Title VII.”

The decision vacates a trial court ruling against Zarda’s claims based on sexual orientation discrimination under Title VII, remanding the case to the court for reconsideration. The “en banc” ruling also overturns Second Circuit precedent against protections for gay workers in the jurisdiction – the 2000 decision in *Simonton v. Runyon* and the 2005 decision in *Dawson v. Bumble & Bumble*.

In the past year alone, that precedent formed the basis for two rulings from three-judge panels on the Second Circuit against the idea that sexual orientation discrimination is sex discrimination (although in one case, the court ruled in favor of the gay plaintiff anyway based on sex-stereotyping claims). The latest “en banc” ruling means lesbian, gay and bisexual plaintiffs will now unequivocally be able seek relief in the Second Circuit if they face anti-gay workplace discrimination.

The ruling is also a blow to the Trump administration, which sent Deputy Assistant Attorney General Hashim Mooppan to the court for oral arguments in September to argue employers should be able to fire workers for being gay despite Title VII.

Greg Nevins, an attorney and employment fairness project director for Lambda Legal, argued on behalf of Zarda before the Second Circuit and said the court’s decision is “huge” in the effort to prohibit anti-gay workplace discrimination nationwide.

“It really changes the dynamics about how people talk about who’s winning this argument,” Nevins said. “Nobody can



The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit has issued a ruling against anti-gay workplace discrimination. (Photo by Ken Lund; courtesy Flickr)

call Hively an outlier. We now have an overwhelming victory in two circuits – out of Chicago, and out of New York now – and both of them were lopsided.”

In the reasoning for the decision, Katzmann finds three separate ways in which sexual orientation discrimination is a subset of sex discrimination.

First, Katzmann finds sexual orientation “is defined by one’s sex in relation to the sex of those to whom one is attracted,” which makes it impossible to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation without taking sex into account.

“In the context of sexual orientation, a woman who is subject to an adverse employment action because she is attracted to women would have been treated differently if she had been a man who was attracted to women,” Katzmann said. “We can therefore conclude that sexual orientation is a function of sex and, by extension, sexual orientation discrimination is a subset of sex discrimination.”

This interpretation is also known as the “but for” argument that anti-gay discrimination is sex discrimination. In this case, Zarda would have been able to keep his job as a skydiver as a man but for his attraction to other men.

Secondly, Katzmann finds anti-gay bias is based on assumptions and stereotypes about gender, which the U.S. Supreme Court has made clear is an unlawful motive for employment discrimination under existing precedent.

“Viewing the relationship between sexual orientation and sex through the lens of gender stereotyping provides yet another basis for concluding that sexual

orientation discrimination is a subset of sex discrimination,” Katzmann writes. “Specifically, this framework demonstrates that sexual orientation discrimination is almost invariably rooted in stereotypes about men and women.”

Finally, Katzmann finds anti-gay workplace discrimination is associational discrimination based on sex because the employer is making a judgment about with whom an employee should have a relationship.

“Consistent with the nature of sexual orientation, in most contexts where an employer discriminates based on sexual orientation, the employer’s decision is predicated on opposition to romantic association between particular sexes,” Katzmann writes. “For example, when an employer fires a gay man based on the belief that men should not be attracted to other men, the employer discriminates based on the employee’s own sex.”

Joining Katzmann in the decision were U.S. Circuit Judges Peter Hall, Denny Chin, Susan Carney and Christopher Droney. U.S. Circuit Judge Rosemary Pooler joined the decision, except for the section that determination a termination “but for” an employee’s sexual orientation is unlawful.

Four other judges on the Second Circuit – Dennis Jacobs, Robert Sack, Raymond Lohier and Jose Carbranes – filed concurring opinions in the case that affirmed protections for gay, lesbian and bisexual workers under Title VII, but reached that conclusion differently. The judges picked and chose from the findings presented by Katzmann on sexual orientation discrimination, although none disputed of any the reasoning.

One of the justices who dissented in the decision, the Obama-appointed U.S. Circuit Judge Gerard E. Lynch, objected to the majority opinion on the basis Congress didn’t intend to cover gay people when it passed Title VII in 1964.

“I would be delighted to awake one morning and learn that Congress had just passed legislation adding sexual orientation to the list of grounds of employment discrimination prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Lynch writes. “I am confident that one day – and I hope that day comes soon – I will have that pleasure. I would be equally pleased to awake to learn that Congress had secretly passed such legislation more than a half century ago – until I actually woke up and realized that I must have been still asleep and dreaming. Because we all know that Congress did no such thing.”

The two other judges who dissented were U.S. Circuit Judges Debra Ann Livingston, a George W. Bush appointee, and Reena Raggi, another George W. Bush appointee.

The court reached a conclusion in favor of Zarda despite efforts from the Justice Department to convince the court otherwise. In a strange development, one arm of the federal government, the Justice Department, had argued against gay protections, but another arm, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, argued in favor of them.

Devin O’Malley, a Justice Department spokesperson, said the department is committed to upholding civil rights, but argued against the gay plaintiff in this case because the administration believes existing civil rights law doesn’t apply to him.

“The Department of Justice is committed to protecting the civil and constitutional rights of all individuals, and will continue to enforce the numerous laws Congress has enacted that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation,” O’Malley said. “We remain committed to the fundamental principle that the courts cannot expand the law beyond what Congress has provided. The position that the department advocated in this case has been its longstanding position across administrations and remains the law of nine different courts of appeals.”

Victoria Lipnic, acting chair of the EEOC, had the opposite reaction to the ruling and praised the Second Circuit for the decision.

“Today, the Second Circuit became the second federal court of appeals to hold that Title VII provides legal employment protections for individuals based on their sexual orientation,” Lipnic said. “The EEOC has advanced this legal interpretation for the past few years, and I commend the fine

See next page

lawyering by the agency that contributed to today's decision. This is a generous view of the law of employment protections, and a needed one."

Each of the three states in the Second Circuit – Vermont, Connecticut and New York – already had state laws prohibiting workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The ruling, however, adds an additional layer for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers because under Title VII, sex discrimination need only be a motivating factor to meet the threshold for unlawful discrimination as opposed to state law, which requires it to be the only factor.

That's why Zarda sought to sue under Title VII; his claims of sexual orientation discrimination were deemed insufficient in state court.

Nevins identified other benefits for gay workers in the Second Circuit to sue under Title VII, but pointed out they can still obtain relief under state laws.

"It helps the lawyers and the judges because it's familiar terrain, and the remedies can be better and the procedural requirements can be clearer and, in this case, easier to satisfy," Nevins said.

The Second Circuit is the second federal appeals court to find anti-gay discrimination is unlawful under Title VII and contributes

an emerging legal consensus that sexual orientation amounts to sex discrimination under current law. In 2015, the EEOC determined in the case of *Baldwin v. Foxx* it would accept and litigate cases of anti-gay discrimination under Title VII.

Last year, the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in the case of *Hively v. Ivy Tech* became the first federal appeals court to find anti-gay discrimination is illegal under Title VII. The U.S. Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, however, reached the opposite the conclusion and found no protections for gay workers in the case of *Evans v. Georgia Regional Hospital*.

Despite the circuit split, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to grant a writ of certiorari in the *Evans* case to iron out once and for all nationwide whether Title VII affords non-discrimination protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual workers.

Eric Lesh, executive director of the LGBT Bar Association of New York, said in a statement "momentum is headed towards justice under the law for LGBT employees" in the aftermath of the Second Circuit ruling.

"Today, the Second Circuit joined many other federal courts in recognizing that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 extends to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation," Lesh said. "The LGBT Bar of

New York agrees with the full Second Circuit – which sits in our backyard. Everyone has the right to feel safe and protected at work. The U.S. Supreme Court should settle the divide among our appellate courts. LGBT employees need to know that they are protected under federal law. The time is now."

In what may be the opposite of a silver lining to gay workers, the ruling leaves no opportunity for LGBT rights advocates to seek review from the Supreme Court in hopes of a nationwide decision. The only party that could file the petition is Altitude Express, but the company defended its termination of Zarda based on a technicality and isn't likely to seek review.

Saul Zabell, an attorney with the Bohemia, N.Y.-based law firm Zabell & Associates, represented Altitude Express and expressed disappointment with the decision, but was non-committal about a decision for filing a petition for certiorari.

"We are extremely proud of the esteemed 'en banc' panel of the Second Circuit for curing this glaring legislative gap in fundamental human rights," Zabell said. "Though we are equally as disappointed that the panel chose to ignore the facts of the underlying matter. In the course of doing so, the panel exceeded their judicial mandate to reach what appears to be a predetermined conclusion. Although we

recognize the dire need for this change in the law, the manner in which it was effectuated calls into question the scope of power relative to the branches of government."

Asked whether that meant Altitude Express would seek review before the Supreme Court, Zabell replied the company is still reviewing options.

Nothing in the Second Circuit explicitly spells out whether Title VII has impact on anti-transgender discrimination in the workforce. No precedent exists one way or the other in the jurisdiction on whether transgender workers are eligible for relief under the law.

Nevins said Katzmann took pains to restrict his ruling the issue of anti-gay discrimination, but his reasoning could just as well apply to transgender people.

"The biggest argument on the other side of this has always been Congress has been asked for these protections pretty explicitly and has not done so," Nevins said. "To the extent that arguments bites the dust, a rising tide lifts all boats. Any victory for the principle that you interpret the law that you have, not the law you wish you had, is a good day for entire LGBTQ community."

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National LGBT Media Association.

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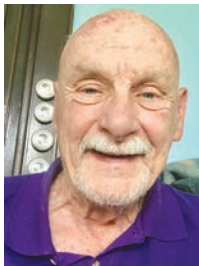
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Ten in Seventh Heaven (Pt.2 of 3) Parting Glances

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

It's 12:01 a.m. according to my now celestial iPhone. I have been just 60 seconds in Heaven—the result of a Michigan Republican-sponsored pothole tripping mishap, courtesy of Gov. Snyder—but it seems like an eternity to me.

So, here begins my 10-minute sojourn into recollection, which, I say with all modesty, must be an LGBTQA first. I mean, who would believe that someone gay would be welcome here in big time showbiz (Even if St. Peter checks credentials.)

My stay at the Seventh Heaven Condo, corner of Oscar Wilde Boulevard and Alice B. Toklas Avenue, begins with a campy hug from concierge Truman Capote.

“Dear BTLer, Welcome to other voices, other rooms, so to speak,” he giggles celestially. “We met a half-century ago on Fire Island. You followed me for days. At long, long last we meet!”

Next I'm greeted by some radiant creature— Archangel Diva DeLuxe— who by beatific botox turns looks like the Red Queen from Alice in Wonderland, Christine Jorgenson, Lady T Tempest and Tallulah Bankhead. (But not necessarily in that angelic order.)

Archangel Diva has a radiant thousand stars in her tiara, and as she speaks, she scatters patchouli-scented daisy chains around me. I'm transformed

As she kisses me gently on my forehead, and says, “May the Eternal Mary be with you! Glitter and be gay! Enjoy your stay, however brief your afterlife taste of things to come! Oh, yes! Cloud 9 Drag Queen Bingo here is 24/7! They may want an ad in BTL.”

As I lace a daisy chain about my neck, I suddenly, exhilaratingly, feel transformed. I take a selfie of myself, pleased to discover I now look a svelt, youthful 25, am 75 pounds lighter, and underneath my ever-so-radiant, designer D&G choir gown with snow-white angel wings, I— too good to be true— have a born-again 32-inch waist.

I'm sure it's a habit I haven't outgrown yet, but even here in the afterlife I have to check my cellphone. Weather: Eternally sunny. Caressing winds. San Diego: 75 'til noon. Palms Springs: 80 'til 5 p.m. Ferndale: 70 for evening vespers.

Archangel Diva— who's a splendid harpist and heavenly lip-synch artist— greets me with a medley of show tunes from “Gypsy,” “West Side Story,” “Sound of Music,” “La Traviata,” and “Hedwig and The Angry Inch.” She informs me that, because I am ‘family’, I also have been granted a choice.

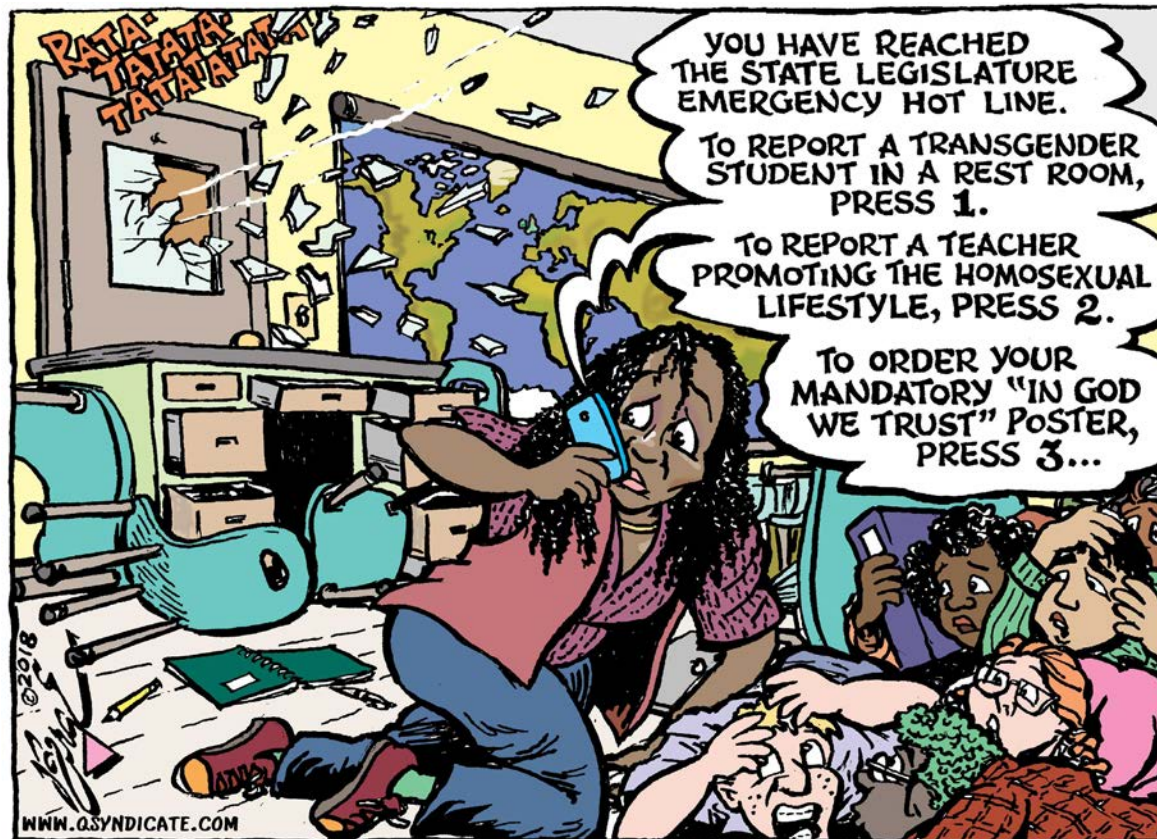
Switching from uptempo Broadway renditions, to a rousing delivery of “Amazing Grace,” she smiles, “If you like, you can eventually stay here with your rainbow friends and family, or you can spend 10,000 years ‘bright shining as the sun’ praising the The Big Guy in the Trinity Broadcast Sky.

“Fair's fair. It's up to you. It's your choice. Don't say we didn't warn you, Mary! (Confidentially, 10,000 years is a helluva long time, if you'll pardon the expression.)”

Decisions. Decisions. First no book publishers, now this. My cellphone says it's 12:05 a.m. It seems more like a century since I arrived. I must say, my condo room's intriguing.

The walls are lined with pictures of myself over the years. (My God, the changes I've gone through.) And golden-framed pictures of me with friends I seem to have long forgotten. Oh my! If only ... I'm sorry ... I didn't know ... I drank too much

See Parting Glances, next page



Viewpoint

More Than a Skirt of Bananas

How Josephine Baker Gave Pinups, Burlesquers and Rockabilly Women of Color a Sense of Independence



BY OTAYMAH BONDS

What things her gaze conceals, yet gives acknowledgement to? What horrors, and yet what joys? “Josephine Baker,” I whisper to myself before shows, willfully propelling myself forward, no matter the obstacles. “Josephine,” others say as to why they began their careers. What exactly did Josephine Baker give us, give this world, to which we pay homage to her at every interval? Things that she has not been acknowledged for.

Josephine Baker left the U.S. to escape extreme poverty and lack of upward mobility largely due to racism. She acquired fame and fortune in Paris beginning in the 1920's, while dancing in the production “La Revue Negre.” A dance entitled “Danse Sauvage,” in which Josephine was

clad in nothing but a skirt made of feathers; this introduced her to Parisian stage. But it was the acclaimed banana dance in the “La Folie Du Jour” show at the Follies Bergère some time later, that catapulted her to superstardom. Both of these dances were meant to discuss the black [dancing] body as the savage, exotic other. But, the dances and its dancer succeeded in celebrating and showcasing the beauty of the black body, of black skin, for the first time in history.

Striving for pretty, sparkling things can be a worthy quest for many a woman. But, those glittering gems can cover up so many ugly truths. What injustices Josephine endured throughout her career due to racism are widely

See next page

► More Than a Skirt

Continued from p. 12

known. But is it known that we pinups, burlesquers and rockabilly gals of color still endure the same discriminations and prejudices today, in a prettier, covert package?

Does Josephine know, that that's why we are spurned on to fight oppression like she? Hoping for a loving community where we are accepted and our beauty acknowledged, at last. That time has not come in full regard. However, it has come in one in one thousand pinup publications having a brown body on its cover. It has come in ethnic dismissal as emails to publishers and editors go unanswered, or simply rejected with the words, "You are not pinup material."

It has come in the idea, the image of a pinup, its ideal, of a rockabilly babe having porcelain skin, while dancing to music created by their brown counterparts, as an expression of painful dire circumstances unknown to them, yet appropriated by them. It was once said that Josephine was the Black Venus. For, you see, she couldn't just be Venus; she had to be black first. After many years and achieving notoriety overseas in Europe and the rest of the western world, Josephine Baker came back to the U.S. to perform. She was not met with open arms to American borders or stages by white show business bosses. Instead, she was literally turned away due to her brown skin; the very skin that had been fetshized in order to cement her celebrity status and fortune. What pain she must have endured after being turned away at the main hotel and stage doors, having to enter through the back entrances even though she was the star of the show.

While today we seek refuge in self-published pages that shout how gorgeous we are because we are so rarely seen in mainly Caucasian magazines, in the mainly Caucasian world of burlesque and pinup. Josephine gave more than the silly faces and animal-like movements, stereotyping herself in order to gain employment. She gave a narrative, a voice to her people, to all people, of beauty, of song, dance, elegance ... of strength. Josephine gives us the choice to learn, to move

forward with agency, knowing that we are more than a skirt of bananas. Josephine Baker gave us brown girls a sense of independence. She is forever the embodiment of enterprise,



Josephine Baker

business savvy, a love for the arts and all humanity. We can do whatever we want with our bodies. We can own ourselves.

Josephine gave me, specifically, the acknowledgement that I am a beautiful black woman - both in mind and in body. That my mind and body are actually perfect for pinup, burlesque and any other genre, and no one can stifle me. I strive to move forward, like Josephine: boldly, proudly. I work and seek to share my experiences and those of other women of color, and increase visibility and knowledge about the things we have gone through historically due to racism and that we must overcome still.

The Irresistible O is a burlesque and pinup historian, known as the Sepia Queen of Burlesque, the Black Prima Ballerina of Burlesque, and the Pin Up Queen. She is the 2015 Burlypicks Michigan Master of Voice, 2015 Miss Pin Up Perfection, 2016 Miss Phobia Pin Up, the Inaugural Miss HotWheels Pinup and the 2017 Burlypicks Master of Improv. She has been featured by Ohio burlesque, and the top blog I Gave My Body, an international tribute to Women of Color, Moxie Dolls Pinups and Burlesque Magazine. The Irresistible O is a writer for Burlesque Bitch, and guest blog writer for Burlycon. Her literary work has also appeared in Burlesque Bible Magazine where she was attributed to "Bringing Color to Burlesque." She has been a cover model for Onxy Vintage Magazine, and a featured pin up in various other magazines. O also instructs the world-renowned History of Performers of Color in Burlesque courses, and actively teaches and discusses the absence and history of women of color in the pinup, rockabilly and burlesque genres. She also teaches all genres of dance, theater and vocal arts.

► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 12

And, embarrassing to think about, some photos a little too X-rated, a little too candid. The lighting's a little too dark for optimal designer decor; one or two photos I turn to the wall. (I'm actually blushing ...)

Outside, the sun has turned into a giant disco ball. Its light dances my mood away. Dots of light turn into thousands of faces ... some old ... too many young ... 12:06 a.m. Wow,

I suddenly realize that it's been six minutes without Trump

Charles Alexander is prolific both as a BTL columnist (700-plus columns) and as a well-known LGBT community artist (1000 Face Book images). He is a Spirit of Detroit Award recipient and an Affirmations LGBT CENTER Jan Stevenson awardee. Connect with him at Charles@pridesource.com.

Creep of the Week

William Ligon

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI



When it comes to the hundreds of thousands of kids in the child welfare system, Republicans are all about banning potential parents. Specifically, LGBTQ parents.

While the nation has been grappling with the fact that we have too many guns, another thing we have too many of that gets less attention: children in the foster care system.

Interestingly, the Republican plan for dealing with these two issues couldn't be more different. When it comes to guns, they don't want to ban anything. In fact, the more guns the merrier! Give every teacher a gun! Have armed guards roaming the streets! Everybody gets a tank!

But when it comes to the hundreds of thousands of kids in the child welfare system, Republicans are all about banning potential parents. Specifically, LGBTQ parents.

In fact, I would not be surprised if Republicans believed children would be better off with an AR-15 as a parent than with two dads. In fact, that's probably being written into the law advancing in Georgia that would allow adoption agencies to refuse LGBTQ people on "religious freedom" grounds.

The bill, called the Keep Faith in Adoption and Foster Care Act was sponsored by Georgia Sen. William Ligon who claims, "The goal is to open as many doors as possible for those children that are in need of homes, and this bill will do that."

And how does limiting the number of families an agency will work with increase the number of homes available? Well, it doesn't. But Ligon believes that this bill would result in religious adoption agencies flocking to Georgia where they can be anti-gay in peace. Or anti-single parent. Or anti-Muslim. Or anti-whatever they want so long as they say Jesus is the reason for the season.

In other words, if two women want to adopt a child, this law would allow agencies to say, "Nope, Jesus thinks

little Johnny would be better off without a family at all than with you. Now get out of our office before our Virgin Mary statue starts bleeding from her eyes."

"Just because you are a faith-based organization, doesn't mean you have to check your faith at the door and cannot participate in government programs," Ligon told WRAL.com.

But, funny story, actually it does. If you are "faith-based" you don't pay taxes. And if you don't pay taxes then, yeah, I think it's okay if you're excluded from tax-payer funded area of civic life, especially if you want a license to discriminate.

It's important to note that Georgia isn't the first or the only state to try to do this. Michigan, for example, is currently being sued by the ACLU over a similar law that Gov. Rick Snyder signed in 2015.

The Georgia bill is getting a lot of attention, which is nice to see considering how the news cycle is so frantic that it's hard for anything to gain much traction these days.

Chelsea Clinton Tweeted about the bill, "Because what we clearly need right now is ... less love? Fewer loving parents?"

To which some Twitter users probably screamed at her, "YOUR MOM LOST THE ELECTION SHUT UP AND GO KNIT A MAGA HAT!" because Twitter is full of monsters.

People in the film industry, which does a lot of business in Georgia, also took notice. Showrunner Ben Wexler Tweeted, "To my fellow showrunners: if this dumb bill becomes law, let's be done filming television shows in Georgia."

It really does seem like economic pressure is the only thing Republicans understand (see: North Carolina's bathroom bill fallout). So if this bill passes, you could boycott Georgia. Or you could work like hell to help get the GOP out of office there. And in Michigan. And everywhere.

Hussain Alqattan On the Cost of Coming Out

The Complicated Relationship Between a Mother and Her Son, a Gay Muslim

BY DREW HOWARD

Hussain Alqattan's mother has refused to speak with him or his twin sister since 2011 when she discovered they both identify as gay. Seven years later, he's still uncertain of where his mother lives, how she's doing or when he might see her again.

Yet Alqattan is quick to defend his mother, a devout Muslim who moved with him and his sister to the U.S. in pursuit of an education and a better life.

"People are quick to judge," he said. "I don't want anyone to judge her because she brought us here to be educated in the U.S. This doesn't make her a bad person."

The incident occurred on Feb. 1, 2011 when Hussain's mother stumbled upon suggestive photos of his twin sister Farah and her then-girlfriend. What resulted was an "escalated" conversation on one of the final days the three would live under the same roof.

"It turned into a violent altercation," he said. "Things were thrown, and there was lots of pushing and yelling that day. My sister really stood up for herself and I was really proud of her - I was very scared during the fight."

When Hussain finally came out to his mother he was forced to do so over text. He hasn't seen her since she disappeared from their Detroit apartment with its furniture in tow.

"I asked to see her following her leaving due to my sister coming out, and she said I was welcome and my sister was not," he said. "Then I texted her I was gay. I texted her that my sister and I have supported our household, are going to school and have been good children. She never responded to any of my texts."

His mother's reluctance to even entertain the idea of his sexuality reflects the twins' upbringing. Both were raised in the Muslim faith with the expectation they'd pray five times a day, participate in Ramadan and even abstain from drinking. He describes his upbringing as very strict, with most nights calling for a 9:30 p.m. curfew.

"Any time we had arguments it was very hostile," he said. "In the Arabic and Muslim culture the parent is always right, so her comeback was always, 'You think you can teach your mother?' It's not OK for us to speak our minds in the house. I tried to stay at school as much as possible."

Sexuality was also scarcely discussed in the house. The topic was so rare that Hussain



Hussain Alqattan

admits to never even having "the talk" with his mom.

"Being gay is something we never ever discussed because it's not even in the books," he said. "I stumbled across porn once, and when I learned about it I was scared. I would even schedule my counseling meetings during our sexuality classes in school."

He eventually grew into his own identity, though, dating a man for the first time at age 20 and then another at 21.

"I had to sneak around and pretend they were my friend," Hussain said. "We had to hide everything. One my exes climbed through the window to see me - it was very romantic."

Hussain admits that his mother was likely aware of his sexuality, though they never dared discuss it with one another. Sex in general wouldn't have been discussed even if he was straight, he said.

The twins were left to come out to each other with Farah making the first move on a family trip to Florida.

"I was very supportive of her and told her she'd make the perfect girlfriend," he said, adding that he came out to Farah and her then-

girlfriend in a bathhouse, and the conversation went similarly to their first. Their respective coming out stories were especially ideal compared to what happened next.

Following the Incident

Hussain and Farah were 22 when their mother disappeared, and have since had to grow up faster than most American young adults are expected to. An average day for the pair involved scheduling time for both work and their studies at Wayne State University where Hussain was pursuing his bachelor's in health sciences and Farah was taking 19 credits for her criminal justice major.

Hussain not only met his educational goals but exceeded them. In addition to founding the Pre-Professional Medical Society for pre-health students - an organization that provided volunteer and fundraising events, among other things - he also became the class president, held a student senate seat representing his college and even started a 5K race that supported a local pro bono physical therapy clinic.

The real victory, however, was when Hussain got accepted into the Doctoral Physical Therapy program.

"I was struggling to pay our monthly rent due to my mom leaving suddenly following her knowledge of my sister's sexuality, and I almost decided to drop out of school," he said. "But the following month I received my acceptance letter in the Doctoral Physical Therapy program at WSU. Over 350 students applied to the program that year, and 36 got in."

Hussain realized that this was an opportunity he could not throw away.

"I worked hard daily for three-and-a-half years, and graduated in 2015 with my doctorate degree."

Hussain now lives in Chicago where he works as a physical therapist at Athletico Physical Therapy, while Farah is finishing her master's in computer forensics down in Florida. The distance has yet to put a strain on their relationship, even though Hussain has promised to fund Farah's education all the way to the end.

The move to Chicago - as well as the growing realization that his mother may not come back - has allowed Hussain to more fully explore his sexuality. He has also begun perfecting his skills in the art of dressmaking and costuming at his regular gig with SKIN Productions — a Chicago-based organization that funds local charities through dance parties.

"I like designing things, and I started dabbling with that after my mom left," he said. "I try to make [my costumes] about awareness - for a Thanksgiving party they were more about Native Americans. There's one I made about Muhammad Ali, and another for the first man who landed on the moon."

He takes a fairly unorthodox approach to design method, too, as he's still not properly trained in the art of dressmaking.

"I've known how to only do a regular stitch since middle school - I never took classes," he added. "I like to take ordinary items from stores, deconstruct them and make something new."

The city itself has pushed Hussain to live out a more honest version of himself. He noted that his area features many LGBTQ-friendly bars and social events, opportunities for STD education, as well as a "huge" facility with services tailored for the LGBT community.

Farah says she's seen a tremendous amount of growth in Hussain.

See next page

“He inspires me personally to do more and be more,” she said. “I’ve met a lot of people in my life from various cultures and countries and to be honest Hussain has a heart of gold. I feel like words can’t even begin to express the transformation he’s had since coming out.”

Farah continued: “I feel like with every day he’s finding more of himself, but in a way it’s through helping other people – whether it is by dancing to fundraise or sharing his story to help encourage others.”

And though his Chicago lifestyle certainly isn’t one his mother would support, Hussain remains level-headed in his feelings toward the woman who raised him.

“She suffered a lot of depression,” he said. “She grew up in the Middle East with nine siblings - she was always supportive of them and they weren’t supportive of her.”

Hussain described other events involving divorce and sexual abuse that he believes affected his mother’s mental status. In his retelling of events, there’s a sense of sympathy for his mother that outweighs the years of bitterness and anger.

“She has other kids, but none of them went to school - we were her prized possessions,” Hussain said. “To her it was a big deal we were successful and had kids.”

Hussain isn’t trying to bury the incident in his memory. Years back, when he was finishing his program at Wayne State, he decided to commemorate the anniversary of his mother’s disappearance with a tattoo on his chest. It’s a



quote from Lady Gaga that reads: “A hybrid can withstand these things, my heart will beat on bricks and strings.”

Next to the quote, Hussain placed a barcode with the date “2.1.11.”

“With time I slowly started to forgive my mom,” he said.

More information about Skin Productions, including upcoming events and fundraisers, can be found on the organizations Facebook page facebook.com/SkinProductions.

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Punchy, Fiery and Honest Hilarity

ComedyFest Brings Dynamic Lineup to Dearborn March 3

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Ask a comedian what inspires their comedy, and the answers will range from daily life to aging to their social media accounts. Between The Lines did just that with comedians Suzanne Westenhoefer, Andre Kelley, Pat Regan and Julia Scotti as they were gearing up for Detroit's 22nd annual LGBT ComedyFest.

Whether driving, at work, home or in a crowded NYC cafe, each of the four performers offered a look into not only their comedic styles, but their influences and what they do to keep their acts fresh each night. What follows is a collection of interviews with each of the night's scheduled comedians, both veterans and first-timers.



Suzanne Westenhoefer

You've been an active comedian since the early '90s and you've always been very bold about the fact that you're a lesbian in your comedic sets, where did that bravery come from?

Back in the '90s, it was a better idea to get fame and then come out. But, I didn't want to do that because I felt like, 'What was the point then?' I was trying to change the world (laughs). That's why I marched in pride, that's why I was in the first AIDs walk. You do those things because you're trying to make a statement, because you're trying to move the world forward, and I was given certain opportunities. But, if they're telling

“**Suzanne On Being Out:** *The whole '90s and through 2002, I had someone telling me, "You can't be so lesbian." It just told me that I knew what I was doing was right.*”

you, 'You need to do A, B, C and D,' then everything I stood for was like, 'What's the fucking point?'

So you did it before it was cool?

Yeah, I'm a gayster (laughs).

Who would you say are your biggest comedic influences?

I would probably say the person I most listened to and who I was moved by was George Carlin.

But you originally wanted to be an actress, right?

I was that kid who was in all the plays in middle school and high school and I wanted to be a big movie star. I didn't want to be "famous for being just famous," I didn't have that desire.

I was fortunate enough that I didn't have a mom that said, "No, you can't." She didn't say you could, but she was like, "Well, you have to work really hard to get the things you want." I wasn't beaten down for it, and a lot of kids whose parents are performers, their parents are like, "No, you can't play drums, go to college and do this." I feel like I'm fortunate in that way. It was somewhere in the middle, it gave me the balls to give it a whirl (laugh).

Did you face any challenges being out in the '90s?

The whole '90s and through 2002, I had someone telling me, "You can't be so lesbian." It just told me that I knew what I was doing was right. It just made me say,

"This has to change. It can't be like this and it has to be as OK as it is for a girl to go up and talk about her relationship with her partner, the same as it is OK for a guy to get up and talk about his wife." It's what made me realize that it had to happen.

I've now been on the road for like 24 years, doing standup for 27 years, it is still hard to be a girl in comedy, and it's not as big of a deal to be queer or openly gay.

Really?

Yup. And some of the people that are comic icons – some of them are dead – but like Jerry Lewis and Steve Allen, and even in the last years they were alive in the '90s and early 2000s, they were still saying things like, 'Women aren't funny,' or, 'Nobody wants to see a pretty girl be funny.' And, by the way, it's one thing to hear it from some old guy, (but) the truth is, I think that's still a standard way people feel. We've made giant progress, and I feel like we should have (passed that).

So, it's a given that there's still a lot of work to be done?

I think we know this because we have a giant, huge dick for a president, we're now seeing the classist things in our society and the racism is being shown and the work that needs to be done, in such a blinding light now. Like, "Oh my God, these people completely exist! Oh, wait, they're in my family!"

Are you planning anything specific for your Detroit show?

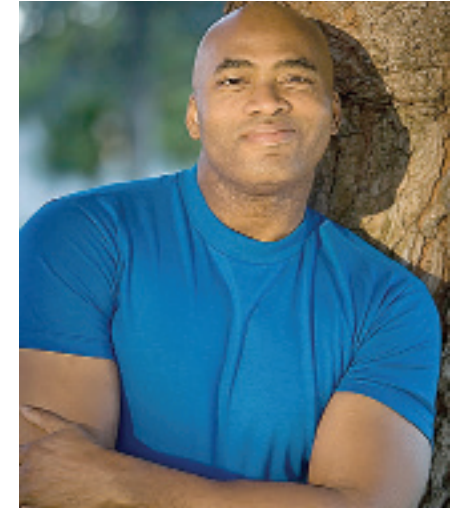
I'm not going to tell you. There are like two, and it's going to be funny (laughs). That's terrible, but sort of true.

Andre Kelley

When did you get your comedic start? You're based out of LA now, are you from there originally?

Oh, God, no. Not that there's anything wrong with this place, but I was born and raised in Kansas and I spent a few years in Kansas City, and a few more years in Chicago and the last 18 in Los Angeles.

I did the travel thing for about two and a half years. I did about 45 states and about 400 cities and colleges, and that's what helped



“**On Andre's Influences:** *My earliest influences have always been Elayne Boosler, Marsha Warfield, Joan Rivers of course - the goddess - Roseanne Barr and people of that nature.*”

me determine my next move to Chicago. I did seven years there – it sounds like prison – and then made the leap to LA, once I decided which coast was best for me and my career.

So you're not too excited about the cold in Michigan I bet?

I'm from that so I'm used to it (laughs).

Who were some of your earliest comedic influences?

My earliest influences have always been Elayne Boosler, Marsha Warfield, Joan Rivers of course – the goddess – Roseanne Barr and people of that nature. They're just naturally better storytellers for a lot of reasons, and you learn more and you learn to pattern yourself after that kind of stand up. The males came in later of course. I probably jumped in around '87, '86 when I was in college. That's what sparked my interest and it just took off from there.

Where you always out as a comic?

Oh no. (laughs) I say that with love, too. I didn't come out until more or less halfway through what I'm doing. Probably when I got to Chicago in the early '90s and doing the Def Jam scene, which was a big part of Chicago comedy.

I was always out off-stage, but I was never specific on stage. I was like Rosie O'Donnell and Ellen on stage, very matter-of-fact, asexual.

Did coming out make your work better?

Absolutely. Better, stronger and still one of less than five openly gay black male comics in the country. There are literally less than five of us on a statistical level.

And audiences overwhelmingly wanted it as well. By the time I figured where my voice was going, it just centered on me being my strongest, most authentic self, and that's what people tended to respond to and just connected to me offstage.

Do you have any tricks for recovering if you have a bad night?

Everyone has their off nights (laughs). The cool thing about LA is that there's stage time every day of the week, so you're only as good as your last show, and the moment you fall off the horse you get right back on it.

How do you keep your material fresh?

What works for me, I tend to do anything new or observational in the middle of my set. That way, there's always a bit of a challenge there, and it keeps you nervous and sharp. Joan Rivers had this great thing. She said, "You can write all the time, the writing is easy. The hard part is figuring out where it goes in your act."

Is there anything that you're preparing specifically for the Detroit show, or that you're excited about the most?

This is probably my sixth or seventh time I've been there since the '90s and I tend to open for women because they have that nice male/female balance, and I've worked with Suzanne Westenhoefer quite a few times, and I enjoy her immensely because she's just this wonderful, smart, very attractive, supremely likeable thing when she's up on stage. She's just running the whole stage. For her, it's just like breathing, it's like nothing for her, and I learned something watching her all the time. I'm excited I'm going to be working with her.

Julia Scotti

“ Julia: On Handling Audiences:

Here's the way I've come to know my audiences: young people sort of like me because I remind them of their grandmother, middle-aged people like me because I remind them of their parents and old people like me because I remind them of them (laughs). ”



You were a comedian for a long time before taking a 10 year hiatus; why the break?

Yes, since Lincoln was president (laughs). I did, I took 10 years off, I taught sixth grade for seven years and actually became a stock broker for a couple of years.

Actually, when I came back to comedy, it wasn't with the intention of ever doing it as a career again. It was something I loved, because I had done it for so many years, but when I decided to come back, there were two things I absolutely insisted that I do: One was to be totally honest, and the other was to be fearless up there. That meant telling my story on stage, and it was a fearful thing, but I did it. (laughs).

You got very famous soon after coming back to comedy in 2016 when you were on "America's Got Talent," and came out as transgender during your set. What was that like?

Oh my God, it was a life-changing event. I really wasn't sure if I was going to out myself on television, until the very last second when Howie asked me why I was away so long. I was going to say something else, but I said,

"Well, I may never get this opportunity again, and it may help a lot of people." So, I did it, and the response was terrific, surprisingly.

Have you faced any backlash since you came out in 2016?

There are some people that don't want to book me because of me being trans, because they think that's all of my act, that's all that I talk about.

I do run into the issue of getting paid less than men, which is kind of ironic. Somebody reached out to me for a show and they asked, "Well who do you want to work with?" I said, "Can we have so-and-so comic on to feature because she's good?" And they wrote back, "Well, we don't want to have a two-woman show." I was like, "Wow, it's both a compliment and a slap in the face at the same time."

Were you always drawn to comedy as a kid?

There were two things I was drawn to as a kid. One was comedy and the other was music. I was a drummer for many years before I became a comedian. I never really thought about making a living as a comedian, but this opportunity came up to be in an amateur show. That was all I needed; I went off.

How often do you find yourself writing comedy?

I'm always writing new stuff.

Have your methods changed as a comic since you came out?

When I was Rick Scotti, my style was pretty much developed somewhere between seven and 10 years, and when I came back as Julia I had a lot of rust, and I had to get my muscles back in shape again. So, that took about a year. In terms of my style, it's ever-evolving into something better, I hope.

Do you ever tailor your performance depending on who you are speaking with?

Sometimes. Like the festival we're doing, the things I'm talking about are universal, so I don't really have to adjust much. Here's the way I've come to know my audiences: young people sort of like me because I remind them of their grandmother, middle-aged people like me because I remind them of their parents and old people like me because I remind them of them (laughs).

Is there anything about the upcoming performance that you're most excited about?

I'm very excited it, and I'm really looking forward to it. Really, you guys are my first comedy festival for the LGBTQ community.



“ On Pat's Tour: It'll be nice to get different eyes, because I feel so lucky being able to do shows for people all the time, and it's such a good scene, but sometimes you do get the feeling like, "Wait, am I performing for the same 100 people every week? ”

Pat Regan

Was comedy always what you pictured yourself doing as an adult?

I always felt like I could make people laugh and I always liked that because, especially as a gay kid, it was a defense mechanism. I'm one of six kids and it helped with getting attention and I always liked attention. My family is really supportive, but they're not a super artistic family, so I never thought, "I'm going to be a comedian," I just thought I was funny.

When did you begin performing?

I didn't perform until way later, because it was not in my world. I always secretly wanted to, and after college I was working in an office and I started taking UCB (Upright Citizens Brigade) classes I started improvising there and I improvised there for years. Standup is a bit more rewarding because you get to do just your stuff, you're alone up there, you really get to laser in on what you think is funny, and I selfishly kind of loved that.

See Comedy Fest, page 18



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► Comedy Fest

Continued from p. 17

Do you feel like your improvisation experience helps you onstage?

Yeah, definitely. I feel like those tools are always there, and I think I'm less prone to get nervous or intimidated by stages, because for so long I was getting so many performances in and having performances with nothing.

Have you always been out while performing?

I actually wasn't. I didn't come out until I was 25 years old. I think a big part of the reason why I came out was that I was finally at UCB where there were all these really great gay comedians that I looked up to so much. If I came out in high school or college, I would have been the only gay kid at my high school or college, and all that was going to be at a place where that wasn't going to be as big of a thing. But some of the (out) people at UCB were some of the most highly respected people at the theater.

Did coming out impact your performance in any way?

One thousand percent. I think especially because I was improvising. The mental effort it takes to be improvising as a character, but also acting straight as yourself and always giving, like, 20 percent of your mental effort to that little battle, it honestly felt like I had had my hand tied behind my back and suddenly I didn't have to do that anymore.

You're based in New York right now, are you from there originally?

I'm originally from Long Island. All of my friends, both within comedy and outside of comedy are centered here, my family is out on Long Island. For the past 15 months I moved back out to live with my family, specifically because I got sober during that time. And now I'm still there and doing well, and I feel like I want to move back into the actual city.

Have you toured much outside the New York area?

I have largely stuck to New York, I'm just starting to do more road gigs. I did a show in Philly a couple months ago, and that was fun. Now I'm doing this, and we're just trying to book a bunch more. I just signed with a new manager in the beginning of this year and one of our goals is to start more, and because I came from a big family, I love the idea of getting to do my set elsewhere, but Michigan will be the farthest.

Do you think you'll find more inspiration for material through touring?

It'll be nice to get different eyes, because I feel so lucky being able to do shows for people all the time, and it's such a good scene, but sometimes you do get the feeling like, "Wait, am I performing for the same 100 people every week?" It'll be nice to get fresh eyes on it. Even Philly was kind of nice to get out of super New York stuff, but Michigan will be even better and I'm looking forward to seeing how it affects my creative process.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity. The 22nd Annual LGBT ComedyFest will be held on Saturday, March 3 at 8 p.m. at the Courtyard Detroit-Dearborn at 5200 Mercury Drive, Dearborn. Tickets start at \$30. More information can be found online at comedyfest.org.



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British Crooner Talks Coming Out, Falling For Straight Men & Learning to Love Himself

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

“Britain’s Got Talent” finalist Calum Scott, who incited massive swooning on music mogul Simon Cowell’s reality show in 2015, once thought he’d be a counselor. He wanted to ease people’s troubled minds. Give them hope. But Scott, 29, has found you don’t need an office to help heal people – you can do that on a stage.

Following his Cowell-praised show run and a devastatingly gorgeous piano version of Robyn’s “Dancing On My Own” that charted at No. 93 on Billboard’s Hot 100 (Robyn’s original didn’t manage to crack the list upon release), the honeyed-voice crooner wants his new songs, some of which are personal reflections on coming to terms with his sexuality, to serve as a support system for those who also know or are currently weathering the struggle to live openly as a queer person.

With his debut, “Only Human,” he’s your out, gay shoulder to cry on. And if you like them as tenderhearted and impassioned as Scott, who exudes a warm optimism in conversation, he’s certainly the kind who will make you feel better after a lengthy, enriching talk about the greatest love of all.

What’s the motivation for wanting to move people with your music?

I’ve always wanted to help people. Since writing an album based on personal experiences, I’ve realized I can inspire people with my music and reach people on an emotional level. I love the fact that people are moved by my music. It’s a dream come true, man.

One of my all-time idols is Michael Jackson, because he said to the press that he wanted to change the world with his music. It kind of sounds a bit corny, I guess, but it’s such a beautiful sentiment and I try to live by that. If I can inspire one person to come out and find the bravery and strength to at least confide in one person and lessen that burden on themselves, and inspire

them to be who they were born to be, then I feel like everything I’ve gone through in my life is worth it.

Recently, I went to a conversion therapy protest here in Michigan. There’s a church, Metro City Church, that is offering these “unashamed identity” workshops for LGBTQ girls.

That’s ridiculous.

It’s on my mind because it just happened. But there’s a lot of conversation about the importance of queer representation for young people, and you are now a part of that team. What do you want the message of the music to be for young struggling queer people?

Growing up for me was really difficult. My sexuality ... I went through the phases that I know a lot of gay people have gone through: “If I could take a straight pill, I’d take it.” Sort of feeling ashamed and embarrassed, like I had to hide away. Feeling judgment.

Those were all things that held me back from being my true self. That took me all the way through my teens, all the way through my 20s, really, until I got into songwriting. And when I got into songwriting, the penny dropped for me. I started writing about the fact that I was terrified of coming out to the press. I have a song on the album called “If Our Love Is Wrong” – it’s right on the top of the album – and it’s all about being terrified of telling people about my sexuality.

It terrified me to the core, to a point where I didn’t want to talk about it. I felt sick, like I’d rather be anyone else. I only told my dad three years ago, as a full-blown adult. My heart was in my mouth, and I felt sick. I was upset, and I just didn’t know how to tell him. But when I started writing ... that song actually developed into something empowering.

Relating that back to what you said about conversion camps: It’s disgusting that you could tell a person that what they feel is wrong, when they don’t have any control over what they feel. So, the message behind this album is to embrace how you feel and who you are and who you love and to feel empowered by it. And you don’t have to change who you are, and, in fact, you should embrace who you are and love who you are.

Do you think queer public figures have a responsibility to be out for that reason alone?

I think it’s a difficult one. If that had been said to me when I was in the closet, I’d be

LOVE
LESSONS
WITH
CALUM
SCOTT

Photo: Frank Ockenfels

really upset. Not that I necessarily was condemning the gay community in any way – I just wasn't ready to come out. So, I feel like maybe that's the case with thousands of men and women. We have a shortage of out football stars, and I think it's because they're terrified of what their peers might think. But as a nation and a globe going forward, we should be reassuring people there is love in the world, and hopefully with music you can inspire a generation. With music, we've got the power to move people.

I love how matter-of-factly the two men who are casually holding hands in your video for "You Are My Reason" are treated.

Yeah, it meant a lot to me to have that in there. Being a gay man, there needed to be that representation. I pitched it into the video because it reflects the message of the song, which is "Love is love, and love conquers all and love isn't heterosexual." I said to our director, Frank Borin, "As a gay man myself, I want a gay couple in there because that's a representation of me."

It was the same reason why I didn't change the lyrics on "Dancing On My Own." I wanted it to be from the perspective of a gay man. I've fallen in love with plenty of straight men and watched them have a relationship with a girl, and I wanted to make sure when I sang that version it wasn't me doing a straight cover of Robyn. It was me trying to say, "This is me," and I'm sure there are hundreds of thousands of LGBT community members who can appreciate where that voice is coming from. I'm not a flag bearer for the gay community, but I'm definitely an advocate of wanting people to be themselves and giving a voice to the LGBT community.

How do you end up falling for so many straight men?

I think it happens to all of us in the gay community. There's no way of telling anybody's sexuality. I have a song called "Hotel Room," about me meeting this guy while I was on the road. Great looking guy. Great personality. Got along really well. All the signs were there, and I was like, "Oh my god, this guy is maybe the one." I really fell for him. And I took it a bit further, and he told me he wasn't gay. I was shocked. It's very much a song about the heartbreak, but it's about trying to put a positive spin on it. "Hotel Room" is one of the heartbreaking

songs on the album where I suppose at the time I was like, "You bastard!" (Laughs) But I don't want to write with malice.

How did your song about coming out to your dad take shape?

The song you're referring to is called "Out at Sea," which actually didn't make the album, unfortunately. It was definitely one of the songs I wrote initially, and it was one of the triggers that got me into really writing honestly with my music.

It was about my fear holding me back, almost drowning me. I was going through that process with my dad, and when I told him, the burden that left me was just unreal. It literally felt like a physical weight had been lifted from my shoulders. And it's so liberating, and I felt euphoric after that. I had pins and needles in my face. I couldn't stop smiling. I was crying. I was on top of the world. It was the most liberating feeling. I wrote that in the song, about feeling tied down and drowned under the walls, and not being able to breathe from the pressure and judgment and fear of disappointing, well, everybody, I guess. But then casting it away and it actually turning out better than I thought it would.

It didn't not make the album because it wasn't good enough. It was because I wanted to give variety on the album. I wanted to showcase what kind of an artist I am – and didn't want to write a whole album that would make people cry. There are other emotions! (Laughs) I've written a lot about my sexuality, because it means a lot for me.

Of course – it was your catharsis.

It was a journey, yeah. And it was something I put my heart and soul into. I wrote "No Matter What," and the chorus is really beautiful. I think I'm gonna play it for my headlining show. It's about my mom saying, "I love you no matter what."

You performed on "Dancing with the Stars" in May with two dancers: one male, one female. On tour, have you given any thought to possibly having two male dancers dance as intimately as that opposite-sex pair did?

Makes sense, man. It's something I've thought about, either having two male dancers or running a short film, maybe. I'm always on the lookout to create with the

See Calum, page 24

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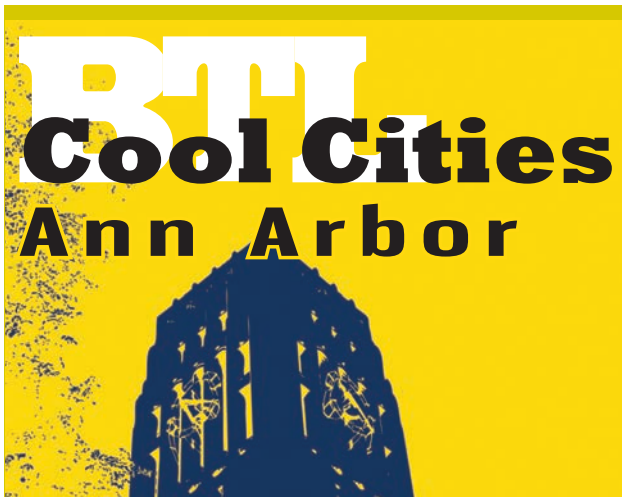
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- Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra . 4
- The Ark.....5
- /aut/ Bar6
- Brookeside Veterinary Hospital.....*
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- Common Language.....6
- Delux Drapery.....*
- Dependable Collision Center*
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- Gail van Langen Ph.d.9
- Greene, LMSW, ACSW, Marge... 10
- HIV/AIDS Resource Center (Harc) *

- Humane Society of Huron Valley..*
 - Iglesia Martell Law.....11
 - Jim Toy Resource Center6
 - Lewis Jewelers.....12
 - Lord of Light Lutheran Church....*
 - Merkel Carpet One.....*
 - Michigan Theater12
 - Necto.....15
 - Orion Automotive Services Inc.....*
 - People's Food Coop.....16
 - PFLAG Ann Arbor.....*
 - Rock Shoppe*
 - Spectrum Center.....19
 - Three Chairs Co20
 - Tios Mexican Cafe21
 - Trillium Real Estate6
 - UMHS Comprehensive Gender Services Program*
 - University Musical Society22
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Theatre NOVA Presents Michigan Premiere of 'The Devil's Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith'

ANN ARBOR – Theatre NOVA is Ann Arbor's professional theatre with an exclusive focus on new plays and playwrights. Now, coming to its stage is "The Devil's Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith" by Angelo Parra and Miche Braden.

The off-Broadway musical celebrates Bessie Smith, whose life was reputed to be as "large and outrageous as her talent," according to a press release. "The Devil's Music" re-imagines Bessie's final evening after she and her band are turned away by a whites-only theatre. Within that storyline, the musical is filled with some of Bessie's all-time hits, with songs like "I Ain't Got Nobody," "St. Louis Blues" and "Tain't Nobody's Biz-ness If I Do."

According to a press release, its mission is to "to raise awareness of the value and excitement of new plays and playwrights and provide resources for playwrights to develop their craft by importing, exporting, and developing new work," and that's why this selection was perfect for NOVA.

K. Edmonds plays Bessie and Brian Buckner is cast as her piano player named Pickle. The production is directed by Lynch Travis, including a production team with Forrest Hejkal (scenic design), Daniel C. Walker (lighting design), Brian Buckner (music direction), Haley Cook (costume design) and Michelle Resnick (stage manager).

"The Devil's Music" will run March 30 through April 22, 2018, at Theatre NOVA (410 W. Huron, Ann Arbor), a downtown



performance space. Performances are Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m., and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m. Theatre NOVA features free parking for patrons, as well as quick access to the city's restaurants, bars, bakeries, and coffee shops. Tickets are \$25, and Theatre NOVA continues its commitment to making the theatre accessible by offering pay-what-you-can tickets for those who need them. For tickets, visit TheatreNOVA.org, call 734-635-8450 (Tuesdays through Fridays from noon until 3 p.m.), or buy them in person at the box office one hour before show time.>

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'Me, The Other,' a Documentary Featuring Washtenaw County College Students, Returns to Ann Arbor

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

'Me, The Other,' a locally produced documentary that tells the story of 12 students attending college in Washtenaw County, is returning to the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor on March 7. The diverse group featured in the film ranges from an African-American acting student from Flint who tells a personal heartbreaking story of the current water crisis in her community, a student from Mexico on the DACA program living in fear of deportation, a student from the storm-devastated island of Puerto Rico; a #metoo story of an orphaned immigrant from Cameroon, and a 65-year-old transgender student who was homeless and alcohol and drug dependent but chose education over suicide.

Shidan Majidi, who works in New York theater, directed the film.

"The message of the film really is, I hope, that through otherness we can come to a sense of oneness and really understand that oneness is the depth of who we are as human beings," Majidi said. "And in that place of the soul of the human spirit there is no difference between us. We all have the same color blood ... as human beings we're not labels. We really are made of the same stock. We're love and light basically. We called it 'Me, The Other,' hoping that through other people that society has stigmatized with all these issues ... and we are so scared of, when you get to the heart of a human being and hear their stories you'll see yourself in them."

The idea for the film began when Majidi received a phone call from a friend of his on the faculty of the University of Michigan Dental School.

"It was in response to the bicentennial celebration and there was a need to do something theatrical to celebrate the diversity on the three of the local campuses," said Majidi. "The three campuses were



“And in that place of the soul of the human spirit there is no difference between

us. We all have the same color blood ... as human beings we're not labels. We really are made of the same stock. We're love and light basically.”

– Shidan Majidi, "Me, The Other" director

Eastern Michigan University, Washtenaw Community College and the University of Michigan. Because I work on Broadway, I work mainly in live theater. The time frame that they gave me to create something theatrical was way too short and I said there's absolutely no way I can do this."

But Majidi could not get the project out of his head.

"I thought about it and one day the idea of a documentary popped into my head and I thought why not empower local students by giving them the chance to audition for a documentary," he said. "It would deal with social issues and diversity and it became really a storytelling exercise where we could show the film around these campuses as an educational tool to raise awareness."

Majidi hastily scheduled auditions.

"The time was so limited that I really didn't think anyone would show up," Majidi said. "But 42 people came to audition and we had quite a range of amazing stories and individuals. Then out of the 42 we chose 12, which was super ambitious."



The 12-member cast featured in documentary

Things moved quickly following the auditions

"Miraculously we were able to find a cinematographer and an editor and over 200 volunteers from the local community," said Majidi. "From then on it was a race against time doing anything and everything we could to raise funds. We knew because of the urgency of the stories and the issues and the world that we live in, that there's a window of opportunity for these stories to be relevant.

"For example, we had a #metoo story before the #metoo movement really became what it became," Majidi continued. "DACA, we have a student from Mexico on DACA. So all of these things started coming up in the news and we had already covered them in our documentary so we felt this was a really important film and we needed money to make it bigger so we extended it by about 25 minutes."

With a final cut coming in at about 90 minutes, the race was on to get the film released.

"We gave ourselves a deadline and the earliest opportunity that was offered to

us at the Michigan Theater was Martin Luther King Day of all days, which was just unbelievable. We grabbed that day. The theater's capacity is 1,750 and we had a staggering 1,638 people show up."

Majidi is hoping for a similar crowd when Me, The Other returns to the Michigan Theater for a special screening March 7. With all that is going on in this country at this time, Majidi feels his film fits right in with the narrative sweeping the nation.

"Look at the times that we live in," Majidi said. "There are movements popping up left, right and center. Finally the people, whose voice has either not been listened to or has been oppressed, they are finally finding a platform," he said. "What is going on right now in Parkland with these school kids is so profoundly important. It's so inspirational. It's a spiritual uprising. It's a spiritual revolution. This film is another movement of the voices who have been oppressed for way too long."

For more information on Me, The Other visit methetheotherfilm.com.

► Calum

Continued from p. 21

intent of making an impact on my audience.

Having two male dancers just shows that it doesn't matter who you are or who you love, you should love yourself, and that being gay, lesbian or transgender is just as normal and just as acceptable as being straight. There should never be a difference. There should never be boundary lines. We're all a human race, and that's what it should come down to.

Would you be open to singing a love song with another man?

Yeah, of course.

Well, you're buddies with Sam Smith now, so you two could make this happen.

Yeah, and do something. I know Sam is as much a believer in what we talked about as I am. He's very much an activist for letting people come out, so I would love to collaborate with him and do something like that.

Sam has been very vocal about weight and body image issues, and we talk a lot about body standards and the struggle for queer people to live up to an ideal prototype in the gay community, in particular. What was your motivation for speaking at the National Student

Pride event in London on this subject recently?

In this industry, there can be quite a lot of body shaming. As soon as I got into the spotlight with my music, you have people all the time saying, "Isn't he getting fat? Hasn't he put on weight?" Instantly, I felt self-conscious and I felt ashamed of my body, and was like, "I'm not gonna be able to eat properly; I'm gonna have to really slim down." It wasn't until I sat back and thought about it. I thought, "Why should I be dictated to by some anonymous hater online about how I should feel about my body?"

Being gay and feeling ashamed at myself, I look back and go, "I should have loved myself a lot earlier," because I tortured

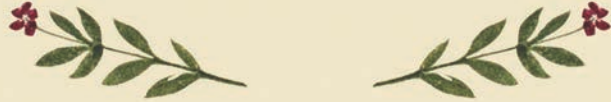
myself for so long. Now, I've finally got the confidence to say, "I'm gay and I'm out." I've never felt so much support. The saying, "Love comes from loving yourself first"? It's true. Hopefully this album is inspiring across the globe for so many different reasons. I just hope that people are inspired enough that they can just love themselves a little bit more.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. Reach him via his website at www.chris-azzopardi.com and on Twitter (@chrisazzopardi).

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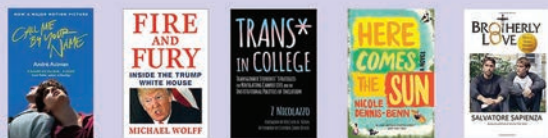


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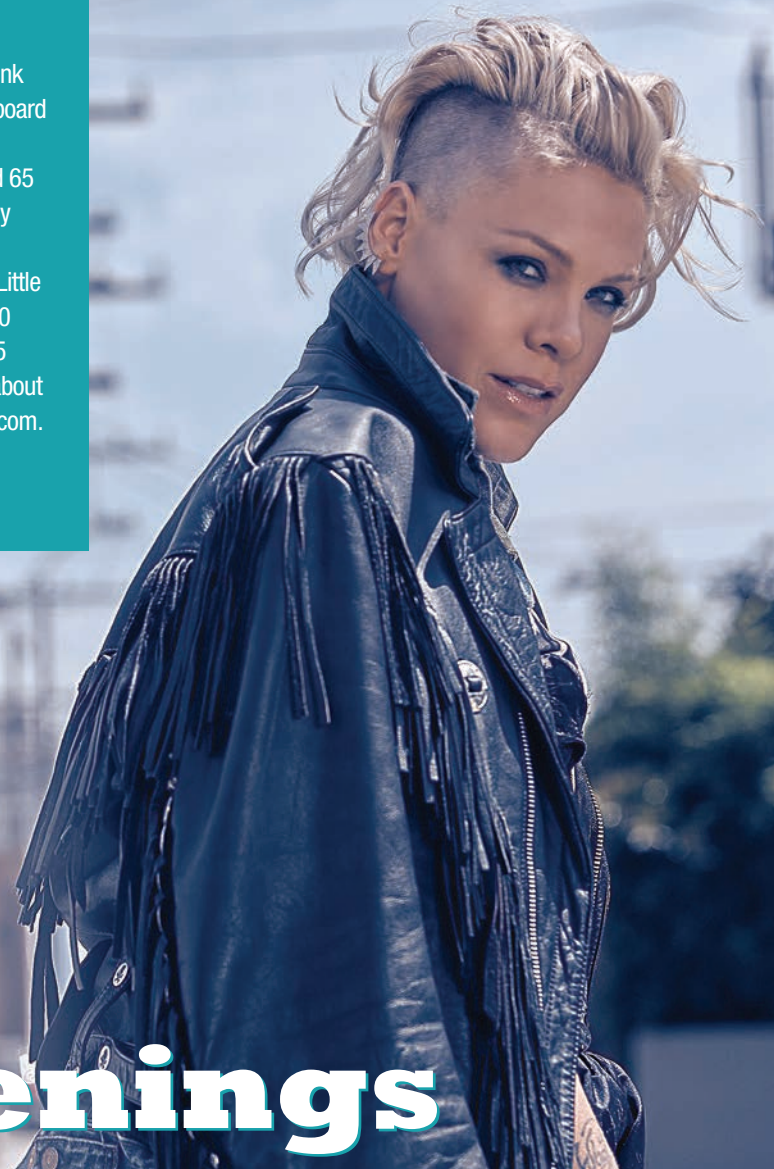
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Pink Heads to Detroit

Since kicking off her solo career in 2000, Pink has had 14 singles in the top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart and four at No. 1. In addition, she's sold 40 million albums worldwide and 65 million singles. Now, the three-time Grammy Award-winning artist is traveling with her Beautiful Trauma World Tour, and will be at Little Caesar's Arena on Sunday, March 25 at 7:30 p.m. Little Caesar's Arena is located at 2645 Woodward Ave., Detroit. More information about ticketing can be found online at pinkspace.com.

Photo by Kurt Iswarienko.



Happenings

OUTINGS

Saturday, March 3

East Lansing Roller Derby Season Home Opener Bout 7:00 pm East Lansing Roller Derby presents Saturday, March 3 ELRD Mitten Mavens vs. Flint Roller Derby East Lansing Roller Derby hosts their season home opener bout for the 2018 season versus the intensely,

competitive women Court One Training Center, 7868 Old M-78, East Lansing. 989-205-1888 join@mittenmavens.net <http://mittenmavens.net/join/bootcamp> <https://www.facebook.com/events/796138650574338/?ti=icl>

22nd Annual Michigan LGBT Comedyfest 8:00 pm Motor City Pride presents their annual Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Comedyfest

featuring 4 outstanding comedians, Suzanne Westenhoefer, Pat Regan, Andre Kelley, and Julia Scott, on Saturday, March 3rd at 8:00pm. Tickets are \$30 in advance Dearborn Ford Community & Performing Arts, 15801 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. 313.943.2350 <http://www.dearbornfordcenter.com/> <http://www.motorcitypride.org>

Sunday, March 4

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups 6:30 pm Event Time: 6:30-8:00 PM FREE and OPEN to the community. For parents of transgender kids, this group meets the 1st Sunday of each month from 6:30-8:00 p.m. Hilltop Counseling 115 W. Maumee St., Adrian, MI An event every month that begins at 6:30pm on day First of the month, repeating indefinitely Hilltop Counseling, 115 W. Maumee Street, Adrian. 313-909-5408 www.standwithtrans.org <http://www.hilltopcounseling.org>

Tuesday, March 6

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups 7:00 pm Event Time: 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. FREE and OPEN to the community. For parents of transgender kids, this group meets the 1st Tuesday of each month at 7:00-8:30 pm. St. Mary's In-the-Hills Episcopal Church, An event every month that begins at 7:00pm on day First of the month, repeating indefinitely St. Mary's In The Hills Episcopal Church, 2512 Joslyn Court, Lake Orion. 248-391-0663 www.stmarysinthehills.org <http://www.standwithtrans.org>

Thursday, March 8

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups 7:00 pm All youth are welcome to attend this FREE group. This group meets the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month. FREE and OPEN to the

Editor's Pick

Collected with Pride: A Glimpse of Detroiters' Art

Now through April 29, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History presents an exhibition with nearly 70 works from more than 20 African-American collectors from Detroit. Collected with Pride: A Glimpse of Detroiters' Art focuses on works collected as far back as the '60s. The exhibit is divided into four sections including "work created as a series, figurative and representational art, artists' expressions, and abstract and non-representational art," said the museum's page. This exhibit is free with museum admission which starts at \$8. The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History is located at 315 E. Warren Ave., Detroit. More information about the exhibit can be found online at thewright.org.



Editor's Pick

Detroit Roller Derby at the Masonic Temple

Although the sport has been around for decades, roller derby got a burst of fame in the early 2000s when modern roller derby leagues began cropping up around the U.S. Now, the sport has regained its popularity and for many, has become a local fixture in the community. On Saturday, March 10 the Masonic Temple will host a dual competition with Detroit Men's Roller Derby competing against the Cleveland Guardians and the Detroit Derby Allstars Red vs. Black. Tickets start at \$15 online and are \$18 at the door. More information can be found online at themasonic.com.



community. Orchard United Methodist Church 30450 Farmington Rd, Farmington Hills An event every month that begins at 7:00pm on day Second of the month, repeating indefinitely An event every month that begins at 7:00pm on day Fourth of the month, repeating indefinitely Oakland United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road, Farmington. 248-626-3620 www.oaklandumc.org http://www.standwithtrans.org

Friday, March 9

Pride Night at Pistons 7:00 pm Come out to our Pride Night @ LCA on March 9th Post & Share! <https://fevo.me/2hCGHQ4> Little Caesar's Arena, 2645 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 3133495777

Company Wang Ramirez 8:00 pm A couple both onstage and in real life, Sébastien Ramirez, a Frenchman with Spanish parents, and Honji Wang, a German woman with a Korean mother, make their UMS debut with *Borderline*. Their dance backgrounds could One event on March 10 at 8:00pm Power Center, 121 Fletcher Street, Ann Arbor. (734) 647-3327 http://smt.umich.edu/about/facilities/central_campus/power/index.htm <https://ums.org/performance/company-wang-ramirez/>

Sunday, March 11

BTL's LGBT Wedding & Anniversary Expo! 12:00 pm It's back! Don't miss the fun! Watch for details! 2 Free tickets with code: BTL2018. Register @ MilGBTWedding.com Motor City Casino, 2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit. 866-782-9622 donelle@pridesource.com pridesource.com

Elias Quartet 4:00 pm After a three-year project exploring all of Beethoven's string quartets, the Elias Quartet decided to consider how composers after Beethoven lived up to his monumental legacy. "Magic moments abound... This remarkable ensemble's ability to live and Rackham Auditorium, 915 E. Washington St, Ann Arbor. (734) 764-8572 <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/rackham-building/amphitheatre> <http://eliasstringquartet.com/>

Tuesday, March 13

Path of Miracles – Tenebrae 7:30 pm Founded by former King's Singers member Nigel Short in 2000, Tenebrae's members are drawn from the choirs of Westminster Abbey, King's College Cambridge, and Britain's two major opera houses. Talbot's work was supposed to premiere St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 2250 East Stadium Boulevard, Ann Arbor. 734-769-2550 <http://www.stfrancis2.com/> <https://ums.org/performance/tenebrae-path-of-miracles/>

Wednesday, March 14

Piedmont Blues: A Search for Salvation 7:30 pm Ragtime rhythms, a unique finger-picking guitar style, and understated vocals are the hallmarks of the folk music style found in the Piedmont region, the area between the Atlantic Coastal Plain and the Appalachian Mountains covering Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 <https://ums.org/performance/piedmont-blues-a-search-for-salvation/>

Friday, March 16

Prince and MJ Experience – Detroit 8:00 pm As selections of hits, rarities, and remixes from both artists are presented over the course of the evening, audience members square off in funny battle, holding signs bearing the mug of their favored entertainer to El Club, 4114 W. Vernor Hwy, Detroit. <https://www.elclubdetroit.com/>

Saturday, March 17

Blue Cathedral 7 p.m. Higdon Blue Cathedral Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 1 Schumann Symphony No. 1 "Spring" Hear for yourself why American orchestras perform the music of American composer Jennifer Higdon more frequently than scores by any other contemporary Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 <http://www.a2so.com/events/blue-cathedral/>

ART 'N' AROUND

Monet – Framing Life One ticket sends you on two artistic adventures — Monet: Framing Life and Church: A Painter's Pilgrimage. Travel to distinct places and time in history to experience the world as these two artists did. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2100 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-833-7900 <http://www.dia.org>

The Art of Containment 12:00 pm 50 plus Vessels from Bloomfield Hills resident Sidney Swidler's Collection, curated & amassed over 30 years! Tickets: Adults \$7, Kids \$5, Senior Citizens \$5, Free under 12, FREE SATURDAYS! Flint Institute of Arts, 1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint. 810-234-1695 <https://fiintarts.org>

Penny Stamps Series presents Giorgia Lupi: Data Humanism March 8, 5:10 pm Giorgia Lupi is an award-winning information designer, author, and co-founder of Accurat, a data-driven design firm where she serves as design director. She is also the co-author of *Dear Data*, an aspirational hand-drawn data visualization Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/giorgia_lupi

Chelsea Manning: A Conversation with Heather Dewey-Hagborg, presented by Penny Stamps Series March 15, 5:00 pm Chelsea Manning speaks on

the social, technological, and economic ramifications of Artificial Intelligence, and on the practical applications of machine learning. She is an advocate of queer and transgender rights and government transparency. During her Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/chelsea_manning

Penny Stamps Series presents Yvonne Rainer: A Truncated History of the Universe for Dummies; a Rant Dance March 22, 5:10 pm Yvonne Rainer, one of the founders of the Judson Dance Theater (1962), made a transition to filmmaking following a fifteen-year career as a choreographer/dancer (1960-1975). Her experimental feature-length films include *Lives of Performers* (1972), *Privilege* Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/yvonne_rainer

Penny Stamps Series presents Brian Selznick: Struck With Wonder March 29, 5 p.m. Brian Selznick has been making children's books since 1991. His illustrated novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* won the 2008 Caldecott medal and was the basis for Martin Scorsese's Oscar-winning movie *Hugo*. Wonderstruck, his 2011 Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/brian_selznick

THEATER

Bug March 1-4, 8:00 pm Tickets \$20 Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak. 2485418027 <http://www.stagecrafters.org>

2018 Career Fair March 6, 2:30 pm The 2018 Spring Career Fair at Washtenaw Community College expects to include representatives from more than 70 regional employers looking to immediately fill current and many job openings. The event is free and open to

First Date @ A2CT March 8, 7:30 pm Chronic Singles Aaron and Casey meet up for their arranged blind date and invite every doubting voice in their heads along for the ride. How will it go, and where will it lead? *First Date* One event on March 9 at 8 p.m. One event on March 10 at 8 p.m. One event on March 11 at 2 p.m. Arthur Miller Theatre, 1226 Murfin Ave., Ann Arbor. 734-764-2538 http://smt.umich.edu/about/facilities/north_campus/walgreen/arthurmiller/

Steel Magnolias March 9-25 8:00 pm Tickets \$20-\$23.50 Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak. 2485418027 <http://www.stagecrafters.org>

A2CT Workshop: Creating Magical Spaces March 10, 1:00 pm CREATING MAGICAL SPACES: SET BUILDING AND PAINTING Instructors: Brice O'Neal and

Debra Golden March 10, 1:00-4:00 PM Ages 16+ \$20 for A2CT members / \$25 for non-members Hands-on workshop constructing basic set pieces out A2CT Studio Theatre, 322 W. Ann St., Ann Arbor. 734-971-2228 <http://www.a2ct.org/classes-and-workshops>

Piedmont Blues: A Search for Salvation March 14, 7:30 pm Ragtime rhythms, a unique finger-picking guitar style, and understated vocals are the hallmarks of the folk music style found in the Piedmont region, the area between the Atlantic Coastal Plain and the Appalachian Mountains covering Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 <https://ums.org/performance/piedmont-blues-a-search-for-salvation/>

A2CT Workshop: Auditioning for Musical Theatre March 17, 1:00 pm AUDITIONING FOR MUSICAL THEATRE Instructors: Jared Hoffert and Jonathan Sills March 17, 1:00-4:00 PM Ages 16+ \$20 for A2CT members / \$25 for non-members Practical tips for musical theater audition prep, including how to A2CT Studio Theatre, 322 W. Ann St., Ann Arbor. 734-971-2228

GRUNT Detroit Round 2 March 21, 8:00 pm GRUNT is a grassroots national touring network established to support diverse artistic voices in dance. This round of GRUNT Detroit features work by April Sellers Dance Collective (Minneapolis), Kristi Faulkner Dance (Detroit), and AJ Sims (Detroit). An event every day that begins at 8:00pm, repeating until March 22. Jam Handy, 2900 E. Grand Blvd., Detroit. 313-451-0806 Kristi@KristiFaulknerDance.com <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3331976>

Bubble Schmeis at The Schvitz March 22, 7:30 pm Welcome to the steam baths! The word *bubbe-meis* is a Yiddish term meaning "a grandmother's story" or "an old wives' tale." Writer and street performer Nick Cassenbaum, along with his klezmer musicians, invite you into One event on March 23 at 7:00pm One event on March 23 at 9:00pm One event on March 24 at 2:00pm One event on March 24 at 8:00pm One event on March 25 at 2:00pm One event on March 25 at 6:00pm The Schvitz, 8295 Oakland Street, Detroit. (313) 724-8489 <https://schvitzdetroit.com/> <https://ums.org/performance/bubble-schmeis/>

Nederlands Dans Theater March 23, 8:00 pm BUY TICKETS | RELATED EVENTS | COMMENTS (0) "The world's most magnificent dancers... a retina-shredding spectacle of passion and power." Known for pushing boundaries with its bold repertory and distinct virtuosity, Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT) One event on March 25 at 8:00pm Power Center, 121 Fletcher Street, Ann Arbor. (734) 647-3327 http://smt.umich.edu/about/facilities/central_campus/power/index.htm <https://ums.org/performance/nederlands-dans-theater/>

Penny Stamps Speaker Series Presents Transgender Activist Chelsea Manning and Heather Dewey-Hagborg

The University of Michigan's Stamps School of Art & Design prides itself on its "diversity, equity and inclusion." The school, which requires an "international experience" for each of its students to make them more worldly, describes itself as an institution that prepares students to "think in new ways, to educate them to become concerned world citizens, and to equip them with the skills for life-long accomplishment."



One of its methods to ensure that is its regular speaker series, and on March 15 it will feature Chelsea Manning. Manning rose to fame when she released sensitive information to Wikileaks.

Manning is an LGBTQ rights activist and a transgender woman who also campaigns for governmental transparency. Manning will speak from personal experience as she talks about the "social, technological and economic ramifications of artificial intelligence and on the practical applications of machine learning," the school's website said.

Manning joined the U.S. Department of Defense as an intelligence analyst, and during her time there she publicly released classified documents that she felt revealed human rights abuses.

For her actions, she was tried and sentenced to 35 years in military prison, but after serving only seven years, President Barack Obama commuted her sentence. Joining Manning's presentation will be Heather Dewey-Hagborg, a bio-political artist and educator who will be collaborating with Manning during her presentation, the school's website said.

"Dewey-Hagborg received cheek swabs and hair clippings from Manning to create DNA-derived sculptural portraits," it said. "The work illustrates a multitude of ways in which DNA can be interpreted."

The presentation will be held on Thursday, March 15 at 5:10 p.m. at the Michigan Theater. The theater is located at 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. This event is free. More information can be found online at stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/chelsea_manning.

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ShannonLoren Named LGBT Chamber of Commerce's Newest Gold Member

BY BTL STAFF

DETROIT — Recognizing them for their “creative” and “innovative” marketing techniques, the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce announced that ShannonLoren is its newest Gold Member.

“We look forward to working alongside their leadership to help them secure an LGBT Business Enterprise designation,” said commerce president Kevin Heard. “In doing so, ShannonLoren will strengthen its future economic opportunities as more local businesses become inclusive and work to diversify their supply chains.”

Headquartered in Troy, ShannonLoren is a full-service marketing support services company. Since 2009, the business has expanded greatly from a single, small-room office to its current 20,000 square foot headquarters. ShannonLoren President David Huber said he is happy to accept the gold membership.

“Our involvement with the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce is a welcomed step in our continued growth as a company,” said Huber. “The opportunities to establish new relationships within the LGBT community through this Chamber is energizing for Michael (McManus) and I, as well as our employees. We look forward to the events for 2018 and improving our visibility.”

In order to become a certified LGBTBE, businesses must: be at least 51 percent owned, operated, managed and controlled by an LGBT person or persons who are either U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents; exercise independence from any non-LGBT business enterprise; have its principal place of business (headquarters) in the U.S. and have been formed as a legal entity in the U.S. Further, it must offer clients a variety of services, including: marketing and promotions; signs and displays; creative services; direct mail; distribution and fulfillment; and database management.

The DRLGBTCC hosts a variety of events throughout the year that focus on business leadership and advocacy, education and training and social and networking opportunities. It also serves as the coordinator for Michigan's Out & Equal Regional Affiliate, also known as MERGE, by hosting monthly networking events that support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning and allied employee resource groups. MERGE strengthens ties between corporations and the LGBT community in Michigan.

For more information about the DRLGBTCC, including membership information, visit detroitlgbtchamber.com.

The Colorful World of Simon Black

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Take a look at his picture, and there's no getting around it: Detroit native and dance music sensation Simon Black is a little unusual.

“I've always danced to the beat of my own drum,” Black said. “I used to think that was something bad. But now I don't.”

Black traces his love of music to his formative years in the 1980s.

“I was an '80s baby and MTV was new,” he said. “The artists that were hot at the time are the ones who inspired me to be who you see today: Madonna, Prince and Michael Jackson.”

Madonna, especially, spoke to young Mr. Black.

“There was something about her that really sparked an interest in me,” said Black. “She inspired me as far as music, as far as daring to be yourself and not caring what anyone thought about it.”

Barely a teenager, Black said he was an early bloomer.

“The first time I went to a nightclub I was 13 years old and with my older brother,” Black said. “It was an after-hours club and I heard house music for the first time. I thought, ‘I want to make music like this.’”

The whole scene appealed to him, and when he came out and started going to gay bars, lip-syncing did especially.

“Seeing some of the drag queens standing on the speakers lip-syncing the songs, that was really intriguing to me because I used to think I had an awful voice because it was so different,” said Black.

So, when Black started out on the music scene, he was unsure of himself.

“I was very apprehensive about being an artist because I didn't know what type of artist I wanted to be,” he said. “I didn't know how people would receive me. I liked so many styles of music, and in America people want to put you into a box based on genre.”

He tried various genres, and then Black began making a name for himself around Detroit performing at local bars and at Pride festivals. Then in 2013, he said, he hit his stride.

“That's when I met the producer I



still work with today, Brian Javontte Garrett,” Black said. “My friend Ziam asked me to perform for one of his parties during the Movement festival that year. My track started skipping. So Javontte, who I had never met, asked ‘You want me to play something? You want some house, right?’”

It was then that a special musical moment was made.

“We meshed,” said Black “And ever since then it's been nothing but chemistry.”

Black credited Garrett with giving him confidence.

“He was always telling me, ‘Simon, you're a star,’” said Black “There's something about you that we really need to tap into because I see something in you.’ People tell you that but you have to believe it as well. I'm not going to say I didn't believe it, but I didn't own it like I do now.”

Today, Black defines his sound as a mix between soul, rhythm and blues and dance music with a touch of pop.

“The things I usually sing about are love and God,” Black said. “I have a gospel tinge to my voice. It's God-

given. I like women who have big, strong husky voices like Phyllis Hyman and the Jean Carne and the Gladys Knights and Tina Turners.”

This March, Black will release his latest project: a full-length CD called “The Love Suite.”

“I call it that because I am growing up as a person,” said Black. “And in the world we live in we definitely need a lot of love. People are so busy they forget what love is. So a lot of the songs on my new CD are oriented around love. It's more of a grown up R&B sound. I still have a couple of house songs but it's a different side of me. I know people say ‘stick with what works,’ but as an artist you grow.”

His new single, “Fool For Love,” is “kind of self-explanatory,” Black said. “We've all been fools for love. I don't mean you're getting slapped or anything. I mean ‘I love you so much honey I'll do whatever you need so long as I'm next to you.’ It's a mid-tempo beat. You can ballroom and hustle to it and that's what most people do when they see me

perform it live.”

To see Black live, you need go no further than Full Truth Fellowship of Christ Church on Detroit's west side on any given Sunday. There, Black, an ordained minister, serves as the praise and worship leader and president of the choir.

“It's just a great feeling to be a minister,” Black said. “I like helping people and I've always been a charitable person.”

Black takes his role on the Full Truth ministerial team very seriously.

“People in the world need to know that God really loves them,” he said. “Mainstream churches push people away because they're too judgmental. Little do they know, they are killing people spiritually with their judgment.”

With his career on the rise – he is managed by his husband Kurtis Grant – and with his soul stirred by his ministerial duties, Black said he is in a good place in life.

“I am happy with myself and my place in the world,” he said. “And I am content simply being me.”

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Find over 300 Non-Profit Listings Serving Michigan's LGBTQ Online @ pridesource.com

Editor's Note: This is a sampling of the hundreds of Michigan non-profits working with the LGBTQ community across the state. From time to time this print resource will emphasize different sectors as space permits.

AIDS/HIV

There are dozens of AIDS/HIV organizations and resources listed at www.PrideSource.com. Here are just three of them:

AIDS Walk Detroit

Contact info@aidswalkdetroit.org or 248-399-9255 for more information. The walk takes place this year on Sunday, Sept. 15, 8:30 a.m. at the Royal Oak Farmers Market

Macomb County STD Clinic

27690 Van Dyke
Warren, MI 48093
586-465-9217
<http://health.macombgov.org/Health-Programs-HPDC-HIV/AIDS/Counseling/Testing>

Matrix Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program

120 Parsons Street
Detroit, MI 48201
888-226-6366
248-545-1435
www.matrixhumanservices.org/programs/ryanwhite/

UNIFIED - HIV Health and Beyond

3011 W. Grand Blvd. Suite 230
Detroit, MI 48202
313-446-9800
www.miunified.org
Michigan HIV/STD Hotline
800-872-2437

Advocacy

Equality Michigan

19641 W. 7 Mile, Detroit, MI
313-537-7000
equalitymi.org
[Facebook.com/equalitymichigan](https://www.facebook.com/equalitymichigan)

Campus

Currently there are 19 organizations listed as active online at www.pridesource.com/ yellow pages. The following are some in the southeast Michigan area:

U-M Ann Arbor

Spectrum Center
Spectrumcenter@umich.edu
<http://spectrumcenter.umich.edu>
734-763-4186

Oakland University Gender & Sexuality Center

gsc@oakland.edu
www.oakland.edu/gsc
248-370-4336

Eastern Michigan University

LGBT Resource Center
emich.edu/lgbtrc
734-487-4149

The Lawrence Tech LGBT Resource Center

ltu.edu/student_affairs/lgbt.asp

Wayne State JIGSAW

[Facebook.com/groups/WayneState.JIGSAW](https://www.facebook.com/groups/WayneState.JIGSAW)
wsujigsaw@gmail.com

Community Centers

Michigan has nine active LGBTQ community centers, with a tenth planned in Lansing. Here are three of them.

Jim Toy Community Center

Ann Arbor
www.jimtoycenter.org
www.facebook.com/jimtoycenter
or follow them on Twitter @JimToyCenter.
319 Braun Court
Ann Arbor, MI
734-995-9867

LGBT Detroit

Detroit
www.lgbtdetroit.org
www.facebook.com/lgbtdetroit
or follow them on Twitter @LGBTDetroit.
20025 Greenfield Road
Detroit, MI
Phone: 313-397-2127

Affirmations

Ferndale
<http://goaffirmations.org>
www.facebook.com/Affirmations/
or follow them on Twitter @GoAffirmations.
290 W. Nine Mile Road
Ferndale, MI
248-398-7105

Legal

American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan

Jay Kaplan, Staff Attorney, LGBT Project
2966 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI
www.aclumich.org
313-578-6800

Fair Michigan

PO Box 6136
Plymouth, MI 48170
877-432-4764, 313-556-2300
fairmichigan.org
[Facebook.com/fairmichigan2016](https://www.facebook.com/fairmichigan2016)

Know Your Rights Project

Outlaws U-M student group
outlawslegal@gmail.com
734-995-9867

Older Adults

SAGE Metro Detroit

290 W. Nine Mile Rd. Ferndale, MI
313-578-6812
sagemetrodetroit.org
Facebook: SAGE Metro Detroit

Political

The LGBT and Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party

[Facebook.com/TheLGBTACaucusoftheMDP](https://www.facebook.com/TheLGBTACaucusoftheMDP)

Stonewall for Revolution

www.facebook.com/stonewall4revolution

Professional Groups

Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box 32446
Detroit, MI 48232
detroitlgbtchamber.com
1-800-DET-LGBT

Ties Like Me

Professional networking events
third Weds. 5:30 - 8 p.m.
TiesLikeMe.org

Suits And The City

Lansing, MI
suitsandthecity@gmail.com
www.suitsandthecity.org

Transgender

FtM Detroit

<https://www.facebook.com/FtMDetroit/>
ftmdetroit@gmail.com

FtM A2 Ypsi

ftmannarborypsilanti@gmail.com
<https://www.facebook.com/ftma2ypsi/>

Transgender Michigan

23211 Woodward Ave.
Ferndale, MI
info@transgendermichigan.org
www.transgendermichigan.org
800-842-2954

Trans Sistas of Color Project

19641 W. 7 Mile Rd. in Detroit
313-537-7000 Ext 107
info@tscopdetroit.org
www.facebook.com/TSCOPD/

Youth

Ruth Ellis Center

77 Victor Street, Highland Park, MI
48203
info@ruthelliscenter.org
Facebook: Ruth Ellis Center
313-252-1950

Ozone House

102 N. Hamilton Street
Ypsilanti, MI
734-662-2265
734-662-2222

Stand With Trans

Farmington, MI
www.standwithtrans.org
248-739-9254



Find a digital version of PrideSource Magazine online under Our LGBTQ Yellow Pages

Find these resources online

- Adoption Services
- AIDS/HIV Hotlines
- AIDS/HIV Organizations
- Alzheimer's Association
- Animal Shelter
- Anti-Violence
- Archives/Collections
- Campus; Student and Alumni Groups
- Cancer Support Groups
- Choruses
- Community Centers
- Employee Resource Groups
- Families and Parents
- Foster Care
- Foundations and Funders
- Hotlines & Switchboards
- Labor Union
- Legal Organizations
- Museums
- Music Groups
- National Organizations
- Political Organizations
- Professional Organizations
- Religious & Spiritual
- Senior Living
- Seniors
- Social/Community Organizations
- Sports
- Substance Abuse
- Transgender Groups/Services
- Women's Health
- Youth Services

Get Listed, Promote Your Events

You can add or update any listing by going to www.PrideSource.com and clicking on Yellow Pages. Once you submit your listing, our staff will contact you to confirm your information.

You can add your event to the Pride Source Calendar online and in print by going to www.PrideSource.com and clicking on Calendar, then "Add Event." Send any press releases and announcements to editor@pridesource.com

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

#MuteRKelly Protesters at LCA: 'Black Girls Lives Matter'

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Around 30 protesters gathered outside Little Caesars Arena Feb. 21 to make a statement supporting sexual assault victims and to let R.Kelly know that his “rape culture is not welcome here.”

Several of the R&B singer’s shows have been cancelled on his most recent “Tale of Two Kings” tour with Charlie Wilson as a result of the #MuteRKelly movement. The Detroit group that formed in December 2017 aimed to cancel this show that was put on by the radio station 105.9 Kiss and 313 Presents — a joint venture between Olympia Entertainment and Palace Sports and Entertainment.

“We’re out here trying to mute R.Kelly and bring awareness to sexual assault and the violence that happens to young black and brown girls,” said Sharron Fincher, protestor co-organizer and access coordinator at Wayne County SAFE in Detroit. “There is no accountability standard with R.Kelly. He’s still able to perform in arenas and people still support him and it’s very problematic. We would like to raise awareness about what is going on and give a voice to people in our city and to young girls who are voiceless.”

R. Kelly, 51, is accused of being a cult leader, a rapist, and a sexual predator. He has managed to balance years of success — the sale of over 100 million albums, winning multiple Grammy Awards — with almost a dozen allegations and one trial since the 1990s, for illegal and inappropriate sexual conduct with both women and minors.

“It’s the time right now,” said Dr. Kevicha Echols, who protested with Tafari Stevenson-Howard. “Women’s voices have been silenced for so long and now that you have so many people out here speaking about it. Whether he’s been convicted or not, I don’t know, but I feel like it’s just time to hold people accountable.”

The protest was hosted by Detroit Slutwalk, Wayne County SAFE, Wayne County Greens, Girls Rock Detroit, Metro Detroit Political Action Network, Women’s March Michigan, and the Sexual Assault Services for Holistic Healing and Awareness Center (SASHA Center).

Members of the community who marched were chanting “Black girls lives matters,” “LCA shame on you,” “What are we gonna do? Mute R.Kelly! When are we gonna do it? Now!” and “We love Uncle Charlie, but not R.Kelly.”

Protest co-organizer Kalimah Johnson, who is also founder and executive director for the SASHA Center, said, “I think it’s important for us to make our voices heard because the city of Detroit has allowed a known predator of females into our city to perform to make his money so he can continue to hold women hostage in their homes in Chicago and in Atlanta. It’s just inappropriate. We have never wanted him here. We have been muting R.Kelly for years. We believe this is part of the #MeToo movement ... We just want everyone to know that black women matter in this country, and he hasn’t lost his job like Matt Lauer, he hasn’t lost his job like Harvey Weinstein. So, when (are) we gonna hold this man accountable?”

Follow the #MuteRKelly movement online at facebook.com/MuteRKelly.



ICON Detroit Reaches 25-Year Milestone

Detroit’s Premier Leather Club Celebrates 25 Years of Service, Friendship, Leather and Kink

BY DAVID RYALS

ICON Detroit is celebrating their 25th anniversary this year. Unlike the average leather club, this nonprofit was established in February 1993 by the “Original Six” — friends with a keen interest in leathermen and S&M. These founding fathers — Kevin, Larry, Michael, Eric, Buck and Alleycat — could not find a leather group that fit their cause. Most leather clubs during that time were just social clubs that got together to play.

So they started their own club and evolved into a unique group of men who wanted to represent and fight for those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. The sword in their logo signifies their pledge to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS within the Detroit leather community.

“Our founders always wanted to give back to the community which was not occurring with other leather clubs at the time,” said Burns pointing to their fundraising efforts for various groups dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention, care, community research and advocacy. This includes UNIFIED - HIV Health & Beyond (formerly AIDS Partnership Michigan), and Mr. Friendly, which ICON Detroit was the first club to designate as a recipient of charitable giving. Burns remembers when they volunteered to be ushers in their leather gear at the then annual prayer vigil for “people who care about people with AIDS.”

Other charities ICON Detroit has

supported over the years are the Ruth Ellis Center, the Triangle Foundation (now Equality Michigan), the Wellness House of Michigan, PFLAG, W.A.G.S. & Friends Alliance, and the national leather charity, CLAW (Cleveland Leather Annual Weekend), which named ICON Detroit 2017 Club of the Year.

Burns said the plan of the “Original Six” was to “enhance the bond of friendship between us and seek other like-minded people that we thought would be excellent additions to our group.”

The goal, he said, was to learn more about the leather community and all it entails.

“Then we could educate others. We would also join in the battle against something that had a hold on our community — the AIDS crisis. Many people thought the leather community to be one-dimensional — sex day in and day out,” he said.

“ICON Detroit wanted to show that in fact there are several layers to our community ... camaraderie, a sense of caring and a fun loving spirit. One of the areas the club has grown the most is with its charity contributions — whether hands on or monetary.”

After 25 years, ICON Detroit is still instigating fun, educating others, organizing fundraisers for local charities and helping members of the community in need. As they celebrate their silver anniversary, Burns said they are proud to boast their long list of accomplishments for men inside the gay and bisexual

community.

According to ICON Detroit’s website, the club was one of the first to have a female full member (Brenda). “The club was progressive and multicultural from its inception, with members from many ethnic backgrounds including white, black and Latino — in fact, during the decade before ICON Detroit was formed, several U.S. leather clubs did not accept full members who were people of color.”

The leather community has expanded in the last 25 years. Many aspects of the leather community include new aesthetics and forms of expression. On changing with the trends inside the male leather community, Burns said, “We have grown alongside the entire leather community. We have included the new emerging offshoots of our community, such as pups, handlers, skinheads and others. We have plans to further engage ourselves more into hands on help in the leather community.”

Burns said, “The future is boundless for ICON Detroit. Much progress has been made in regards to health issues, but many people still need our assistance. Also, there are many newbies that the club is always willing and capable to train, teach and mentor.”

For more information, visit icondetroit.org/, facebook.com/icondetroit/ or facebook.com/menjoscomplex.

Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Anne Hathaway 'Wanted' by Dee Rees

While director Dee Rees didn't get an Oscar nomination for her acclaimed film "Mudbound," the movie nonetheless made a big splash, with cinematographer Rachel Morrison becoming the first woman nominated in that category and Mary J. Blige breaking records as the first performer to snag acting and songwriting nods in the same year. So what's next for the lesbian filmmaker behind "Pariah" and "Bessie"? An adaptation of Joan Didion's political thriller, "The Last Thing He Wanted," with Anne Hathaway currently in negotiations for the lead. Presuming contracts are signed, she'll be playing a real-life Washington Post reporter covering the 1984 presidential elections who finds herself embroiled in the Iran arms-dealing conspiracy. The talented Rees's career is going great guns (sorry, pun) and it's a pleasure to see queer women of color taking their share in Hollywood. Meanwhile, even during that weird try-hard backlash we were solidly Team Hathaway, so we'll be extremely happy if she takes this gig and keeps proving the naysayers wrong over and over again.

'1985' gets its shot

Sometimes we report on the production of a little LGBT indie movie by an up-and-coming filmmaker and we just hope that it gets finished and makes its mark somewhere, anywhere. Well, last year when we reported on just such a film, "1985," its director Yen Tan – a gay Malaysian-born filmmaker based in Texas – was mostly known for the lovely "Pit Stop," a drama that made queer film fest rounds. But now "1985" has a slot at this year's South by Southwest, and that higher profile placement is great news for the film starring Cory Michael Smith ("Gotham"), Virginia Madsen and Michael Chiklis. Smith stars as a young man living with AIDS who returns home to his estranged family, with all the complications that are now part of the all too familiar legacy of the time. After SXSW, look for this one in arthouses soon enough. With "Call Me By Your Name" already having returned to the early '80s to explore a love story on the cusp (and outside) of the AIDS crisis, the time is right for films that can contextualize the epidemic and its role in queer history during that harrowing decade.

Emily Dickinson: Girl Gone 'Wild'

If you saw Cynthia Nixon in 2017's "A Quiet Passion" you came to know American poet Emily Dickinson as a solitary woman devoted to her work and yearning for human connection

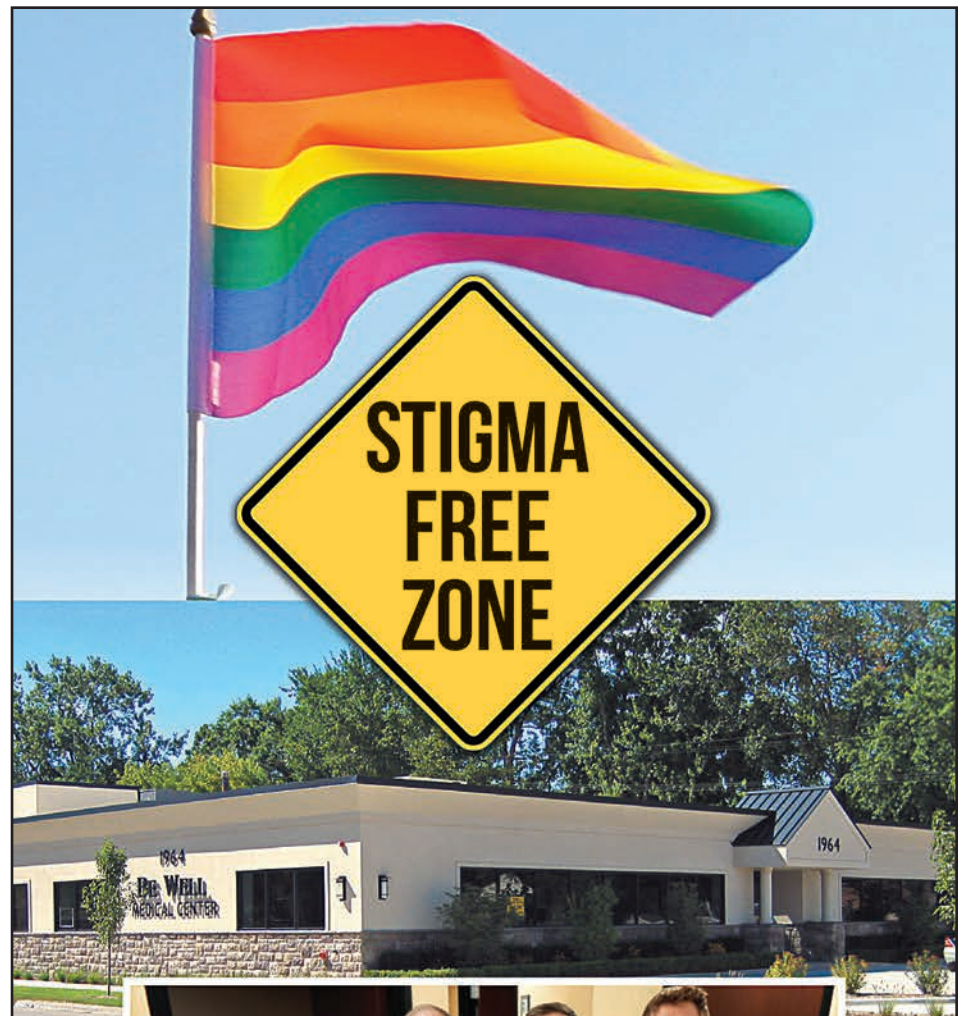


that often eluded her. Well, there's a comedy flipside to this, and filmmaker Madeleine Olnek is going to shake up what you learned in high school English Lit with her take on the reclusive Dickinson in "Wild Nights with Emily." Starring Molly Shannon ("SNL") as Dickinson, supported by people like Amy Seimetz ("Alien: Covenant"), Brett Gelman ("Lemon") and even former MTV VJ Kevin Seal, it's the story of E.D.'s more robust and overtly lesbian side, as well as her lifelong romantic relationship with a woman. Premiering at this year's South by Southwest Festival, look for it to take the stuffy air out of the official story. We will expect liberties to be taken with fact – it's from the director of "Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same," after all. And frankly we don't care what's true and what's not. We're just here to party with Emily.

Isabelle Huppert takes a 'Vacation' with Ira Sachs

Acclaimed gay filmmaker Ira Sachs is on his way back into theaters after the success of "Love is Strange" and "Little Men," and this time he's bringing Isabelle Huppert along. The much-lauded French actress ("Elle") will star in "A Family Vacation" alongside Greg Kinnear and Marisa Tomei, in a story written by Sachs and co-writer Mauricio Zacharias (who also co-wrote "Strange" and "Men"). It's about three generations of the same family on holiday in Portugal and a "life-changing experience" they deal with while far away from home. That's all the detail we have right now, but it's no stretch or spoiler to say that Sachs has turned into an astute observer and chronicler of the anxiety of living in sophisticated urban environments, as well as the ways in which people in those spaces strive and often fail to exercise their moral duties to one another. In other words, he makes serious and thought-provoking cinema about real people and we are here for it. This one's just getting started, so expect it sometime in 2019.

Romeo San Vicente vacations usually resemble the National Lampoon variety.



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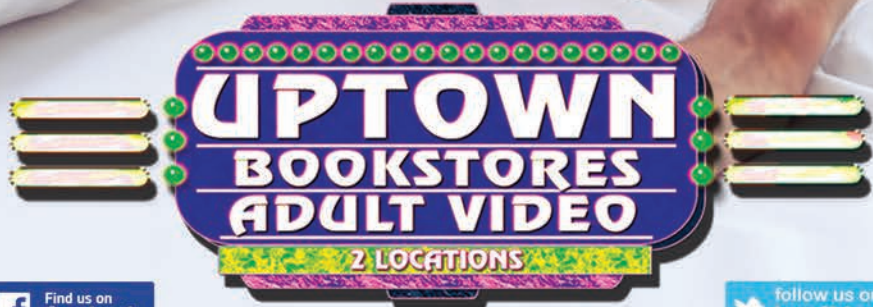
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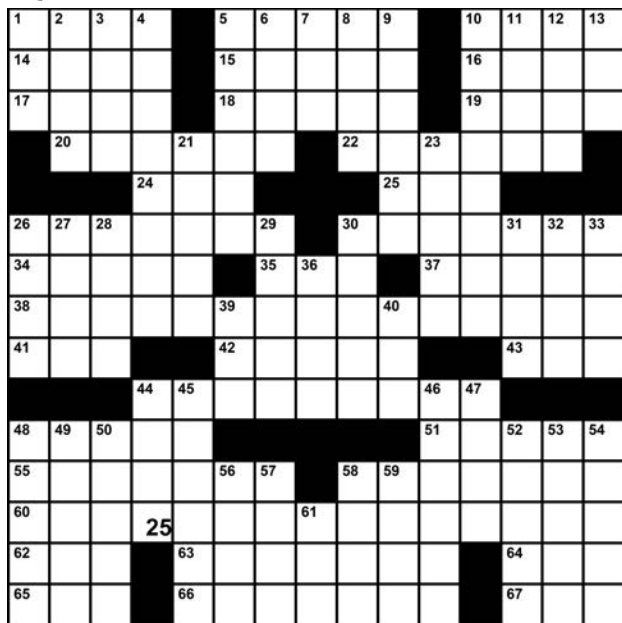
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Q Puzzle



- 41 Wicks once of the WNBA
 42 Penny pincher
 43 Madonna's Peron role
 44 "I tried my ___ to believe in the rainbow" (Judy Garland)
 48 One coming from Uranus, e.g.
 51 "Bear" that's not a bear
 55 Gay men's chorus event
 58 Gutsy Greek
 60 End of the advice
 62 Uey from WSW
 63 Say again
 64 Hawk-chicken difference
 65 Streaker over the Atlantic
 66 "The Wapshot Chronicle" author
 67 Initials of Stonewall Jackson's boss
- Romeo?"
 21 Audre Lorde's "A Burst of ___"
 23 Like Oscar Wilde
 26 Works under Edith Head, perhaps
 27 Pants dropped
 28 "At Swim, Two Boys" is set in this land
 29 River through K'In
 30 Put out
 31 Words before delighted
 32 How far up it goes (abbr.)
 33 Stiff bristle
 36 Home, to Dave Pallone
 39 "Very interesting ..."
 40 It comes before mature ejaculation
 44 Date of Xmas
 45 Iron-poor
 46 Adam Rippon, for one
 47 Legal wrong
 48 Remembers some S&M
 49 Students may take them out
 50 Atlas enlargement
 52 You might shed this
 53 Inevitable online claim
 54 Gay porn director Rainier
 56 Kind of IRA
 57 It can bear fruit
 58 Navratilova, for one
 59 Townshend of The Who
 61 Before, to the Bard

Down

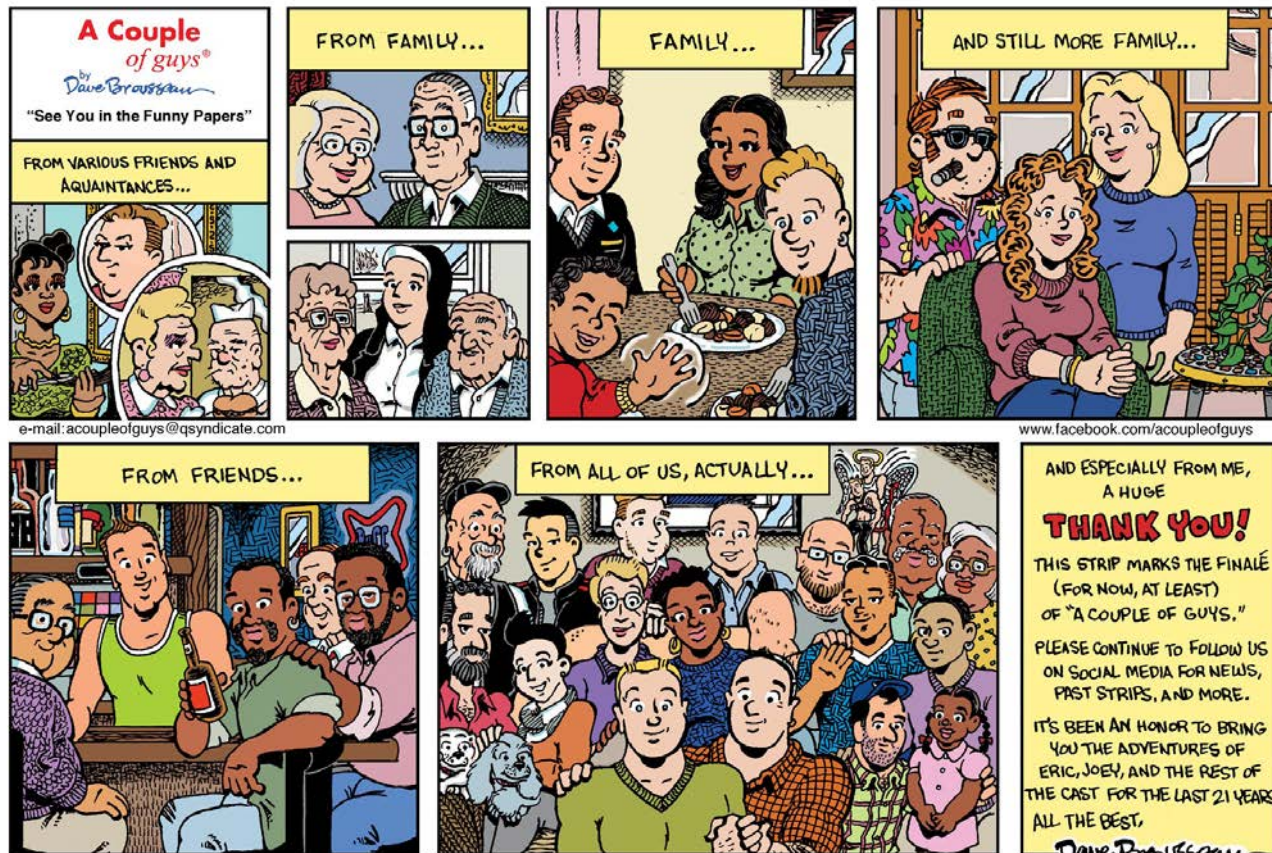
- 1 Bloomers worn around the neck
 2 Old Dodge
 3 "Rocky Horror"'s ___ Raff
 4 Old maneuver in David Kopay's sport
 5 Slip away
 6 Mahoney (1940-2018), who played Martin Crane, Frasier's dad
 7 Childcare writer LeShan
 8 Leonardo's thing
 9 Linked with
 10 King Lear's youngest
 11 Where to find hot buns
 12 Result of getting rear-ended
 13 "Wherefore ___ thou

Advice from Frasier's Dad

Across

- 1 Alfred Douglas' title
 5 Spit out
 10 Ending for Copland
 14 Islamic ruler
 15 "Cabaret" line about screwing Maximilian
 16 Out partner
 17 The lowdown
 18 Climax at the end of an action film
- 19 Pay for a pad
 20 Start of advice from Frasier's dad
 22 More of the advice
 24 One of TV's "Bosom Buddies"
 25 Da Vinci's threesome
 26 Rod on a screen
 30 Frilly mats
 34 John of "Gay Sex Quotes"
 35 "Sex and the City" shower
 37 Come slowly
 38 More of the advice

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BTL Celebrates 25 Years of LGBTQ Publishing with Kick-Off Event at March 11 Expo

Our 25th anniversary is a significant accomplishment here at BTL. This March marks a quarter of a century in business, reporting on the lives of LGBTQ Michiganders – as we fight for full equality. The first of several events planned for our anniversary year will take place during the 8th Annual LGBT Wedding and Anniversary Expo at MotorCity Casino on Sunday, March 11.

Join us for rainbow cake as we celebrate more than 25 years producing the award-winning weekly LGBTQ print publication, *Between The Lines*, the Michigan Pride Source Annual Yellow Pages and Magazine and our online site, Pridesource.com.

In the coming year we will reflect on 25 years publishing BTL, the largest and longest-running LGBTQ publication in Michigan, and we're excited to look to what will come next.

So join us at this fun kick-off event. Eat cake with us around 1:30 p.m. during the 8th Annual Ultimate LGBT Wedding & Anniversary Expo on March 11 from 12 to 4 p.m. at The MotorCity Casino Hotel, 2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit. Over 90 equality minded vendors will be on hand to help you.

More information about the event can be found online at milgbtwedding.com. Tickets can be purchased on the site also, for \$10 in advance, or for \$15 at the door. Or take advantage by registering online right now and entering BTL2018 for two free tickets. For updates, follow our Facebook page at [facebook.com/UltimateLGBTExpo](https://www.facebook.com/UltimateLGBTExpo), @BTLExpo on Twitter and @BTLEXPO on Instagram.



1 Towanna Jackson and LaShawn Peterson of Southfield were married on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, 2016, around 1 a.m. inside the Plaza Royale Wedding Chapel in Las Vegas.

"My sister was able to catch a flight and fill the role of best woman, maid of honor and DJ. My cousin and his wife happened to be on vacation and met us at the chapel. We had friends that woke up and watched the live stream," said Jackson.

Keeping with tradition doesn't really matter to them as long as they are together doing what they enjoy like traveling, camping, cooking, watching Netflix in "chill" mode, shopping, spending time with their grandchildren – Celine and Andre III – and selling real estate.

Jackson said, "It's all fun with LaShawn by my side."



2 Crystal and Heather McBride of Wyandotte met almost 15 years ago in Toledo, Ohio, through a mutual friend.

"We hit it off from the first meeting and have been inseparable ever since," said Heather. The couple got engaged on Dec. 23, 2013.

"I said yes without hesitation never really knowing if we would truly have the opportunity to wed," she said, adding that it was important for them to show their two adopted children what true love, commitment and dedication is.

Crystal and Heather were married on the beach on Aug. 10, 2015 in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. They had a reception back home with family and friends.

Visit MiLGBTWedding.com

Our extensive site includes full coverage of the couples shown here and many more. There is also an extensive resource directory for all your planning needs for any event – especially your wedding or anniversary celebrations. Visit to see the equality-minded vendors who look forward to working with you.



3 For Scott Sauter and Domenick Viviano of Ann Arbor, marriage equality means they are no longer second class citizens.

"It means putting that civil union nonsense to rest. It's about having the same right to a beautiful marriage or a painful divorce," said Domenick, who married Scott on April 23, 2017, the couple's eight-year anniversary together.

Scott proposed to Domenick at a Garbage concert (his favorite band) at the Majestic Theatre in Detroit in 2013.

Finally, after marriage equality and months of planning, the couple ended up getting hitched at the Neon Museum in Las Vegas.

"The right to marry did not affect our relationship, but it prolonged our engagement during the first year," said Domenick. "We blame years two, three and four on disagreements over the setlist."



4 Candice and Renee Coschino of Clinton Township have been together for six and a half years. Candice proposed to Renee on Valentine's Day in the Renaissance Center in Detroit after four years of dating.

They were married on July 10, 2015, shortly after it became legal to do so.

"We didn't want to wait because we were worried that it would be taken away from us again, so we did a quickie wedding in our backyard," said Renee. "We both cried and celebrated and were just incredibly happy that we could finally have the same rights as everyone else."

However, the couple still wanted to do a big formal wedding so they took the next year to plan their perfect day and got married again on Aug. 26, 2016 at Fox Hills Golf Course in Plymouth.

THE ULTIMATE LGBTQ WEDDING & ANNIVERSARY EXPO



5 Hannah Hartley and Diane Schultz of South Lyon – two transgender women who met four years ago during an LGBT community meeting at Affirmations in Ferndale – were married locally on June 17, 2017 at The Barn, a 4,400-square-foot restored barn from the 1860s found online at Vacation Rentals by Owner.

"Diane caught my eye from the first moment we met. She seemed to have an elegance and a kindness that made me think, 'I really need to know that woman,'" said Hartley.

Schultz knew, too, that she had found a new friend. She said, "Hannah seemed like the cool girl, and a person that was a real go-getter in life."



6 The Buckley-Ball couple, Megan and Birdie, at the Joe Louis Arena on their wedding day, Sept. 28, 2012. Birdie is like many masculine of center women who choose to wear tuxedos and suits to their wedding. The dilemma for many MoC women, transgender men and gender non-conforming individuals, though, is finding a shop where they feel welcome and respected, and a clerk adept at the differences between fitting women and men's bodies.

"I rented a tux, and the funny thing is it was easy," she said. "But the people took my measurements as if I was a guy. So when I did try on the shirt it fit me perfectly fine in the neck and that was it. So the clerk, she

realized at the time that she didn't take the right measurements. Eventually, she found me a shirt that was a little too big. But it was my own fault for not getting a custom-fitted shirt." Even if the process can be a little complicated, Birdie said it's worth it to be able to walk down the aisle feeling confident and comfortable.



7 Dr. Theodore Carson Baker, II (57) and Richard William Thomas, Jr. (60) are, in Baker's words, "nontraditional." They met in 1999 at an HIV retreat and, despite challenges over the years, have remained together.

They were engaged in September 2015. They had their wedding two years later at the Drayton Avenue Presbyterian Church in Ferndale (Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit). Their reception was held at DeCarlo's Banquet & Convention Center in Warren.

"It was a Cinderella and Prince Charming thing ... well, a Prince Charming and Prince Charming," Baker said with a laugh. "The number of people, how big it was, how long it was, we did it with all the pomp and circumstance. We did the chauffeurs and everything."

For people with wedding plans as big as Baker and Thomas' (BATO's, as the pair loves to be called), Baker has very specific advice: "If you have a handful of people, maybe four or five that you can absolutely trust to do a thing and know what they're doing and you trust them to do it, and you have a lot of money to pay for things, do it." Otherwise, he said, don't aim for a wedding like his.



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8 Tia and KB Ivory were married on Sept. 23, 2016 in Flint. In 2013, KB surprised Tia with a ring while they celebrated their five-year anniversary at the Atheneum Hotel in Detroit. On Sept. 23, 2016, they were married at the 67th District Courthouse in Flint by Judge Herman Marable, Jr. As the

two approach nine months into their marriage they say they feel good about their relationship and it's future.

"It's awesome actually," said KB. "You feel more whole, more complete finally. I was sure of myself before I got married but I'm actually more confident of myself now. It feels good."

“ You feel more whole, more complete finally. I was sure of myself before I got married but I'm actually more confident of myself now. It feels good. ”

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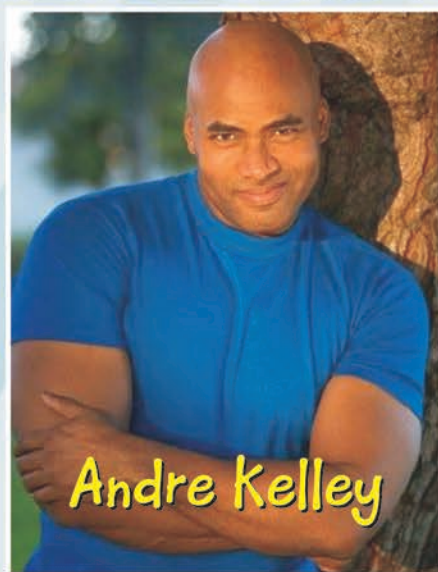


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