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 **GILEAD**

Transgender Thought Leader Says ‘Transphobia Is a Sin’

J Mase III Aims to Change the Course of History on Transgender Issues

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Poet, educator and self-described thought leader, J. Mase III will be speaking at the opening ceremony for LGBTQ Week at Oakland University on March 12. Mase will be speaking about faith and the criminalization of the black trans body through poetry and a discussion. As a trans man, Mase said he was a unique insight into the issue.

“What brought me into doing this intentionally was working at an LGBTQ youth center in Philly where much of my job was outreach and education work with providers of youth services,” Mase explained. “The questions I was getting from medical providers, teachers, social workers ... many were not unclear about the physical pieces of taking care of trans youth, but rather were asking specific questions about whether or not they would be sending a child to hell by affirming this truth about them.”

Mase said that what “clicked” while doing that outreach was that as a member of the black, transgender community, often his life, and the lives others within that group, is dictated by not only his own religious practice, but by that of others.

“Which impacts our ability to access work, housing, medical care and physical safety,” he said.

Though he has a bachelor’s degree in multicultural relationships, Mase said it’s not his institutional experience that qualifies him to do this educational work.

“This is work that I’ve learned just by doing,” he said. “A lot of people have to get credentials, but my credentials come from life. From helping communities like mine, that’s where I gained my expertise.”

Recently, Mase has been speaking out about a new Human Rights Campaign report released in November. Titled “A National Epidemic: Fatal Anti-Transgender Violence in America in 2018,” the report includes many sobering statistics. For instance, more than 22 trans women have been killed since the beginning of 2018. Of those, 82 percent have been women of color and 64 percent were under the age of 35.

“Thinking about Kelly Stough, who was murdered [in Detroit] by a pastor recently; thinking about the rising numbers of anti-trans violence that physically targets black trans women and femmes; thinking about the legislative antagonism we are facing, which also has some roots in the ways that large LGBTQ organizations intentionally divested from protecting trans people in the ‘90s and beyond; thinking about the harassment we get on the street,” Mase said. “That can sound a lot



“This is work that I’ve learned just by doing. A lot of people have to get credentials, but my credentials come from life. From helping communities like mine, that’s where I gained my expertise.”

- J. Mase III

like the pastor in the pulpit.

“Much of the things we are facing stems from a view of religion that allows trans people, and especially black trans people, to be dehumanized,” Mase continued. “It is one thing for someone not to like you. It is another for them to say that not even their God likes you. From that place, many learn the language and practice of viewing trans people as something other than worthy of care and protection.”

And when not traveling the college circuit, Mase is working on a new project called the “Black Trans Prayer Book” that he is co-editing along with collaborator Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi. The project is an interfaith resource dedicated to healing members of the black transgender community and allies to them.

“It is part history that links transphobia to

roots in colonization and white supremacy, it is part poems, part spells and part prayers,” Mase said. “No other resource exists like it and it will be the first of its kind.”

Mase is currently accepting donations to help with this project. But perhaps Mase’s biggest project to date has been the #TransphobiasASin campaign.

“The campaign came out of the work we had already been doing to lay the groundwork for the ‘Black Trans Prayer Book,’” Mase said. “Back in January, we had participants from at least six countries on three continents share photos with one of four phrases: ‘Transphobia Is a Sin,’ ‘Transphobia Is Harem,’ ‘Trans People Are Divine’ or ‘Trans People Exist Because Our Ancestors Existed.’ We wanted to get people both in and out of religious communities to talk

about religious-based violence. The campaign itself is still ongoing and folks are welcome to add photos to the hashtag #TransphobiasASin on all social media.”

The fact that the campaign is word and message-focused is not a mistake, either. At the heart of all Mase does is his love of words, for he is a poet first and foremost.

“I have wanted to be a poet since I was 8 years old and learned what poems are,” Mase said. “Yet, I didn’t become a full-time poet and educator until I, like a vast portion of black trans people, got pushed out of 9-to-5 work. Being an artist is often one of the few accessible work forms for black trans people in which we get to have our own autonomy and demand a living wage while preserving a legacy of black trans culture and resistance.”

Mase said he enjoys his work even if life is a little rougher on the road in this new MAGA era.

“When it comes to traveling these days as a black trans person who is queer and reads as trans or queer often, I have noticed an uptick in people being antagonistic when I am on the road,” he said. “White folks, cisgender folks, straight folks are definitely feeling way more entitled to harass people, including me. It is definitely more stressful being on the road these days to me, than say, even five years ago. That also reminds me how necessary the work myself and Dane do is.”

J. Mase III will be at speaking at Oakland University at noon on March 12 at Oakland Center, Suite 151, Gold Rooms A&B, 312 Meadow Brook Road in Rochester. For more information on Mase, visit jmaseiii.com.

Stand With Trans Expands Ally Moms Program to Include All Parents

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Feeling alone or misunderstood in one's adolescent years is, for many, a rite of passage. Especially within the LGBTQ community, that period often leads those enduring it to discover more about themselves and find a group of peers who feel similarly. However, for those who aren't able to find such a support group there can be consequences that range from anxiety, feelings of isolation, depression and, in some instances, suicide. Stand With Trans is a nonprofit dedicated to aiding transgender Youth, and its Founder Roz Keith said it was a story of suicide that inspired



her to create a helpline for transgender youth.

"Ally Parents started as a way to provide love and support over the phone for trans youth who perhaps were not getting that at home. It started about four years ago when we heard about the passing of Leelah Alcorn, a young transgender woman who did not have the support and was not recognized as a trans girl," Keith said. "She was misgendered by family and finally just couldn't take the pain any longer. Unfortunately, that was her way out."

Now as of February 2019 the service is called Ally Parents, but those familiar with it may remember it being originally titled Ally Moms. Keith said that there was "something so sweet" about the idea of moms of trans kids serving as support centers for youth in need.

"But as we grew and as we got more and more requests, we realized that we needed to expand the offering and open up the group to all parents of transgender individuals," Keith said. "We have right now 250-plus moms on the list, but we probably have about 100 requests on the list that are being processed. And then, within that, we have started to process requests from the dads and other parents. And if a parent doesn't identify as mom or dad, we felt that [the name] Ally Parents was a way to not specifically gender the parent."

Keith said that interest in the program has

grown so much since its inception that almost all 50 states have Ally Parents ready to offer support services to youth in need. Keith added that once the current round of applications are processed that they will number close to 400, and the service is on track to have 600 active parents receiving calls by the end of 2019. For those interested in becoming a Ally Parent, the requirements are simple: an applicant must be the parent of transgender child and pass a background check. Once approved, a training video will go over basic listening skills and, perhaps most importantly, what parents should do if they encounter a caller in crisis.

"Once they get approved, we send them the welcome letter and a link to the training video. Basically, it's run by two people who are well-versed in working with at-risk youth and youth who have been in vulnerable situations," Keith said. "A lot of it is about good listening skills and how to assess if there's a crisis because we're not crisis counselors and we're not therapists. So if

there's a safety issue happening, then that's one behavior that they know they need to refer them to call 911 or the Trans Lifeline or the Trevor Project. We don't try to resolve those issues, and the video will make the parent aware of what to watch out for."

Then parents are invited into the private Ally Parents Facebook group where they can share information about transgender resources available to their callers locally, seek advice from other parents on how best to advise their callers and view Facebook Live events that cover Ally Parents-specific issues. Keith, who is also an Ally Parent herself, said that it's rewarding being a part of someone's transition process because the correspondences offer a benchmark into a youth's forward progress.

"Generally, if there's somebody who reaches out and clicks with one parent, they will reach out from time to time. I know I have people that I might not hear from for a few months and then, all of a sudden, they'll pop up and send me some random text letting me know something or that they made progress at home," Keith said. "That's kind of fun because you can see how their transition is going."

To find out more about Stand With Trans and the Ally Parents program go online to standwithtrans.org.



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Michigan Churches React as UMC Maintains Plan to Ban Same-Sex Marriage, LGBTQ Clergy

Bishop David Alan Bard Says Constitutionality of Traditional Plan May Be in Question

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

The debate over LGBTQ issues may finally split the United Methodist Church, America's second-largest Protestant denomination.

Following a special session of the church's General Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, over the weekend, delegates voted down the One Church Plan on Tuesday, Feb. 26. The proposal was submitted by more progressive members of the global church to lift the denomination's ban on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ clergy.

With the threat of schism looming, a majority of the Council of Bishops in May 2018 recommended the One Church Plan as a way forward through the denomination's nearly 50-year-old battle over homosexuality. It would have let individual churches and regional bodies decide whether to ordain and marry LGBTQ members.

Michigan Bishop David Alan Bard is one of those bishops.

"It was a difficult day, chaotic in terms of just the legislative process," he said.

The One Church Plan was first rejected during a preliminary vote on Monday, Feb. 25, getting only 47 percent support. It was presented again by the Rev. Tom Berlin of Virginia as a minority report during the plenary session of the General Conference made up of 864 invited delegates, split evenly between laypeople and clergy. About 43 percent of the delegates were from abroad, mostly from Africa, and overwhelmingly supported the LGBTQ bans. This top lawmaking body makes decisions for the church and is the only body that can officially speak on behalf of the church.

Berlin, a member of the church's legislative committee, made a final push to substitute the One Church Plan for the Traditional Plan, asking delegates to otherwise abstain from voting for the more conservative legislation. The One Church Plan minority report failed by 75 votes.

The Traditional Plan, which delegates from around the world voted 438-384 to pass, will reinforce the church's current positions.

The Book of Discipline teaches that homosexual practice – as well as all other extramarital sex – is inherently immoral, bans "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" from being clergy, forbids their ministers from performing or their congregations from hosting same-sex wedding ceremonies, and forbids the use of official denominational funds from being used "to promote the acceptance



Michigan Bishop David Alan Bard is one of the bishops who recommended the One Church Plan. It would have let individual churches and regional bodies the right to decide whether to ordain and marry LGBTQ members.

of homosexuality."

These provisions have been on the books for years, repeatedly reaffirmed by General Conference, which takes place every four years.

Throughout that time, Bard has been traveling across the state holding dozens of listening sessions at local churches to hear questions and concerns from members of the community about how the church is addressing human sexuality.

"One of the most important aspects of these listening sessions is learning how to share what's on our hearts without causing harm to others. I think it has helped," Bard said. "We have also provided lots of resources to local churches who want to learn more and start their own dialogues. Right now, our United Methodist Church polity is under question, but historically, it is what has held our church together. We continue to discuss, debate and pray on how to move forward."

Where Do We Go From Here?

"It's really important to acknowledge that our current language about LGBTQ people is experienced as tremendously hurtful. They feel

marginalized in the church," Bard said. "Our families, our friends, we hurt. We feel that hurt and the important thing is not to minimize that. Acknowledge the depth and pain of that hurt and stand with each other in the midst of that."

While members of the community may feel like they're done with the church after Tuesday's decision, Bard urges them to breathe and reassess as there are a number of unknowns.

"Take a couple of steps back and engage your thinking as well as your feeling," he said, noting there is a chance the Traditional Plan may be ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council.

"The Traditional Plan seeks to add some provisions for more strongly enforcing those provisions if a clergy or bishop violates those. What's still left to be determined, however, is the constitutionality of some of those enforcement provisions," Bard said. "The Judicial Council on a couple of occasions has identified constitutional problems with the Traditional Plan, and they may or may not have been rectified during the amendment process today."

If that happens, the One Church Plan may be brought back as a minority report. Despite that, Berlin said the passing of the Traditional

Plan will prompt church members to leave. The loss of church membership is complex and while it can't be traced simply to LGBTQ inclusion, Bard said that is a concern.

"There are some broad social forces that have affected every mainline denomination in the U.S. and are also impacting the UMC," he said. "Even if we get to a place of greater LGBTQ inclusion, that does not fully resolve the issue of declining membership. That is why we continue to focus on mission and ministry that serves our local communities."

In Michigan, the denomination serves thousands of residents through local community mission programs including disaster response, homeless shelters, food banks, free stores, after-school mentoring and tutoring programs, summer camps and others – all of which could be impacted by the vote. Since 1972, the UMC, which claims about 12.6 million members worldwide, including nearly 7 million in the U.S., has kept its policy against homosexuality. Many of the growing communities in the Philippines or countries in Africa are committed to theological teachings against same-sex relationships and marriages.

Yet there has been an increasingly public

movement of more liberal United Methodists openly defying these standards. In May 2016, 111 members of the clergy signed and released a letter saying they identified as LGBTQ. About 80 percent of the pastors, deacons, elders and ministry candidates who signed the letter said they were coming out publicly to their bishops and district superintendents for the first time.

Six in 10 United Methodists in the U.S. believe homosexuality should be accepted, according to a Pew Research Center Report. Despite its policy against homosexuality, the New York Times points out that some congregations have celebrated same-sex weddings and had LGBTQ pastors, at times receiving church approval to do so even though it technically violated church policy. The report said, "Punishment of those who violated the rules has been uneven, and church trials for the few who were sanctioned have been unpopular." Under the Traditional Plan, regional bodies would be compelled to expel LGBTQ clergy.

However, no progressive or traditional local churches in Michigan have indicated they plan to leave the denomination. And 2,000 clergy and laity, non-clergy, will still meet in Traverse City on May 30 to June 2, 2019, for the Michigan Annual Conference.

What Rules?

In Michigan, the First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor is among the most LGBTQ-friendly in the state. The congregation voted in 2007 to adopt a welcoming statement to make clear that they are inclusive.

That statement reads: "As congregants of the First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor, we welcome and affirm all persons. We are intentional in being inclusive of those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender as well as all genders, ethnicities, nationalities and abilities. In modeling the ministry of Jesus Christ, we shall all journey together into full participation in the life of the United Methodist Church and a closer relationship with God."

According to the Rev. Nancy S. Lynn, senior pastor of the Ann Arbor church, one of the strengths of their denomination is that it is a global church with many different cultural perspectives.

"That said, the majority of people in my congregation hope that the United Methodist Church would pass a plan that allows for full inclusion of the LGBTQI community including permission for our clergy to perform gay marriages and for gay individuals to be ordained," she said. "If the United Methodist Church should split, our congregation will consider thoughtfully and prayerfully how we can best move forward with our commitment to the LGBTQI community. We have been present in Ann Arbor for almost 200 years. No matter what happens, we will continue to be here loving God's people and serving our community and world."

Given where they are as a congregation, the Rev. Janet Gaston Petty of the Metropolitan United Methodist Church in Detroit was also hopeful the One Church Plan would be considered because it would have allowed for further dialogue.

"Metropolitan is a very welcoming congregation in theory," she said. "What I mean by that is our former minister of music is a gay man who has a husband and a family. The church appreciated his ministry and embraced his family. I only had the privilege of working with him for a few weeks. He made the decision to leave his employment with Metropolitan United Methodist Church because he was concerned about the General Conference's stance on human sexuality issues. That being said, I am aware that we have members who consider homosexuality a sin and they would strongly support not changing the denomination's position on this matter."

"Our congregation strives to welcome all," said the Rev. Marsha Woolley of First United Methodist Church in Northville. "We have members and attendees who are LGBTQ, some of whom have been here for 50 years. We host a gay support group, we have celebrated members who have married partners, have had gay members on staff and have baptized children whose parent or parents are gay."

Woolley continued, "If there is a split in the denomination, we will seek to continue to be a welcoming church, open to all who want to participate in a congregation that seeks to do all the good we can."

"One of the highest values of our faith community is welcome. Those who are first-time guests share with us that they have experienced a feeling of openness and welcome," said the Rev. Dr. Sherry Parker-Lewis of the First United Methodist Church in Brighton. "We seek to offer the love of Christ to all people. While the decision before the greater UMC may indicate division, our church is unified in its welcome and commitment to serving all persons in our community. We will continue to do this, no matter the outcome of the vote."

In their commitment to their core values to Welcome All and to Put Love Into Action, the sanctuary held a community prayer on Feb. 27, at the Birmingham First United Methodist Church known for being a loving and diverse Christian community.

"As a congregation, many of us are still reading and working to understand all of the legislation that was passed today. The legislation affects our members, families and the ones they love in a variety of ways. In the present moment, we are inviting people to pause, to breathe, to pray and, most importantly, to exemplify the love of Jesus for each other by being the church together," said the Rev. Elbert Dulworth.

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St. Joseph LGBTQ Non-Discrimination Ordinance Could Be Passed by Month's End

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

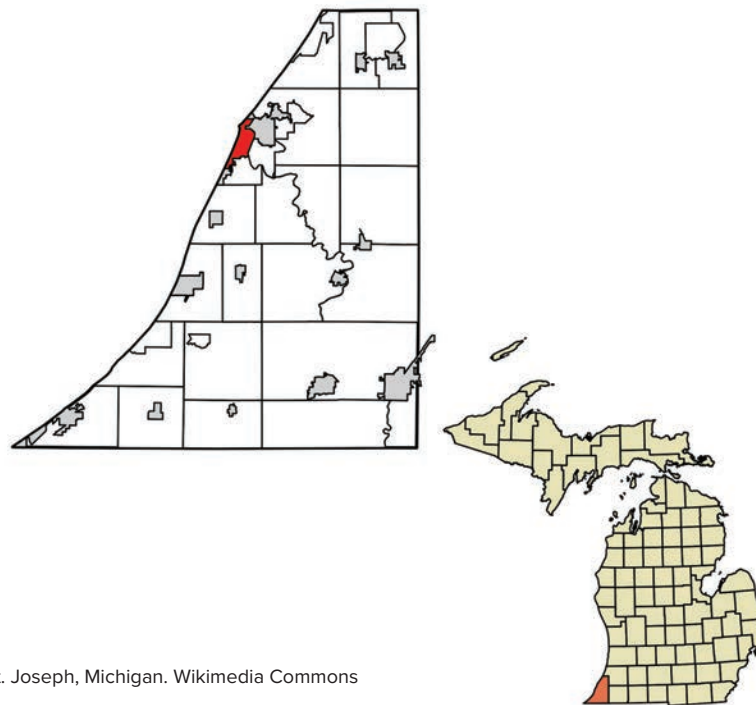
Last week, commissioners in the city of St. Joseph went through the first reading of a non-discrimination ordinance targeted at expanding Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to expressly protect the rights of its LGBTQ citizens. Now tentatively scheduled for a second reading and vote for March 11, if passed, the ordinance will bring the number of explicitly LGBTQ-inclusive communities in the state to 46. As it stands now, it will punish all instances of discrimination with a \$500 fine. Mary Jo Schnell is the executive director of the OutCenter which serves the Southwest Michigan LGBTQ community. She was in attendance at the meeting in her capacity as executive director and said she's thrilled to hear that St. Joseph is taking this step.

"when I got the news on Sunday that the packet was available online to take a look and then show up on Monday, I was over the moon," Schnell said, adding that she had been waiting for months for a decision on the issue. "Because I know that part of the [commission's] conversation consisted of, 'Now we have [Democratic] leadership in the state, why don't we just wait for the state to do something?' And so, when we heard that we had the opportunity to educate them about what Speaker Chatfield has already kind of said and what happened with then-governor-elect [Whitmer's] transition team in December, that there was little or no confidence that the state legislature, which was predominantly GOP, was going to amend Elliott-Larsen."

Schnell was involved in the original push to introduce this ordinance this past summer, and presented to the city commission the merits of expanding the existing civil rights act — that does not currently include protections on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. After reviewing the existing language in the first draft, Schnell said she was happy with it overall, but suggested two changes.

First, the ordinance uses the word "practice" in reference to the LGBTQ community.

"No. 1, it's not a practice," Schnell said. "We are concerned about area



St. Joseph, Michigan. Wikimedia Commons

law enforcement use or interpretations of being LGBT that we've experienced beginning a year ago this last month, that being LGBT is a choice, a lifestyle and/or belief system. And so, when law enforcement or elected representatives or people in government look at sexual orientation as a choice or lifestyle, belief system, they're not thinking consciously or unconsciously about how they're looking at the letter of the law."

St. Joseph Commissioner Laura Goos said that she values Schnell's contributions to the discussion on the ordinance because even as an LGBTQ ally, she didn't notice the potentially problematic implications of using the word that way.

"Quite honestly, after I had read it several times I didn't even realize it was in there and then she pointed it out and it's like it's in a glaring, bold font," Goos said. "So we absolutely wanted to remove the word 'practice' because we did not want there to be any thought of choice versus nature. We definitely want to be inclusive in the verbiage because there's sexual orientation, there's gender identity, there's gender expression and nobody's 'practicing.'"

The second proposed change regards the proposed complaint review committee put in place by the ordinance. To simplify the complaint review process, it requires that they be submitted to the city manager. However, Schnell pointed out that a review process by a single individual could

lead to unfair treatment if that person were biased. Goos agrees, too.

"We're reviewing it because, again, we want to make sure whoever is responsible for reviewing a complaint, and preferably more than one person, that they have an objective understanding of the ordinance," Goos said. "In other words, so that claims of discrimination would not be turned away because of potential bias."

When asked why as an ally it is important to her that the local LGBTQ community have protections like these, Goos said that the answer is simple: because the Michigan legislature hasn't done it yet.

"What I'm hoping is that the Michigan legislature takes up this work so that municipalities don't have to create special ordinances to cover our citizens," she said. "These are members of our community that need to be included in the Elliott-Larsen language and I would hope that our Michigan legislature would see to take care of that glaring gap. It would be remarkable of course if it was our entire state and we're hoping we can be another spark to light the fire, but the fire does need to be lit."

The next meeting scheduled to discuss the ordinance will be held on Monday, March 11. To find out more about that meeting, read the proposed ordinance and future meetings, visit <https://sjcity.com/government/city-commission>.



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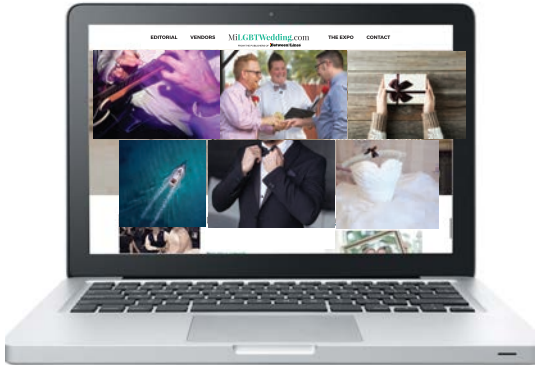
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OBITUARY

James "Diamond Jim" Brown II

Aug. 2, 1960 – Feb. 11, 2019

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Former bar owner and gay rodeo enthusiast James Osmond Brown II, known to many as Diamond Jim, died Feb. 11 from congestive heart failure. He died at his home in Detroit with his rescue dog Diamond by his side. He was 58.

Brown grew up in Highland Park and attended Cass Technical High School. Following high school, Brown moved to California to study architecture at UCLA in 1979. It was in Los Angeles that Brown came out.

Brown returned to Detroit in 1984 and became involved in the city's leather scene. He won the titles Mr. R&R and Mr. Michigan Leather, which allowed him to compete in the annual International Mr. Leather contest in Chicago. He would go on to work on the production of IML for the next 16 years.

A love of rodeo led Brown to found Michigan International Gay Rodeo Association in 1994. Brown produced five rodeos at the Michigan State Fair Grounds. He was an accomplished bareback bronc buster, bull rider and steer wrestler having won over 20 buckles overall in various national rodeo competitions.

Brown participated in the Gay Games in 1990 and 1994 competing in shot put, discus and flag football. He would go on to return to the Gay Games in 2006 and win a silver medal in the Masters Heavyweight Division.

But of all his many achievements, what Brown will probably best be remembered for is his bar. Brown opened Diamond Jim's Saloon on the west side of Detroit in 2001.

"He did a lot for the bear community, the leather community, he crossed a lot of genres," said Tim Zazo, general manager of the Menjo's Entertainment Complex, who worked for Brown for a time at Diamond Jim's. "He did line dancing, which was a staple of his for years. The biggest event he did in his bar was called Wall to Wall Fur. It was a huge bear event, a weekend event. I literally modeled my

Bear Expo on his Wall to Wall Fur."

Goddess Lakshimi, Ms. World Leather 2003, met Brown just before she ran for her title.

"We were line dancing at what I did not know what his bar," she said. "When

said. "We would laugh and talk with others who were battling some form of cancer and he would be cheering others on in their fight."

Brown was, friends say, looking forward to getting back out there this summer as the Motor City Bears celebrated their 25th anniversary. But it was not to be.

"He always had a large presence, though he had a soft-spoken rich baritone," Lakshimi said. "The Ancestors have gained a powerful ally and I will always know there is a big gay bear, line dancing-loving, leather angel watching over me and all of his chosen family."

Brown was also remembered fondly by Musfasi Ali, the founder of ONYX, the leather fraternity for gay, bi and trans men of color.



I made the decision to run for the title of Ms. World Leather, he said the bar would be glad to help sponsor me. The sponsorship was not monetary but advisory. He opened his bar to whatever I desired to do. He even participated in the mock interviews I did to practice answering questions from the leather and gay press.

"He was known for his philanthropic endeavors," Lakshimi continued. "He sponsored many people in events and titles that gave back to the community."

After more than a decade, Brown closed the bar in 2010 as a result of landlord issues. He survived a bout with cancer in 2012 and a devastating car accident in 2014, which led to a withdrawal from the community.

"When he had his battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, I would sit with him in his chemo sessions," Lakshimi

"My longtime friend and brother Diamond Jim has crossed over to be with the ancestors," Ali said. "Jim was a longtime and fervent support of ONYX and our mission since our inception. He was a dedicated gay rodeo participant, bar owner, contest producer [Mr. Leather Cowboy] and Detroit leather community member who always had a huge smile and a big hug. ... May his spirit always ride on in us."

Funeral services for Brown were private. A GoFundMe page has been set up to cover the cost of final arrangements. Any additional funds raised will go to create the James O. Brown, II Legacy Fund to benefit Detroit's LGBT community. The link is gofundme.com/jamesobrownii-legacy-fund.

Editor's Note: Brett Reynolds contributed to this story

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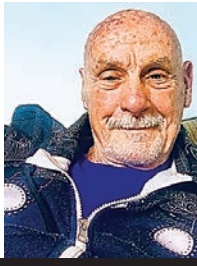


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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Catnippers and Boners Go Gay!

A veterinarian-funded study by People & Friends of Cats and Dogs, or P-FCD, reports that “persons of rainbow personality make the best dog owners, but have little influence on pussies, er, cats, although this should not be misconstrued as homophobia on the part of America’s feline population.”

The P-FCD Study — “Are American Pets at Risk with Gay/Lesbian Owners?” — finds that “dogs owned by LGBT people are happier, better-mannered, more likely to heel and to fetch than dogs reared by straights. They shed less — the dogs, not the heterosexuals — during summer months, and do their gender sniffing and hydrant marking in a covert, more decorous manner.”

Interestingly, too, is the study’s finding that most breeds — with the exception of Pekingese, Chihuahuas and dachshunds — show marked sporting instincts: catching Frisbees, treeing squirrels, chasing unmarked police cars and guarding unattended U-Hauls when raised by lesbians (the dogs, not the U-Hauls).

“Rottweilers, when dyke-raised, tend to be a one-owner breed. They are loyal to a fault. (The dogs, not the dykes.) Curiously, pit bulls become remarkably docile when trained by lipstick lesbian owners in suburban settings. Rainbow rhinestone collars help.

“Breeds raised by gay men seldom bark, or if they do, it’s barking in quieter tones, and are less likely to eat ill-prepared dinner scraps or TV frozen dinner leftovers. They also show a preference for dog houses that are painted in warmer tones and edged with white lattice work. Collars are preferred with sequins and, in leather outings, studs or spikes.”

The old saying, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks!” has been proven, “to be utterly false and denigrating to aging canine populations. Old dogs — with gay owners as role models — are actually remarkably adept at doing new tricks. Especially if they - the tricks - stray into backyards.

A big study disappointment is with finicky cat populations. It’s determined that cats raised by LGBT people are just as likely to be as independent as cats raised by straights. “The truth is that cats just don’t give a rat’s winkle if you’re straight or gay. If you feed them on time, they just couldn’t care less. And whatever you do, don’t smoke their catnip around them. And please leave their fur balls alone.”

There is a note of progress, however. For some reason “alley cats seem to live longer when kept by gay, single males. This applies whether neutered or not neutered.” (The cats, not the single males.)

Not everyone is pleased with the P-FCD findings. The Family Way, a right-wing, vigilante organization headquartered in Free-Fall, Montana, expresses outrage at the P-FCD in its monthly newsletter, “The Litter Box.” (Editorial correction: That should be Letter.)

“The gay agenda stops at nothing,” opines the editorial. “Not only do they want special political rights, the right to marry and to adopt children, now they want to raise America’s wagtail

See **Parting Glances**, continued on p. 15



BY MICHAEL LAMB

Positive Thoughts

I’m an HIV-Positive Gay Man Committed to Racial Justice

The day the universe decided it wanted to see sugar, spice and everything nice, it was June 10, 1991 – the day I was born. Even as a child, I was always talkative and quite the jokester. Winning “Loudest,” “Class Clown,” and “Most Likely to Work for The New York Times” my senior year of high school proved not only that I could make anyone laugh, but that my banter always led to greater conversation.

Taboo topics have always been my favorite conversation-starters. Whenever the topic of HIV/AIDS came up, I was the smartest man alive. “Only crackheads, hookers and people who shoot up get HIV,” and, “You can tell who got that shit because they look sick,” were two sentences I remember proudly stating. That wasn’t the same energy I had when I was diagnosed with HIV on Dec. 19, 2012.

I was the average 21-year-old white gay man. Living it up, partying every weekend, experimenting with drugs, and of course having plenty of sex.

Man, I knew the pathway to my walk of shame backwards and with my eyes closed, strutting every step of the way while my hips said, “Yes ma’am,” with every sway.

I became an advocate for HIV awareness *after* living with the virus for two years. Stigma led me to my reactive test, and stigma caused me to bury a friend who died due to complications from AIDS in 2014. “I could’ve sworn my doctor said the medicine nowadays keeps people living longer! Why is my friend dead?” I thought to myself as the casket closed.

When I first heard of my friend’s passing, I was shocked. Growing up in Fort Myers, Florida, I’ve lost many friends to gun and gang violence. I knew for a fact my friend wasn’t a gangbanger. After I reached out to his sister, she was basically shocked at my emotional outcry for answers, responding, “Boy, you didn’t know he had AIDS?” I was in shock. How could we have both been diagnosed with the virus, but he’s dead and I’m alive? Oh yeah, he was black.

I’m not trying to sound curt or insensitive, but that was the only difference between us. Both gay men living in Florida, under 25 at the time, we had the same “risk behaviors.” Our skin tones separated us like water fountains in the 1960s separated our parents. Yes, the civil rights movement wasn’t that long ago. It hadn’t dawned on me yet that there are racial and systemic barriers surrounding black gay men diagnosed with HIV – at least not until I had to bury two more black gay men in white caskets, in 2016 and 2017. Black gay men are dying in the “better days of the epidemic.” This is news to some, but a reality to many.

Where I’m from, I was often the only white person, or one of five white people, in black-dominated spaces. My mother owned a daycare on Evans Avenue. She and another gentleman were the only white people who owned businesses in that area. All her employees and students were black. As the years went on, those

See **Headline**, continued on p. 15

► Positive Thoughts

Continued from p. 14

employees became family. I have so many aunts because of that place. My mother was finishing school, going through a terrible divorce, and running a business, so naturally her time was spread thin. She trusted black women to look after her white children. My mother didn't raise us on "don't see color" – she raised us on, "Treat good people better than the world does, because the world will turn good people bad."

When I entered the world of HIV advocacy, I jumped in headfirst, wanting everyone to know their status, but I wasn't yet hip to the fact that knowing your status and navigating the health care system once HIV positive is not the same. From inner community stigma, culture differences, racism, lack of health literacy or cultural competency, and the "one size fits all" messaging at play in the HIV nonprofit world, it's no wonder black and brown bodies fall through the cracks of what is supposed to be the glory days.

You would think after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released statistics showing that black gay and bisexual men have a one in two chance of contracting HIV in their lifetime before age 40 that there would be plenty of space, education, marketing materials and representation for black leadership roles to open up to spread awareness of testing, access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), sexual health and navigation to care if diagnosed. Nope. Not at all.

I remember working for an organization that whenever they had any need for anything to do with black people, I was their go-to man. Why? Because I had black friends. I remember my boss even saying, "I need a gay, black, HIV-positive man to hire as a prevention specialist. Can you think of any of your friends that would want a job?" He wanted to hire my gay, black, HIV-positive friends, but when I wore a Black Lives Matter shirt to work, I was asked to change, because "my politics aren't the same as everyone else's." He wanted a gay, black, HIV-positive man to work for him, but the only time we ever went to a neighborhood that was predominantly black was for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. I took this kind of tokenizing as a spit in the face, and a piss on the graves of my three friends.

It's at moments like this that the voice of South African Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu rings in my ears: "If you are neutral in

situations of injustice, then you have chosen the side of the oppressor." I couldn't live with myself allowing my black friends to become nothing but a quota to fill for a snowcap organization to gain funding. As a gay white man, I don't know oppression like a gay black man, nor will I ever know. Many times, I have challenged my white peers, colleagues and fellow advocates to first have a conversation surrounding the experience of their black counterparts living with HIV and to see the role they themselves have played that contributed to the oppression of their friends, colleagues, clients and employees. White folks with badges aren't the only ones helping kill black folks – it's the white folks in lab coats too.

White people who claim to "get it" and wave their allyship to black folks are the worst. Trust me, I was one of them. Always trying to prove myself to black people, explain racism to black people, and basically telling black people how to be black. Yep, I was your typical white gay. Not only was I singing to the wrong choir, I was totally singing off key.

If it weren't for black leaders, including Maxx Boykin, Larry Scott-Walker, David Malebranche and Phill Wilson – who taught me to check my privilege at the door and told me certain spaces were for black folks only, black folks are a priority to black people, and my presence or my voice wasn't needed at the time – I'd still be stuck in my old ways. I can't thank them enough. I'd be lying if I didn't say the lesson was a hard one to learn, sometimes with tears emanating from my own white fragility. But it helped me be a better person, a better white person.

"Nothing about us without us," said Larry Scott-Walker at the 2018 United States Conference on AIDS, as his beautiful locs hung like wind chimes down his broad back. Usually, in the HIV community, this expression is used to speak to the need to keep people living with HIV at the center of all decision-making about prevention, treatment programs and policymaking. But in that moment in Orlando this past September, I interpreted Larry's call as, "No discussions about the betterment of black people are to be had at the table without black people at the table." Period.

HIV-positive millennial Michael "Miss Mikey" Lamb is a contributor to TheBody.com, as well as an author, life coach, and empowerment speaker. He blogs at www.getchalifewithmike.com. This column is a project of Plus, Positively Aware, POZ, TheBody.com and Q Syndicate.

The editorial ends with the usual request for money in the "cultural war to save our four-footed friends from a life of pampering and eternal perdition. Heaven loves a cheerful benefactor." How true!

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► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 14

majority — our innocent dogs and cats — as same-sex, housebroken pets. Maybe a dry-blown, perfumed poodle or two, but not a born-again Boxer. Never!"

Creep Of The Week

Marc Short

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

This week's column comes to you from both the "But People Can Change" Department and the "Yeah, but no" Department.

Think back to who you were an undergrad in college. I'm going to make an educated guess and say that you were insufferable. Granted, you were probably the sexiest you've ever been even though you ate pizza for breakfast, lunch and dinner most days. But you likely thought you knew everything. And that's annoying.

If you're reading this thinking, "But I was a genius 18 to 21-year-old with no flaws and incredibly humble to boot," my response is: Do some introspection. Maybe yoga will help.

Anyway, I have no doubt that I wrote things when I was an undergrad that would make me cringe today. Thankfully, my undergrad years took place at the infancy of the digital renaissance, and so most of that work is lost to history, and likely for the best.

That said, a short story I wrote in high school did just recently end up on the internet, so I guess no one is ever safe.

The thing is, when I was in college I wasn't making grand pronouncements about how disgusting and awful gay people were. Granted, I was a gay person, so maybe that doesn't count. Still. There's a difference between writing bad poetry or an impassioned diatribe against rape culture via a compare and contrast paper about the "Porky's" and "American Pie" movies (one stellar observation that I can remember: '80s movie nudity contained cellulite). But if those writings surfaced I wouldn't be like, "Oh, wow. I hurt people."

The same cannot be said for Marc Short, Vice President Mike Pence's new chief of staff, who wrote super homophobic garbage when he was in college and published it in the March 1992 issue of *The Spectator*, the conservative college paper he helped found. The front cover of that issue contains a "teaser" that reads: "AIDS: Who Gets It?"

The essay inside is called "AIDS and the Heterosexual" and it is vile. The gist of the essay is that heterosexuals can't get AIDS, only gay people can and trying to get heterosexuals to care about AIDS is all a part of a big gay plot to both get money from Congress and "de-stigmatize the perverted lifestyles homosexuals pursue."

That is, um, one hell of a plan. I mean, so many gay men died horrible deaths while the Reagan administration basically laughed it off and the first Bush administration was hardly better. Call me

crazy, but if there really was an organized and coordinated homosexual agenda I kind of doubt everybody agreed on "let's die off" as an effective strategy.

Short also claims that homosexuals were super excited that Magic Johnson got AIDS since it helped them further the myth that straight people can get it, too. He also railed against "sodomites" getting "preferential treatment," and by "treatment" he meant any government funding for the disease.

But it's not as if senior in college Marc Short was unfeeling.

"Naturally we feel sympathy for ... all AIDS victims," he wrote, "but that does not mean we glorify homosexuals' repugnant practices of frequent anal intercourse nor should we consider them brave for coming out of the closet."

Got it. Homosexuals grossed Short out and the penalty for grossing Short out should be death.

But what does Grown Up Marc Short have to say about all of this?

"I regret using language as an undergraduate college student that was not reflective of the respect I try to show others today," he told *The Daily Beast*. "We have all learned a lot about AIDS over the past 30 years and my heart goes out to all the victims of this terrible disease."

The subhead of *The Daily Beast's* piece read that Short "expressed regret for words he says are no longer reflective of his worldview." Perhaps there was more to the statement Short gave them, but when I read the part they quoted, which I have included above, that is not what Short means. He said he regrets being disrespectful. He doesn't say that his worldview no longer sees homosexuals as sodomites deserving of death.

And here's the thing: It's hard to believe that Short is such a new and improved man considering who he is working for. Mike Pence is anti-LGBTQ through and through. He has been Creep of the Week many times, for good reason.

Pence's leadership and empathy failure dealing with AIDS as governor of Indiana is well-documented. The Trump Administration's approach to AIDS nationally and globally seems more interested in shaming people than in saving lives.

So, yeah, no. If Short wants anyone to believe that he no longer believes the garbage he wrote about AIDS then he should maybe consider working for people who aren't currently operating under the those same garbage ideas.

Pete Buttigieg Makes Pitch to LGBT Voters in Bid to Become First Out Gay President

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

It's pronounced "Boot-a-judge." That was the first thing South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg cleared up for the Washington Blade in response to questions about his 2020 presidential run in a Jan. 31 interview.

Buttigieg, a Rhodes scholar and Afghanistan veteran, beefed up his national profile in his 2017 run to become Democratic National Committee chair.

The 2020 White House hopeful announced his exploratory committee last month. If successful, the long shot Buttigieg would be the first openly gay person to win the Democratic presidential nomination and the White House.

LGBT priorities for Buttigieg, who said he'd run a campaign based on the themes of freedom, democracy and security, include passage of the Equality Act and greater visibility for transgender people.

Distinguishing himself from other 2020 hopefuls, Buttigieg said he supports transgender people having access to transition-related care, even when they're in prison. Other candidates, including Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren, have different records on that issue.

The full Q&A between the Blade and Buttigieg follows:

Washington Blade: You're running in a field of Democratic candidates, many of whom have been longtime LGBT allies. What do you bring to the table that's different?

Pete First of all, I'm very mindful of the possibility of being the first out nominee in American history, and you know, I think it's safe to say for many reasons, I'm not like the others.

I also just have a different outlook: I am from the industrial Midwest, I'm in local government and I come from a generation that I think really needs to be stepping forward right now. I think our generation has so much at stake in the future and the decisions that are being made today, and I think it really shows the people in charge, like the current president and administration, don't care very much about the future because they don't plan to be here.

2054 is the year when I will reach the current age of the current president, and I think you just take some of these decisions about climate, about the economy much more seriously if you're hoping to be here in 2054.

What we have here right now is a sequence of decisions that have been made that are very short term, very destructive and it's time for voices from a generation that has a personal stake in that future to step forward and talk

about how we can make that future different.

Blade: But what makes you think you can win the White House if you get the nomination?

I think the message needs to revolve around three themes: freedom, democracy and security. I think that you have a very strong, progressive foundation for those issues, but I also think we've not done a very good job of communicating them across the aisle. Freedom is something that I think has been monopolized by conservatives in terms of political rhetoric, but when I think about everything from the freedom to marry to the freedom to start a new business knowing you can still get health care, it's really progressive and Democrats have delivered the kinds of freedom that are most important for our daily lived experience.

When it comes to democracy, I think we've demonstrated that we are the party that is more interested in making sure that more people can vote, and I think this needs to be part of a national conversation as well. We need to shore up our democracy through a number of reforms, including D.C. statehood, that just make our democratic republic a little more democratic.

And then on security, we've got to understand 21st century security means a lot more than just border security and traditional military issues. I was in the military. I certainly spent a lot of time thinking about traditional military issues, but we have to be talking about cybersecurity, election security, climate security, digital security. And I think people are ready for a message that's just different from what we've had before.

We have a profoundly, almost historically, unpopular president, but that doesn't mean he gets defeated on his own if we don't have a compelling message that's different and better.

Blade: Let's bring this closer to our LGBT readers. How does support for the LGBT community figure into your run for the presidency?

I think that it will be vital. I think it will be a spruce of lifeblood because we are perhaps the only minority in more or less equal proportion across every racial, ethnic, economic and geographic group in the country, so one thing that will be very important for the success of this project, especially early on when people take your measure based on fundraising is to be able to demonstrate grassroots support from people in the community who believe that representation at the highest levels, actually having someone from the LGBTQ community on the ballot is important, that it will make things better for the next

person who comes along and that America needs to be given a chance to demonstrate that it's ready for this.

Blade: In terms of LGBT rights issues, where do you want to go with that?

I think one of the big things that we're looking at, of course, is the Equality Act. I live in a state where it is still — not in South Bend because we took local action, but in most parts of my state it's still perfectly illegal to be fired for who you are, and I think we need better legislation, civil rights legislation that takes care of that.

Obviously, we have a lot of issues with hate crimes now in Indiana. At the state level, we've been pursuing hate crimes legislation. We have federal hate crimes legislation, but we have to do a lot more, including, not just at the policy level, but at the cultural level. There's several reasons why hate crimes have gone up by most measures in recent years, and I think, a lot of that starts at the top. It has to do with leadership, it has to do with the tone that it set by those in charge and it has to change.

Blade: What concerns you most about how President Trump is handling LGBT issues?

Obviously the attack on trans rights and the trans military ban is extremely disturbing. When I was in the military, the people I served with could not have cared less whether I was going home to a girlfriend or boyfriend. They just wanted to know that I was going to be someone they could trust with their lives and vice-versa.

Trans members of the military who are willing to put their lives on the line in order to defend this country deserve to be supported by their commander in chief, and it's extremely disturbing, especially for someone who, let's face it, kind of pink-washed his campaign early on and portrayed himself as somebody who might change the way the Republican Party related to the LGBT community to turn around and do this demonstrates that he was never serious about that, not to mention the elevation of Mike Pence to one heartbeat away from the presidency.

Blade: What kind of place will transgender people have in your campaign and your presidency?

A very prominent place. I've been really heartened to see more people, especially in my generation, stepping forward. I think Danica Roem opened a lot of doors in terms



Pete Buttigieg is hoping to become the first openly gay person to win the Democratic presidential nomination. Washington Blade photo by Michael Key

of elected leadership, and I think we will be looking to make sure that our campaign as well as a future administration reflects the diversity of this country. Obviously, that includes making sure there are visible roles for trans people.

Blade: One question I want to pose to you because it has been a point of differentiation among the Democratic candidates: Should transgender people, even if they're in prison, have access to gender reassignment surgery?

Yeah. I believe that's part of health care. We provide health care to people who are serving the country, we provide health care to people who are incarcerated. I think the bigger issue is that too many people are incarcerated, but if you are, we need to treat everybody the same, and if you regard this, as I do, as part of health care.

Look, people try to turn others against this around the issue of cost, but the spectacular costs of incarceration have very little to do with things like gender reassignment.

Blade: Are you aware Kamala Harris as California attorney general defended the California Department of Corrections in seeking to deny surgery to transgender inmates and what do you make of that?

I was not aware of that. I do know that California, if I understand correctly, is one of the few places that has been able to provide

See **Buttigieg**, continued on p. 18

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► Buttigieg

Continued from p. 16

that, and I think that the rationale for it is based on it being — not only that it can be medically necessary for many inmates, but also there are shockingly high rates of sexual assaults or sexual abuse for transgender people who are incarcerated, so I think that moving in that direction was the right thing to do and I hope that more states take a look at that, especially the ones that want to ensure that we're preventing sexual abuse.

Blade: What kind of endorsements has your potential candidacy obtained so far and how do you expect them to grow?

Obviously, this is a very early phase. We just announced the exploratory committee last Wednesday, but we are going to seek endorsements from organizations and individuals. We've already reached out to the Victory Fund, to the Human Rights Campaign and to a lot of the people I respect and talked about.

Rightly, they are taking their time and they're being very deliberate about this, but I do hope that we will earn that and demonstrate somebody like me belongs in this conversation at the highest level. Hopefully, we will continue to mobilize the support we need in order to be taken seriously.

This first quarter is critical because this is where we establish that we belong at the table, then it becomes a matter, once we've shown enough early organizational support

at the end of the quarter, then we no longer have to answer questions about whether we belong in the conversation and start really focusing on making sure that what we have to say in the conversation justifies more and more support.

Blade: What will it take for you to move from an exploratory committee to a candidacy in the legal sense?

I want us to be in a position to have a very strong launch coming out of the gate both in terms of the sort of event we are launching and in terms of the organizational support we have on Day One of that phase, that we're right where we want to be.

Blade: I've had experts tell me you face challenges because you don't have the name recognition of other candidates and you should run for governor and not president. What would you say to that?

This is not about steps for me ... I believe in running for an office when you believe what you offer matches the needs of the moment and I am surprised as anybody that things have come this far, but I think we've gotten to a moment where what that office most needs is someone entirely new, something very different, something that is not rooted in the way Washington works today and has more generational energy and on the ground local experience than anybody else. ...

I just don't believe that you run for office because you would love to have it or because you think it's the right step along the way because these offices are too important. You run for office because you think what you have meets the moment, and every time I've decided to run for office and every time I've decided not to run for an office has been the outcome of that same process of discernment.

Blade: Has anyone told you a gay person cannot be elected president in the year 2020?

Yes. Some believe that's the case, and I think there is only one way to demonstrate conclusively that that's not true.

Blade: If there are LGBT people or people anywhere who want to support you, what is the biggest way to help out?

So, peteforamerica.com is the place where you can add your name to the list, if you want to be on the list so we know you're a supporter, if you want to make a financial contribution, which again, right now, in terms of showing we belong at the table, part of how they take your measure is that grassroots financial support.

Over time, especially in early states, we will need help on the ground getting known, making introductions, winning people over and then hopefully as that grows, more and more of a field organization that will have all kinds of roles for people, but you can start by going to peteforamerica.com and adding your name so we know who's out there to support us.

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Brothers Involved in Jussie Smollett Case Issue Apology

BY MARIAH COOPER

The two men who allegedly helped “Empire” star Jussie Smollett stage a fake homophobic and racist attack say that they have, “tremendous regret” for how the incident has affected minority communities and victims of hate crimes.

Olabinjo and Abimbola Osundairo released the statement through their attorney Gloria Schmidt to CNN.

“My clients have tremendous regret over their involvement in this situation, and they understand how it has impacted people across the nation, particularly minority communities and especially those who have been victims of hate crimes themselves,” Schmidt told CNN on Thursday.

Smollett filed a police report that two men attacked him and shouted homophobic and racial slurs at him in Chicago on Jan. 29. While investigating the report, Chicago Police brought in the Osundairo brothers, acquaintances of Smollett, for questioning. The brothers were released without charges.

Smollett eventually was charged with disorderly conduct for filing a false police report. He turned himself into police on Feb. 21. The same day at a press conference, Chicago Police Chief Eddie Johnson said that Smollett paid the brothers \$3,500 for the



Jussie Smollett on “Good Morning America” (Screenshot via YouTube)

attack. According to Johnson, Smollett staged the attack because he was unhappy with his “Empire” salary.

Both Smollett’s reps and Fox have denied that Smollett ever expressed dissatisfaction with his pay. Police did obtain a check from Smollett to one of the brothers, who is a personal trainer, but the memo line read that it was for a fitness and nutritional plan for an upcoming music video.

Smollett says he is innocent and his lawyers have promised an, “aggressive defense.” He returns to court on March 14.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade.

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UMS Exhibit Explores Robert Mapplethorpe's Artistic Impact March 15-16



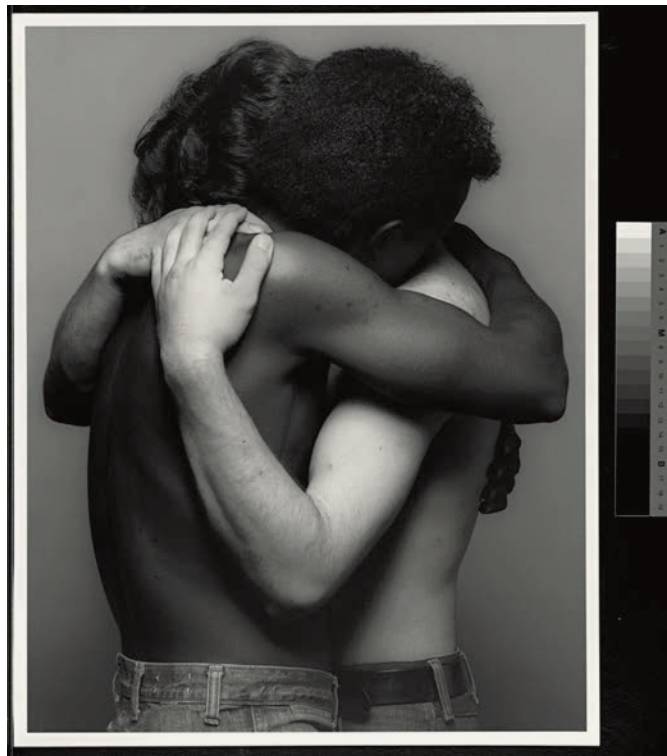
Bryce Dessner and Korde Tuttle Arrington are the creators of the performance piece "Triptych." Photo: Pascal Gely

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It's been 30 years since his death and still Robert Mapplethorpe remains a provocative figure. In a new performance piece, titled "Triptych (Eyes of One on Another)" presented by the University of Michigan's University Musical Society March 15 to 16, music, poetry and photography come together in a theatrical context. The mediums serve to explore the impact of Mapplethorpe's work and the impression it had on the lives and careers of composer and Cincinnati native Bryce Dessner and librettist Korde Arrington Tuttle.

Revisiting Mapplethorpe's life, it's impossible to ignore the controversies surrounding his work, which only intensified following his death in 1989. But the Mapplethorpe story begins modestly. He was born on Nov. 4, 1946, in the borough of Queens in New York City to a strict Roman Catholic family, one of six children. His father was an electrical engineer and his mother a homemaker.

Though Mapplethorpe showed no initial photographic promise in his younger years, after high school he majored in graphic arts at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn



Embrace, 1982 (c) Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used with permission

but left before finishing his degree. During his time there, he met artist Patti Smith and it wasn't long before the two moved in together

and began a relationship. Soon after, he took up photography.

In a 2016 book about her love affair with Mapplethorpe, Smith said, "Robert took areas of dark human consent and made them into art. He worked without apology, investing the homosexual with grandeur, masculinity and enviable nobility. Without affectation, he created a presence that was wholly male without sacrificing feminine grace. He was not looking to make a political statement or an announcement of his evolving sexual persuasion. He was presenting something new, something not seen or explored as he saw and explored it. Robert sought to elevate aspects of male experience, to imbue homosexuality with mysticism. As Cocteau said of a Genet poem, 'His obscenity is never obscene.'"

That obscene-less obscenity spoke to composer Dessner, who transformed his passion for Mapplethorpe's work into "Triptych."

"As a teenager, I was told by the authorities

that I was not allowed to look at Mapplethorpe's photographs," Dessner said. "And that these tremendous works of art were not art at all, but pornography. This censorship made a significant impact on my life at the time and on my decision to pursue art and music as a career. Thirty years later, I have decided to respond in my own way and to look at these pictures again myself, and through the eyes of my wonderful collaborator, the librettist Korde Arrington Tuttle. This project has challenged me more than any work to date and I am honored to share this journey with this ensemble."

Exploring the Medium

When he started taking photographs in the late '60s, photography was only starting to be seen as a legitimate art form. Mapplethorpe took his first images with a Polaroid and, by 1973, he hosted "Polaroids," his first show. Shortly after, Mapplethorpe acquired a Hasselblad medium-format camera from his patron and lover art curator Sam Wagstaff.

Mapplethorpe started taking photos of his colorful circle of friends, which included artists, musicians and film stars. He also began exploring the S&M scene both personally and through his work, creating graphic images that depicted scenes such as fisting and bondage. He would become most well-known, perhaps, for a self-portrait that featured the photographer with a bullwhip sticking out of his naked backside.

Reflecting on his body of work in 1988 for ARTnews, Mapplethorpe said, "I don't like that particular word 'shocking.' I'm looking for the unexpected. I'm looking for things I've never seen before. I was in a position to take those pictures. I felt an obligation to do them."

Yet, even if he didn't like the word, most of those who saw the images agreed that 'shocking' was a fair description of his work. By the mid-'80s he had branched out. He did a photo book on female bodybuilder Lisa Lyons and focused on the black male nude in another. His work also extended to still life shots of flowers that earned him a fair amount of popularity, too.

And as Mapplethorpe's health began to fail, his output increased. Patricia Morrisroe, his chosen biographer, later revealed in her book that, as he declined, Mapplethorpe's assistants did the majority of the set-up in his photography. He died of AIDS related causes on March 9, 1989.

Even after his death, Mapplethorpe's work inspired controversy. Only weeks after his passing a traveling solo exhibit of his works called "The Perfect Moment" became the subject of controversy when the Corcoran



Triptych production. Photo: Maria Baranova

Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., decided to cancel the show. Curated by the Institute of Contemporary Art, the ICA became embroiled in controversy regarding the funding it received for the show from the National Endowment for the Arts from Congress. Then, Dennis Barrie, director of Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center, featured the exhibit in his museum. In response, Barrie was charged with obscenity by the Hamilton County prosecutor.

Congress continued debating the funding's justification amid arguments that Mapplethorpe's images were full of homoerotic and sadomasochistic themes and questioned whether they even constituted art. Even today, those questions remain an issue, but as a result of this attention, awareness of Mapplethorpe's work grew significantly.

"In 1990 in Cincinnati, Ohio, I was a 14-year-old teenager around the time when The Perfect Moment came to the CAC," Dessner said. "It was a big cultural moment in time, and an even bigger moment after Cincinnati police and the Hamilton County prosecutor at the time shut down the museum and put Dennis Barrie in jail for a week. It was kind of a lightning rod moment in my childhood that I didn't fully understand at the time. But, for me, it brought up all kinds of issues."

An Enduring Influence

Today, Dessner said he doesn't see the Mapplethorpe images in the same light.

"The way that we look at those photos, now that I can look at them, is very different in 2019 than it was in 1990, or in 1978 or whenever it

was that certain images were shot. Doing it now, for me," Dessner said, "almost 30 years later from this experience I had as a teenager, it's also been important to approach it with an open mind and from a different point of view."

Significant time was spent, said Dessner, conceiving and conceptualizing the show.

"This is something I've been thinking about for a long time," he said. "I love Mapplethorpe's photographs so I came to do it out of respect for the unbelievability of certain images."

In creating the show, Dessner said he immersed himself in Mapplethorpe.

"I spent time sort of inhabiting his world, whether it be his deep relationships with Patti Smith and Sam Wagstaff or the things he left us. For instance, the Getty Museum in L.A. has an unbelievable collection of, really, his entire archive. He was pretty meticulous in the way that he kept things."

For his part, Tuttle said he's too young to recall the Mapplethorpe controversy.

"I was born in 1990, so the experiential knowledge doesn't live in my body," he said. "But the lived experience of what's presented in his work and the perspective and the point of view always stirred me."

Regardless of his age, Tuttle said he has been impacted by Mapplethorpe.

"The project is meaningful to me on so many levels ... history is alive, and I believe this is a story about all of us."

For more information about "Triptych (Eyes of One on Another)," presented at UMS' Power Center in Ann Arbor, visit ums.org/performance/mapplethorpe.

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To the Rescue



Why One Adoptive Mom Volunteers at POET Animal Rescue

From left, Bubbles, Molly and Sully cuddling with April DeBoer-Rowse.

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

When she's not busy championing causes instrumental in securing things like U.S. marriage equality or busy taking care of her adoptive children with her spouse, April DeBoer-Rowse fills her time as an animal activist at Garden City's POET

animal rescue. One of the biggest reasons she volunteers at the nonprofit, she said, is because of the overwhelming number of animals that are in need – annually, it's approximately 7.6 million that enter shelters nationwide.

"You don't think about it when you go to a shelter or a rescue and you're looking at adopting an animal. There are so many animals

in need," DeBoer-Rowse said. "The high rates of death for shelter animals is shocking."

Roughly a third of the nation's annually sheltered animals, about 2.7 million, are euthanized in shelters. Some are sick, aggressive or injured, but some are put down simply because of overpopulation and lack of space. In an effort to help control the euthanasia rate,

DeBoer-Rowse has begun fostering dogs with her wife Jayne. She said that even a small impact is a worthy one.

"Even if you foster just one, it gives the rescue one more place to put an animal that is in desperate need," she said.

That's how DeBoer-Rowse ended up with three dogs: Sully, a 6-year-old American

Staffordshire terrier mix; Bubbles, a 6-year-old purebred American Staffordshire terrier; and Molly, a 7-year-old boxer. DeBoer-Rowse calls herself a “foster fail” - what happens when a dog or cat who was only supposed to be a temporary foster animal winds up becoming a permanent part of the family. When she adopted Sully she said something unique happened that made DeBoer-Rowse want to volunteer with POET.

“We had recently lost our lab and I can’t be without a dog, so we went through the interview process and were selected to bring Sully home. Within a month and a half of being home he started having a reaction to my oldest son who was 6 at the time. He would lunge at him,” she said, adding that Sully’s background was “rough” prior to arriving at the rescue.

“We said, ‘This isn’t going to work,’ and called POET to tell them we [weren’t] going to keep him. Instantaneously, they partnered me with a trainer for free to help assess the situation, to teach us how to help the two of them coexist so we don’t have to give Sully up,” she said. “For a rescue to do that, to want to make these adoptions successful, was just amazing to me.”

The trainer, Jean Carew, is a professionally educated, Animal Behavior College-certified dog trainer and a member in good standing with the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. Carew offers positive reinforcement dog training to address behavioral issues and new pet integration issues to help build strong relationships between a dog owner and their pet.



Volunteers from POET Animal Rescue at pet adoption event.

“I’ve never met somebody who spends that much time and has that much patience,” DeBoer-Rowse said. “Having someone like Jean is invaluable. An amazing trainer and an

amazing rescue can save a lot of dogs.”

In addition to training, DeBoer-Rowse said it’s important to give foster and adopted pets time and space to adjust to their new

surroundings.

“I never realized that until I brought a dog into my house. We adopted all of our animals when they were older,” she said. “These animals come with baggage and you have to work at making them a family pet. They don’t know a life of being a family pet. You have to adjust to having an animal in your house, but you have to let them adjust to being in your home.”

Altruistic Acts

When asked about her experience volunteering, DeBoer-Rowse said her first event was Meet Your Best Friend at the Detroit Zoo hosted by the Detroit Zoological Society in partnership with the Michigan Humane Society.

“It was a lot of chaos, showing people dogs. But it was a lot of fun, very hard work,” she said.

What stood out to DeBoer-Rowse was the care that POET took with each visitor.

“Even at an event where the objective is to get rid of the animals, they made sure they were getting adopted into the right homes, making sure people adopting had the right education and resources so that the adoptions didn’t fail. And in the adoption contract, if for any reason the adoption fails, the animal must be returned to the rescue,” she said. “This is the type of organization I wanted to be a part of.”

With five kids, it’s not easy for DeBoer-Rowse to volunteer, but she makes time to help with

See **Adoptive Mom**, continued on p. 24

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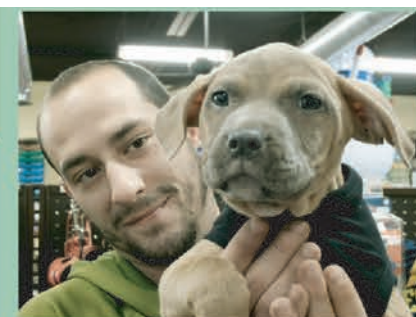
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► Adoptive Mom

Continued from p. 23

transportation of the animals when she can. In the past she's driven as far as Ohio on a couple "freedom runs" to pick up litters of puppies from a high-kill shelter to bring them back to POET to be fostered or adopted.

"It's really cool knowing that you rescued these innocent beings," she said. "I got to name all the puppies. That was a lot of fun. I got to see them grow up and get adopted by good families. It's really rewarding."

Last summer was the first time DeBoer-Rowse and her family took in a litter of eight 8-week-old puppies.

"So much work goes into taking care of puppies," she said. "We adopted that whole litter out. If you're an animal lover, there's nothing like seeing a puppy grow and get confident. It's fantastic."

And for those interested in aiding POET in its mission, fostering animals is not the only way volunteers can help. At the shelter, volunteers can clean kennels, feed animals, put away donations, take pet blankets to the laundromat and walk dogs.

"Exercise and affection is super important," said Pam Namyslowski, volunteer coordinator with POET. "Being in



Puppies from the litter that the DeBoer-Rowse family took in.

a kennel is very stressful for a dog so we try to minimize the stress as much as possible."

Volunteers can also participate in home visits and transport dogs to and from vet appointments. At adoption events,

volunteers can help adoptive owners with the process of applying, clean crates, set up and tear down event materials and walk dogs.

"So many people have told us that it's therapeutic for them," she said. "We hear from people who have experienced personal or family tragedies and in the wake of those things have found us."

And because POET is a nonprofit shelter, this means volunteers are highly necessary; their services are based entirely on donations of both time and money. Like many shelters, POET can't afford to hire full-time staff to care for and walk every single animal, and that is where volunteers step in.

"Everyone is so busy nowadays, it's amazing to me that people find time to give to us when there's a million other things you could be doing," she said. "There is a tremendous sense of community and camaraderie. It's a good opportunity to make friends with people who have love for dogs and cats in common. And we celebrate together when an animal finally gets adopted."

For those who aren't available to volunteer, but still want to contribute, POET accepts monetary donations as well as donations of crates, food, treats, blankets, toys, leashes, collars, bedding, cleaning supplies and bottles and cans. Connect with POET Animal Recue via their P.O. Box 606 in Garden City or visit poetanimalrescue.org.

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Think Outside the Box for a Chance to Win \$1,000

The Michigan Pet Fund Alliance and the Humane Society of Macomb Foundation are soliciting applications for Outside the Box award-winning programs, projects, or documents that Michigan shelters or non-profit home-based rescue organizations are successfully using.

Outside the Box can be something unique, or it may be something old with a new twist. It could also be something as simple as an outstanding documented standard operating procedure that another shelter or rescue could easily replicate by just taking it “out of the box” and tweaking for their needs.

Four creative ideas are selected annually and shared within the Michigan shelter community. Winners will receive a plaque and \$1,000 cash reward, along with the opportunity to present their ideas during a foundation event. To get an idea of what others have done visit gaybe.am/ßLo. Completed applications are due by midnight, April 30.

Animal Abuse Comes with Harsher Punishment in Michigan

The “Howie Bill,” signed by former Gov. Rick Snyder late last year, will increase the maximum penalty for killing or torturing an animal from four years to 10 years in prison.

State Rep. Tommy Brann, R-Wyoming introduced a two-bill package that also allows judges to sentence offenders who harm or kill animals with the aim of causing emotional distress to another person to as much as 10 years. The animal abuse prevention and prosecution law takes effect this month.

Paws on Board

BY TERESA ODLE

It's great to take Fido or Fluffy along on your next driving vacation as long as you carefully plan the trip with an eye toward keeping your pet healthy and safe.

“Traveling and vacationing with a pet has increased 300 percent since 2005,” says San Diego-based pet safety expert Christina Selter. “That’s the reason we’re seeing more accidents where the pets are injured.”

Selter is taking aim at the problem as founder of consumer group BarkBuckleUp, which educates pet owners and evaluates pet-safety products using focus groups.

“We look at the quality, the craftsmanship, the product, how easy it is to use,” says Selter. Approved products are posted on BarkBuckleUp’s website to help pet owners make safe choices for their pets.

Recently, BarkBuckleUp cited the Volvo XC90 crossover SUV as being the most pet-safe vehicle in the U.S. Selter says the group evaluated several brands, but it chose the Volvo model because of a factory- or dealer-installed pet kennel for the cargo area of the vehicle and because of Volvo’s overall focus on safety.

Kennels are one of the restraint systems owners can use to keep pets safe in station wagons, vans and SUVs. But to work best, they need to be fastened securely to the cargo hold. Many cargo areas have “D” rings that can secure harnesses attached to the kennels. Selter says cats and small dogs prefer soft kennels, which can be attached by seat belt in the back seat. Harness restraints come in varying sizes and also attach to seat belts.

“They buckle around the dog’s chest so they don’t pull on their neck,” says Kelly Connolly, issues specialist for companion animals at the Humane Society of the United States in Washington, D.C.

Why restrain your pet at all? First and foremost is the animal’s safety. Just like humans, cats and dogs can be more severely injured in an accident if it is unrestrained. Your own safety also matters. In a 35 mile-per-hour accident, a 60-pound dog can turn into the equivalent of 2,700 pounds of deadly force, possibly injuring or killing a passenger.

Then there are accidents a pet can cause. Selter said a bill recently passed in the California House outlaws pets sitting in drivers’ laps while driving. And when accidents occur, pets can become stressed. Some may escape through a window or door, darting into traffic and causing another accident – (for which you’re responsible) – and possibly getting hit by an oncoming car. The back seat or open cargo area is always preferred to the front seat and pick-up beds never are safe for dogs. In fact, the

BTL SPRING PET ISSUE

Pet owners are taking more care to plan for pets’ safety when they take them along for a ride.

practice is illegal in some states and counties.

Finally, BarkBuckleUp is working to improve the problem of pets and first responders to automobile accidents.

“They can’t get into the vehicle without removing the pet. But if the pet is secure in a safety harness or kennel, the responder can more easily and safely get the pet out of the vehicle and get into the car to help the humans,” says Selter.

To help stressed pets and first responders, BarkBuckleUp has



teamed with Volvo to distribute pet safety kits beginning June 1 at participating Volvo dealerships. The kits are first-responder approved. They consist of ID cards with pet information, emergency contact and vet information that go into the glove compartment and driver’s wallet. A decal that’s affixed to the driver’s-side window alerts first responders that a pet may be inside.

This sticker can be helpful even if you’ve left Fido or Fluffy at home that day.

“Let’s say your pet’s not in the car and the responder sees the decal. They know you’re not going home but are going to the hospital, so they pull the card with emergency information and notify someone who can care for your pet,” says Selter.

The Humane Society’s Connolly suggests that safe pet travel begins with planning.

“Whether you’re just going to the store or on a vacation, decide if you really want to take the pet and if it’s the best thing for your pet,” she says.

Considerations include the effects the trip and the weather might have on your pet’s health. For instance, Connolly says it takes less than 30 minutes for a parked car to heat up to 110 or 120 degrees, even with the windows open, which is too hot for a dog. You’ll need to make frequent stops and plan ahead for pet-friendly rest stops, campgrounds and hotels or bed and breakfasts.

“Just think ahead and decide, ‘Is this best for my pet and, if so, what do I do?’” Or as BarkBuckleUp’s motto says, “Be smart, ride safe.”



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Weighing the Cost of Pet Insurance Is the Cost of Pet Health Insurance Worth It?

BY DAWN KLINGENSMITH

Thanks to advances in veterinary medicine, pets can undergo the same types of lifesaving procedures as people, including pacemaker insertion and kidney transplants. But these procedures are expensive. Pet owners who can't afford them face the difficult decision of putting their pet to sleep.

The worst-case scenario is the most compelling reason to buy pet insurance. In the event of an animal's serious illness or injury, it makes costly treatments possible for pet owners who otherwise couldn't afford it. However, pet owners should weigh the cost of insurance against the likelihood they'd submit a claim for a catastrophic situation. And they shouldn't assume that pet insurance will save them money. In fact, policy holders can end up paying more for veterinary care than if they didn't have insurance.

So what's a doting cat or dog owner to do?

"I definitely tell people they should at least look into it," says Los Angeles veterinarian Karen Halligan, who discusses the pros and cons of pet insurance in her book, "What Every Pet Owner Should Know".

"What happens if your pet gets sick or gets hit by a car? A lot of people consider pets as family members and would spend any amount of money to keep them alive."

Pet insurance premiums range from about \$10 on up to \$50 per month. Over a pet's lifetime, premiums can add up to several thousand dollars.

Many plans don't include routine care such as annual exams and vaccinations, and those that do usually cost more than paying out of pocket, Halligan says.

Often, there are lifetime maximums, per-incident limits or annual limits to what an insurance provider will pay out.

Many policies don't cover hereditary or congenital defects. Pre-existing conditions are seldom covered.

"It's buyer beware. You really have to read the fine print," says Janice Brown, editorial director, Tails Pet Media Group, Chicago. "Each company is different. Some will exclude certain breed-specific predispositions. For example, labs are susceptible to hip dysplasia so they might not cover it."

When shopping around for pet insurance, consumers should find out whether companies use a benefit schedule to reimburse claims. If so, the policy will only pay up to a set amount per condition regardless of the total cost of treatment, versus covering a certain percentage of the claim based on the actual cost.

Pet owners should also ask about prescription drug coverage and discounts for multiple animals, Brown says.

A veterinarian and fellow pet owners can point people to reputable insurance providers. The largest and oldest is Veterinary Pet Insurance, Halligan says.

For policy comparisons and reviews consumers can look up companies on Petinsurancereview.com and on A.M. Best's website, ambest.com, which rates the financial strength of insurance providers.

Pet owners also have the option of applying for CareCredit, which offers no-interest financing for human and pet medical care and may be a suitable alternative to pet insurance.



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Photo: Focus Features

French Cinema Legend Isabelle Huppert Talks Sapphic Subtext of 'Greta,' John Waters & LGBTQ Roles

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

I'm saying goodbye to Isabelle Huppert, grande dame of French cinema with over 100 films to her name, including 2001's "The Piano Teacher," the Oscar winner "Amour" and 2016's "Elle," for which she was nominated for a Best Actress Oscar.

But this is not goodbye. Quiet aside from a savory "mmm" here and another savory "mmm" there, Huppert has wandered back to my line of questioning about "Greta," her wild new film from director-writer Neil Jordan ("The Crying Game"), and its queer resonance. Publicist-monitored time is seemingly of no

concern to her.

And so I'm still saying goodbye, this time also thanking her for our interview. Silence. "Yeah, but it's interesting," she starts again, absorbed in thought as she reflects on playing the titular crazy old lady. "I'm happy that you bring it up, because of course this attraction from that woman toward young girls, you can make many readings about it."

Is she implying that Greta's interest in these young girls could be sexual? "I didn't consciously think of it," she adds, "but it's there, of course. It lingers."

Roped into Greta's subtextually Sapphic scheming is Chloë Grace Moretz's poor Frances,

a New York waitress who out of the goodness-but-misguidedness of her heart returns a handbag to the sadistic stalker (Huppert). And talk about lingering: You won't soon forget Huppert doing that Chopin murder-dance. Or gum! Which is to say Juicy Fruit will now be haunting you when you least expect it.

Huppert, 65, recently spoke about playing bad women, her many LGBTQ-themed films, and the queer community's relationship to camp.

John Waters once said you play a lot of bad women, but you corrected him and said, "No, I play women in bad situations."

That's right. But this time, this one is a really bad one (laughs). She's in a very bad situation and she's a very bad woman, and she's very different from all the others I've been playing so far.

In what ways?

She's different in the sense that she has not the least bit of innocence in her (laughs). I mean, she's really a psychopath and, in a way, a kind of monster. When you go that far, when you cross the border like she does, there's nothing to make whatever she does legitimate or justified, so she's a monster. But the movie is not psychological. The movie doesn't try to

give you explanation or justification; it just shows the facts and just the facts. And it's also very highly stylized in the sense that it's sometimes very funny, and there's also a great sense of humor.

Did you read the camp elements before shooting?

Not really, actually. I liked the script and that's why I did it. It was enough for me to do it, and also because I knew Neil Jordan was going to direct – so, of course! If it wasn't him directing, or let's say a name of someone that I could expect to be a great director, I'm not sure I would have done it the same way. But given I knew he was going to do it and that he added some elements, like the fact that she plays the piano – and, at the end, the staging – made it all. The design, the apartment where she lives and the whole atmosphere of the film is very, very special; it's a bit out of time, also. There's something a bit timeless, which I think makes it a bit more mysterious. At the same time a tale, not a fairy tale...

But I see where you're going with that. I picked up some "Hansel and Gretel" parallels myself.

And also, the name of my character – Greta – reminds you of this kind of tale with the innocent, the good and the bad, the white and the black, and that's what I like, also. But the movie, it really deals with stereotypes: what it means to be good, what it means to be bad, what it means to be innocent, what it means to be guilty.

You said you've never quite played a woman like this before. What steps did you take to prepare for Greta?

I didn't really have to take any steps myself. Neil gave us a lot of freedom; I just played it the way she was written. I didn't really bother. I didn't try to make her more nice or more horrible. She appears very innocent and almost invisible at the beginning. A bit weird. The way she lives in this old apartment, it's a bit like she was coming from another time. But that was it, you know?

That's why I'm saying you just have to get yourself (in character) just by the facts, nothing else. And not trying, of course, to bring any element of emotion that would be completely irrelevant, even though there is a kind of emotion, but emotion is certainly not the right word. But, for instance, when you find out where she keeps all her victims in this room that is completely from another time, with all these dolls and teddy bears, something that's a threat, it's very disturbing.

This story is one that I could see John Waters having a lot of fun with.

Absolutely. I mean, John Waters. Dario Argento also. All these kinds of people who play with stereotypes with great freedom, because there is this ironical dissonance and, again, there is great stylization in the film, which makes it very, very special. So, again, on one hand you can call it a thriller and something really mainstream, but on the other hand it's really sophisticated, which I like about it. Otherwise, it would've been one more thriller. It's a bit more than that. And I like the reference to John Waters, who I love, by the way, as a filmmaker.

Why haven't you worked with him?

Oh, I would love to! Maybe I'm not fat enough to work with him. (Laughs)

Are you aware of why LGBTQ audiences might respond to the sort of winking humor of this film more than other audiences?

Yes, maybe because there is something provocative in a very good sense, and there is also a freedom to it, and when all the codes are kind of scattered and it's beyond the good taste, that's where you

find some truth about life, about what it means to be a woman, about what it means to be a man.

I played this monologue directed by the great stage director Bob Wilson years ago (in 1993-1995, and based on the novel by Virginia Woolf) called "Orlando," where I was a little boy at the beginning who turned out, finally, to be a woman at the end of the journey. That was a play I did on stage, a wonderful play I did with Bob Wilson, and so I explored all these possibilities. That's not exactly camp, but I think I understand what you mean, so, yeah, I'm not surprised.

But it's not only for gay people. I think it's for everybody who has a little bit of taste, a little bit of openness, a little bit of fantasy, a little bit of expectations from what it means to be a creator, what it means to bring metaphor to any imaginary expression.

We really never get to know Greta's backstory because she's not trustworthy and she's a master manipulator. Even her sexual identity is unknown. She could be queer.

Oh, she could be! Oh yeah, absolutely!

Did you think about that in the process?

No, I didn't. Honestly, I don't think about anything when I act, I hate to disappoint you (laughs). I just think about saying my lines.

See Isabelle, continued on p. 30


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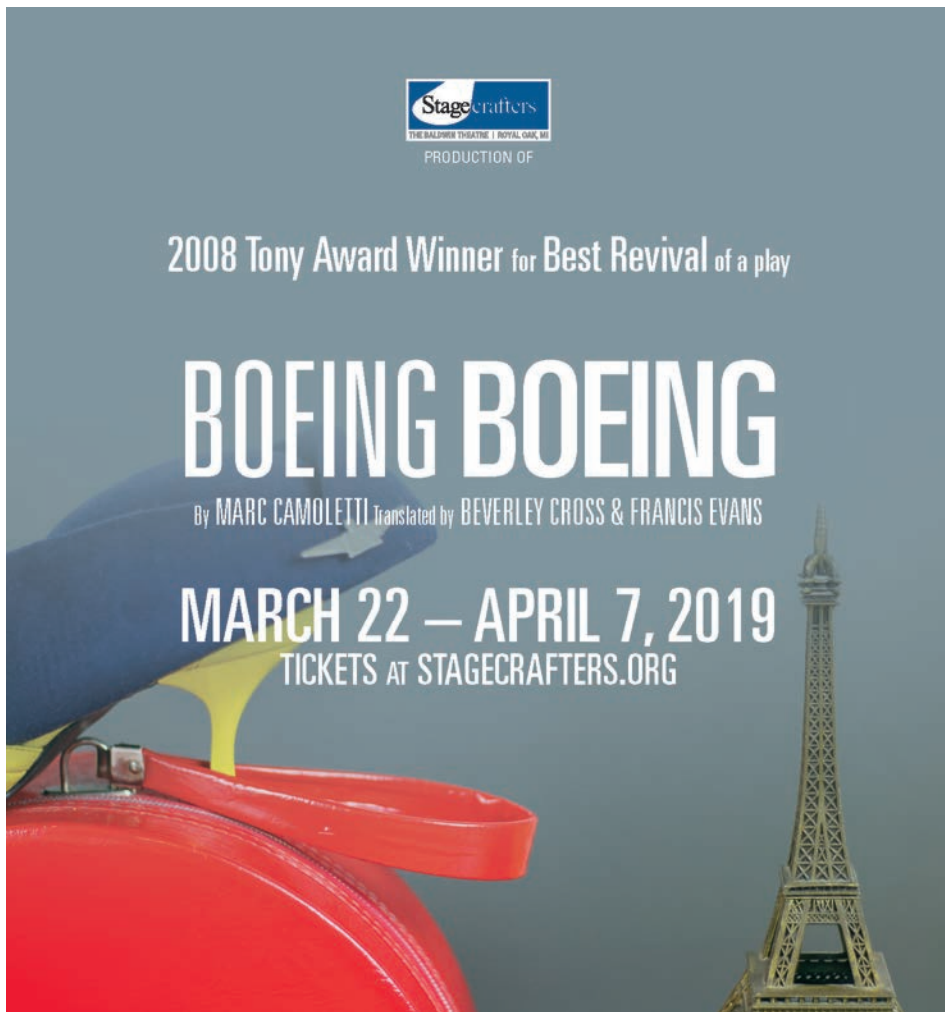


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Chloë Grace Moretz and Isabelle Huppert in "Greta." Photo: Focus Features

► Isabelle

Continued from p. 29

I'm like (actor) Robert Mitchum. Robert Mitchum used to say that.

In director Diane Kurys's 1983 film "Coup de Foudre," you and another dissatisfied housewife found romantic satisfaction in each other. The Advocate called the film "the best gay film" of that year. How do you reflect on playing a gay character at a time when gay characters weren't quite as accepted by society?

Oh, I loved that film. It's so wonderful. It's interesting that you present her as a gay character, in fact, because in the film we never really – it was saying a lot about the time, which was 1983, and the time that story was set in. This homosexual aspect of the relationship was never really clearly expressed. In fact, it's hardly something – not to say not at all – that we even brought up as I was acting, but the story was so strong that everything that was going on underneath brought us there. But that's the theme of the film, because the story took place in the '50s when these sorts of things weren't supposed to be said in the daylight.

Another queer highlight was Anne Fontaine's 2017 film "Reinventing Marvin." You play yourself and you guide the film's gay protagonist, Marvin, who's experiencing a sexual identity crisis. What drew you to that film?

I like the film very much, yes. Well, I like working with Anne. You know, I did another film with her which is soon to be out here, which is called "Pure as Snow." It's a very, very contemporary version and very unexpected version of "Snow White" and I'm playing the bad queen.

Another bad woman.

A very bad woman! But, again, she goes

against the stereotypes, and instead of having a Snow White "white as snow," it's a Snow White a bit more in the quest of sexual pleasure. My character, of course, is the bad queen that she is, but also very vulnerable and more (triggered) out of a very personal wound, so it's a different way of showing the good and the bad.

What other films of yours would you say have resonated with LGBTQ audiences?

So, clearly, Anne Fontaine's movie because that was about this young man's journey, but yeah, let me think, I don't know... I hope all of the films I'm doing (laughs)! But in terms of subject, clearly, yes, "Coup de Foudre."

And in 2013's "The Nun," by director Jacques Rivette, your mother superior was homosexual.

Yes! Of course, of course! Yeah, you have to refresh my memory, I've done so – but yes, yes, so clearly! That was wonderful! I loved doing that part because, again, when the story takes place, which is the 18th century. If you read the book by (Denis) Diderot, it's about this nun wanting to sleep with the youngest nun. There is such a sense of humor – you know, it's really, really funny – even though the whole journey of the young nun is very tragic, but that part in particular, whatever irony and humor I brought to it, I found it in the book itself. I loved doing it. It was this very good director called Guillaume Nicloux. I forgot about that one. That's probably the one role I really played with the most awareness of what I was doing.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in GQ, Vanity Fair and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.



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OU Film Festival Focused on 'Challenging Femmephobia'



BY BTL STAFF

Marking its 35th year, Oakland University's Women and Gender Studies Film Festival will present Challenging Femmephobia: Breaking the Gender Binary in Queer Communities. This year's festival features screenings of the films "Making Masculine" and "The Same Difference." The screenings, and a panel discussion, will take place from 12 to 3 p.m. on Saturday, March 9, in room 1050 of the Human Health Building on OU's Rochester campus.

'Making Masculine'

Released in 2018, "Making Masculine" is a documentary about the constructs of masculinity and pressure that society places on individuals to fit into a heteronormative culture. Director Nicholas Swatz turns the camera on himself to share his personal experiences with femmephobia within gay culture, and how he had to find a sense of peace with his feminine characteristics.

The film also highlights Justin Gerhard, a Canadian actor who has made an online-personality out of his sexuality in the form of The Queer Network (formerly known as The Gay Men Channel) on YouTube, and how he challenges the masculine 'norm' that has followed him since childhood.

Additionally, Dakota Conduct, a Chicago-based drag queen who embraced drag culture in response to the Trump presidency, shares personal triumphs

after coming out and being rejected by family. Farah Ali, a clinical psychologist explains the psychological effects that the coming out process has on LGBT youth, and where low self-worth comes into play in the story.

All of these stories come together to express the sense of pride that all LGBTQ people must possess in order to be unapologetically themselves, every day.

'The Same Difference'

"The Same Difference" is a 2015 documentary about lesbians who discriminate against other lesbians based on gender roles. Director Nneka Onuorah takes an in-depth look at the internalized heteronormative gender roles that have become all too familiar within the African-American lesbian and bisexual community.

Onuorah shows how these behaviors reproduce the homophobic oppression and masculine privilege of the straight world, while looking for solutions in compelling discussions with community members. Self-identified studs—and the women who love them — discuss hypocrisy in terms of gender roles, performative expectations and the silent disciplining that occurs between community members.

This film features many queer celebrities, including actress Felicia "Snoop" Pearson from the critically acclaimed HBO drama "The Wire," and Lea DeLaria from Netflix's "Orange

Is the New Black," living daily with opinions about how identity should be portrayed. Onuorah's engaging documentary shines a light on the relationships and experiences within the queer black female community, intersecting race, gender and sexuality.

Following the screenings, distinguished panelists will lead a group discussion.

About the panelists

Nicholas Swatz, director, is a filmmaker born and raised in southeast Michigan, and now living and working in Chicago. Nicholas graduated from Oakland University in 2016 with a B.A. in Cinema Studies, after which he officially launched Baby Pomegranate Productions, an independent production company rooted in creative fury that focuses on "telling stories that matter." "Making Masculine" is his first feature-length documentary.

Amber Stankoff, editor, is an associate producer for The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, where she creates video content surrounding programming, exhibitions, and acquisitions of the historic destination. She collaborated with director Nicholas Swatz on his debut documentary, Making Masculine, in the role of post-production supervisor. Stankoff is a 2016 graduate of Oakland University.

Kole Wyckhuys is a counselor and advocate at LGBT Detroit, Community Educator at Wayne State University, and independent educator in violence prevention. Kole has more than 15 years of experience in education, 10 years in prevention education models, and seven years in violence prevention and advocacy. His career mission is to be a part of dismantling a dominant social structure that allows for the prevalence of partner abuse, sexual assault and other hate-related violence.

This event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be provided. For more information, contact the Women and Gender Studies program at 248-370-2154



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- Ka’Juan Hill, YouTube
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Happenings



Dog Bowl 2019

Check out the world's largest Olympic-style festival for dogs May 25-26 at Frankenmuth River Place Shops at 925 South Main Street in Frankenmuth. Dog Bowl 2019, a free family fun festival, features more than 25 fun dog events from a pet parade to wiener dog races to border collie sheep herding demos to dock diving and disc dog competitions. Meet with dog-friendly vendors and local dog rescue groups, too. Family dogs are welcome, but must be on leashes. For more information, visit dogbowlfun.com

OUTINGS

Saturday, March 9

LGBT Community Chat 11 a.m. Saturday LGBT Chat is an on going social discussion group meets every week to discuss issues LGBT people face. Coming out, dating and much more. Java Hut Ferndale Michigan, 165 w 9 mile, Ferndale. 248-632-8274. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com.

LGBT Social Meet Up 6:30 p.m. Lgbt social meet up group is a group for all lgbt people who want to meet have light hearted discussions and social activities some activities, all are welcomed. Hazel Park Community Center, 620 West Woodward Heights, Hazel Park. 248-632-8274. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com.

Sunday, March 10

Men's Swing/Latin/Ballroom Lessons 4 p.m. Same Sex Men's Touch Dance lessons, Casual Attire This is touch

dancing where you hold your partner close. No partner needed plenty of single men available. Singles, couples, beginners or seasoned dancers. Jordan Mac Studio 444 W. Maple Suite E Troy. 248-288-7624. Calls only. xanaduspa@me.com. [meetup.com/SHall-We-Dance](https://www.meetup.com/SHall-We-Dance).

Monday, March 11

Harry Potter Trivia with Ferndale Pride and Tito's Handmade Vodka! 6 p.m. Quizzo is bringing us Harry Potter Trivia! Cash prizes to Pop's for Italian, 280 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248 268-4806. julia@ferndalepride.com.

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. chippewavalleysschools.org.

LGBT Game Night 7 p.m. LGBT Game

Night is an opportunity for all LGBT people and allies to come play a board game, drink coffee and socialize with other LGBT individuals. Java Hut, 165 W Nine Mile, Ferndale. 248-632-8274. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com.

Wednesday, March 13

Affirmations Senior Koffee Clatch! 1 p.m. A discussion and networking group for people 45 and older. Various discussion topics, social outings, and potlucks are held throughout the year. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. goaffirmations.org.

Rainbow League Bowling! 7 p.m. This is a fun bowling league and provides a great opportunity for anybody to become acquainted with bowling. The 2018-2019 season celebrates our 26th season. Lodge Lanes, 46255 S. I-94 Service Drive, Belleville. 734-697-9178. info@a2bowling.com lodgelanes.com rainbowbowlingleague.com.

Editor's Pick

Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo

Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo is one of the nation's largest off-site pet adoption events. The Detroit Zoological Society hosts this semi-annual event in partnership with the Michigan Humane Society. Since the event's inception in 1993, more than 25,000 dogs, cats and rabbits have been placed into new homes at the spring and fall events. Visit the Detroit Zoo from 12-6 p.m. on Friday, May 17 and 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 18. This is a free event and in the parking lot beneath the Zoo's landmark water tower in Royal Oak. Visit detroitzoo.org/events/zoo-events/meet-your-best-friend/ for more information.



Thursday, March 14

Toastmasters International SpeakOUT! LGBTQ Meeting 7 p.m. Professional & personal communication skills development. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 734-995-9867. lawrencemoeb@gmail.com. speakout.toastmastersclubs.org.

Thursday, March 28

Detroit Pistons Equality – Celebrating Pride Night at LCA! 7 p.m. The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the Detroit Pistons to bring you Piston Equality-Celebrating Pride Night! Little Caesar's Arena, 2645 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-349-5777. info@detroitlgbtchamber.com. detroitlgbtchamber.com.

OUT Night at the Ann Arbor Film Festival 7:15 p.m. This year's Out Night films focus on recurring themes of memory and community and historical belonging, said guest programmer Sean Donovan, a doctoral student in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397. info@aafilmfest.org. aafilmfest.org.

Saturday, March 30

Spring Bash at MGM Grand Detroit 6 p.m. Come celebrate Affirmations 30 years of service to the LGBTQ community! MGM Grand Detroit, 1777 3rd Ave., Detroit. 877-888-2121. mgmresorts.com.

MUSIC & MORE

Midwest RAD Fest March 9, The 10th Anniversary Midwest RAD Fest is a juried contemporary dance festival which will feature over 200 professional

dance artists from all over the world. The Epic Center, 359 S. Kalamazoo Mall, Kalamazoo, MI. 269-342-4354. rachel@wellspringdance.org. midwestradfest.org.

Franck, Fireflies and Fortissimos March 10 2 p.m. Fortissimos thread together the playful spirit of fireflies and Mozart's Symphony No. 35 along with Franck's remarkable Symphony in D minor. Franck's dazzling Symphony in D Minor is "nothing but pure music." Throw in a beautiful First United Methodist Church, 42501 N. Territorial Road, Plymouth. 734-453-5280. michtix.com.

Black History Month Concert Series—Curtis Taylor March 10, 2 p.m. Grammy Award-winning trumpeter Curtis Taylor has played at the Kennedy Center and NPR's Jazzset—now he's here to entertain us at CADL Downtown Lansing! Capital Area District Libraries – Downtown Lansing Branch, 401 South Capitol Ave., Lansing. 517-367-6350. cadl.org.

Mapplethorpe in Performance March 14, 5 p.m. Thirty years after the death of Mapplethorpe, we still cannot turn away from what his photos reveal. Mapplethorpe's work both unites and divides viewers, provoking a consideration of perceived opposites: black/white, male/female, gay/straight, art/porn. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397.

David Adjaye March 18, 8 a.m. Sir David Adjaye is recognized as one of the leading architects of his generation. A British-based architect of Ghanaian descent, Adjaye garnered international acclaim for his globally-inspired designs, for his innovative use of materials and Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397. stamps.umich.edu.

Does Addiction Treatment Work? March 19, 7:30 p.m. Dr Carl Christensen

will review the recent criticisms of treatment for substance addiction. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725. dawnfarm.org.

Peter Sellars March 21, 5 p.m. MacArthur Genius Fellow Peter Sellars is an American theater director, noted for his unique contemporary stagings of classical and contemporary operas and plays. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397.

Cabaret 313 Presents "11 O'clock Numbers" March 23, 6:30 p.m. This brand new musical revue, when originally launched at Feinstein's/54 Below in New York City earlier this year, played to a sold-out audience and received a standing ovation, and now it's coming to Cabaret 313. Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway St., Detroit. 313-237-SING. cabaret313.org.

Flint Symphony Orchestra Presents "Ravel's Bolero" March 23, 7:30 p.m. FSO March Classical Concert featuring Enrique Diemecke, conductor, and Baron Fenwick, pianist. Come and enjoy Ravel, Ginastera, Berlioz, Saint-Saens and Gershwin. The Whiting Auditorium, 1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint. 810-237-7333. thewhiting.com.

57th Ann Arbor Film Festival March 26, 5 p.m. The Ann Arbor Film Festival is the oldest avant-garde and experimental film festival in North America. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397. stamps.umich.edu.

Grief and Loss in Addiction and Recovery March 26, 7:30 p.m. Jerry Fouchey will explain theories of grief and grief recovery. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725. dawnfarm.org.

Editor's Pick

Winter Pack Walk

Join Canine to Five's pack leader for their last Winter Pack Walk at 10:30 a.m. on April 7. The theme for this walk is "Think Spring as members of the community and their four-legged friends stroll along the beautiful Detroit Riverfront or down the Dequindre Cut. Each route includes a 10-minute break at the halfway point. Remember to bring a leash, fresh water, and poop bags. Parking is free at Cullen Plaza, 1340 Atwater St. in Detroit, where the group will meet. For more information, visit facebook.com/caninetofivedetroit/.



org.

Sarah Vowell April 4, 5 p.m. By examining the connections between the American past and present, she offers personal, often humorous accounts of everything from presidents and their assassins to colonial religious fanatics, as well as thoughts on utopian dreamers, and Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397.

Michigan Philharmonic Presents "PhilPalooza2" April 6, 7:30 p.m. Highlighting our local stars playing cool music with an urban vibe. Michigan Philharmonic, Plymouth Arts & Recreation Center, 650 Church St., Plymouth. michtix.com.

THEATER

Fisher Theatre Presents 'The Lightning Thief' March 9, 2 p.m. The Greek gods are real, and they're ruining Percy Jackson's life. As a son of Poseidon, Percy has newly discovered powers he can't control, monsters on his trail, and is on an epic quest. Fisher Theatre, 3011 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit. 313-872-1000. broadwayindetroit.com.

The House on Poe Street at The Detroit Repertory Theatre March 9, 3 p.m. Gothic ghosts encounter modern monstrosities when twin sisters inherit the house where Poe is reputed to have composed *The Raven*. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. 313-868-1347. DetRepTh@aol.com. detroitreptheatre.com.

Stagecrafter's Second Stage Presents 'Sondheim on Sondheim' March 9, 8 p.m. Part musical revue, part documentary, Sondheim on Sondheim gives us an intimate portrait of famed songwriter Stephen Sondheim in his own words and music. Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak. 248-541-8027. stagecrafters.org.

Wharton Center Presents 'Miss Saigon' March 12, 7:30 p.m. Experience the acclaimed new production of the legendary musical *Miss Saigon*, from the creators of *Les Misérables*. Wharton Center, 750 E. Shaw Lane, East Lansing. 517-353-1982. wharton@msu.edu. whartoncenter.com/events.

More events online @pridesource.com

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TRIPTYCH (EYES OF ONE ON ANOTHER)

Composed by **Bryce Dessner**
Libretto by **Korde Arrington Tuttle**
Featuring words by **Essex Hemphill** and **Patti Smith**
Directed by **Kaneza Schaal**
Featuring **Roomful of Teeth**
in cooperation with **The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation**

Photographer and visual artist Robert Mapplethorpe died in 1989 at the age of 42, and 30 years later we still cannot turn away from the compelling emotional complexity of his influential body of work. Composed by the Grammy-winning Bryce Dessner of The National and featuring texts from poet Essex Hemphill and Mapplethorpe's longtime muse Patti Smith, *Triptych (Eyes of One on Another)* explores the eroticism of and inspiration for Mapplethorpe's images. The vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth gives voice to these words as enormous projections of Mapplethorpe's iconic photographs — approved for use in such a setting for the very first time — move across the stage.

This work may contain a frank discussion of sexuality and will include images depicting sexuality and nudity.

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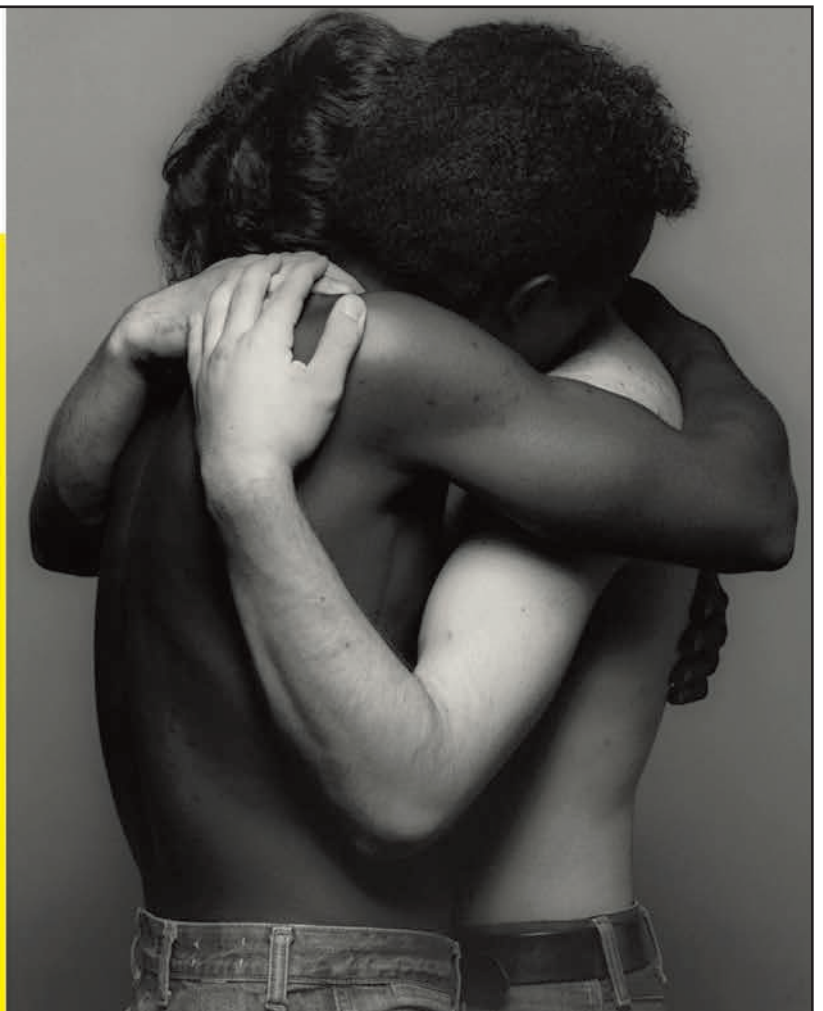
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Photo: *Embrace*, 1982 © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEN SAN VICENTE

Jim Parsons-produced 'Special' really will be special

Now that "Big Bang Theory" is winding up its run, Jim Parsons is expanding his reach in the mogul business. After jump-starting "Young Sheldon" on CBS, he has turned his attention to a sitcom first. It's called "Special" and it actually is. Based on the book "I'm Special: And Other Lies We Tell Ourselves" by Ryan O'Connell, a gay man with cerebral palsy who has also worked as an executive story editor on "Will & Grace," the upcoming Netflix series will star O'Connell as a fictionalized version of himself. The plot revolves around O'Connell rewriting his identity in order to get the life he wants and live well with the body he was born with. O'Connell will not only star, but write and produce the series, too. And it will be the first time a queer person with a physical disability has headlined a sitcom. Look for it to drop on Netflix April 19.



is now riding on Billy Eichner's shoulders. He will write and star in a Judd Apatow-produced, gay-themed romantic comedy for Universal. Nick Stoller ("Neighbors," "Forgetting Sarah Marshall") will direct the film that currently has no plot details up for inspection, but here's what's at stake: nothing less than studio support for LGBTQ+ content in mainstream cinema. This will be, if you can believe it, the first major studio film with a queer plot and a queer leading character since "Love, Simon," and

the first of its kind pitched at an adult audience since 1997's Kevin Kline-starring, coming out comedy "In & Out." Not that we've gone without all these years. Queer indie cinema hasn't stopped cranking out the rom-coms and every other genre of movie, and TV has turned into the place for characters of all genders and races (the studios seemingly only have eyes for gay white men) but this is where the big studios are, and it would be great if Eichner and Apatow knocked this one out of the park so more – and more diverse – stories could get their shot.

'American Horror Story' gets Gus

Ryan Murphy is gearing up for another season of "AHS" – its ninth, for the record, and there are no plot details yet – and he has cast Olympian Gus Kenworthy in a major role, playing the boyfriend of Emma Roberts, the only other actor announced in the cast to date. This is not especially shocking news, we understand, as Murphy is as skilled at stocking his casts with exceptionally handsome men as he is at keeping alive the screen presences of his favorite mid-and-late-career leading ladies. We begrudge him none of his choices on that front. We're just going to assume that Kenworthy is a naturally charismatic actor, because so far his limited resume highlights are an episode of "The Real O'Neals" and a cameo in "Sharknado 5: Global Swarming." No shade there, either, though; everyone has to start somewhere after they win medals in the Olympics. We are officially rooting for Gus, and also possibly Jessica Lange and/or Stevie Nicks.

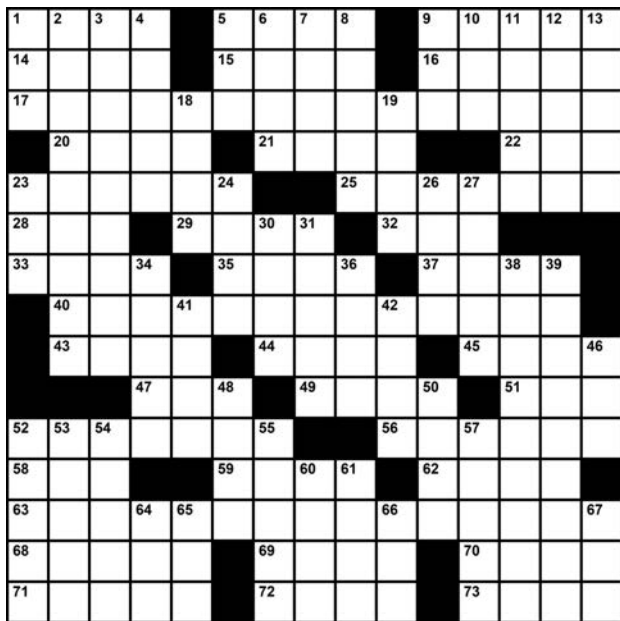
'Rock Paper Dead' is a horror movie we want to see right now

The horror pedigree on this one is a meeting of legends. Tom Holland (the filmmaker, not young Mr. Spider-man), who gave us "Child's Play" and "Fright Night," is working on a new scary movie called "Rock Paper Dead" (we really love the blunt instrument qualities of that title) and it's co-written by Victor Miller ("Friday the 13th") and Kerry Fleming. But what's queer about it? Well, it stars gay actor Luke Macfarlane ("Brothers and Sisters," and all those Hallmark Christmas movies, including the one where he has to fall in love with annoying right-winger Candace Cameron Bure) as a man released from a hospital for "the criminally insane" who goes home to what seems to be a haunted house. And then there are murders, naturally. Bonus casting: Tatum O'Neal and "Brady Bunch"'s Maureen McCormick, as we don't even care what – we're just thrilled to see their names on the IMDB page, and we hope they both get to do some evil deeds.

Queer cinema's hopes are now pinned on Billy Eichner

No pressure, but it would appear that gay viability in mainstream Hollywood filmmaking

Romeo San Vicente last fright night involved running out of ice cream and it was a harrowing experience.



Hot at Sundance

QPuzzle

Across

- 1 Type of balls that you play with
- 5 Switch positions
- 9 Hands of a manhandler
- 14 Skater's feat
- 15 Gay Bob, for example
- 16 Old square
- 17 Judith Light feature film at Sundance
- 20 James of "Only When I Laugh"
- 21 AK, once

- 22 Frozen dessert
- 23 Enjoy a breast or two
- 25 Jolly Roger fliers
- 28 Old-time actor Erwin
- 29 Phantom of the Opera name
- 32 Unc, to Pop
- 33 Sophie B. Hawkins' "The Cream Will ___"
- 35 ___ awkward position
- 37 Grace
- 40 Toni Collette feature film at

- Sundance
- 43 Morales of "Jericho"
- 44 Site of valuable stones
- 45 NASA chimp
- 47 Gomer's Sgt. Carter, for one
- 49 Hairy one in the den
- 51 Coins w. Abe images
- 52 Short end of the stick
- 56 Go nuts
- 58 Summer for Colette
- 59 It's sometimes a drag
- 62 Lanford Wilson's "___ in Gilead"
- 63 Hari Sama feature film at Sundance
- 68 Paul Monette's partner Horwitz
- 69 Quote authoritatively
- 70 Rowlands of film
- 71 Actor Milo of "Oz"
- 72 Star quality
- 73 Like a nervous Nellie

Down

- 1 Snatch
- 2 Apple's Tim Cook, for one
- 3 Adjusts, like Mapplethorpe
- 4 Congregation
- 5 It may be Sapphic
- 6 Auto racer A. J.
- 7 Ice chunk near a polar bear
- 8 Sucking sound
- 9 Chess queen, ironically
- 10 "Where did ___ wrong?"
- 11 Namely
- 12 Amount of time for premature ejaculation
- 13 Satisfies fully
- 18 Tevye, to Harvey
- 19 "Charlie's Angels" role
- 23 Outdated atlas abbr.
- 24 Iroquoian tongue
- 26 Movie about a gay hotel, with "The"
- 27 Bring down
- 30 Part of ILGA (abbr.)
- 31 Meat that gets stuck
- 34 Serengeti sight
- 36 Michelangelo's David, e.g.
- 38 No longer on the air
- 39 Like Ennis to his wife, in "Brokeback Mountain"
- 41 What homophobe Pence is president of?
- 42 Eager desire
- 46 Boom source of old
- 48 They move your dinghy
- 50 Dressing gown
- 52 Like bell-bottom jeans
- 53 Threesome member for Dumas
- 54 Use a scale
- 55 What a knight sticks in his enemy
- 57 Barracks boss
- 60 Shakespeare's was "mortal"
- 61 Katharine's "Butch Cassidy" role
- 64 Get a load of
- 65 Gershwin of "'s Wonderful" fame
- 66 "Vice Versa" publisher Lisa ___
- 67 Nureyev's nyet

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Location: Police Department Records Bureau
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Employment Type: Full Time

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For a full list of qualifications and to apply, go to <https://www.ferndalemi.gov/jobs>.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

aut Bar Sold

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Owners Martin Contreras and Keith Orr recently announced the sale of aut Bar, the popular LGBT owned restaurant and bar in Ann Arbor's Braun Court. aut Bar will now be owned by BarStar Group, which currently owns and operates several successful establishments in Ann Arbor including Lo-Fi, Nightcap and Babs' Underground.

Contreras and Orr first started doing business in Braun Court in 1985 when they opened the Mexican restaurant La Casita de Lupe. After a decade, they transformed the restaurant into aut Bar, Ann Arbor's only gay-owned, full-time gay bar and restaurant.

In 1996 the couple began buying additional properties in Braun Court, including the building that houses the Jim Toy Community Center — formerly the Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project — and, beginning in 2005, the building that occupied Common Language Bookstore, which the two acquired in 2003. They operated the store until it closed at the end of last year.

Over the years, Contreras and Orr built the LGBTQ identity of the courtyard by hosting events and fundraisers there, including OutFest, which is now known as Ann Arbor Pride.

"With the announcement of our retirement, we are hearing so many stories from people who tell us that if it weren't for the aut Bar their coming out would have been very different, and not nearly as positive," Orr said. "We've heard from couples who met at the bar. Some folks had relatively brief but profound relationships with the bar during their student years. Others have had literally lifelong relationships with the bar."

Contreras said he will always be proud of what he and his husband accomplished in Braun Court and with the aut Bar in particular.

"Keith and I have 34 years here in Braun Court," he said. "It has become our family of choice. aut Bar and Braun Court shaped us as well and gave us so many cherished moments we never would have had. Like the author Armistead Maupin so succinctly puts it, 'It is our logical family.'"

Micah Bartelme, CEO of BarStar Group, said his company will preserve and add to the rich history of aut Bar and Braun Court.

"We are excited to preserve the cultural



Martin Contreras and Keith Orr being honored at Unified's wine cellar benefit in 2016. BTL file photo.

and community resource at the heart of Braun Court," he said. "We know this is an important institution that is cherished by the staff, customers and greater Ann Arbor community. Our company's energy, systems and resources will allow us build on what Martin and Keith established while retaining the soul and essence of aut Bar."

Other residents in the court are, of course, sad to see Contreras and Orr go. But they say they are both encouraged and optimistic with the announcement of new ownership.

"We're very excited to see the new owners continue to operate aut Bar as an LGBT space that caters to our community," said Leo Cartier, director of Ann Arbor Pride and a member of the board of the Jim Toy Community Center. "We're all very excited to see what it looks like. It sounds like they are certainly making an investment in the community and I've heard great things from the staff at aut Bar and other folks from the community who know Micah."

Sandi Smith owns Trillium Real Estate, which is also located in Braun Court.

"I have spoken to Micah and just introduced ourselves and vowed to get in touch soon," Smith said. "We've enjoyed our relationship here with Martin and

Keith over the years, supporting the Jim Toy Center and hosting and co-hosting rather significant events. We've had some pretty good times here ... We're excited about what might be the new iteration.

"I hope that it continues to grow," Smith continued. "And by grow, I mean in popularity and we get some vibrant businesses in here. The bookstore struggled for a while and it would be nice to have something open during the day during the hours that we are open. I'd like to see it continue as close to it is now but with some new energy."

As for energy, Contreras and Orr say they still have plenty of it. And though they are retiring, they are not leaving the community.

"It's amazing how many people assume we must be considering moving to Florida," Orr said. "While I look forward to being able to escape winter on occasion, our roots are here. We've been too busy to be able to enjoy Ann Arbor. Now we will have the time to do so."

Contreras and Orr are planning a Retirement Party—Pass The Torch Community Celebration on Friday, March 22, 2019. The event is free and open to the public.

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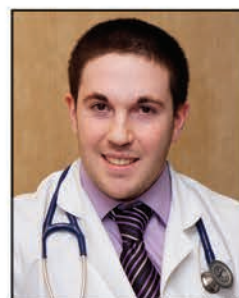
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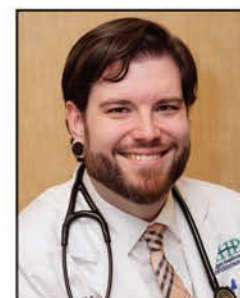
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