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VOL 2611 • MARCH 15, 2018
ISSUE 1058

PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP

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SVSU Pride Center Presents 11th Annual Charity Drag Show

That Saginaw Valley State University will kick off its second decade of drag performances on Saturday, April 7 at 7 p.m. with its 11th annual Charity Drag Show. This year's theme is Fairy Tale Frolics, meaning that drag contestants are encouraged to tailor their performances to it.

All proceeds from the performance are set to benefit the Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Center which provides, "mental health, substance use disorder" treatment as well as treatment for HIV/AIDS, according to its website. The show will also benefit the the AIDS Run & Walk in the Great lakes Bay Region which is dedicated to fighting the autoimmune disease.

"The Pride Center is under the direction of Lucy Mercier, Assistant Dean of the College of Health and Human Services. The Pride Center at SVSU is staffed by BSW Interns who are under the supervision of Kim Johnson, Social Work Field Director," said the SVSU Pride Center's page. "The Pride Center is guided by an Advisory Council consisting of Saginaw Valley State University faculty, staff and students."

The show will be held at the SVSU Doan center Thompson Student Activities Room or TSAR, and tickets are available in the SVSU Pride Center which is located in Gilbertson Hall: GN 253. More information about tickets can be found by contacting pridedcenter@svsu.edu or by calling 989-964-4776.

OBITUARY

Raymond Edward Shepherd

Aug. 3, 1948 - Feb. 27, 2018

Raymond Edward Shepherd, a longtime member of Metropolitan Community Church – Detroit and an active member of Affirmations, died Feb. 27th. He was 69.

A native of Detroit, Shepherd lived for many years in Ferndale. Most recently he was a resident of the American House in Hazel Park. Shepherd spent time in the U.S. Air Force before earning a master's degree.

"Ray was a very loving and compassionate person," recalled MCC-D pastor the Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow. "Adventure was always calling him and he would respond. He loved to travel and make new friends. Ray will be greatly missed by his communities at MCC-Detroit and Affirmations."

Charles Alexander remembered seeing Shepherd at church, even as his health declined.

"He would be at church with the aid of a walker," said Alexander. "He could not really articulate because he had a speech difficulty. However, I learned he was highly articulate on the computer and that that was his area of expertise. He was a member of Mensa and very intelligent."

Services for Shepherd took place earlier in the month at Phillips Funeral Home in South Lyon. The family suggested that memorials could be made to MCC-Detroit in remembrance of Shepherd.

-Jason A. Michael

MCC Honors Transgender Youth Activist with 'Seth Tooley Day'

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It was early last month when more than 300 people came out to protest a workshop for girls at Metro Church in Riverview. Many said that the church-offered service was merely conversion therapy in disguise. One of the speakers that night was 17-year-old Seth Tooley of Brownstown.

Tooley, who is a young trans man, had attended the church a handful of years ago with his mother. He enjoyed Fuel, a 'life group' for middle school students that was offered by the church.

At school, however, Tooley was experiencing some bullying for being trans by other kids in his class. So his mother, Kim, took him to the pastor of the church, Jeremy Schossau, to counsel her son. But before the counseling sessions had ended, things took a distinctively downward turn.

"On our last session the pastor asked if it was OK if my mom left the room," Tooley recalled. "I was totally OK with it. He was my pastor and I trusted him. When it was just me and him and an elder of the church and his wife, they started praying real loud, laying hands on me. They said I had the demon of homosexuality in me. I was screaming and crying for my mom because I was terrified."

Despite the trauma of the session, Tooley and his mom did not immediately leave the church.

"Seth lived to go to this youth group," said Kim Tooley. "He had absolutely no socialization other than this Monday night youth group."

But soon, Kim Tooley said, she was told Seth could no longer attend unless he presented as female.

"I begged and pleaded with the pastor to let him stay," she said. "I just couldn't understand what the big deal was, because no one knew he was transgender."

But when Tooley refused to comply with the church's wishes, Tooley and his mom said they were forcibly removed from the church.

"They had security come get us out of praise and worship," he said.

These events never really left Tooley's mind. He moved on and found a new church home, Metropolitan Community Church – Detroit, which was at the time located in Ferndale. There he got to know other trans persons, such as Deacons Ethan Best and Michelle Fox-Phillips.

"He was very shy at the beginning," said Best. "He was super, super shy. His mom did most of the speaking."

Over time, Tooley came out of this shell. Eventually, even more than that, thanks to his mom, his church and



17-year-old Seth Tooley of Brownstown with his mom Kim Tooley. He has been a vocal opponent of conversion therapy.

a supportive high school – Southgate Anderson – Tooley became confident. So, when he saw on Facebook that a protest was being organized against what LGBTQ activists were calling conversion therapy at his old church, Tooley knew he had to become involved. He went to the protest and he spoke out.

"I told the people my story about what happened to me, and how damaging it was and how bad it is for a child to go through it," Tooley said.

For his courage, MCC-Detroit named Sunday, March 4, Seth Tooley Day.

"Seth is a fine young man who has just blossomed into an activist, said Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow, MCC-D's senior pastor and teacher.

"He's almost like an accidental activist," Stringfellow said. "But when he recognized how he was treated, and how other young people were being treated as objects rather than people he decided to speak up."

Best is very pleased with the Seth he sees in church these days.

"Hearing what he shared this time in his voice, not his mom's, really just spoke volumes about who he is and who he's growing up to be and the power he has within himself," Best said. "Seeing how he feels so strong and grounded because of the love and care and support of his mother is great."

Today, Seth is excelling at school and he's had a girlfriend for almost over a year.

"My message to be, is just, to know that God loves you no matter if you're, gay, trans or a purple unicorn," said Tooley. "God loves you no matter what."

"I'm in psychology because I love learning about the human brain," Tooley continued. "I love helping my friends who are LGBTQ or questioning. They come to me with questions and they know they will have acceptance from me. So I definitely plan to keep helping people."

For his mother, watching her son bloom has been a blessing.

"Seth is the strongest and bravest person I know," said Kim Tooley. "He has been through a lot and still has the grace to be a good person in spite of people who have shown him hate. Seth is always honest and does what he says and says what he means. He truly wants the world to be a better place. He feels it's his mission, his calling even by God, and I think that's honorable. He has a true desire that people know God's love in spite of what these other churches say."



In February, opponents of conversion therapy protested at Metro Church in Riverview.

Bill Banning Conversion Therapy in Washington State Enters Final Phase

Michigan Legislators Need Support for HB 5550, Urge Public to Contact House Health Policy Committee

BY DREW HOWARD

Washington is now in the final stages of becoming the 10th state to outlaw gay conversion therapy on minors.

The Washington state Legislature voted 33-16 in favor of Bill 5722, which would ban licensed therapists from performing conversion therapy on patients under 18. Regulating such practices will, according to the bill, “protect the physical and psychological well-being of minors, including LGBT youth.”

Bill 5722 now sits in front of Washington governor Jay Inslee for final approval. If signed into action, Washington will join nine other U.S. states that have banned conversion therapy: New Jersey, California, Oregon, Illinois, Vermont, New Mexico, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Nevada.

Violators of the new bill could be faced with fines, license revocation or suspension. However, the bill reads that the act “may not be construed to apply to” non-licensed counselors acting under the auspices of a religious denomination, church or organization.

Michigan

In Michigan, State Rep. Adam Zemke (D-Ann Arbor) introduced a similar bill, House Bill 5550, on Feb. 8, which would also prohibit licensed professionals from conducting conversion therapy on minors. This marks the bill’s third reintroduction.

Supporters of 5550 introduced a Change.org petition which can be found online at gaybe.am/Aa to arraign a public hearing for the bill. The petition currently sits at 225 signatures, and is being regularly promoted through the Facebook page “Pass House Bill 5550 - Ban Conversion Therapy in Michigan.”

Oakland University professor and trans advocate Char Davenport is one such supporter of the petition. She said holding a public hearing would provide a platform to share stories of those who have been impacted by conversion therapy.

“We want to get these stories out there,” Davenport said. “We also think it would help educate the faith community, which is really,

really important, because maybe they will understand that this is not how you love your children.”

In House Bill 5550, conversion therapy is defined as a means, practice or treatment by a mental health professional that seeks to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity. A recent report by the Williams Institute – which can be found online at gaybe.am/0t – at UCLA School of Law estimates that 698,000 LGBT adults, including 350,000 adolescents, have undergone conversion therapy at some point.

State Rep. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) said House Bill 5550 now sits in the House Health Policy Committee. He remains hopeful his colleagues will move forward with banning the practice, something he considers to be child abuse.

“The reality in Michigan is we have a very conservative legislature that by and large ignored the LGBTQ community, We don’t see a lot of movement on LGBTQ civil rights. I think these issues a black eye on Michigan – it’s a black eye that gay conversion therapy is something that can still be committed.”

- State Rep. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield)

“The reality in Michigan is we have a very conservative legislature that by and large ignored the LGBTQ community,” Moss told BTL. “We don’t see a lot of movement on LGBTQ civil rights. I think these issues a black eye on Michigan – it’s a black eye that gay conversion therapy is something that can still be committed.”

Moss encourages opponents of conversion therapy to directly contact members of the House Health Policy Committee, including its chair Hank Vaupel.

Members of the community will continue protesting an alleged conversion therapy workshop held at Metro City Church. Those interested in attending upcoming demonstrations regarding conversion therapy can visit the Facebook page “Pass House Bill 5550 - Ban Conversion Therapy in Michigan.”

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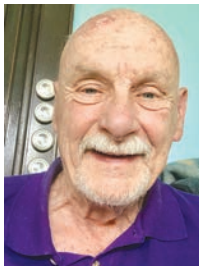
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Keys! Wallet! iPhone! (Amen.)

Parting Glances

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

After five years of faithful, heavy-duty service the battery in my expensive gift Shinola wrist watch expired. I should have known it was going to happen, because, for the past several weeks, its second hand hesitated, stopping completely for milliseconds, before lunging forward by five-minute notches at a time.

In spite of this, its time was impeccably accurate, so I ignored the warning signal.

I took the watch in for replacement at a nearby busy, busy outlet, but was told I'd have to return the next day for battery replacement as the technician wasn't available. (Probably enjoying the long overdue, 52-degree sunshine.) I said I'd return. Replacement of battery is free I was told.

For the rest of the day, an annoying and curious thing kept happening. Until finally, embarrassed by my own automatic behavior, I took my watch off.

My embarrassment? I found that every half hour or so – sometimes at 15 or 20 minutes intervals without thinking – I kept looking at my watch as if to get my bearings for where I was and for what was expected next on my day's unplanned, free agenda.

Several of those instances I reminded myself that my watch was not working, the battery was dead, dead, dead, but to no avail. I automatically kept checking to see what time it is, er, was, or might be. Most disconcerting!

If such ingrained behavior isn't problematic enough I have come to the realization that I, as a senior citizen in a busy metropolitan city, am totally dependent of knowing with certainty three things: Where my iPhone is, where my keys are and whether or not I have my wallet.

I call these three conditions of contemporary existence my "trinity of personal salvation." I panic if an item is out of place or missing. When I say "panic" I am not exaggerating. Without my iPhone, for example, I have no meaningful contact with friends, the outside world, or 411 – Grindr is not an option at my age).

There was a time when one could find a pay telephone on most city corners. Today, such coin-operated mediators between self and substance are antiques at best, or archaic boxes for graffiti embellishment or once-in-a-pinch shelters in a thunderstorm.

At my age I can remember when the technology was limited to the dial-your-number telephone – "It's your nickel, sir!" – and the living room radio for entertainment, news and social enlightenment. And as a kid, magical enjoyment of Saturday's program of "Let's Pretend."

I remember also seeing my first black-and-white TV. The screen was no more than eight-by-10-inches, while the console that housed it took up most of the corner of the living room. (Gay note in passing: I had my first "crush" on a regular of the weekly "Paul Whiteman Show." Whiteman was a popular band leader.)

Today's SmartPhone has made brainiacs of us all. Ask and ye shall receive. Whatever info your curiously little, infinite minds wants to know, Google, Yahoo and Wikipedia will give you the knowledge. What you do with it is your down business, just don't get caught with your panic down.

And, whatever you do, for heaven's sake – and your own sanity – don't misplace or lose your cellphone, your keys or your wallet. (Intellectual virginity, optional.)

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.



Viewpoint



BY JAY KAPLAN

Unanimous Vote in Favor of Michigan Transgender Woman is Groundbreaking

A landmark legal decision for transgender rights was issued last week. A unanimous three-judge panel of the federal Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals — covering Michigan, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee — ruled that Michigan RG & GR Harris Funeral Homes violated federal civil rights laws when they fired Aimee Stephens for a being a transgender woman.

Aimee Stephens worked for Harris Funeral homes for six years as funeral director, receiving excellent performance evaluations. Having to conceal her gender identity at work during that time, she informed her employer that she was a transgender woman and would begin presenting as her authentic female self at work. The funeral home immediately terminated her.

Aimee contacted the ACLU of Michigan, and we advised her to file a complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) — the federal agency that investigates employment discrimination complaints. Under the theory of sex discrimination, the EEOC found that Harris Funeral Homes illegally discriminated against Aimee because she did not conform to gender stereotypes regarding how a person assigned male at birth should look and act. When Harris refused to agree with the findings and terms of settlement, the EEOC filed a lawsuit in federal district court in Detroit for the Eastern District of Michigan.

See next page

“ *Discrimination because of an individual's transgender status is always based on gender stereotypes: the stereotype that individuals will conform their appearance and their behavior – whether their dress, the name they use or other ways they present themselves – to the sex assigned them at birth.* ”

► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 12

U.S. District Judge Sean Cox held that although the funeral home may have discriminated against Aimee, the owner's religious beliefs that being transgender was against God's plan, exempted him from having to comply with Title VII, federal law that prohibits sex discrimination.

The case was appealed to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals and the ACLU of Michigan joined the lawsuit on behalf of Aimee Stephens. We asked to join the case because the U.S. Department of Justice, under President Trump, interprets sex discrimination laws such that LGBTQ people are not protected by these laws. We wanted to ensure Aimee's legal interests were adequately raised and addressed. In Oct. 2017, the ACLU argued the appeals case which resulted in last week's decision.

Although the Sixth Circuit has favorably addressed the issue of transgender employees being protected from discrimination under Title VII in previous cases, this decision makes it explicitly clear that discrimination against transgender employees is gender stereotyping. In its written opinion the court stated, “Discrimination because of an individual's transgender status is always based on gender stereotypes: the stereotype that individuals will conform their appearance and their behavior – whether their dress, the name they use or other ways they present themselves – to the

sex assigned them at birth.”

Equally as significant, this is the first time that a federal appeals court has ruled that an employer's religious beliefs do not exempt him from civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination against transgender employees.

While employers may have sincerely held religious beliefs, the government has a compelling interest in eradicating discrimination in the workplace. This holding is especially important because we have seen increased efforts by employers and business owners citing their religious beliefs to justify discrimination against LGBTQ people. The most high-profile case was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in December, where a bakery owner refused to bake a cake for a same-sex couple, citing his religious beliefs concerning same-sex marriage. That decision will be issued sometime in June.

The funeral home is entitled to ask for a rehearing by the full panel of Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals judges or request that the U.S. Supreme Court take up the case. But for now this seminal decision stands. Transgender people are protected from discrimination under federal law, and employers can no longer use their religious beliefs to justify discrimination against trans people. The Sixth Circuit got it right and Aimee Stephens will at last have the justice that she deserves.

Jay Kaplan is the staff attorney at the ACLU of Michigan. He can be reached at jkaplan@aclumich.org

Creep of the Week

Betsy DeVos

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

On Twitter the thing I probably write most often is “Betsy DeVos is a monster” in reply to stories about her.

Now, if you don't know much about DeVos you might be thinking, “Okay, I get that you don't agree with her policies, but she's not an actual monster.”



To which I say, “Oh, she is.”

After all, one of the worst things a person can do is to hurt children. And DeVos hurts children like it's her job. Because it is.

Or, rather, that's what she's chosen to do as the Secretary of Education under Donald Trump.

Granted, she's not physically hurting kids. But she also doesn't seem particularly interested in stopping kids from getting hurt, or killed for that matter.

After the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, I couldn't help but notice how totally absent DeVos was. Especially since the students there became household names fighting for gun control and refusing to accept that they were acceptable collateral damage in this country's obsession with guns.

True, DeVos did visit the school, but the students said she basically “pet a dog and left,” in reference to the therapy dogs that had been brought to campus to help the grieving students and faculty return to school.

To most people, the idea of guns in school is completely insane. The vast majority of Americans are like, “GTFO with that.”

But not DeVos.

“[Teachers having guns in the classroom] should be an option for states and communities to consider,” she told Lesley Stahl during a 60 Minutes interview. And I hesitate to think of, like, my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Zorhoff, I couldn't ever imagine her having a gun and being trained in that way. But for those who are — who are capable, this is one solution that can and should be considered. But no one size fits all. Every state and every community is going to address this issue in a different way.”

To which DeVos sadly did not add, “And since anyone who supports such a thing has no business having anything to do with schools, I hereby resign on national TV.”

When Stahl asked DeVos what she's actually DOING about gun violence, DeVos said she's going to “head up a task force,” which corporate speak for, “Nothing.”

Stahl asked DeVos what accomplishments

“[Teachers having guns in the classroom] should be an option for states and communities to consider,” she told Lesley Stahl during a 60 Minutes interview. And I hesitate to think of, like, my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Zorhoff, I couldn't ever imagine her having a gun and being trained in that way. But for those who are — who are capable, this is one solution that can and should be considered. But no one size fits all. Every state and every community is going to address this issue in a different way.”

she's most proud of as Ed Secretary, and DeVos said, “We've begun looking at and rolling back a lot of the overreach of the federal government in education.”

And while “overreach” sounds bad, the things DeVos has been working to roll back include the Obama administration's guidance for restroom use by transgender students, which dared suggest that trans students be allowed to use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity.

DeVos also wanted to remind Obama guidance on “discriminatory discipline,” which is the problem of great disparities in the severity and frequency of discipline dished out to white and black students. When Stahl asked if this was an example of institutional racism, DeVos basically shrugged it off.

She's also revamped the Title IX guidelines for handling college sexual assault. As CBS News puts it, “She's allowing colleges to require stronger evidence from accusers, and give the accused a greater benefit of the doubt.”

Imagine that, a Trump Administration official who thinks that sexual assault victims have it too easy when it comes to reporting their assaults.

During the 60 Minutes interview, Stahl asked DeVos why people hate her so much.

“I'm more misunderstood than anything,” she replied.

Huh. If she thinks she's misunderstood, imagine how being a transgender student who needs to use the bathroom feels.

Did I mention that DeVos is a monster?

Michigan Non Profit Resource

Have You Experienced Discrimination?

If you or someone you know has experienced discrimination, intimidation, harassment or violence because of sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity,

contact Equality Michigan's Department of Victim Services at :

report@equalitymi.org or call 1-866-962-1147

Equality Michigan is working with state legislators to update the Ethnic Intimidation Act to include proper protections for the gay and transgender community.

To get involved in the movement for better hate crimes law, contact policy@equalitymi.org.

Hundreds more resources can be found at
www.PrideSource.com

Dan Savage Knows a Lot, but He's No 'Sex Moses'

Royal Oak Music Theatre Hosts 'Savage Love Live'

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Picture this scenario: you're 18, you've been watching porn for a while and you don't know if your varied preferences are crossing the line. Now this: it's year 10 of a fairly sexless marriage, and you're seeking a third to spice things up. Lastly: you're a woman in her 60s who's ready to make the plunge into lesbian relationships, but you don't know where to turn. For each of these scenarios and more, Dan Savage has an answer.

And he should. He's been a sex columnist for 26 years now, and his "Savage Love" love, sex and relationship advice column has been syndicated worldwide.

Now, he's bringing his live show, "Dan Savage: Savage Love Live" to the Royal Oak Music Theatre on Sunday, March 25. Between The Lines caught up with the openly gay author, podcaster and director before his Michigan performance to chat about some of the things he looks forward to in live performances, to ask if he follows his own advice and why the idea of "the One" is "bullshit."

Have you ever gotten a question that really stumped you? How do you provide such measured responses to the questions your readers send in?

(Laughs) That's because I only print questions that I have answers for. I get plenty of questions in the column or in the podcast where I say, "God, I don't know what to tell this person. During a live show if someone asks me a question that I can't answer, then I can't answer it (laughs). Then I'm exposed as not being omniscient.

Do you ever feel imposter syndrome? Like you'll be found out at any moment for not being an expert?

Yeah! Absolutely. I feel imposter syndrome every day, and then I remind myself that a column like mine is just a conversation, and when you look up advice in the dictionary it says, "Opinion about what could or should be done." And, literally, the only qualification you need to give someone your opinion is being asked for it (laughs). When I remind myself of that I feel eminently qualified and the imposter syndrome evaporates.

Is it true that even though this column became very successful, you didn't even plan on writing it?

I didn't even expect to write it. I was suggesting to this guy I met, Tim Keck, who was starting a newspaper, that he have an advice column because I like to read them. He thought that was a great idea and he asked me to write it. Initially, as a joke, I was going to treat straight people and straight sex with the same contempt and revulsion that straight advice columnists had always treated gay people and gay sex and gay relationships. But it kind of took off, and within a few months it was a real advice column by accident (laughs). And now, 26 years later, I'm still doing it.

So, in your eyes, looking for "the One" is bullshit?

Yeah, well it is bullshit (Laughs)! I think the myth of "the One" is really destructive. It causes people to look at the partner they've got now, and not assess them on their merits like, 'Is this person bad? Good? Am I sad? Or, am I happy?' But to judge the person that they're with against an impossible standard, and then go out in search of someone who doesn't exist.

Have you ever sought "the One"?

I don't think I was ever guilty of that myself. If anything, my problem was sticking in relationships too long and trying to make them work.

For a time in your life you lived abroad in Europe. Did living in another culture affect how you viewed sex and sexuality?

I think it was being gay that really affected how I view sex and relationships (laughs). It put me in a position to offer useful and practical advice to straight people. I would observe a lot of people who were struggling under rules that had been written for them, and a lot of them needed permission to do their own thing and write their own rules. I was in a good position – as a person who had given themselves exactly that permission – to give it to straight people.

Do you ever find yourself breaking your own advice?

Yeah, also in a position like mine, sometimes you get your column quoted back at you which is really frustrating (laughs).

You look at sex as a very deep, powerful force. Do you think most people don't see it like that?

Yeah, like the lie that we're told as kids is that you will grow up one day and have sex, but the reality is that you will grow up one day and sex will have you. Sex works through us



and is older and more powerful than we are; sex built us. There was sex before there was human civilization by hundreds of millions of years, and this idea that this powerful force of nature that is something that is subject to our religious superstitions, subject to our will, to the stories we want to tell ourselves about how sexual relationships ought to work is ridiculous. Sex is more powerful than we are, and sex, in the end, always wins.

That doesn't mean that I think people should do whatever they want to without taking into consideration other peoples' feelings or others' rights to bodily autonomy, but we have to channel our desires and interests. You can't dam them up.

Did you grow up in a very sex-positive household?

(Laughs) It wasn't quite the opposite. My parents were Catholics. Nothing made my

parents less comfortable than talking with their kids about sex, but they made themselves do it, because they wanted to be good parents and it just made us want to die (laughs). So, they tried to be sex positive, but they were kind of sex repulsive in their attempt.

Did you find you had a sexual awakening after your first time? Or were you really interested in understanding sex before then?

Oh, I looked into it before, but there wasn't a tremendous amount of relevant, useful information available to me (laughs).

Edmund White – a terrific gay writer – wrote that every working-class mechanic, it doesn't matter, a bus driver, schoolteacher, philosophy professor is a philosopher looking in the mirror and asking, "Why Me?" And that's who I was. I was very curious about sex in the same way that women are curious about gender and how it works, because it's the locus of their oppression. And people of color may do more reading and thinking and contemplating in their head about racial issues than clueless white people who never really had to think about it because it doesn't create friction, tension or conflict in their lives.

So it was that struggle that made you who you are?

Yes. Yes, exactly. I think a lot of straight people understand that to be true about their gay friends. Even when I was in high school, and even when I was in college, a lot of straight peers and friends came to me even about sex advice. I think because straight people just intuitively realize, 'Oh, here's a gay person. They know more about sex, because they've had to think more about it than I've had to.'

What are you most looking forward to in the upcoming live performance?

I've learned as much from my readers and listeners as I hope that they've learned from me, from the dialogue and exchange, and I'm not a sex Moses coming down from the mountain top with my advice column carved in stone tablets (laugh). So, what I really enjoy is the back and forth.

More information about Dan Savage can be found online at thestranger.com. Tickets for "Savage Love Live" start at \$35 and can be found online at royaloakmusictheatre.com. The Royal Oak Music Theatre is located at 318 W. 4th St., Royal Oak. 248-399-2980.

Anti-LGBT ‘Religious Freedom’ Bill is Back — and Trump has Promised to Sign It

NEWS

Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) has reintroduced legislation in the U.S. Senate seen to enable anti-LGBT discrimination in the name of “religious freedom” – and President Trump made signing the legislation a campaign promise during the 2016 election.

The purported intent of the First Amendment Defense Act, as introduced by Lee on Thursday, is to protect individuals from adverse action by the U.S. government if they oppose same-sex marriage or sexual relations outside of marriage.

A section of the bill explicitly forbids the U.S. government from “alter[ing] in any way the federal tax treatment” of institutions that oppose same-sex marriage.

Lee said in a statement the legislation is necessary to ensure the federal government doesn’t impinge on individuals’ beliefs about marriage.

“What an individual or organization believes about the traditional definition of marriage is not – and should never be – a part of the government’s decision-making process when distributing licenses, accreditations, or grants,” Lee said. “And the First Amendment Defense Act simply ensures that this will always be true in America – that federal bureaucrats will never have the authority to require those who believe in the traditional definition of marriage to choose between their living in accordance with those beliefs and maintaining their occupation or their tax status.”

A section of the bill explicitly forbids the U.S. government from “alter[ing] in any way the federal tax treatment” of institutions that oppose same-sex marriage. That has been a concern expressed by public universities against gay nuptials, such as Brigham Young University, who fear their tax-exempt status will be stripped away much like the U.S. Supreme Court in 1983 stripped Bob Jones University of its tax-exempt status for not recognizing interracial marriage. (Bob Jones dropped its interracial ban in 2000 and its tax-exempt status has been restored.)

According to Lee’s office, the legislation has 21 co-sponsors who are all Republicans. Among them are Sens. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Orrin Hatch

(R-Utah), Ben Sasse (R-Neb.), Rand Paul (R-Ky.), Tim Scott (R-S.C.), Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and Ted Cruz (R-Texas).

But critics say the legislation, also known as FADA, would impair LGBT rights in various ways because it would carve into federal non-discrimination protections for LGBT people.

For example, FADA would

for LGBTQ people.”

“Supporters of this legislation are using religious liberty as a sword to hurt LGBTQ families rather than staying true to our long tradition of it serving as a shield to protect religious expression from government overreach,” Stacy said.

According to Human Rights Campaign, FADA would compromise



Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) has reintroduced legislation in the U.S. Senate seen to enable anti-LGBT discrimination in the name of “religious freedom” Photo: Washington Blade

undermine President Obama’s executive order against anti-LGBT workplace discrimination among federal contractors. Although legislation says it wouldn’t apply to federal for-profit contractors, that means non-profit contractors — such as religious affiliated hospital or university — would be able to engage in anti-LGBT discrimination and still obtain U.S. government contracts.

Jennifer Pizer, law and policy Director for Lambda Legal, said the bill is evidence “one of the main goals is to freeze-frame the lack of civil rights protections for LGBT people.”

“Many religiously affiliated non-profits want to keep getting lots of public money and want to be able to discriminate,” Pizer said. “We have been steadily building the body of the law and the public recognition and that that discrimination is wrong and that’s true if it’s LGBT people or same-sex couples as well, so it’s an effort to get public money.”

David Stacy, government affairs director for the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement the legislation “would legalize state-sanctioned discrimination and undermine key civil rights protections

Obama’s 2014 executive order, LGBT non-discrimination protections in the Violence Against Women Act for emergency shelters; LGBT non-discrimination rules for homeless shelters within the Department of Housing & Urban Development; and same-sex couples access to benefits under the Family & Medical Leave Act.

Conn Carroll, a Lee spokesperson, downplayed via an email to the Washington Blade the possibility the legislation would affect each of these pro-LGBT measures.

On Obama’s 2014 executive order, Carroll said FADA would “prevent a government agency from cancelling a contract just because some bureaucrat didn’t like a religious contractor,” but offer no organizations protection “from an EEOC claim that they discriminated against gay people.” (That response address concerns about compromising the executive order by asserting the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission could take up the slack.)

Carroll denied FADA would supersede Family & Medical Leave Act benefits and, with regard to HUD rules, said he’s

See FADA, page 10

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► **FADA**

Continued from p. 9

“unaware of any homeless shelter even asking about a beneficiary’s married status.”

With respect to compromised LGBT protections at emergency shelters under VAWA, Carroll also said he doesn’t see a problem.

“I could see an organization declining to counsel in support of a same-sex marriage, but why would anyone decline to protect someone in an abusive relationship?” Carroll said.

Pizer the kind of discrimination Carroll said doesn’t exist is much more widespread than one might think even with LGBT non-discrimination protections in place.

“You have many vulnerable members of our communities who should get better treatment, whether it’s youth in foster care, or whether it’s people in medical settings, or whether it’s people who are homeless,” Pizer said. “That’s an enormous area of concern and lots of that bad treatment happens now.”

The website for Lee’s Senate office has a Q&A about FADA that seeks to downplay the potential impact of the legislation on LGBT rights.

The Q&A denies FADA would make it legal for businesses to refuse service to gay

people; for churches to fire gay employees; for businesses to deny benefits for same-sex partners; for landlords to advertise that they will not rent to unmarried parents; or for federal bureaucrats to refuse to process benefit claims made by same-sex couples.

On the question on whether FADA targets gay people, the Q&A says the answer is “absolutely not.”

“Many religious institutions have codes of conduct that forbid premarital sexual relations among their members even when those sexual relations are completely heterosexual,” the Q&A says. “FADA would protect those heterosexual codes of conduct just as it would protect traditional beliefs about marriage.”

Pizer said the answer is “no” when asked if the Q&A’s denials about FADA are accurate based on “how the different concepts are framed” in the discussion.

“So the whole description of the landscape, I think, is a mistake and it is consistent with their way of framing all of these religious exemptions,” Pizer said.

Trump made a pledge to sign the FADA a campaign promise during the 2016 election — one he spelled out in a statement to social conservative Catholics who support his

candidacy.

“If I am elected president and Congress passes the First Amendment Defense Act, I will sign it to protect the deeply held religious beliefs of Catholics and the beliefs of Americans of all faiths,” Trump said.

The White House didn’t immediately respond to the Washington Blade’s request to comment on whether Trump still supports the First Amendment Defense Act and would sign the legislation as introduced into law.

FADA has undergone various iterations in the past. Although the latest version is some respects more narrow than it was first introduced, FADA has new language covering individuals who think marriage should be limited to “two individuals as recognized under federal law,” not just confined to opposite-sex couples.

Pizer said that new language may be an attempt to make FADA seem less discriminatory, but in fact “that doesn’t cure the problem” because the bill makes clear it’s main concern is a desire not to recognize same-sex marriage.

“It’s kind of like saying, ‘OK, we’re going to specially privilege people who want to discriminate based on religion against Jews, oh, and also people who want to discriminate

against Italians, so therefore we’ve taken care, it’s not really just about discriminating against Jews,’” Pizer said. “It’s like well sure it is; you didn’t take care of the problem.”

Should Congress pass the legislation and Trump sign it into law, Pizer said it would be “subject to challenge” in the courts and found constitutional because it violates the Establishment Clause and Equal Protection Clause.

“It’s an Establishment Clause problem because it’s preferring a particular religious view and set of views over other religious positions, and it’s an Equal Protection problem because it’s targeting same-sex couples,” Pizer said. “The focus on religious objections to same-sex couples is right there and explicit, and, as I said, you can’t cure that problem by adding some other language that seems to permit discrimination against other people, I’m not sure who it would relate to. They haven’t cured the problem by adding additional permission to discriminate.”

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

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6th Circuit Decision: 'Couldn't Come at a Better Time'

BY LISA KEEN

For the third time in less than a year, a federal appeals court has ruled that an LGBT person can seek protection from job discrimination under Title VII of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The latest ruling, a March 7 decision from a three-judge panel of the Sixth Circuit, says that sex discrimination prohibited by Title VII in employment also includes transgender discrimination.

Lambda Legal Law and Policy Director Jenny Pizer called this latest ruling, in *Stephens v. Harris Funeral*, an extraordinarily significant decision. The liberal think tank ThinkProgress called it a massive victory.

Others are less enthusiastic, but everyone supporting equal rights for LGBT people sees *Stephens* as another important step in the right direction toward providing some protection for LGBT people in the workplace. More than half of states have no laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Alliance Defending Freedom, a legal group frequently pushing against the legal interests of LGBT people and the group who took sides against a transgender employee in this case said the Sixth Circuit panel misread the law and court precedents. Its senior counsel, Gary McCaleb, said the group would consult with Harris Funeral about whether to appeal the decision to the full circuit bench.

The *Stephens v. Harris Funeral* litigation began with a complaint filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) by Aimee Stephens, an employee of the RG & GR Harris Funeral Home in Detroit, Michigan. In her first six years with the business, Stephens presented as a male. She had been identified as male at birth and named Anthony Stephens, but for her entire life, she felt she was female. In 2013, after deciding she wanted to live according to her sincerely-held gender identity, she explained to the funeral home owner, Thomas Rost, that she would begin presenting and identifying as female.

Rost fired her, telling Stephens that he did not believe the public would accept her transition.

Stephens filed a complaint with the EEOC that, one year earlier, had determined the Title VII prohibition on sex discrimination included a prohibition on discrimination based on gender identity.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bans employment discrimination based on sex.

The EEOC agreed to sue Harris Funeral in federal court on Stephens' behalf. It argued that Rost violated Title VII by



discriminating against Stephens because she was transitioning and not conforming to sex-based stereotypes. During litigation, EEOC also determined that Rost had provided a clothing allowance for male employees but not female employees.

In court, Rost, who identifies as Christian, argued that he had a sincerely held religious belief that motivated his discrimination against Stephens. He said his funeral homes were operated to honor God and that he believes changing one's gender identity violates God's commands, because gender is an immutable God-given gift.

The district court did not dismiss the lawsuit but said the lawsuit could not proceed on the grounds that Title VII prohibits job discrimination based on transgender status, but only on the basis of gender non-conformity. The district court also ruled, however, that the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act may protect Rost's right to discriminate.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a federal law passed in 1993, prohibits any state or federal action from substantially burdening a person's exercise of religion unless the government demonstrates that its action furthers a compelling governmental interest and does so in the least restrictive means possible.

The district court also said the complaint over the Harris Funeral clothing allowance was improperly included in the EEOC complaint.

In a 49-page decision that echoed a recent Second Circuit decision concerning Title VII and sexual orientation, the unanimous Sixth Circuit panel reversed the district court on the transgender status issue and the RFRA. It said that discrimination based on transgender

status is protected under Title VII and that Title VII did not substantially burden Rost's exercise of his religious beliefs.

The three-judge panel included Judge Karen Nelson Moore and Helene White (Clinton appointees) and Bernice Donald (an Obama appointee).

"Discrimination on the basis of transgender and transitioning status is necessarily discrimination on the basis of sex," wrote Judge Moore, "and thus the EEOC should have had the opportunity to prove that the Funeral Home violated Title VII by firing Stephens because she is transgender and transitioning from male to female."

The panel relied heavily on the U.S. Supreme Court's 1989 decision in *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*. That decision held that discriminating against an employee because the employee does not conform to gender stereotypes is a form of sex discrimination.

And the panel noted the Harris Funeral business was not affiliated with any church, that it operated on Christian holidays, that it serves and hires people of all faiths and that it omits any religious figures from its rooms.

The panel also said the clothing allowance disparity was also properly before the court.

The panel decision sent the case back to the district court to determine whether the funeral home owner did, in fact, discriminate based on Stephens' transgender status.

Alliance Defending Freedom, which is representing Harris Funeral, said it is deliberating over its options for appeal.

"American business owners, especially those serving the grieving and the vulnerable, should be free to live and work consistently with their faith," said ADF's McCaleb. The *Stephens v. Harris Funeral* decision, he

said, "Misreads court precedents that have long protected businesses which properly differentiate between men and women in their dress and grooming policies. Court opinions should interpret legal terms according to their plain meaning when Congress passed the law. This opinion instead re-writes federal law and is directly contrary to decisions from other federal appellate courts."

Pizer, of Lambda Legal that submitted a brief in support of Stephens, said she thinks the Sixth Circuit panel decision, "Methodically considers and rejects the series of contorted notions that courts have used in the past to deny transgender workers the protections against sex discrimination that existing federal law should provide them." And the panel's analysis, she said, "Is consistent with the important recent decisions from three federal appeals courts similarly confirming that discrimination against a worker for being lesbian, gay or bisexual necessarily takes that person's sex into account, contrary to federal law."

The three federal appeals court decisions are *Hively v. Ivy Tech* in the Seventh Circuit, *Zarda v. Altitude Express* in the Second Circuit (both decisions of the circuits full bench); and *Franchina v. Providence* (a decision of a First Circuit panel). The Seventh and Second circuits said Title VII bars sexual orientation discrimination; the First Circuit panel decision hinted that recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court and others might persuade the full First Circuit bench to rule that Title VII covers sexual orientation.

Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, said the Stephens decision was the first to reject a RFRA defense.

And Pizer says that rejection couldn't come at a better time.

"The Sixth Circuit makes it crystal clear: the employer's religious rights were not burdened by being required to treat Ms. Stephens equally at work. And even if there was a burden on those rights, our federal employment nondiscrimination serves compelling purposes in a proper way," said Pizer. "This is consistent with decades of employment law and couldn't be more timely, as we see President Trump's Department of Justice arguing against civil rights protections for workers in Title VII cases and for customers seeking wedding-related services, and we see his Health and Human Services Department seeking to elevate religious rights over patients' needs for quality medical care. This decision shows why that thinking, as a general matter, is simply wrongheaded. It couldn't be more timely."

LGBTQ Wedding Expo Attracts Hundreds

Inclusive Vendors Offer Engaged Couples Equal Treatment and Respect

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Ashley Howe and her fiancé Justine Simpson have been to several bridal shows, but none quite like the Ultimate LGBT Wedding and Anniversary Expo held on Sunday, March 11, in MotorCity Casino's state of the art ballroom in Detroit.

"At this one, people aren't asking us 'Who's the bride?'" said Simpson, 29. "We always have to explain, no, we're both brides. We're getting married together."

The couple from Wyandotte is set to wed on Sept. 7 and attended the event - hosted for the eighth year by Between the Lines and Pride Source Media Group - to seek out ideas.

"Most of the time vendors won't allow me to take the stuff they're giving away," said Howe, 33. "I just stand off to the side while they talk to her, like I'm the gay best friend or something."

Simpson said, "Here, they acknowledge that we're both brides and they talk to her too."

Jordan Hefty, 28, and her fiancé Nicole Milliman, 35, had a similar experience at a local bridal show.

"It was so uncomfortable and impersonal and unwelcoming," said Hefty. "This is such a better experience. We love it. The vendors actually want to talk to you. This is what I thought the first one was going to be like."

The couple is getting married on Aug. 11 in Traverse City and attended the expo for a worry-free shopping experience.

"We have the right to be brides, too," said Milliman. "I need to have that feeling of excitement, and an event like this helps with that. Otherwise, it's terrifying. This increases that excitement while we plan."

More than 100 inclusive vendors were on-site showcasing everything couples need to plan their upcoming celebrations, including weddings, anniversaries, vow renewals, graduations, bar and bat mitzvahs, adoptions, baby showers and more.

The expo featured demonstrations throughout the ballroom, a fashion show, and live entertainment along with an impressive array of prizes for attendees, including a \$500 gift card provided by sponsor Snethkamp Chrysler Dodge Jeep RAM Detroit to use with any vendor in attendance. Other 2018 sponsors include MotorCity Casino Hotel, B. Ella Bridal, C&N Party Rentals, Real Estate One Agent Lynne Stange and Comerica Bank.

"We love the opportunity to work with this community," said Monica Ingles of Sorella's Custom Cakes in Livonia. "This is a really meaningful event for us in general."

Johnson, who represented the bakery with



Some of the couples who attended this year's expo include: Top row, left to right: Ashley Howe and Justine Simpson are set to be married Sept. 7 of this year. Lavon Hall and Brandon Lampkin will be married June 8, 2019. Bottom row, left to right: Dawn Carpenter and Angela Pullen have not set a wedding date yet, but attended to gather ideas. Jordan Hefty and Nicole Milliman will be married on Aug. 11. BTL Photos: Eve Kucharski

her sister Bertha Ferguson, discussed the loss of their nephew, Spencer, in early March. He was a member of the LGBTQ community and died from cancer at the age of 25.

"We are getting a taste of what our nephew might have enjoyed had he lived long enough to have his own wedding. Many of our loved ones are a part of the LGBTQ community. We love love," said Ingles, adding that they have offered to show people the door who have a problem with the way they love.

That sentiment was expressed in the Mr. & Mr. and Mrs. & Mrs. cake designs on display.

Ingles said, "It's such a celebration, such a labor of love making our cakes and putting them together."

Wally Russell of Russell Photography in Lake Orion agreed with that statement.

"For us, in photography, love is love,

"This is great. Being a gay couple, you don't know who's going to accept you if you walk in the door somewhere ... this is a safe place to find people who are welcoming of our business."

- Dawn Carpenter

however it's conveyed," he said. "It's love and that's what we love to photograph. If you love photographing and you've got love in front of you, it comes out great."

Russell and his wife, Michelle, are longtime

supporters of the LGBTQ community and were "excited" to attend the expo for the first time to offer up their services.

"Our job as photographers is to find beauty in everybody that we see," said Russell. "The wedding is all about them, not us. We leave our ego at home. We want to be a support team for our couples and help them have the best day of their life."

Walled Lake couple Lavon Hall, 25, and Brandon Lampkin, 31, are getting married on June 8, 2019, and are in the beginning stages of their wedding planning.

"This is such an inclusive feeling," said Hall. "We know we're welcome here and can meet with vendors who will supply the services we need without discriminating against us."

While Dawn Carpenter, 49, and her fiancé

Angela Pullen, 48, haven't set a wedding date yet, the St. Clair Shores couple attended the expo to gather ideas.

"This is great," said Carpenter. "Being a gay couple, you don't know who's going to accept you if you walk in the door somewhere ... this is a safe place to find people who are welcoming of our business."

The expo was also an important opportunity to celebrate the businesses in Michigan that vocally support equality for the LGBTQ community and everyone else. Co-publishers Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz sliced into a rainbow-colored cake provided by Sorella's Custom Cakes to celebrate more than 25 years printing their award-winning weekly LGBTQ print publication, *Between The Lines*. The celebration also commemorated the Michigan Pride Source Annual Yellow Pages and Magazine and its online site, *Pridesource.com*. This month marks a quarter of a century in business, and reporting on the lives of LGBTQ Michiganders as they fight for full equality.

"To mobilize a community they have to know what's going on, and Susan and I consider the paper a vehicle for activism," Stevenson said. "The best way we know how to get the largest number of people educated and motivated, to make real change, is by publishing *Between The Lines*."

Events celebrating LGBTQ rights are especially important in the current political climate, as legislation is consistently being passed that endangers them. For instance, on March 8, a bill called the First Amendment Defense Act (FADA), was introduced by Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT). The bill, cosponsored by 21 Senate Republicans, would bar the federal government from ameliorating discrimination against same-sex couples, single parents and unmarried couples when an entity evokes a sincerely-held religious belief or moral conviction.

The political climate has been inundated with news of religious liberty advisory councils forming to advocate for discrimination

against LGBTQ Americans, and anti-LGBTQ marriage and family boards attacking same-sex marriage rulings by the Supreme Court. Even though LGBTQ couples can still get married in Michigan, there are no civil rights protections statewide, so they can be fired from a job, denied housing or services.

Rev. Deb Cox, associate pastor at MCC Detroit in Clawson, attended the expo to remind LGBTQ couples that there are many inclusive and welcoming congregations in the faith community that exist.

"Try them out," said Cox. "We're not one-size fits all necessarily, because each church has its own personality. Stay for like six weeks. Get over the jitters of, 'Wow, can this really be church?' We've been told for so much of our lives that church can't be real if it's open to LGBTQ people. The world is changing, though, even if our government is not, and people are more accepting. The more we talk about it and the more we stand together, the more we sit in places of worship where we know we're welcomed, the more we can be much less jittery."

Carlton Johnson, 41, and his fiance Stafford Sykes, 54, of Detroit got engaged during the expo. They plan to get married May 19, 2019.

Johnson said he believes communities of faith will "slowly come around to understand exactly what this is. Until then, we'll have to work within the system to make it work. More education is needed."

Because, after all, Sykes said, "I should be able to love who I love and be celebrated, not tolerated."

Gordon Matson and Tim Osiwala, too, think of the expo as a way to educate and bring awareness that "this is OK." The Oak Park couple is set to wed on June 9. Matson said it will be "a ceremony of love, not gender. It's not a gay wedding. It's a wedding between two people that love each other."

Eve Kurcharski contributed to this article.



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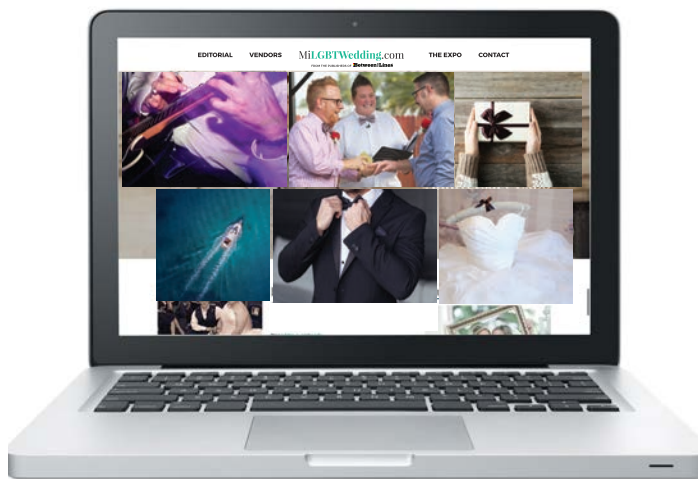
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BTL publishers Susan Horowitz and Jan Stevenson cut the four level rainbow cake created by Sorella's Creative Cakes in Livonia, kicking off a year of activities celebrating 25 years of publishing. BTL photo: Eve Kurcharski.



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Photo: 20th Century Fox

From 300 Theaters to 2,400 – What’s Changed About LGBTQ Cinema, According to Director Greg Berlanti

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Historically speaking, the most culturally influential LGBTQ-focused films have been independent, slow-rollout, arthouse-screened touchstones, from Best Picture Oscar contender “Brokeback Mountain” in 2005 to Best Picture Oscar winner “Moonlight,” released in 2016.

Within and since that decade, and thanks to queer-cinema trailblazers such as Gus Van Sant’s “My Own Private Idaho,” “Paris Is Burning,” “Torch Song Trilogy” and “Philadelphia,” queer storytelling has only abounded: Universal Pictures’ indie division, Focus Features, released “Milk,” an account of activist Harvey Milk in 2008; two years later, in 2010, the studio rolled out “The Kids Are All Right,” starring Annette Bening and

Julianne Moore as lesbian parents; “Weekend” garnered much acclaim after its 2011 release via Sundance Selects; Focus released notables like “Dallas Buyers Club,” featuring Jared Leto as a trans woman, and “Beginners,” with an affecting performance from Christopher Plummer as a gay late-comer; and last year, “Call Me By Your Name” roused critics and Academy Award voters alike, recently earning the film an Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay and plenty of rightful prestige for Timothée Chalamet’s star-making turn as queer, lovelorn Elio.

It was just a matter of time before a major “big six” distributor would take queer stories to the next level with an all-out same-sex romance, and that time is now.

In many ways, 20th Century Fox’s “Love, Simon” is the first of its kind: a classically

helmed John Hughes-echoing rom-com, with two gay teens connecting via email, confronting their queerness together, and finding their happy, out-and-proud endings. The best part? Some teen in Small Town, America, where oftentimes queer indies don’t get a theatrical release, can see him or herself reflected on the big screen: “Love, Simon” is opening wide – in a whopping 2,400-plus theaters (“Brokeback Mountain” opened in 683 theaters, while “Call Me By Your Name” capped at 914 theaters).

Known for a breadth of screen work that dates back to WB’s teen drama “Dawson’s Creek,” premiering in 1998, and which now includes hunky CW superheroes, writer, director and superproducer Greg Berlanti hasn’t just observed the waves of change that knocked down the doors for “Love, Simon”

– he’s been making some of those same waves himself. Here, Berlanti, who directed “Love, Simon,” discusses shooting a Whitney Houston musical sequence for the film, what most people don’t know about casting queer actors for queer roles, and how far Hollywood has come since his last gay-themed film, 2000’s “The Broken Hearts Club: A Romantic Comedy.”

What scene in “Love, Simon” would’ve been the most pivotal to you as a closeted kid?

That is a great question. I haven’t been asked that today! I think the kiss. The happy ending was one that, while we were shooting, I found it affecting me in a way that I didn’t realize it could. It was more substantial than I thought it would be, and it still makes me feel that way. And every time I watch it with

an audience I still feel that way. It's the scene that brings me most back to imagining I was a 16- or 17-year-old kid.

And how if you'd seen that kiss, all the boyfriends you could've had.

(Laughs) I missed my best years.

You have a husband (pro soccer player Robbie Rogers) now, so I think you're good.

It all worked out.

Whose reaction of the film so far has meant the most to you?

My father's. It brought up a lot of conversations about us that we hadn't had in years. I'm 45 years old, and he suddenly asked me about my high school years and being gay and what that meant in a way that he never could before, because he could ask it in terms of the movie. It made me realize something that I'm not sure I was totally aware of when I was making it, which is the kind of conversations it might stimulate between parents and children.

This is a great ice breaker for so many young LGBTQ kids to talk about queer issues with their parents.

And old kids like me. (Laughs)

Ha! While we're on the topic of old kids: Was the "I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)" musical sequence a shout out to us old gay kids?

It was. If you were to ask Nick Robinson (who plays Simon Spier) which scene he dreaded the most and what scene I was the most excited about, it would be that one. I can say to the world: "I'm done now. I have a Whitney Houston musical number." (Laughs) I'm not sure if there's any other art I can do after that that could ever come close. So, I was really excited for that day. And there's a coming out scene in the movie that was shot the same day, so I kept referring to it as the gayest day on the schedule. (Laughs)

For you, why does that Whitney song resonate?

It does remind me of my youth. I just kept coming back to that one. The purpose of it in the movie is, he's going through a lot and it's not until the end that he really finally both accepted himself and is ready to announce to the world who he is. Because this wasn't in the book (2015's "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda") and this wasn't in the original draft of the script, I wanted to show the audience what he imagined he might feel one day.

Why do you think it's taken as long as it has to get a film like "Love, Simon" off the ground?

I remember when TV was different, and it was harder and then that changed. I think arthouse has, throughout, been doing extraordinary work and the work there is magical and timeless. But mainstream studios make fewer of them, they make fewer

bets, they take longer to get made, and I think now they've realized they have to catch up with television and digital platforms and all these other places that are making content that looks and feels like us and like the world we're all living in. And if movie theaters wanna survive, they've got to tell stories that feel like today.

Were there any hurdles you had to jump to get this made?

I actually think Fox 2000 and 20th Century Fox both should be really celebrated. They were making this movie and I applied for the job. I read the script and I asked them, "You know, there's never been a teen film like this, of this nature, made by one of the six major studios in this way before – are you guys really doing this?" They said, "Yes, we're making it, and we're making it next March. We don't need to know who the star is. We're committing the money now. We are making this film. We love this story, and we think it deserves to be made." And every one of those executives and the writers at the time, and all the producers, were straight. I was the first gay person to get involved with the development of the material, and they wanted to do it. They believed in it. And that just shows how important allies are to all of this.

Kids who are the age of your 2-year-old, Caleb, aren't gonna know a time when queer, mainstream, major-studio fare didn't exist. Interesting to think that, right?

I hope so. I hope there are so many more too, and that a few years from now people can't remember what the first one was. That would be my real hope, I think. In some ways, I love when it kind of gets lost to the windfall of other stories.

You've certainly left your mark on LGBTQ characters on TV. After "Love, Simon," are you interested in infiltrating the film arena with more of your queer powers?

I think if you're gonna do stories about people and about the human condition your best asset is to tap into that part of yourself, and that's because it's really the thing that you bring to the table, that nobody else can bring. So, if I were to make more movies, especially original material, those are always going to be the stories that speak to me and the themes that resonate the most.

Where do you stand on LGBTQ actors exclusively playing LGBTQ roles, and how much of the queer community is a part of "Love, Simon"?

I have a lot of different feelings about it. I never ask. I don't ask people their personal business, and I don't even think Producers Guild of America-wise I can ask anybody when they come in the room to audition. When people consider this conversation, they have to consider those things too. I'm not asking people about their personal life when

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Jennifer Garner: A Mother's Love in Life and Film

Actress Talks 'Love, Simon,' Her Beautiful Mother-Son Scene and Gay Roots

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Mothers of gay sons, Jennifer Garner is here to be your guide.

As Emily Spier, whose 17-year-old, Simon (Nick Robinson), has recently come out to her and her husband (Josh Duhamel), the actress is a ray of light and love in every frame she shares with her distressed gay son in 20th Century Fox's gay-led teen love dramedy "Love, Simon."

But the warmest: When Garner consoles Simon with teary eyes and the kind of eloquent post-coming out speech every gay kid's mother wishes she had stored in her front pocket – and every queer kid hopes to hear. "These last few years, it's almost like I could feel you holding your breath," she tells her son. "You can finally exhale, Simon. You finally get to be more you than you've been in a very long time."

Easing Simon's worries with a comforting remedy of maternal support, validation and healing, she is Simon's rock. But for every queer person whose heart Garner will touch, it's because they also know her delicately chosen words are meant for every Simon.

And who better to give the film's bolstering mom hug than the universally adored and real-life mother-of-three?

The ever-affable Garner has portrayed wiggled shero Sydney Bristow on TV's female-led espionage series "Alias," which ran from 2001-2006 on ABC; an HIV doctor at the height of the AIDS epidemic in "Dallas Buyers Club," director Jean-Marc Vallée's 2013 three-time Oscar winner; and Marvel's eponymous girl-kissing anti-heroine in 2005's "Elektra." Point being: Garner was already well on her way to achieving PFLAG-ish Dream Movie Mom status in a queer-centered film, one she's undoubtedly proud of. "Thanks for hunting me down and insisting on an interview, because I'm so happy I've spoken to you," Garner tells me.

During our exclusive one-on-one, Garner, 45, spoke about why she cried when she first read the "Love, Simon" script, the lesbian role her hair was too long for, being beautified by a drag queen as a kid and supporting a gay ex.

You're so wonderful as a gay son's loving mother it's hard to believe you hadn't played this role before. I have a feeling you're gonna know a lot more gay people after this movie. The floodgates are open.

I know plenty now! That's why I wanted to make the movie!

Is that right?

Yeah, of course. It was such a small role and so hard to leave town (the film was shot outside of Garner's hometown, in Atlanta), and you're always juggling so many things. But I love (out director) Greg Berlanti and I loved the project, and he just said the things this mother says would have been really helpful to hear as a kid and this movie would've been really helpful for him, and I said, "OK, I'm doing it."

This could really change the way parents talk to their kids, too, about sexuality and coming out. What do you hope is the message



Jennifer Garner as gay-affirming mom Emily Spier in "Love, Simon." Photo: 20th Century Fox

to gay kids and their parents?

What I loved about the role is that Greg just wrote me the fantasy version of what a mom would have the wherewithal to say, and it's a template. I just wanted the words to come out of my mouth selfishly. I just wanted to be a beacon for moms who are confused, or for kids who want to help their moms through something, or for kids who are looking for what they are hoping to get back from their parents when they have that conversation with them.

What does it mean to you to be a part of the first mainstream gay-led teen romance?

It is so important to just be a part of it. I think I ultimately would've gone down and worked on wardrobe or craft service if that's what it had meant. I loved that the film just normalizes this young man's experience, and that it's not sensationalized at all, it's not caricatured at all. It is as delightful one way as it would be if it were two women, if it were a man and a woman. It's just about entertaining the audience, and this is a happenstance of it, which is how the real world is.

And finally we're seeing that reflected in Hollywood.

Finally, *finally*. And look, romantic comedies are not even being made anymore by studios, so the fact that Fox 2000 took this chance on us and gave us this platform and this opportunity and a real budget and a place and a solid cast to go down to make this film was really a big deal, and thrilling.

The sit-down scene in which you tell Simon he can be more him than he's ever been: Tell me about the first time you read that and what it made you feel.

I cried. I thought about a friend of mine who had come out to me when we were young. I just thought about that moment,

and that I hope I had a tiny ounce of wisdom then.

How did you react to your gay friend coming out to you at the time?

Honestly, it was so long ago I don't remember, but I certainly wasn't surprised, and I am sure I was just honored and thrilled that he felt like he could talk to me about it. And that is one of the things that I hope kids take away from this movie: don't let yourself be so isolated with whatever it is you're scared about. Find some way to reach out, whether it's to somebody online, whether it's one friend you feel like you can trust; hopefully it'll be your parents and you can lean on them.

But you are not alone. Find someone who helps you feel anything but alone, because in our own minds, especially when you're a teenager, you can build panic in your mind and you can build sadness and you can build really scary, scary things, and you don't have to. There is someone out there who wants to talk to you about what you're going through, if it is that you're going through something. You can find someone to help you.

Are these messages that you've been instilling in your own children?

At this point my kids are young enough that I'm just trying to show them by modeling it for them and keeping open lines of communication. As far as my kids growing up in a world that is different from the way that the generation above them has grown up – my kids are growing up saying, "I don't know if I'll someday marry a man, a woman. I don't know." Everything is open, especially ... I don't know, I don't think just especially in LA. I think that we're just looking at it differently than the world used to. The kind of gender normative thing is not celebrated and expected in the way that it used to be.

If you were to have played a gay teen like Simon, who would you have wanted to be your movie mom?

Annette Bening. I'd just love to work with her all the time. I don't care in what capacity. She could play my girlfriend, she could play my mom, she could play my daughter, whatever. We actually got to work on a little movie called "Danny Collins" (in 2015), but I know Julianne Moore got to be her girlfriend (in "The Kids Are All Right"). I was totally jealous. But they were great together.

What is the closest you've gotten to playing a lesbian role?

I was meant to do this HBO movie forever ago (1996) called "If These Walls Could Talk," but I was doing a different job at the same time and they wouldn't let me cut my hair and "If These Walls Could Talk" wouldn't let me wear a wig. But yeah, it was that. I was so excited too!

For some young gay people, you may have been their introduction to same-sex kisses when you got one from actress Natassia Malthe in "Elektra." It was nominated for Best Kiss at the MTV Movie Awards in 2005, the year "The Notebook" won. How do you reflect on that scene?

It was a great kiss. I was like, "Oh, I get it. Women *are* softer. No wonder women kiss women." But she also, at the time, had bronchitis, and I remember I was in the middle of a really intense production cycle. So that's my personal memory of it. Besides that, it was very fun and every man from the studio who I'd never met or heard from or seen before showed up on set to watch that day.

Even the gay men?

Yeah. The gay men, the straight men – they just all suddenly were like, "Yeah, we just came for a set visit in the middle of nowhere, in British Columbia." (Laughs)

Are you aware of the devoted LGBTQ following "Alias" had?

I know, and I love it. I just always loved that we always had that following and that we always had that fan base, and I always felt so much love from the L-G ... I always get it confused because it just always changes. The LGBTQ community!

You portrayed an HIV doctor in "Dallas Buyers Club," alongside Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto, who played an HIV-positive trans woman. What about that movie spoke to you?

We didn't even know that it was actually gonna get made. It was such a tiny little movie, and once we finished it we didn't know that anyone would actually see it. It's so crazy. But I loved how much respect there was in the film for the gay community and for the men going through it (the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the time), but what was shocking

for me in just doing the research was how HIV-positive patients were treated when it all started happening. Nobody knew what to expect, nobody knew how it was passed back and forth, and it was just such a horrible kind of dirge.

Growing up in a conservative home in Charleston, West Virginia, what was your introduction to the gay community?

My parents were conservative in that they didn't curse, they didn't drink. We weren't allowed to pierce our ears, we weren't allowed to wear makeup, but they had zero judgment on the way anyone lived their lives. I did not grow up in a house that had an ounce of judgment about other people. There was a gay minister at my family's church, which in West Virginia, looking back, I think, "Oh!"

And I grew up in this community theater world and Miss Gay World Ted Brightwell (a West Virginia drag queen whose stage name is Viki Williams) did my hair for every event. He would get me ready to go on stage with my community theater – and then he would redo my hair into an updo for prom later that night! (Laughs) My best friends were a gay couple; actually, there were three guys who were roommates and I was in high school and I would go and hang out with these guys when I was a peanut. So, it was always totally normal and my mom wasn't saying, "Oh, don't do that." She trusted them. She knew that they would be just careful with me in the way an adult should be with a child, and they were my closest friends growing up.

How did your relationship with those gay men influence you?

It influenced me in that it wasn't a thing. It's just never been a thing, as it should be. It didn't turn me into some kind of activist, it didn't light some kind of fire. It was just, this is how it should be, and what can I do to contribute to this being normal for everyone in the world and not just for little girls who grow up in ballet and theater?

In "Love, Simon," Simon's best friend, Leah (Katherine Langford), has a crush on him. Have you ever dated a gay man before?

Yes. Not one of those guys, no; they were much older than I was. I don't know: Did I ever date him or did I just have a crush on him? But yes, at some point when I was young.

How did you react when he came out to you?

I was totally like, "Oh, thank god you feel like you can tell me."

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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The Royal Oak Music Theatre is slated to showcase drum/keyboard duo Matt & Kim on Wednesday, April 18. Although Matt Johnson is from Vermont and Kim Schifino is from Rhode Island, the two met while students at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. According to Johnson in a 2016 Westword interview, they were immediately drawn to each other.

"I grew up in a small town in Vermont," Johnson said, "and I'm a little bit younger than Kim is — and here's this girl with tattoos and a little bit older than me. I'm like a country boy from Vermont, essentially. She gave me her number, and I was too scared to call. And then she saw me again, and she cursed me

out for not calling her, because she's the very forward one."

And, for the duo's sake, it was good they met again. The two would go on to have a successful relationship and created the now award-winning duo Matt & Kim. Together, the group has released five studio albums that all showcase their unique mix of electronic dance music, and the prolific group has released nearly 20 singles.

Doors open for the show at 7 p.m. and more information about ticketing can be found online at royaloakmusictheatre.com. The Royal Oak Music Theatre is located at 318 W. 4th St., Royal Oak. 248-399-2980.

Michigan Five to Perform at Berman Stage

BY BTL STAFF

The Michigan Five, featuring some of the most outstanding and creative dance talent from colleges and universities throughout the state, will take center stage at The Berman Center for the Performing Arts March 17.

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at The Berman Center for the Performing Arts. It is a 600-seat venue. The Berman is known for showcasing an eclectic variety of entertainment for all audiences.

Tickets start at \$27. More information can be found online at theberman.org. The Michigan Five performs at The Berman at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 17. To purchase tickets, please visit theberman.org or call 248-661-1900 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Berman Center for the Performing Arts is located at the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit, D. Dan & Betty Kahn Building | Eugene & Marcia Applebaum Jewish Community Campus at 6600 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield.



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► Simon

Continued from p. 17

they walk in the room, so there's that part.

There's the other part of, I'm old enough to remember when the real challenge was casting LGBT people at all, as any straight character. There were definitely times I would have executives and casting people kick actors back to me and say, "Doesn't he seem a little soft?" "Doesn't she seem a little tough or hard?" Which was code for too gay. I remember how upset I would get about that. I felt like, "Well, no; if they seem like the character, they seem like the character," and so that was one of the fights we were fighting. Finally, the element of when you're dealing with young people, I think they're still in real life figuring themselves out. With all that being said, we were cognizant, and I was really cognizant, of wanting real representation in the movie. I just didn't know when I started out where it would necessarily be, and we have straight, gay and bisexual actors in this movie playing all sorts of different parts and I think that's the real representation. It's one that I'm proud of.

How do you find queer actors like the ones in "Love, Simon" if you can't and don't ask about their sexuality?

Sometimes you find out after the fact. Sometimes you don't find out until after they decide they want to talk about it to the

press. Keiynan Lonsdale (who plays Bram) is an example of someone who won the part because he was the best person for the role. I worked with him on "The Flash" and we were friendly, and he had recently, before we made the film, come out to me, but he wasn't out publicly and chose to come out right after we finished making the film. The thing I'm hyper conscious of as a producer and a director? I never want a studio, or anybody, to tell me they don't want to cast somebody because of what that person might be in real life. That's the thing I can truly protect against.

Ethan, the gay, black character who has a major influence on Simon's coming out, was written specifically for the film, right?

I added the character. When I read the script, he was not in the script. I felt like even at some of the smaller schools, there's more than one kid who happens to be gay. The last shot of those two individuals represents two very different walks of life of the gay experience. I remembered what it was like when I got to Northwestern, where I went to college, and I wasn't ready to come out and how brave I thought some of the kids in my theater program were. They were wonderful examples to me every day and just lived so bravely. I remembered thinking to myself, "Why don't I have their courage?" So although it has to be centered on a person, I didn't just want it about Simon's gay experience. I also wanted to make sure that

the additional gay characters we had weren't just there for laughs. It was really important to me that (Ethan) have a poignancy and a point of view and a strength that Simon maybe wasn't ready to exhibit.

Based on your other work over the years, how have you seen the tide change for queer representation in media? What can you do with gay characters now that you couldn't do in the late '90s?

I mean, everything. It's so different. There's so much openness, and part of that comes with all the young people who are coming up now and what great storytellers they are and how they grew up in a different world. They're even more open and more brave and more honest, and they want to take all of these stories to the next level.

I'm excited for the world to see "Love, Simon," but I'm really excited to see what happens next. I really believe it's just the beginning, and I didn't feel that way when I was bringing "The Broken Hearts Club" around 20 years ago. I remember feeling like, "OK, the world, it might be awhile." But I don't feel that way anymore. I feel like the studio system knows it has work to do to catch up.

How was the reaction to "The Broken Hearts Club" different than what you're seeing and hearing regarding "Love, Simon"?

We had to work twice as hard to get to 300

theaters. And when I talked to Nick about this role, it never came up once about playing gay. When I talked to any actors back then (the film starred Zach Braff, Dean Cain, Andrew Keegan, Timothy Olyphant, Billy Porter, Justin Theroux and Ben Weber) about playing a character who happened to be gay, they were all cognizant of it. It was always going to be a conversation – if not with them, then with their agents. Now, people were just supportive from the beginning. They understood the value of making a film like this.

You know, every Sunday I'd go to dinner with the young cast, sort of like dad taking them out to dinner. They started a text chain, or whatever you call it – what do *you* call it? (Long pause) A group chat! They started a group chat. And I titled it "the kids" – and I didn't realize that when you title something on a group chat that everybody can see it (laughs), so it's a good thing I didn't call it something else. So the kids and I would go to dinner on Sundays and it was just amazing to me to sit and listen to them talk about the way they perceive the world, and so much is different. But the thing that is still the same: the human heart.

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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Lorde to Perform at Little Caesar's Arena

It's few 21-year-olds who are the owners of a Grammy Award, let alone two, but New Zealand-born artist Lorde has two to her name along with two Brit Awards and 10 New Zealand Music Awards. Now on tour with her second studio album on the Melodrama World Tour, Lorde is coming to Detroit to perform some of her hit songs like "Liability" and "Perfect Places." She will be at Little Caesar's Arena on Wednesday, March 28 at 7 p.m. Ticket information can be found online at ticketmaster.com.



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OUTINGS

Thursday, March 15

Pop-Up Event: Intro to Improv with Go Comedy! 7 p.m. Are you interested in seeing what improv is all about? Attend our latest Pop-Up Event with Go Comedy! Improv Theater. No experience is necessary — come learn the basics of improv and improv games in a Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 www.facebook.com/events/148262689217060/

Monday, March 19

OU Pride 'Zine-Making Party 6 p.m. Join Feminists of OU in the Lake Superior B room at the Oakland Center in making a zine on the theme of pride. Feminists of OU will provide craft and collage materials for attendees to Oakland University, 2200 N. Squirrel Rd., Rochester. 248-370-4336 gsc@oakland.edu gsc@oakland.edu www.oakland.edu/gsc/

Wednesday, March 21

GRUNT Detroit Round 2 8 p.m. 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). Jam Handy, 2900 E. Grand Blvd., Detroit. 313-451-0806 Kristi@KristiFaulknerDance.com www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3331976

Thursday, March 22

Pop-Up Event: Dance! Introduction to Partner Movement 7 p.m. Learn the rumba or 4 count hustle at Affirmations with our friend Jeffrey T. Rakowski from Evoke Ballroom. All couples and ages

are welcome in this free workshop series. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 www.facebook.com/events/390728118060084/

Pop-Up Event: Love, Simon at Royal Oak Emagine 7 p.m. Join Affirmations at Emagine Theatres for an exclusive screening of the film Love, Simon. Tickets are \$20 and include a refillable 44 oz Popcorn & 21 oz Soda. A portion of the proceeds will go straight back to the center. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105

Jen Kober Comedy Show 7 p.m. Jen Kober's powerful performances weave together a southern-style tale of love lost at the buffet, road trip adventures at The Waffle House and midnight mishaps at Wal-Mart. Originally from Lake Charles, Louisiana, Kober has taken Oakland Center, 312 Meadow Brook Road, Room 118, Rochester. 248-370-3230 gsc@oakland.edu gsc@oakland.edu oakland.edu/oc/ oakland.edu/gsc/ events/2018/032218-jen-kober-comedy-show

56 Ann Arbor Film Festival Out Night: Films in Competition 5 9:30 p.m. The 17th celebration of queer cinema at the Ann Arbor Film Festival spotlights recent experimental films with LGBTQ themes. Check our website for full details of featured films. Presented in partnership with AAFF Community Partner: Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 info@aafilmfest.org aafilmfest.org

Friday, March 23

Trans Day of visibility: Grand Rapids Grand Rapids Pride Center and Grand Rapids Trans Foundation are excited to present our 2018 Grand Rapids Trans Week of Visibility! Following the monumental success in 2017, we're asking you to join us, regardless of Grand

Rapids Pride Center, 343 Atlas Ave. SE, Grand Rapids. www.grpride.org/tdo

Slam for Solidarity II 6 p.m. Join the Gay-Straight Alliance for their Poetry Slam in room 1050 of the Human Health Building. Poetry Slam allows students to perform their own poetry pieces, or those of another author, in a private setting. Oakland University Human Health Building, 433 Meadow Brook Road, Rochester. 248-370-2100 gsc@oakland.edu oakland.edu/gsc/ events/2018/032318-slam-for-solidarity-2

Saturday, March 24

March Lezread: The Fifth Season (The Broken Earth series) 4 p.m. For March, we're reading N.K. Jemison's The Fifth Season. This is the first novel in The Broken Earth series, winner of the Hugo Award for two years running. Hailed as "intricate and extraordinary" by the Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 734-995-9867 www.facebook.com/events/2043526049258473/

Sunday, March 25

Ferndale Pride Fundraiser at J's Penalty Box 1 p.m. J's Penalty Box March Madness Fundraiser for Ferndale Pride J's Penalty Box, 22726 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. (248) 398-4070 julia@ferndalepride.com www.ferndalepride.com

Pink 7:30 p.m. Grammy Award-winning singer Pink will perform at Detroit's Little Caesar's Arena. Little Caesar's Arena, 2645 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 3133495777 detroit.gaycities.com/events/994282-pink-detroit-mi

Wednesday, March 28

Affirmations Youth Workforce

Development Program 4:30 p.m. Improve communication skills, write an effective resume, nail that interview, understand budgets and financial responsibilities. Ages 13-24. The first 2018 Workforce class is now open and taking applications! Please click here to access the application. An event every week that begins at 4:30pm on Wednesday and Friday, repeating until July 11. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 www.goaffirmations.org

100 Women Strong 7 p.m. Join us in celebrating Women's Month as well as Music in the Schools month — 100 Women Strong in support of music education. This is the third-annual fundraiser. Entertainment provided by our Michigan Philharmonic CLASSICAL Michigan Philharmonic, Plymouth Arts & Recreation Center, 650 Church St., Plymouth. michtix.com/events/100-women-100-dollars

Thursday, March 29

Talk With The Girls: Security, Safety, Prevention and Response 6 p.m. Understand the misconceptions that impact the prevention of and response to hate crimes targeting transgender women-federal allies. Ask questions about strategies and resources for community safety & security. This event is brought to you with Ruth Ellis Center, 77 Victor St., Highland Park. 313-252-1950 www.ruthelliscenter.org/

Saturday, March 31

OU Pride Prom 7 p.m. Join the Gay-Straight Alliance for Pride Prom in the Gold Rooms at the Oakland Center. This event is positioned to be a fun and meaningful event for all, whether one wants to relive the prom Oakland Center, 312 Meadow Brook Road, Room 118, Rochester.



Editor's Pick

Coast Modern Comes to Detroit

Though the Los Angeles-based duo hasn't been together long, Coast Modern has already released seven singles since 2017, a mixtape and a full-length self-titled album. The indie pop band consists of Luke Atlas and Coleman Trapp and follows a distinct sound with influences from such groups as The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Led Zeppelin and Weezer. Now, they're heading to Detroit's St. Andrew's Hall on Tuesday, Mar. 27 at 6 p.m. More ticketing information can be found online at saintandrewsdetroit.com.



248-370-3230 gsc@oakland.edu gsc.oakland.edu oakland.edu/oc/ oakland.edu/gsc/events/2018/033118-pride-prom

Mississippi Mud Erotic Art Show 9 p.m. Mississippi Mud Erotic Art Show (Detroit), is a black erotic art show dedicated to promoting a conscious and positive way of thinking toward black sexuality and love. Featuring live band, DJ, food, sex toy vendors, The Artist Village Detroit, 17340 Lahser Road, Detroit. www.facebook.com/theartistvillagedetroit/ detroit.gaycities.com/events/1014511-mississippi-mud-erotic-art-show-detroit

Sunday, April 1

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups 6:30 p.m. Hilltop Counseling, 115 W. Maumee Street, Adrian. 313-909-5408 www.standwithtrans.org www.hilltopcounseling.org

Tuesday, April 3

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups 7 p.m. St. Mary's In The Hills Episcopal Church, 2512 Joslyn Court, Lake Orion. 248-391-0663 www.stmarysinthehills.org www.standwithtrans.org

Wednesday, April 4

Ferndale Pride Fundraiser at Rosie O'Grady's 7 p.m. Rosie O'Grady's, 279 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-591-9163 julia@ferndalepride.com julia@ferndalepride.com

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MUSIC & MORE

Prince and MJ Experience - Detroit March 16, 8 p.m. As selections of hits, rarities, and remixes from both artists are presented over the course of the evening, audience members square off in funky battle, holding signs bearing the mug of their favored entertainer to El Club, 4114 W. Vernor Hwy, Detroit. www.elclubdetroit.com/

Blue Cathedral March 17, 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 www.a2so.com/events/blue-cathedral/

Steve Lehman & Selebeyone March 17, 9 p.m. Though hip-hop and jazz are clearly no strangers to one another, Sélébéyone takes the conversation between the two forms to "feverish new heights", drawing from Senegalese rap, modern jazz, live electronics, and underground hip-hop to El Club, 4114 Vernor Highway, Detroit. www.elclubdetroit.com/shows/ ums.org/

performance/steve-lehman-selebeyone/

GRUNT Detroit Round 2 March 21, 8 p.m. 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 p.m., repeating until March 22. Jam Handy, 2900 E. Grand Blvd., Detroit. 313-451-0806 Kristi@KristiFaulknerDance.com www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3331976

Pop-Up Event: Dance! Introduction to Partner Movement March 22, 7 p.m. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 www.facebook.com/events/390728118060084/

Bubble Schmeis at The Schwitz March 22, 7:30 p.m. Welcome to the steam baths! The word bubbemeis 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. The Schwitz, 8295 Oakland Street, Detroit. (313) 724-8489 schwitzdetroit.com/ ums.org/performance/bubble-schmeis/

56 Ann Arbor Film Festival Out Night: Films in Competition 5 March 22, 9:30 p.m. The 17th celebration of queer cinema at the Ann Arbor Film Festival spotlights recent experimental films with LGBTQ themes. Check our website for full details of featured films. Presented in partnership with AAFF Community Partner: Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 info@aafilmfest.org info@aafilmfest.org aafilmfest.org

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The Devils Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith March 30-April 22, 8 p.m. Theatre NOVA, 410 W. Huron, Ann Arbor. 734-6358450 www.theatrenova.org

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Chick Corea March 31, 8 p.m. Surprise! This perennial favorite is back, but this time with jazz pianist Chick Corea at the helm. Corea's staggering career, spanning more than Ann Arbor Hill Auditorium, 825 N. University Ave., Ann Arbor. ums.org/performance/jazz-at-lincoln-center-orchestra-with-chick-corea/

Storm Large & Le Bonheur April 6, 8:30 p.m. Tickets start at \$20. Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, 3711 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 313-5765162 www.dso.org/ShowEventsView.aspx?id=4708&prod=4707

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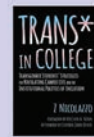


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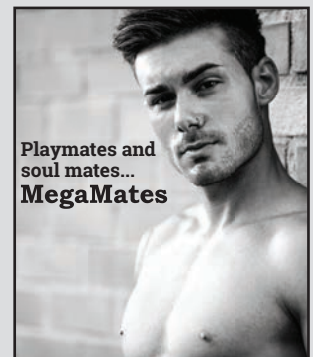
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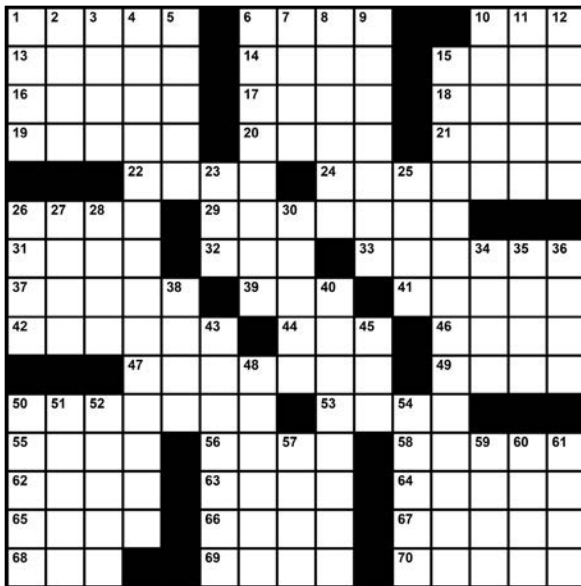
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Across

- 1 Queer-looking E
6 Opening noted at the office
10 Hieroglyphic serpent
13 Hometown of Brando
14 C&W singer McCoy
15 Homophone of a Broadway bio
16 Target of deep thrust?

- 17 Lynch of "Glee"
18 Will beneficiary
19 Jabbed with a joint
20 Bear of the night
21 Bannon and others
22 Decide not to go straight
24 Performing in the Globe, e.g.
26 Suffix with cigar
29 "Sweatin' to the Oldies"

- 47 Washington setting of "Frasier"
49 Strip under the futon
50 ___ People
53 Wannabe singer's tape
55 "Spamalot" writer Eric
56 Type of bag
58 Paul Lynde, on "Bewitched"
62 "The multitudinous ___ incarnadine" ("Macbeth")
63 Man, as a cruising goal
64 It comes under a

- guru Richard
31 Marvel Comics superhero
32 ___ tape (video starring Trump)
33 Tavern with naked dancers?
37 Word before "ass"
39 Org. for Jodie Foster
41 What parents may hope homosexuality is
42 Beat up on
44 "I have a headache" et al.
46 "Brothers & Sisters" producer Ken

- jockey's shorts
65 Scots cover their heads with them
66 Adverb in verse
67 News show of Jenna Wolfe, formerly
68 State that didn't elect homophobe Roy Moore (abbr.)
69 Oldest of the Brady kids
70 Begins, on Broadway

Down

- 1 Batman word like "Pow!" and "Bam!"
2 "Move your butt!"
3 In the pink
4 Start of the "bottom line" about lesbian sex as you get older
5 Alternative to TNT
6 More of the "bottom line"
7 Kind of beer
8 1996 Lili Taylor movie with Mel Gibson
9 She loved Franklin and Lorena
10 "Spartacus" venue
11 Filing for palimony, e.g.
12 As such
15 End of the "bottom line"
23 Gaydar, for example
25 Move the football

- between your legs
26 Jazz singer James
27 What you must remember, as time goes by
28 Todd Oldham designs, e.g.
30 Stood for
34 Bouncer for Amelie Mauresmo
35 China setting
36 Money from Lucy to Ethel
38 "___ yellow ribbon ..."
40 Comic Dana, source of the "bottom line"
43 Falling behind
45 Cole Porter's "___ America First"
48 More economical verbally

- 50 End of a farewell from Frida
51 Like Everett, as a movie husband
52 Wool source
54 Michael of "The Village Voice"
57 Away from the wind
59 Turn over
60 Like some meat
61 Maker of some fruity flavors

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The Science of Grief Explored: Local Poet Hosts 14-Hour Community Grief Outlet

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

The violent death of a family member is the stuff of nightmares, but for poet Natasha Miller it was a reality.

“On Dec. 28, 2013, my brother was gunned down in Detroit, and it was just a really hard, difficult time for me,” Miller said. “He was murdered on the 28th, and then New Year came up on Jan. 1, and Jan. 3 was my birthday. I planned my brother’s funeral and he was cremated on my birthday. His birthday is Jan. 14, so it was 11 days after that. I just had a really hard time dealing with that. He was my friend, we were only a year apart.”

And although Miller will likely never be fully past the traumatic event, she has been proactive in creating ways to deal with her grief, understand it and provide outlets for others to do the same.

“I just thought that there wasn’t enough space for people – specifically people of color – to be open about the grief that they were experiencing,” Miller said. “I think it

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– Natasha Miller

was just one of those subjects that people shy away from it, but we feel it every day. That is a universal language.”

Now, in partnership with the Detroit Institute of Arts, Miller will host a community performance focusing on the expression of grief on March 27 at 7 p.m. It will also be held at the museum.

“The event was supposed to be 24 hours at the DIA, but we were really trying to



Poet Natasha Miller has been proactive in creating ways to deal with her grief, understand it and provide outlets for others to do the same.

figure out if we could man an event for 24 hours,” Miller said. “And then, it came down to 14 hours.”

However, the 14-hour mark was not random. Miller said that the number 14 was perfect for two reasons: her brother’s birthday is Jan. 14, and the number has been an important recurring mark in her life since his death.

“It’s a number I’ve been seeing in my life, in my journey, since the day that he was killed,” she said. “So, I guess it’s a symbol.”

The grief event focuses on all kinds of sadness, but stems from triggers that are specific to Miller’s life, like “queer grief,” “suicide grief,” “trans grief,” and “sibling grief.”

“I’m talking about the things that are close to me. I’m from Detroit, I’m queer, I’m dealing with sibling grief,” she said. “I just wanted to make sure that all of those things are represented and some of the issues that have been kind of threatening and in the media over the last few years.”

Miller’s grief event will be structured so that each moment of the 14-hour event will keep up its momentum. First, it will begin with a prayer from a variety of clergy-members from “as many different religions as we can find.”

“Once the event opens, I’ll talk about my story, and the reason that I brought everyone here. Once I go, then we’ll bring up the topics of grief – they’ll have their own section – and anyone who signed up to participate, they come and speak in 15-minute increments about the grief that they’ve experienced. It could be anyone at all,” Miller said. “In the second half of the show around 1 o’clock, and then every hour on the hour, we’ll have a performer. We’ll have a trans woman who plays the harp, we’ll have hip-hop artists, poets and they’ll all perform in those last seven hours.”

Finally, the event will conclude with a similar prayer that kicked things off. The event will also include resources onsite like grief counselors, therapists and clergy to aid anyone who needs it mid-presentation.

The Science of Grief will begin on March 27 at 7 p.m. at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The event will last until 9 a.m. on March 28. Visitors are welcome to come at any time during the event. For speaking inquiries, contact scienceofgrief@gmail.com. The DIA is located at 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-833-7900.

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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



Gloria Steinem Emphasizes that Feminism and LGBT Rights Are Linked

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Activist, journalist and feminist Gloria Steinem has been actively campaigning for women’s rights since the 1960s. Not only has she imprinted her legacy when she helped found longstanding publications like Ms. and New York Magazines, she has aided in the formation of the National Women’s Political Caucus, produced films on such topics as child abuse and the death penalty and is the author of many lauded books and articles.

On Wednesday, March 7, she shared some of her career expertise on an event sponsored by Wayne State University’s FOCIS initiative, or Forum on Contemporary Issues in Society, entitled Women in the Workplace. She was joined by WSU Senior Scholar Pamela Trotman Reid as moderator, and by panelists Lilia Cortina, a professor of psychology and women’s studies at the University of Michigan, and by Michigan State University professor of management Georgia T. Chao. The group discussed in-depth the growing #MeToo movement, and the future of feminism.

“The future of feminism is, we’re hoping democracy might happen one day, because you can’t have democracy without feminism (laughs),” Steinem said in a press conference after the event. “You can’t

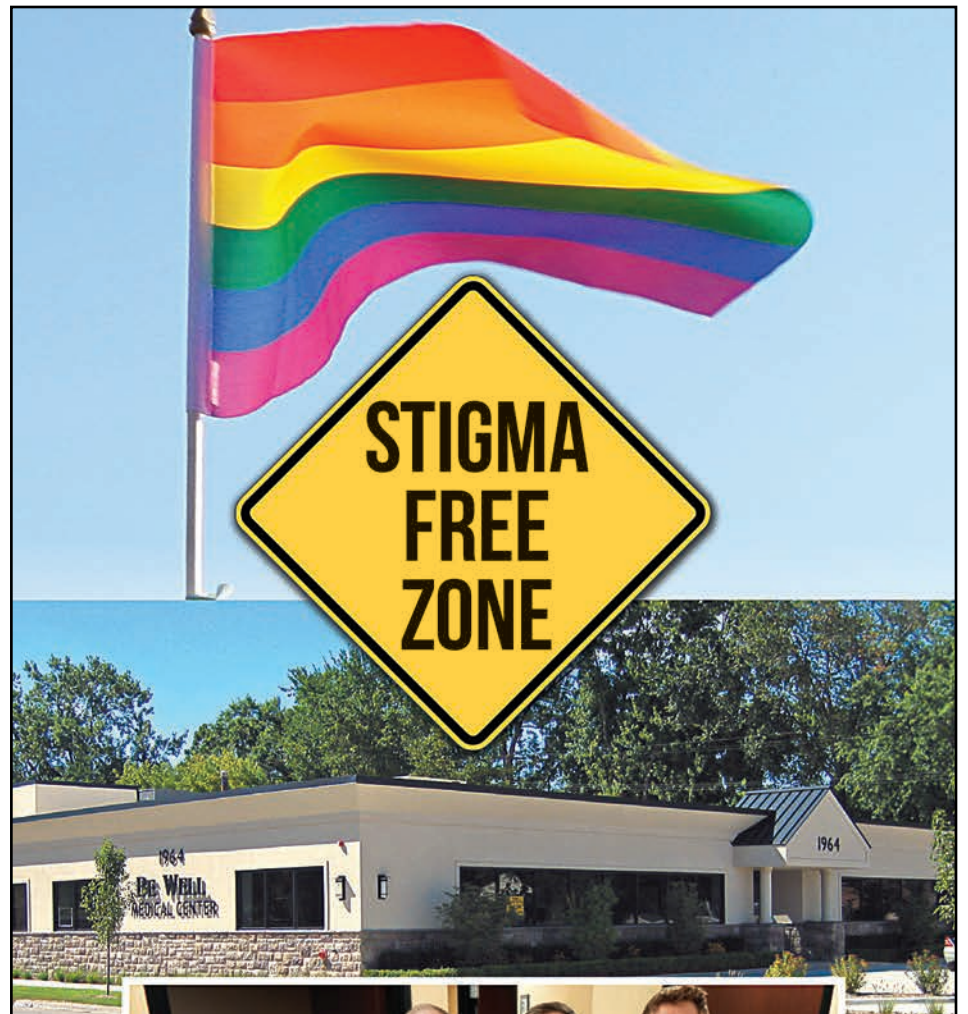
“The future of feminism is, we’re hoping democracy might happen one day, because you can’t have democracy without feminism (laughs).”

- Gloria Steinem

have democracy with racism, with bias of any kind, so we’re striving toward a deep democracy I would say. And, in terms of the relationships between men and women, it’s certainly making them much better.”

When asked about the LGBTQ community upsetting the traditional boundaries of male and female roles, Steinem said that both the LGBTQ rights movement and feminism are deeply linked.

“Gender and race are invented to categorize, and they go deep because of culture, but they also are not inevitable,” Steinem said. “And I think we are all striving to become unique individuals and human being without those kinds of imposed categories. If they’re chosen, OK, but not if they’re imposed.”



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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Ryan Murphy's 'Pose' places trans actors front and center

If we can all survive as a nation until summer, "Pose" will be here to see us through. The latest TV series from mega-creator Ryan Murphy is set in mid-'80s New York City and will dive deeply into the world of underground ball culture, so memorably depicted in the documentaries "Paris is Burning" and "Kiki." There are the usual famous faces attached to the show, people like Kate Mara, Billy Porter and James Van Der Beek. But if we're being honest, the real thrill is going to be the sheer number of transgender actors who'll be taking their shot on the show. Mj Rodriguez, Indya Moore, Dominique Jackson, Hailie Sahar and Angelica Ross, most of whom are first-timers or at least in the early stages of their acting careers, will collectively make "Pose" the show with the most trans actors playing trans characters in TV history. Verdict: we're watching. We don't even care if it's good like early "Glee" or terrible like later "Glee." We're watching.

Lee Pace goes back to the future

Recently, Lee Pace came out as bisexual – to the best of our ability to interpret his statement, that is – and he did so in that way that celebrities who'd rather not be asked too many questions about much of anything come out, by calling the interviewer "intrusive." (We like to

think we had him sorted all the way back to "Soldier's Girl" and "Wonderfalls," well before Ian McKellen accidentally outed him, but that's just us thinking we have special powers of observation.) Oh well, we're still glad to have him on board and we assume he'll get used to being publicly queer soon enough. Meanwhile, he's got a new project, one that takes the idea of scandal back to a more innocent, less jaded, pre-Trump era, when most celebrities didn't come out at all, and when a famous man getting busted for cocaine and other crimes was a big deal and we were all bummed about it because it meant that the "Back to the Future" car wasn't going to be as big a deal as we'd hoped. The film is called "Driven" and Mr. Pace will play none other than John DeLorean, inventor of that iconic, now vintage-cool vehicle, a man who also got involved with crime and cocaine and sent it all crashing down. It also stars Judy Greer, Jason Sudeikis and Corey Stole, so

we're pretty much here for it right now, even though it's due later in 2018.

Dolly Parton, Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin are ready to reboot '9 to 5'

The plan is for Patricia Resnick – the original screenwriter – and Rashida Jones ("Parks and Recreation") to write it. The plan is for three new young women to star in it. But the plan we care most about for the in-talks reboot of "9 to 5" is that Dolly, Jane and Lily are all on board. This is probably the best news of 2018 so far, and if you don't agree then we don't know you and you don't know us. "9 to 5," for you young people, is the classic 1980 comedy about women fighting workplace harassment and discrimination. It also gave the world the great Dolly Parton hit song of the same name. And given the current movement of women in the workplace demanding better treatment, what better time to reboot? The young women haven't been cast yet, but they will find more than capable mentors in the

O.G. nine-to-fivers. Can't wait, obviously, but Dolly's the one with the best public statement on the matter. She advised production to pick up the pace: "I told them we better get after it or it's going to be '95.'" Indeed.



Lee Pace

Denis O'Hare, Anna Kendrick get untitled for now

OK, maybe this one is a bit obscure if you don't follow British comedy, but

if you do then you know the name Christopher Morris is one to trust. The wicked comic genius behind shows like "Brass Eye," "The Day Today" and "Nathan Barley," and director of the blistering terrorism comedy "Four Lions" – yes, we said terrorism comedy – has a new film in the works. It is currently without a title and we know nothing about its content. We do know that it stars Anna Kendrick, gay actor Denis O'Hare ("True Blood"), "Orange is the New Black" actor Danielle Brooks, and one of our fave queer stand-up comedians James Adomian ("BoJack Horseman"). But that's plenty to go on for now. It could star sock puppets, frankly, and we'd still give it our full attention. So while we're waiting around for a title, go investigate Mr. Morris' earlier work. You'll be glad – and possibly unsettled and disturbed – that you did.

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