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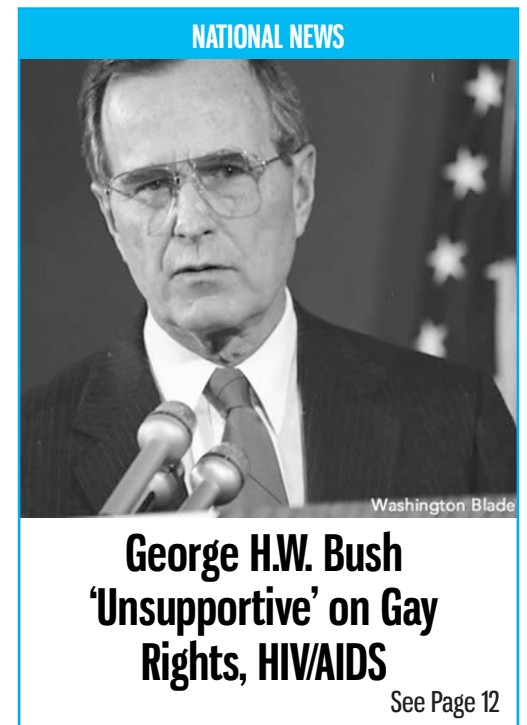
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Gay, Trans and Disabled

Living With Disabilities in a 'Ableist, Racist and Queerphobic' World



BTL photos: Kate Gowman

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Finding a job is simple. That is, if one has a degree, experience, connections and an able body. Things start to get tricky when one of those elements is missing, and nearly impossible when one suffers from physical disabilities — that, at least, is the experience of Jem Zero and Tora Brumalis. The Metro Detroit-based lesbian couple suffers from several disabilities and a variety of mental health issues that have made living a “normal” life a significant challenge.

However, despite the struggles that both Zero and Brumalis face, they make one thing very clear: they are just as human as anyone else — though they “don’t think it’s realistic” that many will care to remember that.

“That’s just what I hope,” Zero said. “There will always be someone who dehumanizes you, especially since we’re gay, trans and disabled.”

Zero, who is non-binary and uses ze/zir pronouns, said that ze’s heard all the usual negative comments from people before.

“Like, ‘Why don’t you do this?’ ‘That’s not my problem,’ ‘You’re irresponsible,’ ‘You should just try harder,’ ‘You’re lazy,’ ‘You’re a drain on society,’” ze said. “They have all these reasons why you’re still the one causing all your problems.”

But Zero asserted that it’s not for lack of trying that ze and Brumalis aren’t able to provide for themselves without assistance.

“It’s not widely known how much structural and institutional biases and oppressions

keep people in inescapable poverty,” added Brumalis, who is also non-binary but uses she/her pronouns. “It’s a really dastardly scheme when you think about it.”

And they’re not alone in their struggle. For instance, a CBS News report showed that despite advances like the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there have been unintended consequences for those who have disabilities; like employers shying away from hiring disabled people because of the potential to incur cost in accommodating disabled employees.

Understanding the Need

Roughly 25.1 percent of adults in Michigan report being disabled. Plagued by persistent unemployment and poverty, Brumalis, like many others, applied for Social Security disability benefits, hoping to get back on her feet. She was denied Supplemental Security Income, and, while initially granted food assistance, both those benefits and her health insurance were compromised by a paperwork error from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. That error resulted in the account being closed.

An article in Bridge Magazine reports that eligibility depends on whether an applicant can no longer achieve “substantial gainful activity” in the labor market. The rapid rise in disability insurance is mostly associated with musculoskeletal conditions and those with mental illnesses, including chronic anxiety, depression and memory loss — categories that critics said can be too subjective.

Because many of those conditions remain difficult to prove, even with documentation by a physician or specialist, only about 40 percent of applicants make it through the application process and a backlogged appeals process without being rejected.

“Some systems are made deliberately difficult and bureaucratic to navigate — this is for abled people,” said Zero. “For disabled people, the confusing procedures are agonizing and can cause people to completely give up. I think they hope for that, to be honest.”

When They Can’t Just ‘Get a Job’

In 2017, 18.7 percent of people with a disability were employed, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In contrast, the employment to population ratio for those without a disability was 65.7 percent.

Disability advocates point out that Americans with disabilities face a host of complex issues such as stigmas, typically lower education rates and higher rates of poverty. Each of those issues can add to the difficulties of finding a job while disabled.

For instance, Brumalis wants to work, but because she was perceived as a man while previously working in the retail sector, she was assigned a disproportionate amount of the physical labor tasks. Additionally, Brumalis was bussing from downtown Detroit to Roseville at 4 a.m. for four-hour shifts that paid minimum wage, which made it even harder to afford transportation costs and justify the demands of her position.

“That mentally and physically broke me,” Brumalis said. “After that, I wasn’t capable of doing much of anything and couldn’t stand the thought of going back into that kind of working environment — which is the most common environment because I don’t have a formal degree and most places don’t hire without some sort of degree or certificate and some experience. Even with the experience, I wouldn’t get most of the jobs I would be a good fit for. It’s kind of a break yourself or bust situation.”

After her attempt to get SSI failed, Brumalis has worked piecemeal gigs, such as sensitivity reading and private catering, to bring in money. Her attempts to get a steady job were unsuccessful for several months, until recently when she accepted a job as an event host in downtown Detroit. Still, her mental health and physical limitations make it difficult to work too many shifts.

Because underemployment is all too common for people with disabilities and low wages prevent workers from gaining independence, people like State Rep. Frank Liberati (D-Allen Park) have tried to shift that reality. In February he introduced House Bill 5587 — now in committee — which prohibits employers from paying an employee with a disability less than the minimum wage.

Hidden Struggles

Zero is a freelance content creator who survives by doing art commissions and writing articles. Ze, too, has tried working fulltime for employers, but limitations beyond zir control make that difficult.

“I can only handle two to three hours of work and then I have to sleep,” ze said. “People don’t want to believe me when I say I can’t do something like stretch to press a button or bend down to file something away. If I bend down for 30 seconds, I end up with a back cramp for 30 minutes.”

Additionally, being autistic makes Zero feel “wrong” to people ze describes as “neurotypical,” or unaffected by disorders like autism.

“At my last job I tried really hard to be socially acceptable and friendly, but they just perceived me as ‘off’ which happens a lot to autistic people. That’s why I’m seeking jobs where I don’t have to rely on other people very much, because people can’t be friendly with me and I take it very personally,” Zero said. “I know you don’t always have to like your coworkers, but it’s very emotionally hard for me to deal with.”

One of the major problems with how disabled people are treated ze said is that there isn’t a physical impairment, a “sign,” or a “look” that indicates they are disabled.

Beyond zir cane and rollator, Zero seems abled on the outside and said ze constantly has to educate people about zir disability.

“I’ve looked for writing jobs and despite having an art degree, it’s very hard to get hired anywhere, especially somewhere that would work with my needs,” said Zero, who is doing zir best to finish an accounting certificate. Brumalis is also going to school, hoping to earn a computer information systems certificate for web design.

A Failed Solution

Now in their late 20s, Zero and Brumalis said they live their lives in a constant state of worry. With changes to Michigan’s public assistance programs, like Medicaid, they were hopeful that utilizing crowdfunding resources would help

“Some people only choose to be equitable because the law of the land will punish them for deviating from that behavior. If trans people lose protections, there will be a surge in assaults, unemployment and homelessness because there won't be anything to shield and protect us from bigotry.”

– Tora Brumalis

them stay afloat. They launched a GoFundMe page in May but had to take it down due to harassment from neo-Nazis.

“It wasn't surprising to be confronted with such open contempt,” Brumalis said while reflecting on the comments that were posted to their page, which included anti-black racial slurs. “Being black and trans, you're uniquely positioned to receive and see attacks on your character or ability, but desensitization just means it hurts less rather than not at all.”

Both she and Zero found the loss of support to be discouraging and haven't attempted to make a new campaign.

This is troublesome for the couple, too, as they are uncertain about the future of their health care through the state's Healthy Michigan Medicaid Plan under the Affordable Care Act. Come Jan. 1, 2020, the program might fall under work requirements — to work, look for work, volunteer or be in training or in school, for 80 hours each month, unless they are otherwise exempt, or risk losing their benefits.

“I would be in very severe trouble. I've never been on public assistance. This will be my first year figuring out how to report self-employment. If my work doesn't meet the requirements, then I'm — excuse my language — fucked. I'll probably die. I'm not saying that as an exaggeration. I will probably die,” said Zero, who relies on six medications daily, one that costs \$1,000 a month.

Beyond that, finding work and translating that to survival is not easy, according to Brumalis.

“Food is expensive, doubly so when you have allergies, intolerances and/or dietary concerns. Transportation is expensive, insurance rates aren't affordable for low-income people, ride sharing costs have gone up,” she said. “You spend most of what you make keeping employment and paying bills without the opportunity to effectively save.”

The hardest part, said Zero, has been proving they truly need and deserve financial support, website or not.

“You will get more support for a dog than you will for a black woman,” said Zero about Brumalis' experiences. “It's just a fact. People don't care as much about women of color.”

Zero, who is white, points to zir emotional support dog, Reyah, who needed medical attention following a seizure a few months ago.

“I got almost \$1,000 in under 48 hours for her,” said Zero, about Reyah's GoFundMe page. Ze explained the racial empathy gap, which has

been studied by numerous researchers.

“White people believe black people don't experience pain,” ze said. “People will look at a struggling black woman and all they'll do is criticize her and think bad things about her. They don't respect her suffering. They justify it with, ‘Oh, the animal is innocent.’”

The implications of that statement are clear. “It's equal parts racism and a general disregard for people's experiences that you don't personally have any intimate knowledge of,” Brumalis said. “No one except for black people know what it's like to be black in a country that hates black people.”

Consistently, complaints of discrimination filed with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights on the basis of disability are second only to complaints on the basis of race. At this point, the couple has become numb to the fact that people have dehumanized LGBTQ disabled people to a group they neither understand nor recognize.

“People think we're parasites,” said Zero. “Our GoFundMe page is not the only place where we've been told to kill ourselves.”

But while access to money is important, it's not the only thing Zero and Brumalis need. When asked what they are looking for, Zero emphasized the need for “accessible opportunities.”

“Opportunities that consider our disabilities, but also consider that we can do excellent work if provided proper accommodations,” ze said. “People should be open to providing accommodations, open to reaching out to disabled people to give them that shot instead of just assuming they can't handle something. Put in a good word for or refer a disabled person for the job. Make those connections to give them a leg up.”

A Glimmer of Hope

The couple met on OKCupid at the end of March 2018. Zero messaged Brumalis right away.

“I refer to it as love at first sight,” said Zero about seeing Brumalis' profile picture on the dating site. “I was hitting on her really hard, but Tora was so anxious about me not liking her that she didn't notice.”

Almost immediately, the two started dating. It wasn't long before they fell head over heels for each other.

See **Disabilities**, continued on p. 10

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Equality Michigan Announces Leadership Changes

BY BTL STAFF

Equality Michigan has announced that Executive Director Stephanie White will be leaving her position effective Jan. 9, 2019. The organization's boards unanimously decided not to renew her contract. This decision, according to a press release, was made as a result of EQMI's efforts to retool for 2019 and years to come. With a more balanced incoming legislature and a pro-equality governor, attorney general and secretary of state, the organization is planning for rapid progress on the issues that matter most to EQMI's members and supporters.

"We are making changes now to be more impactful in the future, and so we can continue our commitment to the work of making Michigan fair and equal for all," said Jim Murray, EQMI's board chair. He will serve as temporary interim executive director as the board considers its next steps.

"Our daily operations will continue as normal through the leadership transition, including our services supporting vulnerable LGBTQ persons and advocating on our community's behalf," said Murray.

"We thank Steph White for her years of service to Equality Michigan, Equality Michigan Action Network, our members, our allies, and the movement for equal rights in Michigan," said Trevor Thomas, EQMI's Action Network board chair. "Her tireless advocacy amplified the voice of the LGBTQ community at a time when many in power preferred our silence, and we wish her well as she takes on new challenges."

EQMI's board consists of Jim Murray, Vice Chair Mike Rowady, Secretary Tim Atkinson, Treasurer Mira Kirshnan, Buzz Thomas, Chuck Otis, Daniel Spadafore and David Worthams. The EQMI Action Network consists of Trevor Thomas, Mira Kirshnan, Chuck Otis, Tim Atkinson, Cheryl Gilliam and Ronald Moore.



Equality Michigan Executive Director Stephanie White's contract is up Jan. 9, 2019 and will not be renewed.



BTL to Host Farewell Party for Common Language Bookstore Dec. 15

BY BTL STAFF

After 27 years as a beacon for those in Ann Arbor's and Southeast Michigan's LGBTQ community, Common Language Bookstore will be forced to close its doors one final time at the end of 2018. According to husbands and co-owners Keith Orr and Martin Contreras, this comes after years of market pressures that have made running the store unsustainable. To honor their efforts in maintaining the business, Between The Lines is hosting a final farewell party on Saturday, Dec. 15, from 3 to 6 p.m., along with a going list of co-hosts that now includes Sandi Smith and Linda Lombardini from Trillium Real Estate, Unified – HIV & Beyond, MI Sen.-elect Jeff Irwin, MI Sen.-elect Jeremy Moss, MI Rep. Jon Hoadley and MI Rep. Adam Zenke. When asked why she was hosting the party, BTL Co-Publisher Jan Stevenson simply said that it was "important for the community to honor its history."

"And the people that made the history," Stevenson added. "And Keith and Martin are certainly that. They've been doing the good fight for decades and this bookstore is just one of the many things they've done over the last 30 years. It's important to mourn the loss of the bookstore and to acknowledge the contribution that Keith and Martin have made in keeping it open for as long as they have and to thank them for that."

Attendees at the party are encouraged to peruse unsold stock, chat with the owners, eat food and take time to acknowledge the loss of a historically significant part of Southeast Michigan's LGBTQ culture. Stevenson went on

to emphasize the significance that bookstores have played as "community centers" for LGBTQ people across the world.

"As a founder of a community center I value that role," Stevenson said. "Whether it's an actual community center or a store or a bar or restaurant — wherever it is that people feel safe to congregate and to learn — I know that that bookstore has served that role for people who have either been just coming out, or maybe wanted to learn about their community or their heritage or just to meet other people."

Orr added that bookstores of this type used to be much more common across the states.

"Back in the day, Michigan had four or five LGBT bookstores and I think there were three in D.C. and four or five in New York City. They used to be such a prevalent part of our culture," Orr said. "You know, in effort to keep it going we've had fundraisers and we've named them The Last Bookstore Standing and we didn't quite make it. There's a few others standing but not many. The last time I counted, I think there were 10 in the U.S. and Canada. That will reduce it to a single digit as we close."

Common Language is located in Braun Court, inside the Kerrytown District of Ann Arbor. Another reason that the bookstore's closure is impactful is because the space has become something of a hub for LGBTQ life — Contreras and Orr also own the Jim Toy Community Center, aut Bar and formerly Shaut, a performance space across the courtyard from aut Bar. The couple acquired Common Language in 2003, after a 12-year stint with the original owners.

When asked what he'll miss the most about his business, Orr said it was the reaction of



Martin Contreras and Keith Orr

people who had never been inside the shop.

"You know, it's really something that a number of people who come in here will say, 'I've just never seen anything like this before.' Part of it, I think, is that it is in an old house. It has that welcoming aspect of it and that is part of its character. You feel like you're walking into a house," he said. "We had the last owner of Oscar Wilde Bookshop, Kim Brinster, stop in at one point and was just gushing over it. That was one of my proudest moments because I loved Oscar Wilde."

Though the physical store will be gone, Orr added that fans of that unique, Common Language style might be in luck for a while longer yet. There are plans in the works to try and maintain an online presence for the store, though not guaranteed, that would allow customers to buy online.

To find out more about the store go online to glbtbooks.com or give the shop a visit before year's end at 317 Braun Court in Ann Arbor. For more information call 734-663-0036 or email glbtstaff@gmail.com.

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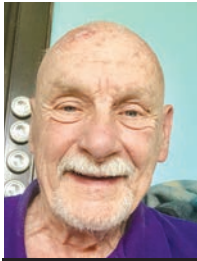
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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Don We Now Santa's Gay Apparel!

'Twas New Years Eve and "Santa Closet" – lavender quill pen in hand, Gucci trifocal sunglasses on his merry nose – was double checking his private list to see who's straight, and who's – hopefully, er, – gay.

Unbeknownst to almost everybody – the exceptions: Christmas Carol and a near-retirement elf named Crisco – "Santa Closet," who usually goes by Claus 363 days, felt entitled to party. Solo.

Mrs. Claus, who hadn't slept with her hubby since bubble lights and artificial tinsel trees broke family values tradition, couldn't care less that she'd have one less mouth to feed on New Year's day at the North Pole.

Forty elves, the usual party-crashing, fur-lined eskimos and those caterwauling chipmunks were enough for Mrs. Claus. She was frankly tired of hearing another round of travel adventures. Boring. (Especially those concerning the Middle East.) Year after year.

Truth is, it was Rudolph, with his shiny nose so bright, that put Claus into the closet; but, to be fair to the antlered, addled-headed kid, it was all Santa's doing.

"It's my only pleasure," she hummed to herself, taking freshly baked Alice B. Toklas gingerbread Angel cookies from the oven.

"Especially without that flighty Rudolph poking around where he shouldn't be. That wet-nosed sniffer is a bit much. Heaven knows what my Nicky sees in him."

Truth is, it was Rudolph, with his shiny nose so bright, that put Claus into the closet; but, to be fair to the antlered, addled-headed kid, it was all Santa's doing.

He bought the bouncy, happy-go-lucky, sky-dancing critter from Gene Autry, the singing cowpoke who ranched and raised Rudolph from a young'n. And sang and guitar strummed the critter into universal – and annoying – fame.

Story is that Autry, who met Santa at a Rodeo Ho-Ho-Ho-down, suspected Santa might take to Rudolph, if for no other reason than Rudolph's sled-mates-to-be each had questionable, funny names. Dasher. Prancer. Comet. Cupid. Vixen. ("Vixen, indeed!" twanged Autry.) Rudolph sound Republican!

It was probably a big mistake from the start to let Rudolph lead Santa's team. But, let's face it. That nose so bright. Well, fellow BTL consumers, chalk it up to conspicuous consumption. And – a real plus – the nose did match Santa's red outfit.

But Santa was pleased as pink holiday punch. Especially as he recalled 10 Christmases ago.

It was Santa's last stopover at Palm Springs, California, the gift-giving, oasis-in-the-desert, party drop off before hula-hula, grass-skirt Hawaii.

Like everybody else who's overworked, Santa was plumb pooped from under-pricing and tamper-proof Walmart packaging. And, if he heard one more Christmas Carol, he thought he'd go completely bonkers.

"Rudy," winked Santa, in need of a perk up, "Use your twinkle

See **Parting Glances**, continued on next page



—George H.W. Bush, March, 1990



BY SARA KRAHEL

Pap Smears and Paint Parties: A Journey Toward Embracing My Bisexuality

This year I finally came out to my best friend as bisexual. But first, I have to tell you about my first pap smear. You see, I have cerebral palsy and often my legs spasm when I get uncomfortable or nervous. I was certainly nervous going into the appointment because I knew there would be issues with those infamous stirrups.

It was the day that changed my life. Let me set the scene: I had hooked my arms around one leg in a death grip and a nurse was holding the other, as the gynecologist was performing the procedure as fast as she could. In this circumstance it was not just my legs that seized up, it was my entire lower body and that included my vagina.

I was visibly sweating and red in the face, trying to hold onto my twitching right leg. The doctor noticed me struggling and told me to "relax and breathe." I rolled my eyes, knowing that it wouldn't magically make my entire body stop spazzing, but I took a deep

breath to be a good sport. It did not help with the spasms. Although they were medical professionals, they didn't get that I couldn't relax in this compromising position. Can anyone truly relax with strangers holding onto their legs and looking at their genitals? No. After years of invasive medical procedures, I have a fairly high pain tolerance, metal in my vagina while having a spasm was one of the most painful things I've ever experienced.

After that horrifying ordeal, I made a swift exit and texted my best friend about the experience. In that same message, I came out to her as bisexual. Thankfully, she said all of the good things that you hope someone will say to you when you come out for the first time.

This opened my life up in new and exciting ways. I told a few of my closest friends and began to feel more comfortable with my new identity, so I decided to change my Tinder settings to include both men and women.

The next step for me was going to a gay bar. I go out often on weekends, but I'd come to realize how uncomfortable I felt at the straight bars. I wanted to go to a bar where I felt like I could be myself: no invasive questions, seedy objectification and slimy pity-grinding. I made plans to go out with another gay friend, and came out to him just as we were about to enter a local gay bar (he took it just fine). When we got to the bar we saw that it had three flights of stairs and no elevator.

Normally, I would ask my friends if we could try a different bar but we were truly determined this time around because it was a paint party-themed night. So, I talked two bouncers into carrying me and my chair up the stairs. The inside of the club was just as inaccessible, with small staircases leading to each area. Once my friend helped me down the steps to the dance floor I went immediately to the front because I wanted to experience the paint-splattered madness.

See **Viewpoint**, continued on next page

► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 8

We had just started dancing when a stunning girl came up and asked if she could dance with me. At first, I froze. I've had girls come up to me in straight clubs and ask to dance with me before ... but it was always a joke to them. I had to remind myself that I was at a gay club and she might actually be into me, so I said yes.

One of the first questions she asked was if I was straight (I've been told that's how I come off). I laughed and said that I was bi and it was my first time at a gay bar. It turned out that she was in the same position. This was the first time I said "I'm bi" to a stranger and, honestly, it felt so good to be open about it.

After a few songs she left for the bathroom and I awkwardly waited around, then saw her leave the bathroom chasing her visibly upset friend. I've had enough friend drama happen at clubs to know I should leave her be, but I couldn't stop thinking about her and asking myself why I didn't kiss her when I had the chance.

Even when I found my friend again, I couldn't get this girl out of my mind. Suddenly, I looked up and saw her dancing alone. I held back for a second because I didn't know if she was actually into me or if it was a pity dance. I told my friend and he said, "No, I saw you two dancing. She was definitely into you!" With that, I gathered up the courage and went over to her. She immediately lit up and started dancing with me again. I was so completely taken in the moment that I forgot all about my friend and let the music move us through the crowd. Eventually, we ended up kissing.

We moved throughout the night dancing

and just genuinely vibing with each other. People even came up to us and asked if we were a couple because our attraction to each other was so visible. We had to laugh and said we just met despite popular belief. The night ended with us exchanging numbers and kissing goodbye with the open promise of seeing each other again.

I would love to say that this meet-cute turned into my first relationship with a girl and that everything worked out. But I never saw her after that night. I texted her twice the next day and got no reply. For a while I was hurt because I don't usually hook up in clubs. That night, though none of that mattered — my wheelchair, my kissing abilities, my self-consciousness of everyone watching us hook up. I had never met anyone who I was so instantly attracted to; where I felt so comfortable with myself and with them. I felt free to just live in the paint splattered moments in the dark.

Even though I'm disappointed this night didn't lead to anything, I am grateful for this experience with her because I realized that the right people don't care that I use a wheelchair to move around in this crazy world in which we all live. They find me attractive for being me, which sounds cheesy, but it isn't always a given when you have a visible disability. Here's to many more nights of living for myself and not letting my disability get in the way of finding love. Or, maybe just a cute person to dance with for the night.

Sara was born and raised in southeast Michigan, but will one day move somewhere with warm because wheelchairs and snow do not mix. She loves reading, being an extrovert and dancing through her weekends. Her essay has also been published in Bi Women Quarterly and can be found at BiWomenBoston.org.

► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 8

nose. Find us a spot where I can get a quickie hot toddy. Or, two. Or, three."

No sooner said than done, Rudolph to the Rescue, attracted by the distant clarion call of that old favorite carol "Jingle Bell Rock" blaring through the star filled desert night, set Santa's sleigh cozily down in an almost full-to-capacity, stud-valet parking lot.

"I shan't be long," said Santa, as he peeped into the red-and-green, bright neon-lighted bistro. Bruce's Cell Block Cafe & Tackle Lounge. "Keep an eye on Dancer and Prancer. And, whatever you do, Rudy, don't let Vixen out of your sight! You know how she likes to get it on."

"Hey, mister, whoever you are in that Santa get up, we've got rules here," barked a rather burly, unshaven guy guarding the joint. "No leather. No go!"

Santa, ever jolly, quick of wit, grinned,

"Hey, Brucie! You remember me. I brought you a Barbie doll with dresses to match for Christmas when you were 10."

"O Shingles!" said pink-faced Bruce, taken aback. "You really are Santa. Beats tarnation and tarp out of me. Go on in. Your leather belt'll do. If anybody asks, it was Ken — not Barbie — I wanted."

Three hot toddies later Santa was on his way. Cheery like all get up. All get out. "You know somethin', Rudy. I've been lettin' the wrong age and dress code sit on my lap."

"Oh, well, it's never too late to be naughty and nice. Why's Vixen gigglin'? You two been decking the halls of parking lot holly?"

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

Creep Of The Week

Mike Pence

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

World AIDS Day was Dec. 1, as it has been every Dec. 1 for the last 30 years. And the day before, on Nov. 30, President George H.W. Bush died. While these two things are unrelated, they're also not.



Bush was, of course, vice president during the reign of President Ronald Reagan, a man who ignored AIDS and the predominately gay men it was killing.

Things didn't exactly improve once Bush became president.

AIDS has killed a lot of people all over the world. And over the years the policies of Republican administrations sure didn't help matters. Faux "morality" crusaders have seemed more interested in punishing people with HIV and AIDS than in preventing the spread of the disease.

Which is why the choice of Vice President Mike, "I'm a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order," Pence to deliver the White House's 2018 World AIDS Day address is so fitting. And so gross.

See, Pence was himself one of those faux morality crusaders when he was in the Indiana House of Representatives. In 2001 he sounded the alarm on CNN about the danger of condoms and Secretary of State Colin Powell's recklessness in advising people to use them. Pence called Powell's advice "very sad."

"Colin Powell had an opportunity here to reaffirm this president's commitment to abstinence as the best choice for our young people," he said to Wolf Blitzer. "The other part is that, frankly, condoms are a very, very poor protection against sexually transmitted diseases, and in that sense ... the secretary of state may be inadvertently misleading millions of young people and endangering lives."

It is, of course, not true that condoms provide poor protection against STDs. When used properly they have a reputation for working pretty darn well. Of course, if you believe that abstinence is the only way and should be the only option, well then a condom's probably going to seem pretty scary since people use them when they have S-E-X. Even young people, as Pence indicates that he, himself, is more than aware of when he references "millions of young people" who might potentially—GASP—use condoms.

He didn't want people in Africa, where AIDS has ravaged so many, to use condoms,

And now people are pissed because Pence didn't even mention the gay community in his 2018 address. It is, no doubt, an intentional omission.

either. Especially not if the U.S. was paying for them.

"The timeless values of abstinence and marital faithfulness before condom distribution are the cure for what ails the families of Africa," he said on the House floor in 2003. "It is important that we not just send them money, but we must send them values that work."

Note that he's basically saying that Africa lacks values and ignorant Africans keep on sexing and cheating so why should the U.S. have to pay for it? Pence's comments smack of colonialism.

Pence's awful history on the subject of AIDS continued as he moved up the political ranks. When he was the governor of Indiana he cut public health funding and rejected a needle exchange program, because "morals," even when there was an uptick in HIV infections. When he finally relented a bit the number of infections went down.

And now people are pissed because Pence didn't even mention the gay community in his 2018 address. It is, no doubt, an intentional omission.

And in some ways it feels like a relief. I mean, the previous examples show that when Pence does discuss specific populations, whether they be Africans, drug users or fornicators, he has a tendency to say really insulting shit. There's little doubt that his take on gay people and AIDS would be a poor one.

But, of course, those who remember the history of the AIDS epidemic know how harmful it is to not be seen or acknowledged. As ACT UP has taught us: Silence = Death.

"We've come so far, but there's so much farther to go to be able to end the AIDS Crisis," ACT UP's Eric Sawyer told Out Magazine. "There's still an inordinate amount of fear and hysteria around HIV that prevents people from testing, coming out about their status, and that triggers all kinds of negative, hateful language directed at positive people."

And, of course, in the case of Pence, hateful lack of language. Gay sex, extra-marital sex, drug use. These trouble Pence's conscience and so he has spent his political career trying to prevent these things. The deaths? At best Pence considers them an afterthought. At worst, a divine retribution.

LGBT Detroit Hosts Holiday Party

LGBT Detroit invites supporters of their services to celebrate the holiday season together with their 16th annual Holiday in December benefit. The benefit, happening on Saturday, Dec. 8 at 2:30 p.m. that includes gifts and raffles, will support LGBT programs and services.

“For over two decades, LGBT Detroit has been receiving unwavering support from neighboring communities in any capacity that promotes the wellbeing and integrity involved in fostering an environment conducive to lesbian, gay, bi and transgender individuals irrespective of race, culture or socio-economic status,” reads LGBT Detroit’s History. “The community support is manifested in their advocating, partnership, testifying before local and state legislators, providing safe gathering spaces where members of the LGBT community can interact without fear of persecution or bigotry.”

At the event, supper will be served at 2:30 p.m. and the dress code is black and Tiffany blue.

To find out more about the organization and its services, reach out to lgbtdetroit.org.

SingOut Detroit Performs Dec. 9

Set to perform at Ferndale High School at 3 p.m. on Dec. 9, The SingOutDetroit Chorus is getting ready for its holiday concert.

“Join us in celebrating the jolly nature of the season. With songs about snow, sleigh bells, and Santa – there’s something for everyone,” write event organizers. “Even a special guest appearance by the Grinch!”

SingOut Detroit is a chorus for everyone that is very welcoming to the LGBTQ community. Anyone who is interested in performing with the chorus is welcome to audition and reading music is not required. They perform regularly across Michigan.

For more information about the event and ticketing reach out to singoutdetroit.org.

► Disabilities

Continued from p. 5

“We bonded over a lot of similar experiences,” said Brumalis. “We’re both kind of iffy around new people. We want to open up to people. We want to get to know people. We want to let people in, but it’s hard because you aren’t really sure how people are going to react to you. You don’t know what’s going to be the part of you that people think is too weird.”

In the first couple weeks after meeting, they spent more time together than they did apart.

“It was so fast. I don’t usually do stuff like this,” Zero said.

And after only one month of dating, Zero and Brumalis moved into an apartment together.

At that time Brumalis was homeless because her family would not support her transition. Zero got word about an available apartment and the two ran with it.

Brumalis said she was initially nervous. “I was pessimistic about the suggestion. I would be moving from a relatively stable, although temporary, arrangement to something brand-new and tenuous,” she said. “It was hard to grasp the idea that it could work, being that we had only just met.”

Becoming stereotypical U-Haul lesbians was not in either of their plans, but it was a life-saving act during a time when LGBTQ rights, disability rights, healthcare and workers’ rights are under attack.

The two have said that their companionship has significantly improved both of their mental health struggles.

“Having company keeps me grounded. I freak out when I’m alone, especially with my physical limitations. When Tora is with me, daily tasks don’t seem so insurmountable,” Zero said.



Jem Zero (left) and Tora Brumalis pose with their dog Reyah. BTL photo: Kate Gowman

Conquering New Challenges

Unfortunately, Brumalis and Zero were unable to stay at the apartment. Low income and roommate problems meant they couldn’t afford rent, so they moved into Zero’s family home. “It sucks not being able to live alone, but I love this house, despite the fact that it’s falling apart in some places,” Ze said, referring to the fact that the home was built in 1948 by zir great-grandfather.

Despite that fact, only six months into their relationship, Zero proposed.

“I had been planning to propose, but ze beat me,” said Brumalis. “I was shocked, but happy, and it gives me hope that we can build a successful life together.”

“I love her so much, and my mom and sibling do, too,” Zero said. “They’ve adapted so well to how quickly everything happened.”

As the couple enters the new year planning their life together, including marriage and children, there are a lot of

Roughly 25.1 percent of adults in Michigan report being disabled.

unknowns — especially considering the proposed legislation against trans people.

President Donald Trump’s Department of Health and Human Services is considering an interpretation of Title IX that would effectively erase protections for people who identify with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth from federal civil rights laws — ensuring that the laws do not prohibit discrimination against transgender people in any setting, including the workplace, housing, schools and health care.

“Some people only choose to be equitable because the law of the land will punish them for deviating from that behavior,” said Brumalis. “If trans people lose protections, there will be a surge in assaults, unemployment and homelessness because there won’t be anything to shield and protect us from bigotry.”

Despite the fear, the two feel safe together. While the holidays can be tough for people with traumatic experiences — which both Brumalis and Zero have — they’re making a grasp at positivity. Though gifts are difficult to buy on a limited budget, ze said that ze is “going to try my best anyway.”

“I really hope our story helps to push the local community toward making life easier for people like us,” Zero added.

“It would be nice to be able to live my life and exist in public without having to constantly fight,” Brumalis said.

Those interested in donating toward Tora and Jem’s bid at surviving this winter, can add funds to their Paypal pool online at gaybe.am/rG. Those interested in hiring Jem or Tora about writing, commission work, sensitivity reading or community issues contact them here: Tora, intresszero@gmail.com or Jem, jemzero.art@gmail.com; www.jemzero.com; Jem Zero (on Facebook).



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Anti-LGBT Petitions Before Supreme Court Could Make for Dire Term



A number of anti-LGBT petitions are pending before the U.S. Supreme Court. (Washington Blade file photo by Michael Key)

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

A number of anti-LGBT petitions are before the U.S. Supreme Court, although legal experts say adjudication of these cases — if justices agree to take them up — may not be as bad as some observers fear.

With one exception, each of the petitions before the court calls for a rollback of LGBT rights or a reversal of decisions from lower courts affirming LGBT rights within those jurisdictions.

James Esseks, director of the LGBT project for the American Civil Liberties Union, said the petitions before the court “set up a potentially very consequential term for LGBT people nationwide,” but they may not necessarily lead to harmful decisions.

“The petitions are here, by and large, because we have been winning in lower courts, right?” Esseks said. “The lower court, including some conservative lower courts have ruled for LGBT equality in a bunch of different contexts.”

The most recently filed LGBT petitions are requests from the U.S. Justice Department calling for a fast-track decision on President Trump’s transgender military ban, insisting justices take up the issue to ensure resolution before their current term ends. Although Trump tweeted in July 2017 he’d ban transgender people from serving

in the military “in any capacity,” four courts have issued preliminary injunctions enjoining enforcement of Trump’s ban.

It would be a rare move for the Supreme Court to adjudicate at this time. The U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals haven’t yet issued their decision on whether the ban should remain in place in the aftermath of Defense Secretary James Mattis’s recommendations affirming Trump’s policy.

Esseks said the Supreme Court takes up cases at this stage “once a decade” and “there’s no reason” for justices to take up the cases before federal appeals courts render their decisions at the behest of the Trump administration.

“One of the reasons they want the Supreme Court to take the case is they don’t want to produce information in the trial courts,” Esseks said. “They don’t want to go through that discovery process and explain how and why they got to their decisions. They’re trying to short-circuit the normal process that would allow for full understanding about what was behind this.”

Three other petitions before the court are asking for clarification on whether Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bars employment discrimination on the basis of sex, also applies to cases of discrimination against LGBT people in the workforce.

As of earlier this week, those petitions were set for consideration in conference scheduled for Nov. 30, but the Supreme Court’s website now indicates those petitions were removed Nov. 26 from the docket and will be considered at a later time.

One of the petitions was filed by the anti-LGBT legal group Alliance Defending Freedom on behalf of Harris Funeral Homes in Michigan, which terminated the employment of transgender funeral director Aimee Stephens after she told the employer she’d transition on the job.

After the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Stephens’s favor, Alliance Defending Freedom filed the petition before the Supreme Court, asking justices to clarify whether Title VII bars workplace discrimination based on gender identity.

Two other petitions seek clarification on whether Title VII bars discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. One was filed by Altitude Express, which fired now deceased gay skydiver Donald Zarda allegedly because he was gay. The U.S. Second Circuit Court Appeals ruled the termination could be found unlawful under Title VII.

The other petition — the only one before

the Supreme Court seeking to advance LGBT rights — was filed in the case of *Bostock v. Clayton County* and seeks reversal of recently established precedent in the 11th Circuit that anti-gay discrimination isn’t covered under Title VII. The petition — which risks a Supreme Court ruling affirming anti-gay discrimination is legal — was filed by private attorneys, not LGBT legal groups.

Even if the Supreme Court were to take up cases on LGBT workplace rights, Esseks expressed optimism the Supreme Court would ultimately rule in favor of non-discrimination, pointing to polls showing widespread opposition to anti-LGBT discrimination (and in some cases, belief it’s already unlawful).

“These are also cases that are not only in synch with a bunch of lower courts, but completely in synch with the American public,” Esseks said. “Supermajorities of the American public think that it’s wrong and unlawful to fire people because they are LGBT. For the Supreme Court to take those protections away would be really quite a radical act, and so, that all gives me hope about how some of these cases could all come out.”

Jocelyn Samuels, executive director of the Williams Institute for the University of California, Los Angeles, said the Supreme Court has already ruled for an expanded view of laws against sex discrimination and the “increasing consensus” of lower courts is sex discrimination covers discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“I think analytically, and from a core understanding of the conduct intended to prohibit, the cases that find sexual orientation and gender discrimination are prohibited under current law rest on extremely strong grounds, so I would hope that the Supreme Court would understand the power of those arguments and the importance of respecting its own precedent,” Samuels said.

Another filing from Alliance Defending Freedom calls on the Supreme Court to undo a Pennsylvania school district’s policy allowing transgender kids to use the restroom consistent with their gender identity and seeks a reversal of a Third Circuit decision that it is unlawful under Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972.

Although the consensus among the courts is that the law prohibits discrimination against transgender students, Alliance Defending Freedom draws on that statute

“Supermajorities of the American public think that it’s wrong and unlawful to fire people because they are LGBT. For the Supreme Court to take those protections away would be really quite a radical act, and so, that all gives me hope about how some of these cases could all come out.”

- James Esseks, director of the LGBT project for the American Civil Liberties Union

to argue students shouldn't be forced to share facilities with transgender students.

Another petition is a follow-up to the Supreme Court's ruling in the Masterpiece Cakeshop case in favor of Jack Phillips, a Colorado baker who refused to sell a custom-made wedding cake to a same-sex couple out of religious objections. That ruling, which was based on the facts of the case, fell short of Phillips's call for the Supreme Court to find a First Amendment right for him to refuse service to same-sex couples for religious reasons.

The new petition before the Supreme Court was filed by Texas-based law firm First Liberty on behalf of Aaron and Melissa Kline of Sweetcakes in Gresham, Ore., who were fined \$135,000 after refusing to make a wedding cake for a lesbian couple.

The petition seeks a First Amendment right to refuse service to LGBT people. Additionally, the petition calls for the court to revisit precedent in the case of *Employment Division v. Smith*, which found states may accommodate acts that would otherwise be unlawful if they're performed in pursuit of religious beliefs, but aren't required to do so.

Another religious freedom petition was filed by Aloha Bed & Breakfast in Hawaii, which was penalized under state law for refusing to provide accommodations for a lesbian couple. The Hawaii Supreme Court refused to take up the case, which opened the door for the bed and breakfast to file a petition with the U.S. Supreme Court.

Yet another petition could come in the case of *Fulton v. Philadelphia*, which is based on the City of Philadelphia terminating its contract for foster care with Catholic Social Services after discovering the agency denies placement in LGBT homes. The agency is seeking a First Amendment right to maintain its contract despite terms in that agreement not to discriminate against LGBT people.

A ruling from the Third Circuit on a trial court's denial of a preliminary injunction for Catholic Social Services is expected soon. That could lead the Becket Fund, which is representing the agency, to file a petition for review before the Supreme Court.

The Becket Fund has already filed a preliminary request for relief from the Supreme Court, but the court in August refused to intervene at this stage in the legal process. Notably, U.S. Associate Justices Neil Gorsuch, Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas indicated in the order from the court they would have granted the relief.

Samuels said the court for religious freedom petitions may defer to its earlier resolution in the Masterpiece Cakeshop case and decline to issue sweeping decisions.

"I think in the Masterpiece Cakeshop decision, Justice Kennedy made very clear that the dignity of LGBT people is at stake and that is a critical interest for the government and one

One of the petitions was filed by the anti-LGBT legal group Alliance Defending Freedom on behalf of Harris Funeral Homes in Michigan, which terminated the employment of transgender funeral director Aimee Stephens after she told the employer she'd transition on the job.

well worth protecting," Samuels said. "Given the fact that decision was reached less than a year ago and that it reflects a uniformity of Supreme Court views because the dissenters would have done further to deny the religious liberty interests that were presented in that case, I would hope that that would suggest that that recognition of the core importance of LGBT equality and rights would continue to prevail even given the changing composition of the court."

It remains to be seen whether the Supreme Court will review any of these lawsuits. It takes a vote of at least four justices to grant a writ of certiorari, or agree to take up a case.


Whether the Supreme Court takes up these cases could depend on the views of recently confirmed U.S. Associate Justice Brett Kavanaugh, whom President Trump selected from a list of picks coordinated by the Federalist Society and the anti-LGBT Heritage Foundation and whose confirmation LGBT rights groups vehemently opposed.

As a judge for the U.S. Circuit Court for the D.C. Circuit, Kavanaugh had a scant record on LGBT rights prior to his confirmation to the Supreme Court. During his confirmation hearing under questioning from Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), he read a statement from the Masterpiece Cakeshop rejecting discrimination against gay people, but wouldn't say whether he agrees with that statement.

Jon Davidson, chief counsel for Freedom for All Americans, said whether the Supreme Court will take up the petitions remains uncertain and "the results are far from preordained," citing Kavanaugh as well as U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts.

"Because Justice Kavanaugh has never ruled on an LGBTQ rights case and has made very few public statements on LGBTQ issues, we do not actually know what his views are," Davidson said. "He also may be disinclined to lead in very different directions than Justice [Anthony] Kennedy, who was his mentor, for whom he clerked, who swore him in, and whose seat he is filling. It also is possible that Chief Justice Roberts, who is very concerned about the court's reputation, will be disinclined to have the court turn in directions dramatically inconsistent with national public opinion."

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



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George H.W. Bush 'Unsupportive' on Gay Rights, HIV/AIDS

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

Following the death of former President George H.W. Bush at age 94, the nation remembers him for his civil tone in contrast to President Trump and for helping bring the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union to a peaceful conclusion — but his legacy on LGBT rights and failure to confront the raging HIV/AIDS epidemic at the time remain a stain on his overall record.

Gay former Rep. Barney Frank, whose 32-year tenure in Congress included the George H.W. Bush administration from 1989 to 1992, told the Washington Blade in an interview Saturday the late former president “was bad” on LGBT rights and “wouldn’t do anything” to advance them.

“I asked him, for example, to rescind the Eisenhower rule that said we couldn’t get security clearances,” Frank said. “He refused to do it. Bill Clinton did a few years later.”

Frank also said Bush refused to roll back military’s ban on gay service members, which was administrative and not statutory in the days before the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” law of 1993.

“Bush was simply unsupportive on any issue,” Frank added.

Frank, however, qualified his remarks by saying Bush did a positive thing by appointing former U.S. Associate Justice David Souter to the U.S. Supreme Court.

But that appointment, Frank said, was undercut by Bush’s appointment of U.S. Associate Justice Clarence Thomas. Frank said Thomas — who dissented in every major gay rights decision, including the Obergefell decision in 2015 extending marriage equality nationwide — has been “totally negative.”

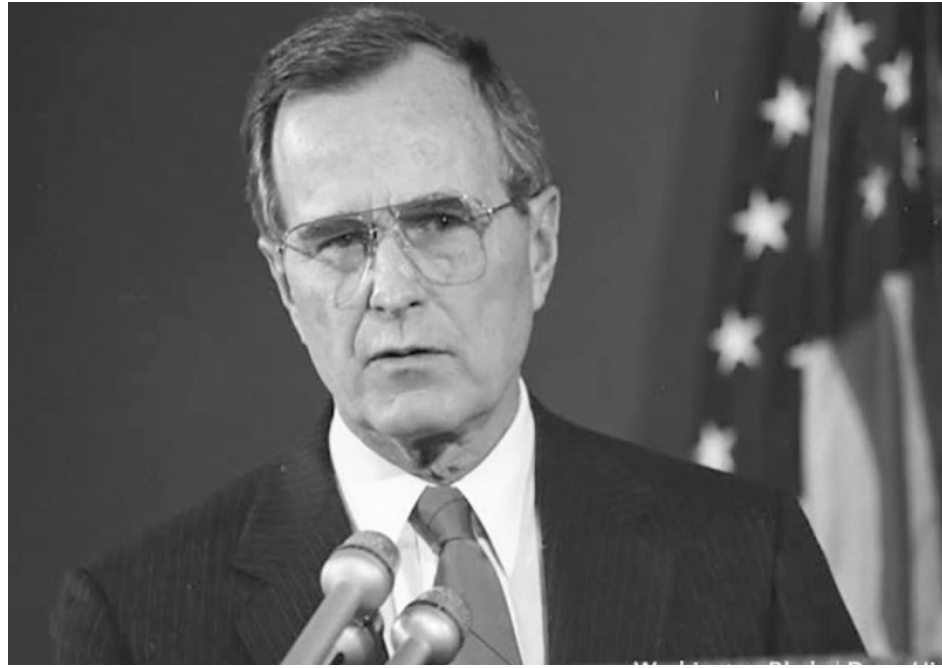
One exchange between a reporter and Bush in 1992, the final year of his administration, prominently exemplifies his anti-gay views. According to a clipping from the Los Angeles Times, a reporter from NBC News asked Bush how he would respond to a grandchild who came out as gay. Bush replied he’d “love that child,” he also denigrated being gay.

“I would put my arm around him and I would hope he wouldn’t go out and try to convince people that this was the normal lifestyle, that this was an appropriate lifestyle, that this was the way to be,” Bush reportedly said.

Bush reportedly added, “But I would say, I hope you wouldn’t become an advocate for a lifestyle that in my view is not normal, and propose marriages, same-sex marriages as a normal way of life. I don’t favor that.”

Urvashi Vaid, who served as executive director of the National LGBTQ Task Force at the time, said Monday the Bush administration “was not a friendly administration on LGBT issues.”

“I think our standards have really declined,” Vaid said. “Compared to the Trump administration it was better, compared to the



President George H.W. Bush speaks at the National Press Club on Jan. 5, 1988. (Washington Blade archive photo by Doug Hinckle)

Reagan administration, it was neutral, but President Bush continued many of the policies of the Reagan administration around LGBT people.”

Vaid added, “I think that that administration pandered to the right wing in the Republican Party and did not stand up to it and allowed itself to do a lot of things. The president allowed himself to be led by people who were far-right zealots like Patrick Buchanan.”

In 1992, Buchanan delivered a fiery speech at the Republican National Convention calling for a culture war, mocking Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton for being called pro-gay by “a militant leader of the homosexual rights movement” and urging followers to stand with Bush on the “amoral idea that gay and lesbian couples should have the same standing in law as married men and women.”

That year was the first-time the National Log Cabin Republicans made an endorsement decision in the presidential race. The group declined to support Bush because he refused to condemn Buchanan’s anti-gay rhetoric at the GOP convention.

Despite Bush’s anti-gay views, at least two pro-gay laws were enacted during the Bush administration. Among them was the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, which required the U.S. Justice Department to collect data on bias-motivated crimes based on a victim’s race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act was the first federal law to recognize and name gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Gay activists were invited to the White House during the signing ceremony on April 23, 1990.

During the event, Bush repudiated discrimination, praised civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., and enumerated the inclusion of sexual orientation in the law.

“Bigotry and hate regrettably still exist in this country, and hate breeds violence, threatening the security of our entire society,” Bush said. “We must rid our communities of the poison we call prejudice, bias and discrimination and that’s why I’m signing into law today the a measure to require the attorney general to collect as much information as we can on crimes motivated by religion, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation.”

The other pro-gay law was the Immigration Act of 1990, which included a repeal of the ban on “homosexuals or sex perverts,” or LGBT people, from entering the United States. That immigration exclusion was present in some capacity in immigration law since 1917, but was explicitly codified in 1952.

In 1990, Bush made an oblique reference to the removal of the LGBT travel ban in a signing statement for the overall bill.

“I am also pleased to note that this Act facilitates immigration not just in numerical terms, but also in terms of basic entry rights of those beyond our borders,” Bush said. “S. 358 revises the politically related ‘exclusion grounds’ for the first time since their enactment in 1952.”

Frank, however, said Bush deserves no credit for either the Hate Crimes Statistics Act or the repeal of LGBT ban in the Immigration Act of 1990.

The inclusion of the repeal language in the Immigration Act, Frank said, was part of a deal he made with former Sen. Alan Simpson, whom Frank called “one of the last pro-gay

Republicans.”

“I was on the immigration subcommittee and I had enough support from other Democrats to say that if they did not agree to include the repeal of the anti-gay stuff, I could defeat the bill,” Frank said. “That deal was originally worked out in ’86. It took a couple years to get the bill through, so Bush did sign that bill, but he didn’t have much choice. Congress had agreed without him that that would happen.”

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act, Frank said, was “actually a compromise” because Democrats in Congress wanted a hate crimes law with teeth, but Bush would only agree to a measure that collected data.

“It didn’t have any teeth,” Frank said. “Frankly, at the time, it wasn’t a big deal, and it wasn’t.”

It wouldn’t be until the Obama administration in 2009 when a broader Matthew Shepard & James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act giving the attorney general authority to investigate and prosecute hate crimes became law.

But Bush faced stronger criticism for continuing the inaction on HIV/AIDS as the epidemic raged during his administration. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, in 1989 the first year of the Bush administration, there were 21,628 AIDS-related deaths in the United States. That number rose to 24,524 in 1990, 28,569 in 1991 and 32,407 in 1992.

HIV/AIDS was the No. 1 issue facing the LGBT community at the time. The activist group ACT UP held die-ins to encourage the delivery of experimental drugs to people with HIV and held protests at the Food & Drug Administration, the White House and Bush’s summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine.

One protest in 1991 recorded and currently available on YouTube shows demonstrators holding signs reading, “It’s time for National Plan, George,” and chanting, “Health Care is a Right! We need more than Right to Life!”

Bush was publicly flustered by ACT UP and its tactics. In 1991, Bush called out the group by name in response to a reporter’s questions about its protests of the Catholic Church for opposing condom use. ACT UP’s efforts, Bush said, were “totally counterproductive” and an “excess of free speech,” according to the book “Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS.”

“To the degree that the AIDS question should be treated as a health question, they work even against that because of their outrageous actions,” Bush is quoted as saying. “And you’re talking to somebody who has his own meetings broken up by them — or had two or three of them in the last year. And I condemn the kinds of tactics that are offensive to mainstream Catholics, Protestants and Jews, anybody else. It’s an excess of free speech to use — to resort to some of the tactics these people use.”

In the aftermath of an ACT UP protest in Kennebunkport, Bush urged “behavioral change” to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

“Here’s a disease where you can control its spread by your own personal behavior,” Bush said. “You can’t do that in cancer.”

With regards to spending on HIV/AIDS, Bush dismissed the notion his administration wasn’t spending enough to fight the disease, asserting the U.S. government was “spending \$4 billion a year on AIDS research.”

“When you consider that on a per capita basis or compare it to heart disease or cancer, it’s an awful lot,” Bush said. “It’s far more.”

According to the Los Angeles Times at the time, the amount spent on AIDS research then was actually quite smaller and less than \$2 billion a year.

Despite anger over the government’s response to HIV/AIDS, in 1990 he was the first president to sign the Ryan White CARE Act, which has provided health coverage for low-income people with HIV/AIDS and reauthorized under George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The elder Bush also signed into law an Americans with Disabilities Act that barred discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS.

Vaid, who famously interrupted a speech Bush gave on HIV/AIDS, said those laws were

directly the result of activism from groups like ACT UP and wouldn’t have been signed otherwise.

“He was not doing enough as a leader,” Vaid said. “I think that those pressures and protests led by ACT UP all over the country ... that pressure is what pushed both members of Congress and the administration to do whatever it did. I can’t say that enough. I think there’s a sense that looking backwards that ‘well, you know, it would have happened, it just was a matter of time.’ It wouldn’t have happened. What we were up against were these really profound negative homophobic attitudes coupled with a right wing that was ... growing in power that these people had got elected through, pandering to that right wing. And so, those forces were very much what we had to deal with, and that’s why got so little action for so long.”

Larry Kramer, a longtime activist against HIV/AIDS, was succinct in response to a Blade email inquiry on whether Bush deserves credit for signing the Ryan White Care Act into law.

“I will not give him credit for anything,” Kramer said. “He hated us.”

Bush’s legacy on LGBT rights and HIV/AIDS stands in contrast to that of his wife, former first lady Barbara Bush, who died earlier this

year and was remembered for being a gay ally who fought to dispel AIDS stigma.

As the Washington Blade reported in 1990, Barbara Bush as first lady visited Grandma’s House, a D.C. home for children with AIDS. During the event, Barbara Bush held up an infant with AIDS and hugged a gay man with the disease, Lou Tesconi. Both the child and Tesconi would later succumb to AIDS.

In 1990, Barbara Bush wrote a letter responding to PFLAG co-founder Paulette Goodman, “We cannot tolerate discrimination against any individuals or groups in our country.” The letter is considered the first positive statement in history from the White House on gay people.

Bush’s anti-gay administration was a precursor to the anti-gay administration of his son, George W. Bush. In 2004, Bush made anti-gay positions a cornerstone of his reelection campaign, making a Federal Marriage Amendment that would have barred same-sex marriage nationwide a central plank. The measure came up in Congress in 2004 and 2006, but didn’t have enough support for ratification.

In the aftermath of his presidency, George H.W. Bush like many Americans signaled a change on LGBT rights and made headlines in 2013 when he participated in the Maine

Despite Bush’s anti-gay views, at least two pro-gay laws were enacted during the Bush administration.

Among them was the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, which required the U.S. Justice Department to collect data on bias-motivated crimes based on a victim’s race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

wedding of lesbian couple Bonnie Clement and Helen Thorgalsen, who were longtime friends of the Bush family, and served as witness for the ceremony.

Bush, who said during his 1988 campaign he “didn’t want same-sex marriage codified,” wrote later in a 2015 biography he still “believe[s] in traditional marriage,” but has “mellowed” on the issue.

“People should be able to do what they want to do, without discrimination,” Bush wrote. “People have a right to be happy. I guess you could say I have mellowed.”

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

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Get Off Social Media and Take to the Streets

BY CLAUDIA PADRÓN CUETO

This article was originally published on Tremenda Nota's website in Spanish. Editor's note: Tremenda Nota is an independent e-zine in Cuba that covers the LGBTI community and other minority groups. It is the Washington Blade's media partner in the country.

HAVANA — While churches oppose same-sex marriage and the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX) fails to take a strong public position, Cuban LGBTI+ activists who are less organized than religious institutions are forced to campaign on different platforms.

At three in the afternoon on Oct. 27 at the intersection of Prado and Malecón Streets in Havana, a kiss-in (or besuqueo as the organizers called it) was planned in support of same-sex marriage. A few hours earlier more than 600 people had confirmed their attendance and the event had been shared hundreds of times on social media. The slogan called to “take kisses out of the closet.”

During the kiss-in Proyecto Abriendo Brechas de Colores (ABC) – LGTBI (Opening Color Gaps Project), a group seeking to “generate spaces for dialogue between religious and social discourses regarding women's and LGBTIQ+ people's rights,” planned to hand out leaflets on religious fundamentalism, as well as posters and stickers about sexual diversity and gender.

ABC was going to project videos produced during the All Rights for All Families campaign. The most creative kisses would also be photographed. They were going to raise the flag for diversity in the Prado area.

However, one day before the planned event ABC publicly cancelled the kiss-in because they had not received state permission to take to the streets.

Despite the cancellation a flash mob took over the intersection of Prado and Malecón.

Event organizers and other activists connected with CENESEX also showed up, and they kissed.

The kiss-in had no major impact: There were 30 people instead of the hundreds planned.

The event's cancellation and the promoters' hesitancy were criticized on social media by several activists. The poet Norge Espinosa summed up his disappointment like this: “True activism is done with daring, with an urgent willingness to go beyond the permitted limits, or it isn't done.”

Ironically, days before ABC cancelled the kiss-in the Mariano Methodist Church gathered approximately 3,500 members of its flock to show their opposition to same-sex marriage, according to a publication on their Facebook page. They held a mass event without anyone's permission.



A group of LGBTI+ activists on Prado and Malecón Streets in Havana on Oct. 27, 2018. Photo courtesy of Jimmy Roque Martínez.

Churches versus Activists

So far Cuban churches have held a firm position against same-sex marriage and “the ideology of gender” on their institutional websites and social media.

However, their activism has also transcended the borders of the virtual world. Parishioners have distributed posters and stickers across the country defending the “original design of the family, as God created it.” They have also taken to the streets around their churches to protest. If that was not enough they have also “published” their message in the *El paquete semanal* or *The Weekly Package*, a Cuban alternative to the Internet that proves a terabyte of data for readers.

Now they want to go even further. Reverend Alida León, president of the Cuban Evangelical League, confirmed to Tremenda Nota that 20 different denominations have collected signatures against Article 68. “We don't have anything against homosexuals but we demand that the concept of marriage be maintained as God created it.”

Indeed, on Nov. 13, more than a dozen Christian denominations published a letter sent to the Constitutional Reform Commission at the Communist Party's Central Committee. The 13 churches that signed the document stated that they had collected almost 180,000 signatures against modifying the concept of marriage in the new constitution.

If Article 68 is kept in the draft constitution, the Christian community could vote against it in the next referendum. In the text “Article 68:

Evangelicals, Catholics, the LGBTI movement and the smoke screens” the intellectual and activist Alberto Abreu Arcia argues that León Báez, one of the Cuban evangelical Church's leaders, declared, “If marriage is not modified in the draft constitution, we will all vote against it.”

According to Instituto Patmos in 2017, 10 percent of the Cuban population stated they were evangelicals, while 35 percent considered themselves to be nominally Catholic. The Christian denominations are organized and they have a presence throughout Cuba. They have places to meet and mechanisms to communicate directly with the state. This puts independent activism on a back foot in this debate.

Many defenders of LGBTI+ rights in Cuba have had to follow a script written by CENESEX. In May they held a procession to a conga beat and then they went back to social networks, where reports, messages and campaigns amass. They cannot reach the streets without the government's consent.

“The social networks and digital environment have become a stand in for the lack of legitimacy in other spaces, but they make it impossible to meet all the challenges,” young activist Yadiel Cepero explains to Tremenda Nota.

“In the interest of transforming the current state of affairs I think, like many other activists, that the LGBTI+ agenda should be promoted alongside civil and political rights so that collectives can become legal, unite, have spaces to meet and make use of mechanisms for participating and impacting on politics,” Cepero argues.

The founder of the debate platform

“Constructing an Agenda for Sexual Diversity in Cuba” believes that the first step for defenders of LGBTI+ rights is taking the risk of grabbing public space. “The church put up its posters and nothing happened. What are we afraid of?”

However, during the debates on the constitution a sector of Cuban activism has lagged behind the churches, confident of the state's role as guarantor of rights.

“We have a powerful legacy of inactivity, of fear, often because they have not allowed us to make our own way,” states activist and lawyer Lidia Romero. “We have reached an important moment to demand our rights and it seems like we don't know what to do, or how to organize ourselves.”

Only on May 17 — International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia — does the government, through CENESEX, permit activists, LGBTI+ people or supporters of sexual rights to march. (Photo by Yariel Valdés González)

Some activists believe that the approval of Article 68 is a foregone conclusion, so they think it is a waste of time reacting to the religious groups. In his blog, *Paquito el de Cuba*, journalist Francisco Rodríguez Cruz argued that they shouldn't be afraid that, “The matrix of conservative opinion of some churches can impose itself on the rest of society.”

The blogger explains that the results of the public consultation will not be based on the number of signatures collected by churches or the number of arguments against Article 68, “Rather by analyzing the pertinence of each proposal that emerges from the debate, by the commission writing the draft constitution and Parliament, which will approve the final text before the referendum.”

Rodríguez Cruz's opinion is supported by statements made by State Council Secretary Homero Acosta Álvarez. Last Oct. 17, during the inauguration of the International Congress ABOGACÍA 2018, the lawyer said, “Rights cannot be the perpetual slave to social backwardness, even when in the moment it could lead to clashes with parts of the social spectrum. A mission to transform must also promote development.”

“Let's organize more kiss-ins”

Over the last few weeks some activists have started to circulate short videos on social networks where LGBTI+ people (and others) show their support for Article 68 of the draft constitution.

68th Pages, Acepto, For Same-Sex Marriage in Cuba, Proyecto Abriendo Brechas de Colores – LGTBI [ABC], Constructing an Agenda for Diversity in Cuba and the Metropolitan Community Church in Cuba are heading different campaigns on social networks. Many others are also joining in from their personal profiles or blogs.

See *Off Social Media*, continued on p. 18

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Divine Peace
Rev. Carolyn Mobley-Bowie
Worship, 9:30 a.m.
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Wednesday, Dec. 12

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Blue Christmas 7 p.m.
26998 Woodward Avenue
and 11 Mile Road, Royal
Oak
248-546-1255
stjohnro.org

Salem Church
Worship Sunday, 10 a.m.
33424 Oakland Ave.,
Farmington
248-474-6880
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Grosse Pointe
Congregational Church
Worship Sunday, 10 a.m.
Rev. Richard Yeager-Stiver
240 Chalfonte, Grosse
Pointe Farms
313-884-3075
gpcong.org

Sunday, Dec. 23

St. John's Episcopal
Church
Healing and Eucharist,
11 a.m.
26998 Woodward Avenue
and 11 Mile Road, Royal
Oak
248-546-1255
stjohnro.org

MCC Detroit
Rev. Roland Stringfellow
Church Service, 11:30 a.m.
205 N. Main St., Clawson
248-399-7741
mccdetroit.org

Antioch Lutheran Church
Worship, 9:30 a.m.
33360 W. 13 Mile Road,
Farmington Hills
antiochelca.org

Whosoever Ministry
Sunday Service, 11:30 a.m.
240 Chalfonte, Grosse
Pointe Farms
888-770-1322
whosoeverministry.org

Monday, Dec. 24

St. John's Episcopal
Church
Christmas Eve Services
5:30 p.m. & 10:30 p.m.
26998 Woodward Avenue
and 11 Mile Road, Royal
Oak
248-546-1255
stjohnro.org

First Presbyterian Church
of Northville
Candlelight Services, 7
p.m. & 9 p.m.
200 E. Main St., Northville
248-349-0911
fpcnorthville.org

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Services, 4 p.m. and 6
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unityroyaloak.org

Salem Church
Christmas Eve Candlelight
Service 7 p.m.
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Christmas Eve Services
5 p.m. & 11 p.m.
Rev. Richard Yeager-Stiver
240 Chalfonte, Grosse
Pointe Farms
313-884-3075
gpcong.org

Divine Peace
Rev. Carolyn Mobley-Bowie
Christmas Ever Service
7 p.m.
6650 Elizabeth Lake
Road, Waterford Township
248-332-1186
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Monday, Dec. 31

Unity of Royal Oak
New Years Eve Burning
Bowl Service 6 p.m.
2500 Crooks Road
248-288-3550
unityroyaloak.org

Tuesday, Jan. 1

Unity of Royal Oak
White Stone Ceremony
10 a.m.
2500 Crooks Road
248-288-3550
unityroyaloak.org

► Off Social Media

Continued from p. 16

However, the proposals and campaigns generated on these digital platforms do not go beyond a virtual space in a country where the majority of people are still not online.

A few months ago, on May 11, 20 Cuban intellectuals and activists published a detailed agenda for LGBTI+ rights in Cuba. The document, the first of its kind in the country, includes 63 specific demands and is divided into two large sections: legislative and political measures, plans and strategies. All of those signing it were members of civil society.

Some of the signatories are activists who are looking for

alternative ways to channel their demands that are independent of the state and CENESEX.

CENESEX "is an institution that excludes those that don't agree with their political ideas. They also do not they share their work progress. They just ask us to trust that they 'are working,' without providing any more information. They don't treat us as equals or as members," adds Romero.

Recently activist Sandra Álvarez Ramírez, formally CENESEX's webmaster and member of the editorial board for the magazine Sexología y Sociedad (Sexology and Society) asked about the cancellation of the kiss-in. CENESEX responded via Facebook that, "Real

See next page

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Pope Francis Says He's Worried About Homosexuality in the Priesthood

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY — Men with deep-rooted homosexual tendencies should not be admitted to the Catholic clergy, and priests who are gay should be celibate or leave rather than lead a double life, Pope Francis said in a new book.

Francis made the comments in a book-length interview with Spanish priest Fernando Prado called "The Strength of Vocation," in which he discusses the challenges of being a priest or nun today.

The pope said in the book that homosexuality in the Church "is something that worries me." It is due to be published this week in several languages. An advance copy of the Spanish version was provided to NBC News by a Vatican spokesperson and the Italian version was made available to Reuters. The Vatican did not comment on the content of the book.

"The question of homosexuality is a very serious one," he said, adding that those entrusted with training men to be priests must be certain that candidates are "humanly and emotionally mature" before they can be ordained.

"In our societies, it even seems homosexuality is fashionable. And this mentality, in some way, also influences the life of the church," Francis was quoted as telling his interviewer.

Francis is quoted in the book as commenting on a clergyman who had told him that having gays in Catholic religious housing "isn't so grave" because it's "only an expression of affection."

That reasoning "is in error," Francis said. "In consecrated life and priestly life, there is no room for this kind of affection."

"For this reason, the Church urges that persons with this rooted tendency not be accepted into (priestly) ministry or consecrated life," he said.

He urged homosexuals who are already priests or nuns to be celibate and responsible to avoid creating scandal. "It is better that they leave the priesthood or the consecrated life rather than live a double life," he said. The pope has warned Italian bishops in the past to vet seminarians closely and reject those they suspect might be gay.

Still, Francis, as he has in the past, stressed that gay Catholics contribute to the life of the church. He said the church must always remember that "they are persons who will live in the service of the church, of the Christian community, of the people of God. Let's never forget this perspective."

Francis in his papacy has sought to stress that while obeying church teachings, the faithful must also be compassionate and open to others with different views.

Catholic teaching considers homosexual activity sinful, and that everyone, except married heterosexual couples, should abstain from sex.

The mid-August interview with Francis was conducted less than two weeks before Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the Vatican's former ambassador to the Vatican, threw the Church into turmoil with a bombshell statement against the pope and Vatican officials on Aug. 26.

Vigano said a "homosexual network" existed in the Vatican, whose members helped promote each other's careers in the Church.

He also accused the pope of having ignored alleged sexual misconduct with adult male seminarians by former American cardinal Theodore McCarrick, 88.

The Vatican said Vigano's accusations were riddled with "calumny and defamation."

The Catholic Church has been haunted for more than two decades by evidence of thousands of cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy around the world, in countries ranging from the United States to Australia, Ireland, Belgium, Germany and Chile.

In July, McCarrick became the first cardinal to resign in nearly 100 years after U.S. Church officials said allegations made in a separate investigation that he had sexually abused a 16-year-old boy almost 50 years ago were credible and substantiated.

McCarrick has said he had no recollection of the alleged abuse of the minor, but has not commented on the allegations of misconduct with the seminarians, which allegedly took place decades ago.

limitations," states Romero.

Less united, and lagging behind the churches, activists are starting to quietly leave networks, they are starting to realize that they need to rebuild the state, institutions and the parts of society refusing to let all people have all rights.

Jimmy Roque Martinez does not believe that those sympathetic to the cause of sexual rights should quietly wait around for the results of the constitutional referendum. "Along with the life stories and opinions that started to circulate on social networks and the pages created, we are also going to organize new kiss-ins, but these won't be canceled" he promises.

► Off Social Media

Continued from p. 18

journalists don't receive instructions from Berlin" referring to the fact that the Cuban psychologist lives in Germany.

For many activists the current panorama is made worse by the lack of coherence within the Cuban LGBTI+ movement. "If you don't have spaces to meet, or to take action, or an institution that represents you as a whole, and you can't even legally associate, then there is no unified work. But we must overcome these



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Margot Robbie Holds Queer Court

Photo: Focus Features

'Mary Queen of Scots' Star Talks Queen Elizabeth Drag and DC Comics Icon Harley Quinn's Queerness

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

After a fierce, Oscar-nominated turn as scandalous skater Tonya Harding in 2017's "I, Tonya," Margot Robbie is off the ice and holding royal court as Queen Elizabeth I in "Mary Queen of Scots." Exercising a power over Europe so great during the 16th century's latter half, nothing could stop Her Majesty – not even her cousin, Mary Stuart (portrayed by Saoirse Ronan).

Their vicious and ultimately deadly contention, the result of Mary's request to be Elizabeth's heir, is chronicled with delicious matriarchal bite for the #MeToo era, period-film glam (those gowns!) and one very infamous beheading in director Josie Rourke's diverse doozy of a historical drama. Beau Willimon's screenplay also turns a tender, heartbreaking

eye to Elizabethan Era queerness via Mary's friend and private secretary, David Rizzio, known in the film simply as Rizzio and portrayed by Ismael Cruz Cordova.

Ruler of the box-office in films such as 2013's "The Wolf of Wall Street" and 2016's "Suicide Squad," as hammer-wielding warrior Harley Quinn, a role she will reprise in 2020 for a Harley-centered spin-off, "Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)," the 28-year-old Australian actress is a queen in her own right.

Read on for Robbie's essential tips for drag queens looking to perfect their Elizabeth look (hint: no arsenic) – plus, talk about her "too gay to function" brother Cameron Robbie, whom she considers her best friend, and a career highlight: watching Martin Scorsese direct a gay orgy.

What tips do you have for drag queens looking to transform themselves into Queen Elizabeth I?

(Laughs) Well, you definitely want to avoid getting smallpox – you have to really layer on the makeup to hide those pox-mark scars! So avoid that at all costs. For a drag makeover, I could give you a list of what *not* to do: number one, don't put lead and arsenic in your makeup the way Queen Elizabeth did because, uh, it really could shorten your life. And I love that she stuck to the red hair and went with the even more vibrant color red and the more elaborate hairstyles as the years progressed.

The contrast with the white makeup, it really worked on her.

Mhmm! Serious contrasting. I mean, she had very thin eyebrows – I don't think that's

really the style these days. Not really in vogue right now.

But if you really want to set yourself apart...

Exactly. If you wanna make it clear that you're really heading toward Queen Elizabeth, yeah, the thin eyebrows are a definite giveaway. White makeup. Fiery red wigs. And just bedazzle yourself. Jewels everywhere!

They wore their jewelry in a different way. Instead of wearing necklaces and bracelets and earrings, which they did do, jewels and diamonds and rubies were sewn into their outfits, which I thought was really amazing. Then when they would get undressed – at the end of it their ladies-in-waiting would undress them – the jewels would just scatter to the floor and someone would have a dustpan and sweep them up for the next outfit.

When you read the script, were you surprised by the film's queerness? And were you disappointed that Mary got a gay "sister" friend in Rizzio and you didn't?

Yes! I was very jealous of Mary's plot in general. I think it was actually a big part of it, that Elizabeth was more isolated. I think that was kind of self-inflicted; she had such a mistrust in almost everyone around her and had a very cynical nature out of self-preservation, therefore she isolated herself. Even with the gowns, you see over the years, as they get bigger and bigger, she's literally keeping people at arm's length at all times. So, I was very jealous that I didn't have the same (relationship) as Mary and Rizzio. So very unfair. (Laughs)

What surprised you most about this time period?

I was interested to kind of discover that the Renaissance period was much more liberal in terms of sexuality than it is today. It's interesting to kind of consider that, or to recognize how we just put labels on everything today. We label everything, and in doing so we often simplify often-complicated things. We're so quick to say, "This person's straight, this person's bisexual, this person's gay, this person's Republican, this person's whatever," and we label everything.

But in terms of sexuality, the Renaissance period, they were far more fluid about sexuality, and bisexual wasn't really a term that had to be placed on someone – it was very common for men to be married and also sleep with other men. That wasn't something that people felt the need to label.

So that was really interesting, and then on the flip side, the women at the time, particularly female monarchs, literally were a body. That was their commodity. Producing a male heir was kind of their purpose, and once they had done that and achieved their purpose they were kind of swept aside. So, it was interesting to see, on one side, how liberal and open sexuality could be at the time – but, on the other side, how women were seen as a commodity, and not more than a conduit for their male successor.

Shifting to your portrayal of Tonya Harding, did you know that you were playing someone who many in the LGBTQ community consider a queer icon?

I did not realize that at the time. I did hear that, and I thought, "Oh, she's got some pretty fun skate costumes!" But tell me more about that.

It's her underdog status.

Underdog status – I love that, yes. Well, as an Aussie, we always gravitate toward underdog stories, anyway, so yeah, that's one of the reasons I played her.

Is being an underdog an Aussie thing?

Yeah, yeah. Always. The country identifies itself as an underdog itself and has that

mentality of fighting for your place, so I love underdog stories.

You've long fought for LGBTQ underdogs. You were a staunch supporter of marriage equality before Australia finally legalized same-sex marriage. You even wore a "Say I Do Down Under" shirt when you hosted "Saturday Night Live" in 2016. December marks the one-year anniversary of that landmark ruling. How did you celebrate the legalization of same-sex marriage in Australia last year?

Honestly, I almost didn't feel like celebrating because I was so upset that it took them that long to legalize it. I feel like when it was legalized across America that's when I really wanted to celebrate. I thought, "Wow, this is a long way for America to come." America, to me, holds such conservative Christian values, generally speaking, so for that to happen in America was like, "Wow, this is really a time to celebrate."

The fact that Australia, which really does pride itself on being such a progressive nation – and it is in a lot of ways. Australia is awesome and can be so progressive. But the fact that we were so late in doing that upset me so deeply that I truly almost didn't want to celebrate because I thought they didn't deserve celebration.

Too little, too late, Australia?

(Laughs) Yes, too late, Australia! No, no; it was bittersweet. Of course I was happy and proud that we finally joined the 21st century in that regard, but at the same time, it was bittersweet. I really felt it should've been done a lot sooner.

You have a brother, Cameron, who has described himself on Instagram as "too gay to function." Are you aware of the gay community's interest in your brother?

No! But I'm sure he would love to hear that. He's awesome. I have two brothers and a sister, but Cameron and I were particularly close growing up. He's always been my best friend – since he was born, really. So, he would be thrilled to hear that. He would really appreciate that.

How did he come out to you?

Well, I guess that's kind of his story to tell. I wouldn't feel right to speak on his behalf. But like I said, he's my best friend, as are all my siblings. I love them endlessly and always will.

Does he take you to gay bars?

I've been going to gay bars and clubs since I got my ID – and probably long before that! There was this fantastic gay club in Melbourne, so when I turned 18 – 18 is the legal drinking age in Australia – and while I was living in Melbourne we used to always go, because on a Saturday night they would do a musical drag performance. It was always incredible. I don't know how they would get it

See **Margot Robbie**, continued on p. 24



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UMS Presents 'Winterreise' Dec. 16

BY BTL STAFF

Contemporary opera composer Jake Heggie describes Joyce DiDonato's mezzo-soprano voice as "staggering": "(It) reminds us that in any generation there are a few giants. ... Those who know her repertoire are in awe of her gifts, and those who know nothing of it are instantly engaged," Heggie said in Gramophone magazine.

Having performed at Ann Arbor's University Music Society before, DiDonato's debut performance of Handel's "Ariodante" was a fan favorite.

Now returning for her UMS recital debut, she is set to perform Schubert's "Winterreise," "a dramatic song cycle of 24 poems, usually sung by a tenor, that journeys through grief to despair," said event organizers. "She is joined for this very special duo recital by Yannick



Nézet-Séguin, music director of both the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera, who trades in his baton for a piano."

This performance will be held Sunday, Dec. 16, at 4 p.m. and will be performed in German with English supertitles. For more information about the performance and ticket prices go online to ums.org.

Ann Arbor LezRead 'The Spanish Pearl' Dec. 8

BY BTL STAFF

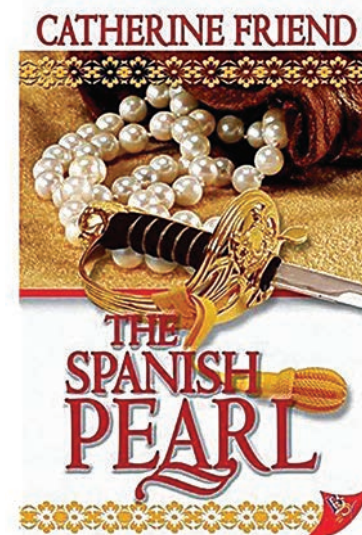
A book club specifically intended for queer women, LezRead meets regularly at the Jim Toy Community Center in Ann Arbor to discuss books on the fourth Saturday of every month. This month's selection is "The Spanish Pearl" by Catherine Friend.

"We've enjoyed many of her books, including 'Hit By a Farm,' and 'The Crown of Valenica,' the sequel to 'Spanish Pearl,'" said event organizers. "Succinctly put by Friend, 'The Spanish Pearl' is an epic adventure spiced with humor, lust and danger — a story with surprising twists that will capture your imagination just as Kate's dilemma captures your heart."

For additional perspective, Friend states: "I write stories to escape the despair and violence and pressures surrounding all of us in the 21st century. If that's what you're looking for too give The Spanish Pearl a try."

Meetings usually last two hours, the first spent talking about the book and the second enjoying drinks and snacks at Aut Bar. Organizers said that first-time attendees should bring a small cash donation for the use of the community center.

This event will be from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 8. More information can be found online on the group's LezRead Facebook page.



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After decades of service to the LGBTQ community of Ann Arbor the bookstore will close Dec. 31. Come thank owners Martin Contreras and Keith Orr and the store's staff for their commitment to keeping our LGBTQ bookstore open for so many years, and help them to clear out their extensive inventory of unique books and gift items by purchasing something - all deeply discounted to go!

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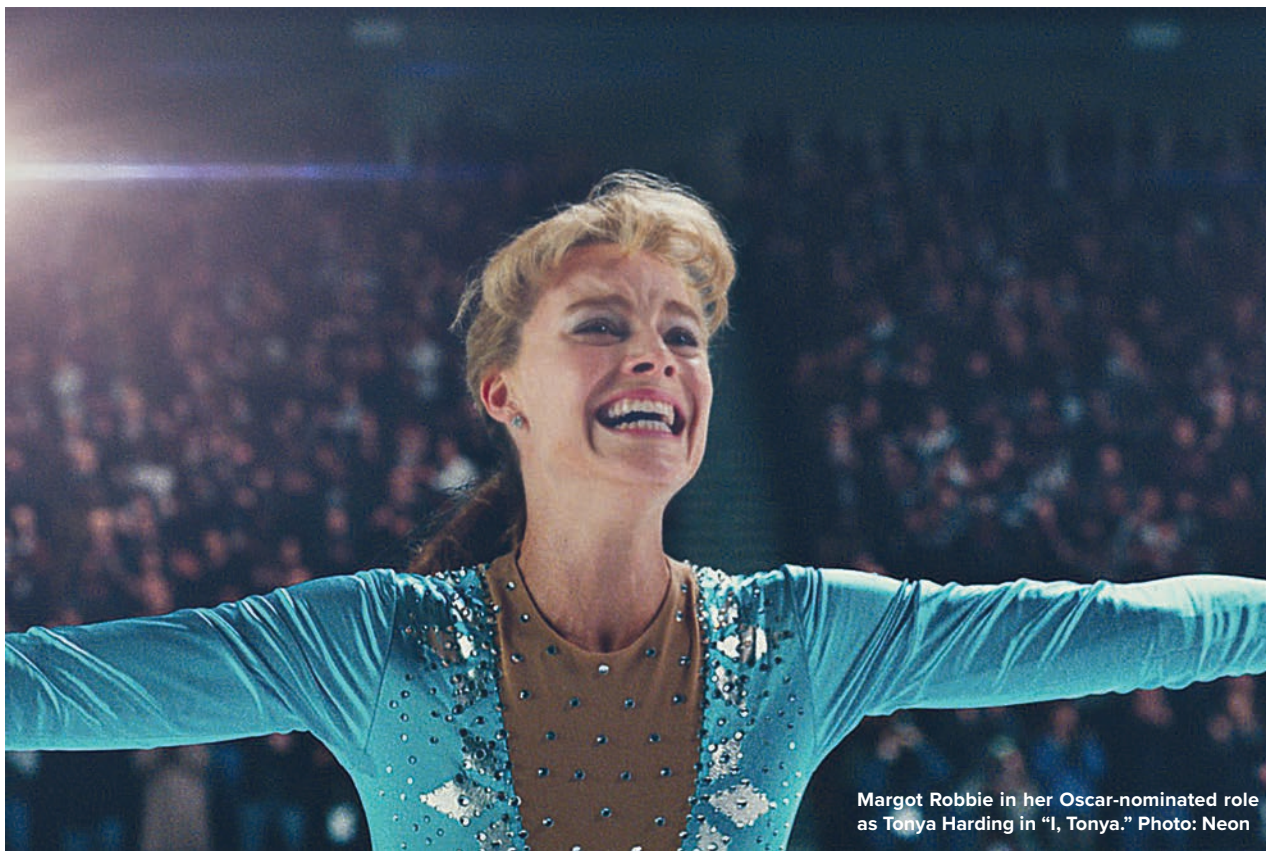
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Margot Robbie in her Oscar-nominated role as Tonya Harding in "I, Tonya." Photo: Neon

► Margot Robbie

Continued from p. 21

together every week. I don't know where they found the time or the costumes; they had the costumes put together, the musical art, the choreography.

But every Saturday night we would go to this club and just have the best time ever. And I remember they did this one musical performance about "Wicked" and it was just the best thing you've ever seen. So, I've been going to gay clubs ever since I've legally been able to go to clubs. I always have more fun.

Those queens are gonna be very proud to see you as an actual queen.

Yes, I hope so!

Iconically, you walked in on a gay orgy dressed in Versace in "The Wolf of Wall Street." Was that a first for you?

That was a first for me. I can't say that I've walked in on any gay orgies in the past.

In a Versace outfit, no less.

In the most fabulous Versace outfit you've ever seen! I really wish that they got more screen time – I don't think you ever get to see them – but they were incredible vintage Versace boots buckled all the way up to mid-calf.

Hate to break it to you, Margot, but I don't think that scene was about your boots.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I don't think anyone

was looking at the boots. But to watch Martin Scorsese choreograph a gay orgy was truly a highlight of my career. He really approached it with as much professionalism and dedication as any other scene in the movie. I mean, a lot of the scenes are absolutely crazy, with so much happening, but to see him sort of choreograph the gay orgy was truly a wonderful experience.

I had read that Scorsese even brought in another choreographer, Michael Arnold, to help organize the shoot.

Oh yeah! It was intricate. There was a lot going on. It was wonderful to be a part of it, though.

In August, DC Comics confirmed that Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy are married, and in 2020, you will play Harley in her own movie. For "Birds of Prey," are you mindful of the way Harley is portrayed when it comes to her sexuality?

Yeah. If you read the comics you know that Poison Ivy and Harley have an intimate relationship. In some comics they convey it as a friendship; in other comics you can see that they're actually sexually involved as a couple. I've been trying to – I would love to have Poison Ivy thrown into the universe, because the Harley and Poison Ivy relationship is one of my favorite aspects of the comics, so I'm looking to explore that on screen.

Have you considered who you'd want as Poison Ivy?

You know what? I've thought about it a lot and there's no one person who

springs to mind. I'm pretty open-minded.

You have your own production company, LuckyChap Entertainment, which is committed to producing female-led films. How conscious are you of LGBTQ inclusion in the films and TV shows your company produces?

Our goal for the company has always been to tell female-driven content with as many female filmmakers as possible. As far as including content for the LGBTQ community, that's a huge aspect. We make movies for audiences to love. A huge portion of the audience is a part of the LGBTQ community, so we obviously wanna make content for everyone. I don't know if anyone could say that they don't have someone close to them who isn't a part of that community, so of course it's important. It's a part of everyone's life; everyone's gonna relate to those stories. We have a lot happening, actually, at the company, especially on the TV side. I'm not sure when they would actually be released – nothing's been announced yet – but what I can say is, absolutely. We always wanna make stories for everyone.

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



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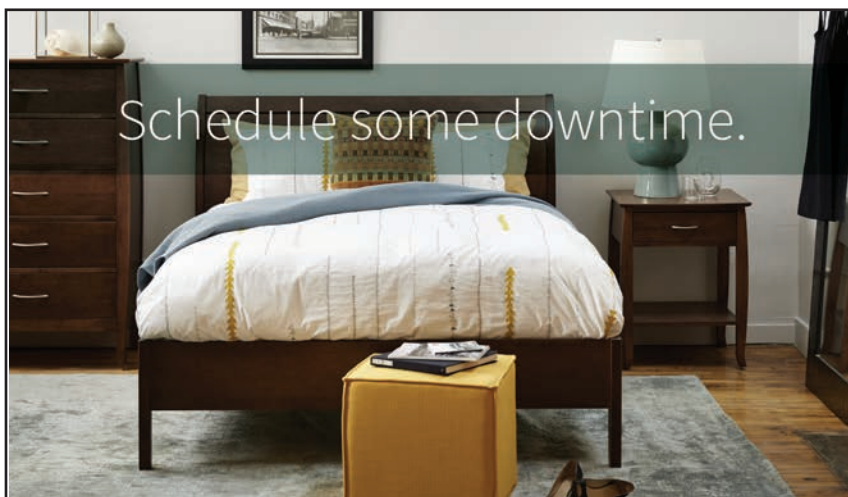


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Jazz & Soul Singer Sky Covington & Club Crescendo Live Every Thursday Night 9 p.m. No Cover. Northern Lights Lounge, 660 W. Baltimore, Detroit. 248-445-1277. northernlightslounge.com.

Saturday, December 8

The Detroit Prohibition Bus Tour 10am Join us for four hours of fascinating Prohibition history in Detroit! We'll visit

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Monday, December 10

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Macomb County 6:30 p.m. Macomb Teen/Youth Support Group: All youth are welcome to attend this free group. Come and meet other trans* youth and teens and support each other through your journeys. Dakota High School, 21051 21 Mile Road, Macomb. 586-723-2700. chippewavalley.schools.org.

Wednesday, December 12

Stand with Trans Youth Support Group – Flint – Genesee 6:30 p.m. Free to all, Trans Youth Support Group. Facilitator

Sara Griffin, MA, LPC is a psychotherapist and a parent of a transgender son, eiregriff@aol.com. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Flint, 2474 S. Ballenger Hwy, Flint. 810-232-4023. uuf Flint.org. standwithtrans.org.

Thursday, December 13

Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce Merge & Mixer 6:30 p.m. Michigan Employee Resource Groups for Equality (MERGE) Monthly Networking Event. Soho, 205 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-542-7646. info@detroitlgbtchamber.com. ferndalesoho.com.

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Farmington Hills – Oakland County 7 p.m. All youth are welcome to attend this free group. Oakland United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road, Farmington. 248-626-3620. oaklandumc.org. standwithtrans.org.

Toastmasters International SpeakOUT! LGBTQ Meeting 7 p.m. Professional & personal communication skills

development. With better communications skills, you'll better your leadership style as well as your relationships. Warm & welcoming members. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 734-995-9867. lawrencemoeb@gmail.com.

Friday, December 14

Home for the Holiday 16: Songwriter Showcase and Charity Drive 8 p.m. The 16th annual showcase raises donations for goods for the homeless population in Detroit. 7 singer-songwriters will perform for the cause. PJs Lagerhouse, 1254 Michigan Ave., Detroit. 313-961-4668.

MUSIC & MORE

New 'Holiday Belles' House Tour at Ford House Thru January 6, With replica holiday décor and new stories, this new tour gives you a glimpse into the society scene of the 1960s during the grand holiday receptions Eleanor Ford hosted

Editor's Pick

GenderBender Drag Show at Planet Ant Theatre Dec. 30

GenderBender is a night of drag performances that span the gender spectrum that will transform into a night of dancing. It is hosted by Sam Meier and Ian Sparkle and will feature a variety of DJs and a bar. Doors open at 9 p.m. For more information about the event email sam.meier93@gmail.com.



Editor's Pick

Mega 80s Ugly Christmas Sweater, Speedo, Romper and Romphim Party

On Friday Dec. 21 Ferndale's Magic Bag will host this 21+ event with music by The Mega 80s and an invitation for all guests to wear their favorite getup from within the theme selection. Doors open at 8 p.m. and more information can be found online at themagicbag.com.



for her granddaughters and features stories. Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, 1100 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe Shores. 313-884-4222. info@fordhouse.org. holidaybelles.fordhouse.org.

RACE: Are We So Different? Thru Dec. 9, 10 a.m. This exhibit is the first in a series of events designed to inspire community conversations, presented by the University of Michigan-Flint and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. Sloan Museum, 1221 East Kearsley St., Flint. 810-237-3450. sloan@sloanlongway.org.

AEG Presents 'Hip Hop Nutcracker' December 6, 6:30 p.m. Detroit Masonic Temple, 3011 W. Grand Blvd., #100, Detroit. 800-854-2196. templedetroit.com. aegpresents.com.

Beethoven's Fifth Dec. 6, 7:30 p.m. No other musical statement can match its raw power and bracing energy. Carlos Miguel Prieto conducts Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and Christian Tetzlaff plays Brahms' impassioned Violin Concerto. Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-576-5111. dso.org.

AEG Presents The Piano Guys at the Fox Theatre December 7, 6:30 p.m. Hailing from Utah. Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-471-6611. aegpresents.com.

Theatre and Dance at Wayne Presents 'December Dance Concert' December 7, 7:30 p.m. Contemporary dance masters come together for one thrilling weekend! Detroit Music Hall, 350 Madison St., Detroit. 313-887-8501. musicall.org. wsushows.com.

A Charlie Brown Christmas with Cyrus Chestnut & Friends Dec. 7, 8 p.m. The holidays don't officially arrive until you hear Vince Guaraldi's classic score from A Charlie Brown Christmas. Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-576-5111. dso.org.

The Detroit Prohibition Bus Tour Dec. 8, 10 a.m. Join us for four hours of fascinating Prohibition history in Detroit! Bus Tour, 1400 Wilkins, Detroit. marion@magicalmichigantours.com.

Stirling's Rock n' Roll Birthday Show December 8, 9 p.m. Veteran music promoter/nightclub impresario Stirling will celebrate his birthday Detroit style! 21+ Northern Lights Lounge, 660 W. Baltimore, Detroit. 248-445-1277. northernlightslounge.com.

Holiday Pops with the Phil December 13, 6 p.m. Get into the spirit of the season with the Michigan Phil performing all your holiday favorites along with a beautiful Mozart horn concerto. The Penn Theatre, 760 Penniman Ave., Plymouth. 734-453-0870. michiganphil.org.

Home for the Holiday 16: Songwriter Showcase and Charity Drive December 14, 8 p.m. The 16th annual showcase raises donations for goods for the homeless population in Detroit. 7 singer-

songwriters will perform for the cause. PJs Lagerhouse, 1254 Michigan Ave., Detroit. 313-961-4668.

Navigating Grace: The Power of Connection and Transformation Dec. 18, 7:30 p.m. Best-selling author and clinician Jeff Jay will describe personal connection, and the concepts of service and altruism that lie at the heart of Twelve Step Programs. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725. dawnfarm.org.

AEG Presents 'Straight No Chaser' at the Fox Theatre December 19, 7 p.m. A male a cappella group. Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-471-6611. aegpresents.com.

Home Alone with the DSO! Dec. 19, 7:30 p.m. Enjoy one of the most beloved holiday films of all time projected on a giant screen in stunning High Definition accompanied by the Detroit Symphony. Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-576-5111. dso.org.

Home for the Holidays! December 21, 10:45 a.m. Share Detroit's favorite holiday musical tradition with family and friends and thrill to the spectacle of the season. Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-576-5111. dso.org.

Sound Board Presents Bret Michaels Dec. 26, 8 p.m. Poison was at the forefront of the Glam metal scene in the 80s and 90s. Motor City Casino Sound Board, 2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit. 313-309-4700. motorcitycasino.com.

Sound Board Presents Nelly Dec. 27, 8 p.m. Cornell Haynes Jr., known professionally as Nelly, is an American rapper, singer, songwriter, entrepreneur, investor, and occasional actor from St. Louis, Missouri. Motor City Casino Sound Board, 2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit. 313-309-4700. motorcitycasino.com.

Sound Board Presents Cedric, The Entertainer Dec. 28, 8 p.m. Cedric Antonio Kyles, better known by his stage name Cedric the Entertainer. Motor City Casino Sound Board, 2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit. 313-309-4700. motorcitycasino.com.

ART 'N' AROUND

Holiday Art Shop at Ann Arbor Art Center Opens November 16! Thru Dec. 31, 10am Support local artists this holiday season by shopping for one-of-a-kind gifts from the Art Center's gallery shop! Ann Arbor Art Center, 117 W. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-994-8004. annarborartcenter.org.

Christmas Market at the Anton Art Center Thru December 22, 10am Shop with us for unique gifts and holiday decor by Michigan artists! Anton Art Center, 125

Macomb Place, Mount Clemens. 586-469-8666. information@theartcenter.org.

Saline Antiques Market 9am. 5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Road, Ann Arbor. 734-761-2796. salinemarket@gmail.com. foodgatherers.org. salineantiquesmarket.com/

THEATER

Theatre and Dance at Wayne Presents 'A Christmas Carol' Thru December 16, 2 p.m. Join Ebenezer Scrooge on a ghostly adventure in Dickens' classic story. Bonstelle Theatre, 3424 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-577-2960. wsushows.com.

The Purple Rose Theatre Presents 'Diva Royale' Thru Dec. 29, 2 p.m. The Purple Rose of Chelsea, 137 Park Street, Chelsea. 734-433-7673. info@purplerosetheatre.org. purplerosetheatre.org. purplerosetheatre.org. diva-royale/

THE ELVES AND THE SCHUMACHERS by Carla Milarch and R. MacKenzie Lewis World Premiere. Thru Dec. 30, 3 p.m. Theatre NOVA, 410 W. Huron, Ann Arbor. 7346358450. A2TheatreNOVA@gmail.com. theatreanova.org.

Evidence of Things Unseen at The Detroit Repertory Theatre Thru Dec. 23, 3 p.m. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. 313-868-1347. DetRepTh@aol.com. DetRepTh.com. detroitreptheatre.com/evidence/

Williamston Theatre Presents 'A Hunting Shack Christmas' Thru Dec. 23, Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam Road, Williamston. 517-655-SHOW. williamstontheatre.org.

War of the Worlds: The Panic Broadcast by Joe Landry Thru Dec. 9, 7:30 p.m. The play celebrates the 80th anniversary of Orson Welles' 1938 radio adaptation that threw humanity into chaos when aliens made landfall on earth. The Marlene Boll Theatre, 1401 Broadway, Detroit. tasiopeg@udmercy.edu. tasiopeg@udmercy.edu. <http://detroitmercyarts.com>

Monster Box Theatre Presents 'The Book of Liz', A Comedy Thru December 16, 7:30 p.m. Sister Liz is a cheese ball maker from a Squeamish order (Amish) in Clusterhaven. Monster Box Theatre, 2529 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford. 248-787-1400. info@monsterboxtheatre.com. monsterboxtheatre.com. monsterboxtheatre.com.

Stagecrafters Presents Peter and the Starcatcher Thru December 16, 8 p.m. Peter and the Starcatcher is the fantastical adventure about how Peter Pan came to be. On a ship bound for the island of Roonoon, three orphan boys befriend Molly, daughter of Starcatcher Lord Aster. Baldwin Theatre, 415

South Lafayette, Royal Oak. 2485418027. stagecrafters.org/on-stage/main-stage/32-peter-starcatcher.html

Detroit Public Theatre Presents 'Cry It Out' Thru December 9, 8 p.m. Cooped up on maternity leave and eager for conversation, Jessie invites the funny and forthright Lina for coffee in their neighboring backyards. Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, 3711 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 3135765162. dso.org/ShowEventsView.aspx?id=5306&prod=5305

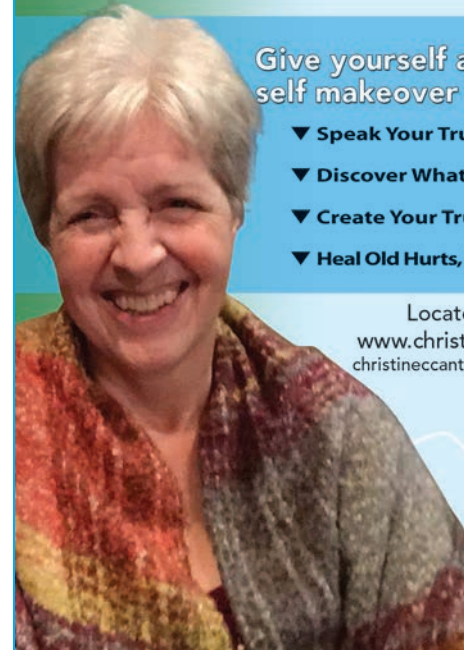
The Ringwald Theatre Presents 'The Cake' Thru December 10, 8 p.m. Della makes cakes, not judgment calls—those she leaves to her husband, Tim. The Ringwald Theatre, 22742 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. 248-545-5545. <https://brownpapertickets.com/event/3562492>

A2CT JT Presents 'The Girl With The Golden Locks' December 7, 7:30 p.m. Ann Arbor Civic Theatre's Junior Theatre presents 'The Girl With The Golden Locks' by Brian D. Taylor at the Scarlet Middle School Auditorium. Scarlet Middle School, 3300 Lorraine St., Ann Arbor. 734-971-2228. <https://a2ct.org>. <https://a2ct.org/shows/the-girl-with-the-golden-locks-junior-theatre>

Theatre and Dance at Wayne Presents 'Vanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike' December 7, 8 p.m. Winner of the 2013 Tony Award for Best Play. Studio Theatre at the Hilberry, 4743 Cass Avenue, Detroit. theatreanddanceatwayne.com/. wsushows.com

Disney's Aladdin at the Detroit Opera House! December 12, 7:30 p.m. Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway St., Detroit. 313-237-SING. broadwayindetroit.com/shows/disneys-aladdin

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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

'Moulin Rouge!' now and forever

The stage production of Baz Luhrmann's "Moulin Rouge!" that opened this summer in Boston is going to Broadway in 2019. Producer Carmen Pavlovic broke the news and the musical will hit the boards at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre for previews starting in June and a July 25 opening night. The Boston cast will make the move, too, including stars Karen Olivo, Aaron Tveit, Danny Burstein, Sahr Ngaujah, Tam Mutu, Ricky Rojas and Robyn Hurder. And if you don't remember the Academy Award-nominated all-singing-all-dancing movie of the same name - it's the one with Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor, meeting at Paris' Moulin Rouge at the turn of the 20th Century, falling in love, singing contemporary pop songs, and dying, more or less in that order - then we wonder a lot of things about you. Perhaps you were not yet born. But good news for you if you actually weren't born in 2001: this new stage version contains covers of hits released since then.

Cherry Jones heads to 'Wine Country' with Amy Poehler

When she popped up briefly in "Boy Erased" to tell a tormented Lucas Hedges that his anti-gay Evangelical parents were dead wrong, we were reminded all over again why Cherry Jones is our favorite character actress. The double Tony Award winner runs the stage on Broadway, but in films she's usually secret weapon support. That's why it's gratifying to see her name among the cast of the all-lady-starring (plus Jason Schwartzman) "Wine Country," an upcoming Netflix film directed by Amy Poehler. The screenplay from "Saturday Night Live" writers Liz Cackowski and Emily Spivey will follow even more "SNL" alums on a birthday road trip to Napa. Along for the ride: Maya Rudolph, Tina Fey, Ana Gasteyer, Rachel Dratch and Poehler. In other words, with each additional female name our hopes grow higher. And frankly, this is the least Netflix can do for the world after making all those recent Adam Sandler movies happen, so more of this, please.

Learn this name: Kiersey Clemons

Young, queer, up-and-comer Kiersey Clemons had a recurring role on "Transparent." She also co-starred in the films "Dope," "Neighbors 2: Sorority Rising" and "Hearts Beat Loud." But if you haven't placed her yet, a name to a face, your task will soon become easier.



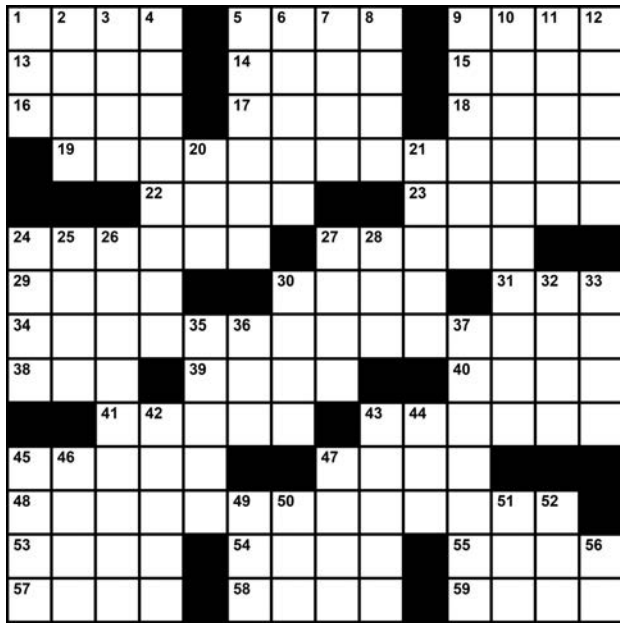
Kiersey Clemons. Photo: KathClick

Coming soon you'll see her as "Darling," one of the human beings in the live-action "Lady and the Tramp"; she's also going to be part of "Rent: Live" in January of 2019; running alongside Ezra Miller in the upcoming superhero film "Flashpoint"; and taking the starring role in the film adaptation of the memoir "The Language of Flowers," about a young woman who grew up in foster care. So if you're wondering when the next generation of LGBT actors is going to come along, they're already out and here, waiting for you to notice.

'The Good Liar' picks up McKellen and Mirren

In between directing tentpole blockbuster properties like "Dreamgirls," the live-action "Beauty and the Beast," and the last two "Twilight" installments, you can usually count on gay director Bill Condon to go small. After all, his Oscar was for the indie "Gods and Monsters," and he was the man who brought us "Kinsey" and the Ian McKellen-starring arthouse film "Mr. Holmes." Now Condon is re-teaming with McKellen for "The Good Liar," a drama about a con man who thinks he's found the perfect mark in rich widow Helen Mirren, only to have the tables turn on him when they grow a little too close. The film also stars Jim Carter ("Downton Abbey"'s Mr. Carson) and "Looking"'s Russell Tovey, two actors we're always happy to see, so we'll be marking our 2019 calendars for this movie's appearance sometime next fall.

Romeo San Vicente doesn't pick pockets anymore. Bank heists are just sexier.



- 34 Role for Madonna or LuPone
 36 Sharice Davids, first LGBTQ ___ elected to congress
 40 "Hollywood Squares" choice
 41 Church sections
 42 Saint, in Rio
 43 Daly of "Judging Amy"
 44 Home of the Bruins
 48 "Claire of the Moon" actor Todd
 51 Greet with loud laughter
 53 Kim Davis, who lost the race for this office
 56 Blue bottoms
 59 "Houston, we have a problem"
 60 Reagan's Star Wars letters
 61 Like an eagle in flight
 62 Pride of lions?
 63 Half a score
 64 First gay man elected governor Jared
 65 Title for Uncle Remus' bear
 66 AARP members

- 10 Place for future Lts.
 11 Porter's "___ Shouldn't I?"
 12 PBS helper
 20 "South Pacific" heroine
 21 Plague for payment
 24 Mabi-us of "Ugly Betty"
 25 "Toodles"
 26 Gay-dog owner on TV
 29 Former labor leader George
 30 Darrin Stevens, for one
 33 St. crosser
 34 Preposition that goes either way
 35 Type of aids
 36 First of the Democratic ass drawers
 37 Tutti-frutti ingredient
 38 "Star Trek" counselor Deanna
 39 Who should be against homophobia
 43 T, to a "Homer-phile"
 45 Wave tops
 46 "Harder days, empty ___ days" ("Oliver!")
 47 Big name in dieting
 49 Field of Ursula Le Guin
 50 Ellen DeGeneres and others
 52 Earth tone
 54 Ready to get drilled by the dentist
 55 Direction for seamen
 56 Race unit in "The Front Runner"
 57 "Xanadu" band, for short
 58 Tennessee foot player

Many Happy (Election) Returns QPuzzle

Across

- 1 They get checked at bathhouses
 4 Abbreviated Broadway musical?
 8 First out governor Kate, who was reelected
 13 Prefix with classical
 14 Antigay prejudice, e.g.
 15 Milk, in Madrid
 16 Mineo, who played Plato
 17 "All's Well That ___ Well"
 18 Emma Stone plays a beard in this movie
 19 Rights law upheld by Massachusetts voters
 22 Whoopi, et al., at the Oscars
 23 Underdog victories
 27 Fruit cover
 28 "___ Ordinary Man" ("My Fair Lady")
 31 Squealer
 32 Lay in the hammock

Down

- 1 It's found under the tongue
 2 Diary entry start by Anais Nin?
 3 Comfort in sorrow
 4 Hardly like a muscle Mary
 5 Even bigger than a bed for a queen
 6 Fill with freight
 7 The A in GLARP (abbr.)
 8 Censor's sound
 9 Tails of the city, when cruising?


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'Prevalent' Exhibit Explores Deep Issues in America

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Racism, gun violence and human rights violations; unless those are issues faced in their daily life, it's unlikely that the average American chooses to face them head on. Detroit-born artist Charzette Torrence decided to change that. The product of decades of work, in her newest exhibit she displays issue-specific photographs — like a kneeling Colin Kaepernick or float of Donald Trump — and painted key words that border the images to elicit various themes. All of this is presented large, on framed, 46-by 32-inch billboards in stark black and white to point directly to some of America's most difficult issues. The exhibit's name, "Prevalent," isn't accidental either.

"These things have risen to the forefront. They've been known but silent, but now they're loud," Torrence said. "We look and we see it, but now it's heavy on everyone's hearts and minds. It's like we're at the boiling point and I think everyone can relate to them."

Recently picked up and presented at Spectrum Miami, a curated contemporary art show, Torrence's work was a part of Art



Charzette Torrence poses beside one of the pieces in her "Prevalent" exhibit.

Basel, a Miami exhibition that focuses on artists from across the globe, and has shown thousands since its inception. Redwood Media Group — the organization that helped

distribute Torrence's work — chose it because of its direct spotlight into difficult issues. In an email correspondence Torrence said that the media group's Director of Exhibitions Rosana Rader and Community Relations Manager Kelly Smith saw the work as "powerful"

"And insightful in adding a new style of art that would make a change not only in the world of art, but spark conversation for a social change," Torrence wrote. "I would like to thank the Redwood Media Group and (the group's president) Eric Smith for having me as a New Rising Artist."

However, as responsive as galleries and museums are now to displaying Torrence's hard-hitting pieces, when she first gathered the idea together in the early '90s she said the response was largely negative.

"I started this in 1993 and I left it alone. It went to storage but I felt that I wanted to create more because there was more stuff to talk about in the world," Torrence said. "Everyone liked it but they all said, 'We can't exhibit this. This is too much.'"

Though now Torrence is nearing a dozen finished pieces, she hopes one day to have closer to 50.

"There are so many things that can be talked about," she said. "The original point of this exhibit was really an installation. In the original exhibit I would put clear transparencies of news articles of what is going on in the world and then images, but people wouldn't look at the images."

Now, with the large images, stark contrasts and key words, it's harder for onlookers to miss the message Torrence is trying to convey. Torrence takes care to size each photograph and to handcraft each frame. Though now a New York City-based artist, Torrence said

that she's always felt that Detroit was her true home. She originally got the idea for these art pieces while still at school at the College for Creative Studies.

"I couldn't afford many materials, so I had to use what I had at home like egg cartons and wooden moldings," she said. "I couldn't afford frames, so I made my own frames. I custom-built each by myself."

Sometimes, the frame-building, painting and picture-sizing process could take weeks or even longer. The only exception to Torrence's black and white color scheme is her Detroit-specific work that honors Aretha Franklin. A longtime fan and friend of Franklin's family, Torrence said that on the eve before her death she got a feeling that she wouldn't make it to morning.

"It's strange, on Aug. 15, I knew that she was transitioning and my wife's like, 'Why are you so sad? Why are you playing her music now?' And I said, 'She's not going to make it. By the time the morning comes she's going to be totally gone.' I had started that week designing the wooden frames on the computer and black just didn't work for her," Torrence said. "I said, 'Aretha, what color do you want?' This was right before she passed, and her spirit said gold and red. And when she passed what was her coffin? Gold. And she was in a red dress. That came from her before she passed. That's what she told me and the universe told me that night, and the words came that night."

Perhaps it is fitting that this piece, the only commemorative one of the bunch, should stand out in gold. Torrence said that because of its uniqueness she intends to donate it to charitable causes in Detroit, along with her piece on Kaepernick, which she hopes to donate to a cause he supports.

"We have to give back to our community and I'm always going to give back to my hometown, Detroit, period. I was raised by a steel worker mom. Give back, no matter what little you have," Torrence said. "Colin, I'm going to connect with him and donate with his organization, and I'm reaching out to give to the arts."

It's that spirit of community support and giving that Torrence hopes to spread by making people more aware of the issues she's chosen to talk about in her work.

"The stuff is simmering over. ... Now as Americans we really have to improve ourselves because we are all one people. We have the same blood, we breathe the same air and we need to realize that," she said. "All the problems that we haven't solved, we need to do action toward (them)."

To find out more information about Torrence's work and future exhibits go online to Charzette.com.



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