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NEWS

- 4 Who Inspires You? Women Leaders Honor Women Leaders.
- 6 'Sarahland' Author On Her Queer Must-Reads By Women
- 8 Michigan Trans Woman Forced to Bunk With Male Cellmate Says She Was Raped
- 12 Queer Community Endures Onscreen
- 13 Transgender Michigan to Host Virtual Day of Visibility Open Mic, Chat Events
- 16 Hazel Park City Council Introduces LGBTQ-Inclusive Human Rights Ordinance

OPINION

- 10 Parting Glances
- 10 I Tried to Figure Out How to Date Men After Dating Women For So Long. My Audiobook Helped Me Get There.
- 11 Creep Of The Week

WEDDING

- 18 A Case for the Porch Wedding
- 22 LGBTQ-Friendly Douglas Gourmet Expands Catering Options
- 24 5 Safety (and Style) Tips for Tying the Knot During the Pandemic

ENTERTAINMENT

- 32 A Trans Artist Wanted to See a Trans 'Badass' Onscreen. Now, in a New HBO Film, She Can.



18 COVER STORY

HERE ARE SOME OF OUR LATEST ONLINE-ONLY PIECES:



Photo: Singer Elton John performs onstage at Minsk Arena on June 26, 2010 in Minsk. By Mazzzur

Yes, It Is Transphobic to Declare Yourself Super Straight

By D'Anne Witkowski

Michigan LGBTQ+ Activist Michelle Brown Writes Chapter in Women's Leadership Book

By Eve Kucharski

Indiana Man Charged With Murder, Targeting Michigan LGBTQ+ Community Via Dating Apps

By Jason A. Michael

Elton John Blasts Vatican's Same-Sex Union Statement on Twitter

By Jason A. Michael

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Who Inspires You?

In honor of Women's History Month 2021, Between The Lines is featuring some of Michigan's most prominent

LGBTQ+ women leaders. Though our state is full of powerful women leaders using their skills,

time and effort to advance LGBTQ+ equality and raise awareness of issues specific to our community, we asked

these seven to share a fellow woman leader who inspires them in their work. These were their answers:



JULISA ABAD

Julisa Abad works as the director of transgender outreach and advocacy at Fair Michigan, an LGBTQ-specific legal advocacy organization. Her work focuses on working side-by-side with like-minded organizations to advance LGBTQ-affirming policy.

"My mother! Being Puerto Rican and Dominican Afro-Latina back [when I was growing up], there wasn't Jennifer Lopez or Adrienne Bailon, and there was no Hispanic representation. She was the first image of beauty strength and perseverance I had ever seen."



MICHELLE BROWN

Michelle E. Brown is a longtime public speaker, activist and author who has advocated for LGBTQ+ rights across Michigan for decades. She has contributed to BTL and her blog radio podcast "Collections By Michelle Brown" airs every Thursday at 7 p.m.

"Although she died in 2015, Grace Lee Boggs continues to inspire me. I can not tell you how many of the guests I have interviewed for my radio show who point back to Boggs' role in their life. One even said meeting her changed the 'trajectory' of their life. She did that for me as well."



ERIN KNOTT

Erin Knott works as the executive director of Equality Michigan, Michigan's statewide LGBTQ+ anti-violence advocacy organization.

"Honorable Mary Brown (D-Kalamazoo) served in the Michigan House of Representatives for 18 years (1976-1994). During her tenure, she secured significant gains for women from the creation of the school-age parents' program and passage of the Married Women's Property Act to the prohibition of probation in rape cases and the development of testimony guidelines for child victims of criminal sexual conduct. She was the first legislator to hold hearings on key women's issues such as pay equity and domestic violence. Upon retiring from the Legislature, Mary continued her public service and engagement in Kalamazoo and mentored many young women to become strong leaders."

ANGIE PERONE

Angie Perone is the director of SAGE Metro Detroit, an affiliate of the national Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders organization. In her role, she advocates for LGBTQ+ elders across the Metro Detroit region.



"My mom constantly inspires me. As a young child, I learned some of my earliest lessons in tenacity, diligence and leadership as I watched her work full time as a social worker during the day and canvas our neighborhood about a local ballot issue in the evenings. She hates the spotlight but loves supporting people and has shown me how a leader can embrace both and still effect change."



AMY HUNTER

Amy Hunter is the executive director of OutFront Kalamazoo, leading one of West Michigan's largest hubs for LGBTQ+ resources, advocacy and acceptance.

"Kamala Harris: She's smart, articulate and direct. She always gets right to the point when she speaks about policy and doesn't cloak her meaning in politician speak. She'll make a good president soon."

NICOLE DENSON

Nicole Denson has been a longtime LGBTQ+ activist. She is the founder of the Mosaic Collective, which advocates for marginalized BIPOC communities, and a board member for the Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan.



"Tamika Mallory. I believe she is one of the best examples of a civil rights leader in our era. She has a powerful voice and leads intentionally. I had the pleasure of working under Tamika Mallory's leadership through the Women's March in 2018. I was amazed at her courage as well as her tenacity to not lose focus on our mission toward equity and justice."



ALANNA MAGUIRE

Alanna Maguire serves as the president of Fair Michigan, an organization that is dedicated to advocacy, education and outreach regarding LGBTQ+ civil rights in the state of Michigan. She is also married to Attorney General Dana Nessel.

"I have two women in my life who inspire me: my mother, Mary Maguire, and my wife, Dana Nessel. My mother was my first and earliest role model for strong female leadership. I have watched her work tirelessly over the years in community organizing. My wife, Dana Nessel, is the other most important and inspirational woman in my life. Dana is brave, bold and earnestly dedicated to doing what's right no matter what. Dana is and always has been a barrier-breaker."

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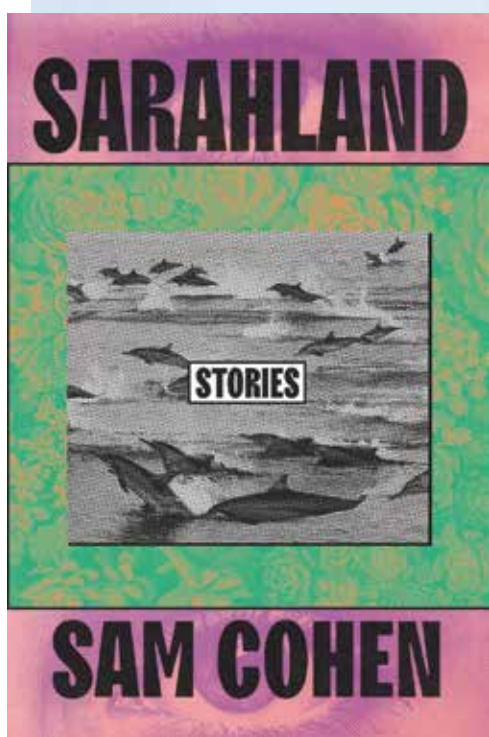
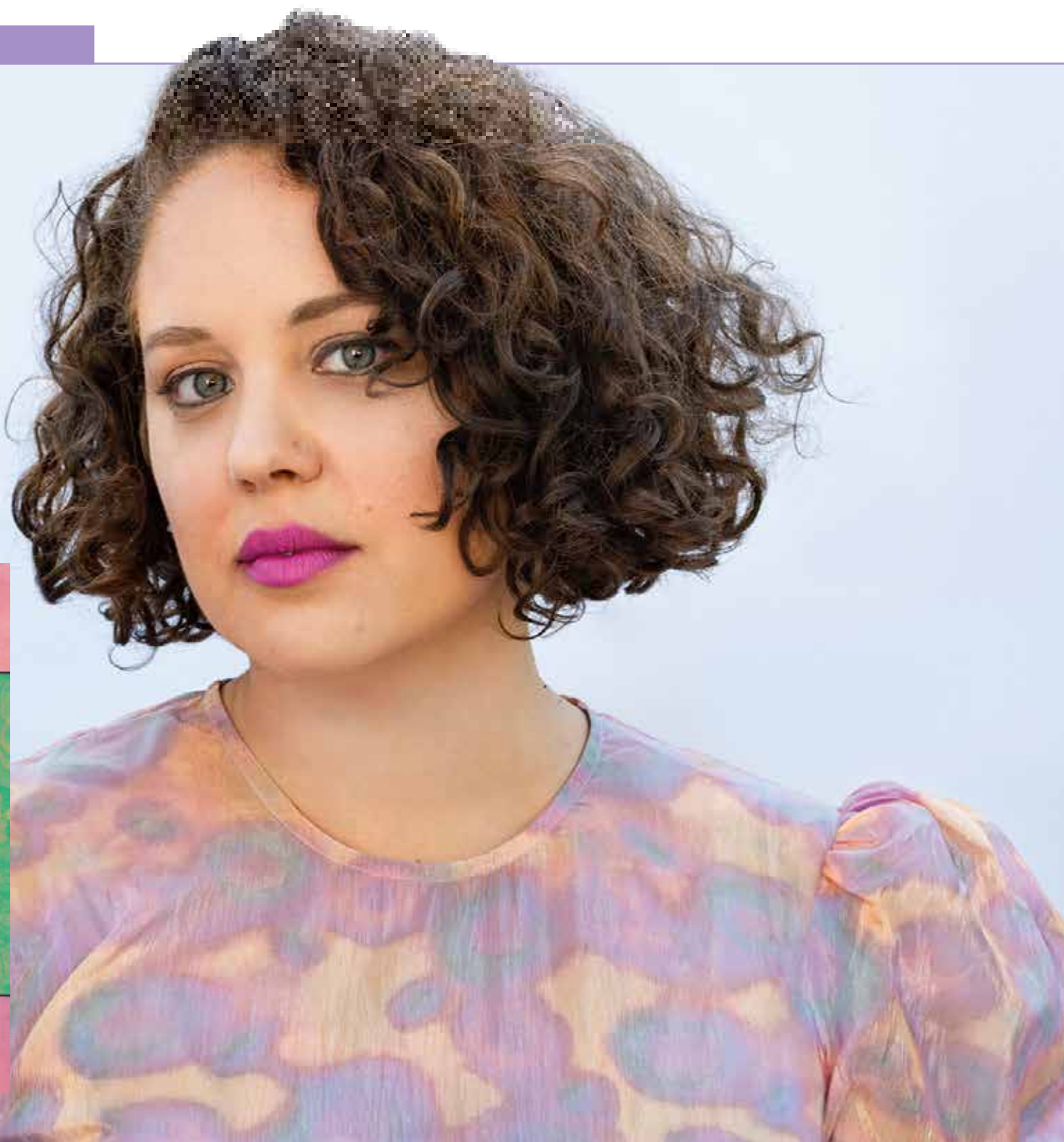


Photo by Lluvia Higuera



‘Sarahland’ Author On Her Queer Must-Reads By Women

BY SAM COHEN

Queer books by women have saved my life. They’ve given me language with which to articulate a self, and enabled me both to understand history in a way that makes sense to me and to find the queer community with whom I am always rearticulating the world.

They are books that reconfigure gender with wit and camp and play, they are books that feature obsessive queer love and hot

queer sex, they are books that get slutty with genre. Without these books, my own first book, the newly released linked story collection “Sarahland,” would not be remotely possible.

“Salt Fish Girl,” by Larissa Lai

An 18th-century mermaid from China transforms into a durian seed and is then reborn in a futuristic corporate dystopia

where she’s still a little fishy. The corporate dystopia makes part-carp girl clones as factory workers, and one of these clones tears out her tracking device and escapes to the forest with our former mermaid. It’s part sci dystopia, part fairy tale, part historical fiction. And a completely incredible story about the ways two girls together can find a way out of capitalist horror.

“Zami: A New Spelling of My Name — A Biomythography,” Audre Lorde

An instance of needing to tell your queer story to yourself, but no suitable genre existing. This book is 20th-century New York dyke history; it’s the story of being raised by Black Caribbean immigrants, it’s the story of someone who needs to discover and name social structures in order to grow into a self, and who needs to create a myth of a magical Caribbean

homeland in order to be who she wants to be. Also, Audre Lorde never gets enough credit, I think, for being funny. She's sharp and detailed and no-holds-barred in her observations, which makes her really fun to read. Oh, and this one also has hot sex.

“Passion of New Eve,” Angela Carter

This novel from the '80s features a many-breasted disabled goddess of color living in a desert compound who swallows up men during sex and leads a feminist cult, a trans Hollywood starlet living stealth in a wax museum and more. Gender and sex are reconfigured, time speeds up and slips and loops.

“The Sophie Horowitz Story,” Sarah Schulman

I had only read Sarah Schulman's incisive criticism (on gentrification, Palestine, the mainstreaming of queer culture and more) when I picked up her first novel and was delighted to find myself in an '80s Lower East Side culture of experimental theater artists, feminist magazines and pickled herring as a young dyke investigates a story about feminist bank robbers. Turns out Schulman writes some of the best sex scenes, too, including one that takes place in the women's balcony of an Orthodox shul.

“Vicious Red Relic, Love: A Fabulist Memoir,” Anna Joy Springer

Stealing from Gina Abelkop's review because it is too intimidating to try to say anything about this book in a few sentences: “Categorized as a fabulist memoir, the book unfolds by way of diary entries, scrawled school lecture notes, shit-smearred dollhouse worlds called ‘metaforests,’ cult literature, collaged drawings and a tiny tinfoil elephant named Blinky.” It's also an obsessive dyke love story and a retelling of the Epic of Gilgamesh. Just, like, read it.

“On Hell,” Johanna Hedva

When you want to break free of capitalism and its violent structures so much you're thinking about hacking your body so that it can literally fly away, read this book. Fabulist, anti-carceral, voicey, extremely contemporary and takes seriously how social structures are made and can be unmade at the level of the body.

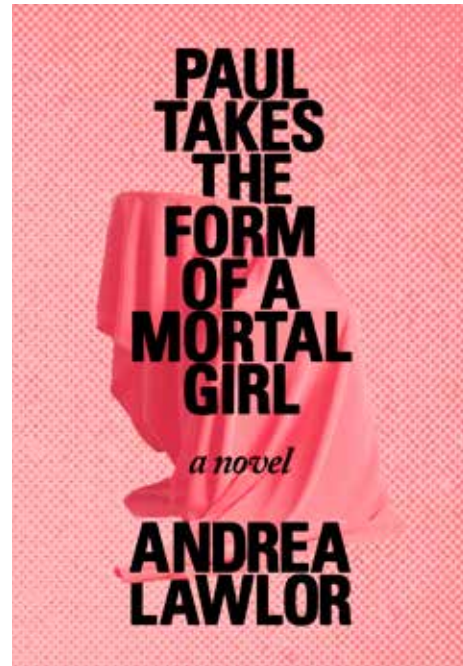
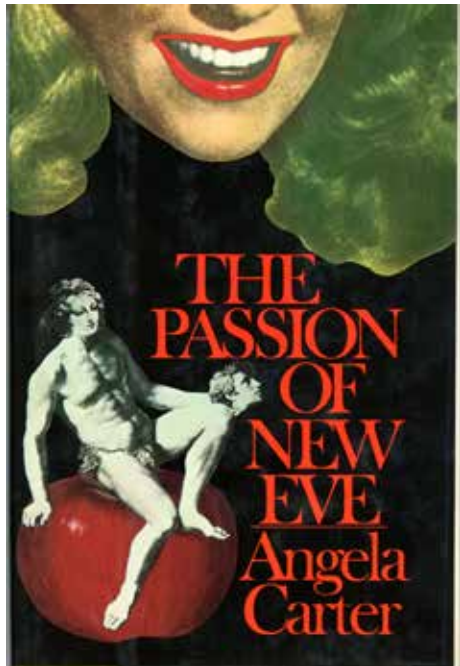
“Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl,” Andrea Lawlor

Lawlor offers queer people what all of us actually want — a character who can change gender presentations and bodies at will, by magic, and thereby fuck all kinds of people in all kinds of ways and also fit into all kinds of queer cultures from Michfest and lezzie Provincetown to the gay leather bars of San Francisco. It's the '90s from a contemporary perspective, it's infused with music criticism and fairy tale retellings, it lets us be “like everyone else only more so.”

“Borderlands,” Gloria Anzaldúa

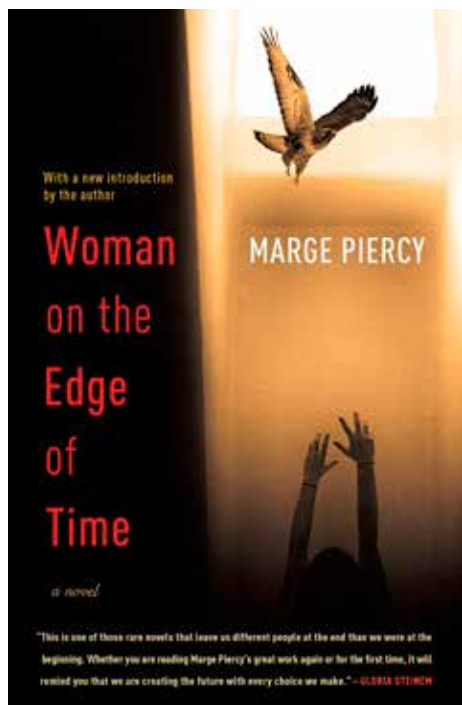
Anzaldúa was also an early maker of auto theory and wild genre-mixer. This '80s book is an incredible mix of poetry, autobiography, history, linguistics, spiritual writing, of both Spanish and English writing, and more. A Chicana lesbian insisting on the power of her voice, which has been shut down by white culture, by Latino culture, by straight people, by the patriarchy and using every one of these modes in order to assert her ways of knowing, of being, of loving as valid. I've read this book so many times and it always changes my life.

See **Must-Reads**, page 8



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→ Must-Reads

Continued from p. 7

“Woman on the Edge of Time,” Marge Piercy

I am constantly thinking about this 1976 book about a future utopia where babies are grown in external chambers and mothered by three people including men who breastfeed, where the gender neutral pronoun “per” is the only one in use, and where formalwear comes from the library or is made of compostable algae.

“Our Lady of the Flowers,” Jean Genet

The 1944 French precursor to John Waters, where shit first became floral, where depravity first became gorgeous and where the first drag queen murderer named Divine is at the center of the narrative. (I am pretty sure that John Waters gave Divine her name at least in part after “Our Lady of the Flowers” Divine). Deep queer colonial critique semi-masked in a campy stage set dripping with gorgeous imagery, a world of gay sex, white tulle tutus and fake jewels meet ghosts and murder, pansies meet hearts dripping blood, and “the world is turned inside out like a glove.”

Sam Cohen is a queer, Jewish femme who was born and raised in suburban Detroit. Her new story collection, “Sarahland,” is available now; her fiction is published in Fence, Bomb, Diagram, Gulf Coast and elsewhere. The recipient of a MacDowell fellowship and a PhD fellow at the University of Southern California, Cohen lives in Los Angeles.

Michigan Trans Woman Forced to Bunk With Male Cellmate Says She Was Raped

Her Attorney Sounds Off on Necessary Policy Change

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

An incarcerated trans woman has filed a lawsuit alleging the Michigan Department of Corrections failed to keep her safe and, in fact, put her in a position to be harmed by forcing her to bunk with a convicted rapist. The woman, who is being referred to in court filings as simply Jane Doe, claims she was raped within the first 24 hours of sharing a cell with the man and that prison officials ignored her requests for help and MDOC’s own policies.

“There are two fundamentals here,” attorney Nakisha Chaney, who is representing Doe, told *Between The Lines*. “The first is that rape is not a part of any prison sentence. I think because of the movies and TV shows and in some way because of how people feel about prisoners, there’s almost like this implicit acceptance that somehow if you’re in prison and you get raped [it’s] too bad, so sad. You must have earned it. But that’s not so.

“The second part,” Chaney continued, “is that prison officials have a constitutional duty to protect inmates from sexual abuse. ... One of the things that’s very striking about this situation is that it’s not as if they didn’t know there was a risk of harm. The flags were screaming at them. They’re literally being told this is a risk. It’s well-known from some of the statistics we list in our complaint ... that a woman incarcerated in a men’s prison is going to be of higher risk of sexual abuse and then putting that woman in a cell with a male rapist is going to put the prisoner at greater risk of abuse. And that’s exactly what happened here.”

Trans inmates are 10 times more likely to be sexually assaulted by a fellow inmate and, perhaps even more shocking, they are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted by a member of prison staff, according to a study by the National Center for Transgender Equality. Five states across the U.S. have enacted policies that allow inmates to be housed according to their gender identity. Michigan is not one of those states and forces inmates to be housed according to the sex they were assigned at birth.

“Our penal system has clearly not caught up to the realities of what’s happening today. Whether or not one agrees or disagrees that transgender women should be housed in women’s prisons versus men’s prisons, the one thing that cannot be disagreed with is the duty of the prisons to keep the prisoners safe. You have a duty to keep those prisoners safe and here there was a fundamental failure.”

“What an extraordinary thing that someone who is a woman is incarcerated in a men’s prison,” Chaney said. “Our penal system has clearly not caught up to the realities of what’s happening today. Whether or not one agrees or disagrees that transgender women should be housed in women’s prisons versus men’s prisons, the one thing that cannot be disagreed with is the duty of the prisons to keep the prisoners safe. You have a duty to keep those prisoners safe and here there was a fundamental failure.”

A coalition of LGBTQ+ organizations from across the state met virtually last week and released a statement on the case.

“The allegations in this lawsuit are unconscionable and sadly preventable. However, neglect and poor training in Michigan jails and prisons continues to put trans people who are incarcerated at risk of repeated abuse and devastating consequences. Not only is additional training needed, but anyone who was complicit in incidents of sexual assault must be held accountable. The state must immediately investigate this incident and others, implement training of MDOC staff, and commit to enacting MDOC policies that allow transgender people to be housed in correctional facilities that are in accordance with their gender identity.”

The coalition includes the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center,

Equality Michigan, LGBT and Allies Caucus, OutCenter of Southwest Michigan, OutFront Kalamazoo, Ruth Ellis Center, Love Rising Lutheran Church in Detroit, Stand with Trans and Trans Sistas of Color Project.

“I think people need to be reminded that in places such as jail or prison there are rights, so taking away what rights someone does have can be detrimental,” said Trans Sistas Executive Director Lilianna Reyes. “It can cause severe mental health issues. Trans people are segregated so it feels like you’re in solitary confinement simply because of who you are. I think we need to look at how we can help trans people and non-binary people navigate a system that is not designed to uphold their rights.”

What Chaney wants for her client is clear. “Any sexual abuse rape victim is going to need recovery and therapy, so we want to make sure she has available to her the resources that she needs in order to fully recover. We want assurances of her safety. Safety, safety, safety. She was not asking to be treated in a special way. She was asking that her constitutional rights be enforced. So, we definitely want assurances of her safety,” Chaney said. “Plus, we want the state department to take these issues of sexual abuse in general, but of specific populations that are of higher risk, seriously.”



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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

A Reminder for April 17

Stonewall! Stonewall! STONEWALL!
Say it loud. Say it proud. It's without doubt to our LGBTQ+ conviction and consensus — and that of the so-called heterosexual community — the single most important event leading to our contemporary Gay Liberation Movement.

That historic weekend of revolt in June 1969, in front of the Stonewall Inn, in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, shook open closet doors with a vengeance and fisticuffs spontaneous:

"We've had it with you 'badass' straight dudes," "This is it, you friggin' cops," "No more. You bigoted Bible braindeaders!" "Never again!" "We're ready for a fight, no matter how long it takes!"

Fifty years later, celebrating the Stonewall riots, the June Pride Celebration drew and estimated 150,000 participants and 5 million spectators attending June 2019 events in Greenwich Village and throughout Manhattan.

There's no question about it that Stonewall is our LGBTQ+ watchword historic happening. How we measure progress since then is another consideration. Judge that for yourself, militant or passive, PG reader.

Yes! Stonewall is of fight-for-life LGBTQ+ importance, but five years before Stonewall, April 17, 1965, another glass-shattering, show-and-tell, in their political faces historic event occurred that few of us in the LGBTQ+ community remember, honor or even know about today:

The first gay/lesbian picketing of the White House. Here's what brought it all about.

In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared homosexuals a threat to national security as "sexual perverts" who were vulnerable to blackmail by Communist spies. He ordered the immediate firing of every gay man and lesbian working for the U.S. government.

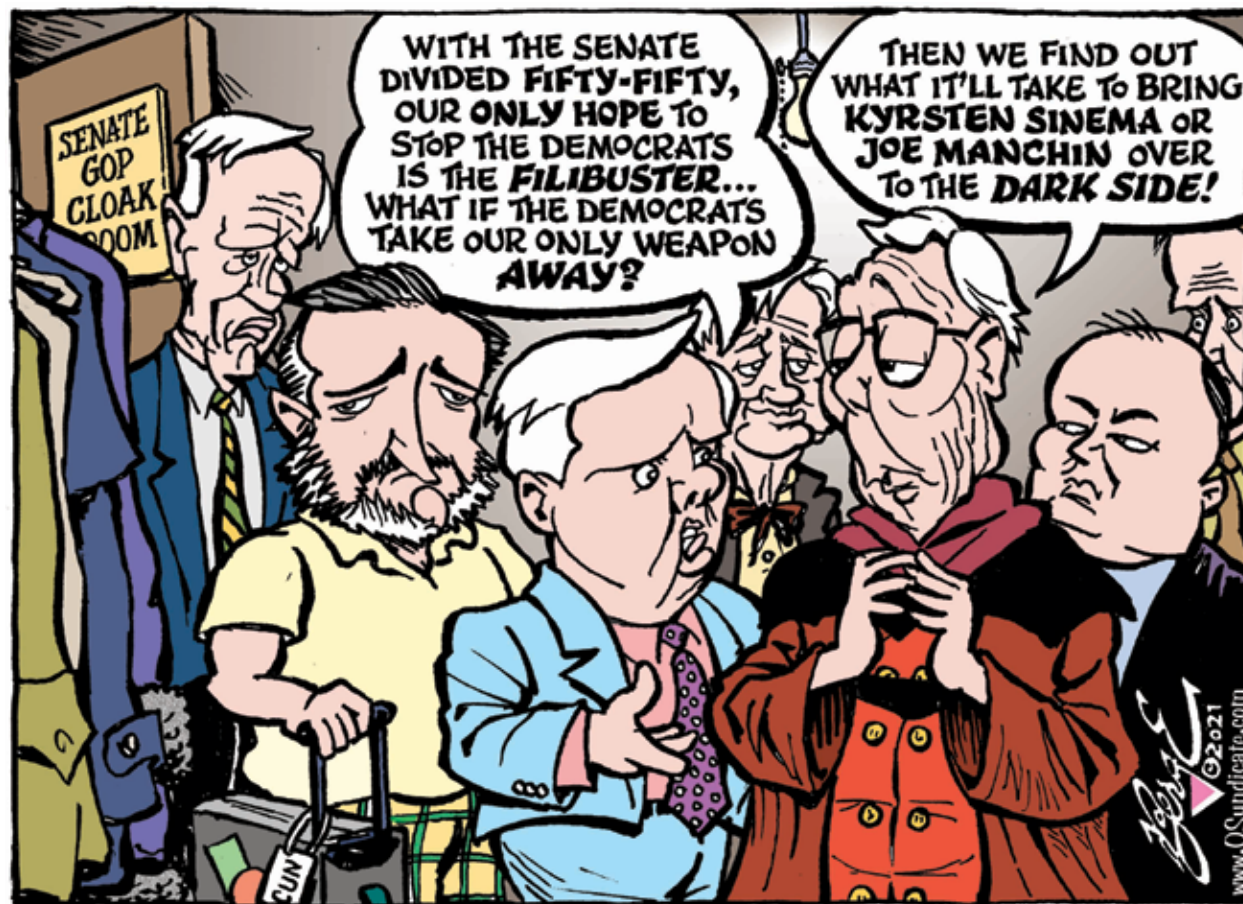
Five thousand government workers, including private contractors and "fellow travelers," were publicly exposed and sent packing. Over the decades following, these numbers climbed to 50,000. View 2012 film documentary "Lavender Scare" to learn more.

One of those casualties was Frank Kameny — the "grandfather" of the modern gay rights movement and a prominent, Harvard-educated astronomer.

During the Eisenhower witch hunt, he was working for the Army Map Service on classified missile projects in the hopes of being an astronaut when he was fired.

Four years before the Stonewall riots in New York City, Kameny courageously led the first picket of about a dozen brave — very brave, indeed — gays and lesbians at the White House in 1965 to protest these unprecedented government firings.

See next page



Viewpoint

I Tried to Figure Out How to Date Men After Dating Women For So Long. My Audiobook Helped Me Get There.

BY KATE WILLETT

In a basement classroom my freshman year of college, I heard a woman with purple hair say, "I came out to my parents as queer when I was 13. And I came out to them as kinky last year."

I had so many questions.

Should any mother have to hear that her daughter wants to be consensually beaten in a hot way? Why would someone say "queer" instead of lesbian or bisexual — like, who did she want to get kinky with anyway? Would I, a basic bisexual from the suburbs, with no romantic experience with women outside of a multi-year infatuation with a straight girl I wrote tortured poetry about, ever be able to fit in with the other women at this Queer Women's Mixer?

I decided, no, I would not.

It wasn't cool to be bisexual in the conservative Christian suburb where I grew up, but it definitely wasn't cool to be an uninformed square in a sundress too terrified to make eye contact with women I was attracted to either. "No one will ever take me seriously as a queer person if I don't date some women or at least get a better haircut," I thought. I went back to my

freshman dorm and decided to join a sorority instead. After spending so many years in the closet, what was a few more?

Maybe it's true — there's a lid for every pot. A year later I was deeply in love with Molly, another lady from the same suburb. We both wore sundresses. It was a proverbial us-against-the-world romance, and I didn't care who knew I loved her. Despite my insecurities about being too basic, too femme and too bi, being in love with a woman allowed me to finally feel I had the right to claim queer identity.

"I'm bisexual," I announced at a monthly sorority meeting. "I don't care if anyone here has a problem with that!" My sorority sisters, in retrospect, looked surprisingly unperturbed. "Kate," someone said to me, "no one minds that you're bisexual. But we need you to stop using the house chores email list to invite people to Iraq War protests."

There was no neutral on a moving train! I quit the sorority and I was ready to live as a full-time queer. I came out to my parents. I moved into a queer co-op and spent the weekends at dance parties and dumpster diving, with people who, for the first time in my life, made me feel a sense of true community.

See Viewpoint, next page

“‘Kate,’ someone said to me, ‘no one minds that you’re bisexual. But we need you to stop using the house chores email list to invite people to Iraq War protests.’”

→ Viewpoint

Continued from p. 10

This community helped me throw the DIY wedding where I married Molly. Multiple former sorority sisters came out of the closet in the years following — it turned out that there’s something kind of gay about wanting to spend all of your time with attractive people of the same sex. As Molly and I built a life together, I stopped identifying as bi, and just identified as her wife.

When we broke up a few years later, I felt like I was losing not only my relationship but my identity. I went on dates with a few women, but I pretty quickly ended up in a rebound relationship with a guy that lasted four years. I was so worried my friends from the co-op would reject me if I lost my queer cred. They didn’t. It turned out they, to use a bisexual cliché, “were just into the person.”

I mostly date men now. I genuinely don’t know if that’s because I’m more attracted to men or because you can just trip and fall onto a straight guy’s dick. The process of trying to figure out how to date guys after so many years of not doing it was

so funny and so traumatic, I had to write a whole audiobook to parse through it. (On a side note: Please check out “Dirtbag Anthropology” on Audible!)

Right now, I’m say, a Kinsey 2. I guess if you really press me on it, I’m bisexual, or pansexual and maybe even demisexual, because so much of sexual attraction for me, at this moment, requires emotional connection.

It’s changed a thousand times. I expect it to change again. Maybe when I’m 80 years old I will look back on the past 30 beautiful years I spent in a multi-gender polycule. I sometimes feel guilty, like I don’t have a right to claim queer identity if it’s been X amount of days or years since I’ve done something gay. But who I’m with doesn’t erase my past, my politics and the lifelong process of reckoning with, and ultimately failing at, hetero-expectations.

Kate Willett’s Audible Original, “Dirtbag Anthropology,” is available now on Audible at audible.com/dirtbag.

→ Parting Glances

Continued from p. 10

He also petitioned the Supreme Court, which refused to hear his case.

Only in 1995 was that order rescinded by President Bill Clinton, who also instituted the controversial military policy, “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Congress voted to end State Department discrimination in 2011. Kameny died in

that same year.

Research and remember April 17, 1965. The memorable day the White House was picketed in support of gay rights — long, long before Trump took office, by the way! It’s just as important as Stonewall. Or, is it? You be the judge once more, ever-thinking PG reader.

Creep Of The Week

The Pope Says Nope to Marriage Equality

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

It’s been one hell of a week.

First, the good news. Vaccine distribution is going great! Hooray! Go get stabbed when it’s your turn! I can’t wait! So many exclamation marks!!!

Then the bad news. More state Republicans are pushing forward with anti-trans athlete bills and anti-voting rights bills. Republicans are counting on Americans to find transgender people far more threatening than the in-broad-daylight racism and anti-Democracy bullshit Republicans are all about. And, sadly, in some cases they are right.

And then there’s the Catholic Church. On March 15 the church declared that they were not stans of same-sex marriages — the day after PI day! Like, can we not have some time for celebration? According to USA Today, “The two-page statement published in seven languages was approved by Pope Francis.”

Yeah, that Pope Francis. The guy who was declared was a kinder, gentler pope and even a friend to the gays. In 2019 he said, “Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God. What we have to have is a civil union law. That way they are legally covered.”

But it seems like the church thought that it was a good time to clarify that whole “civil union” thing by making clear that the “civil” part was as far as it went. The Church itself wasn’t going to bless these sinners, but it was OK if they had rights under the law.

“The blessing of homosexual unions cannot be considered licit,” the Catholic Church’s statement says. “There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family.”

Gosh, thanks for that! I’m not a Catholic. I don’t even believe in God. But I also know that the Pope has a lot of social significance because it matters to a lot of people, even people who are not Catholic, what he says.

But don’t worry. The statement clarifies that this is not “intended to be a form of unjust discrimination.”

Oh, thank goodness. The declaration by one of the most powerful religious institutions in the world doesn’t INTEND for their declaration that same-sex marriages are sinful to result in unjust discrimination. So, any resulting discrimination must be just. Cool.

The statement continues, “The Church does not have, and cannot have, the power to bless

unions of persons of the same sex.”

Interesting that the Catholic Church is declaring that, gosh darn it, they just don’t have the power to do this thing they don’t want to do. As if everything the Church DOES have the power to do isn’t power that it just, like, decided to take for itself.

And this kind of seems to have come out of nowhere? I mean, it’s been over five years since the Supreme Court’s pro-marriage decision allowed same-sex couples to get married.

My guess is that this announcement is a response to a shift in the political climate in the U.S. When Trump was “in charge” — as if he ever did his job well or at all — there was no need to scream from the rooftops about issues like marriage equality because the Trump Administration was hard at work chipping away those rights and denigrating LGBTQ+ people.

President Biden, however, is open about his acceptance of LGBTQ+ people and marriage equality. And he’s a Catholic.

Last year, Crisis Magazine, which dubs itself “A Voice for the Faithful Catholic Laity,” proclaimed that “Biden spent a good chunk of the last century promoting such anti-Catholic policies as systematic infanticide, government-sanctioned sodomy and high taxes.”

In other words, Biden supports reproductive freedom, marriage equality, and, uh, the price we all pay to live in a civilized society?

The Crisis article claims that Biden is “a squish who prioritizes the temporal and sentimental over the eternal and the sacred. Sooner or later, we’ll have to reckon with that fact.”

Perhaps this new anti-marriage equality declaration is part of that reckoning?

Very curious, though, how and if the Church is reckoning with the fact that members of their flock voted for Donald Trump? A man who literally couldn’t name a single Bible verse during an interview in which he professed to be a big fan of the book? A man who was accused of sexual harassment, assault and rape by many women?

A man whose open racism inspired white supremacist rallies and riots? A man who divorced multiple times? A man who literally worshipped himself? A man who ignored the death and suffering of hundreds of thousands of people during his last year in office?

If any Catholic voted for that one, let alone twice, it really begs the question of that whole prioritizing the eternal and the sacred thing. Certainly a lot more than wanting to bless two people saying, “I do.”



A still from "Tamou" by Tom Prezman and Tzor Edery.

Queer Community Endures Onscreen

'A Collective Will to Create Queer Spaces' Is a Running Theme During the 20th Anniversary of AAFF's Out Night

BY GEORGE ELKIND

The Ann Arbor Film Festival is going online March 23-28 for its 59th edition showcasing experimental works. But 2021 also marks the 20th anniversary of its LGBTQ-focused program "Out Night," coming to you virtually on March 25.

A home for the festival's queer programming since its inception (it began as "Girls Out Night" in 2001, with *Between The Lines* as a co-sponsor), the showcase has frequently centered experimental and nonfiction works by an increasingly broad range of queer filmmakers. In its first year, the program culminated with a screening of Barbara Hammer's "History Lessons," which sought to recover and reframe pre-Stonewall depictions of queer women. (Hammer has remained a fixture at the festival both before and since).

Now in its third year with Sean Donovan

as programmer, the series continues to blend historical and political awareness with a forward-looking air. This time it does so with an inviting range of eight new queer-focused shorts all curated from a place of open affection for experimental works, which have long offered a space, according to Donovan, for queer artists to work in relative freedom outside the American mainstream.

"The work of queer creatives is absolutely foundational to experimental filmmaking in an American context," Donovan tells *Between The Lines*. "I think the first experimental filmmaker whose work I really fell in love with was Kenneth Anger, and it's because I was looking for examples of queer artistry in history — before Stonewall, when people held this myth of a completely closeted past." Noting Anger's ability to shape avant-garde filmmaking in the '40s and '50s, he described Anger's work as "decidedly and importantly queer."

While privileging the best slate possible in programming, Donovan cited the relatively "comfortable" and prominent position of queer male filmmakers — many of whom, including Gus Van Sant and Anger himself, have been featured during Out Night and AAFF over the years — as an added driver in showcasing a wide range of voices and styles in the program.

"I've always been mindful of the idea of having a selection of Out Night films as diverse as the LGBTQ community, while at the same time paying attention to what the existing power structures in experimental filmmaking are," he says. "So I can highlight stuff that seems genuinely new, genuinely pathbreaking in different ways."

He specifically points to the prevalence of trans-focused shorts in this year's Out Night slate, as well as the inaugural edition of "Object Lesson," a new shorts program explicitly dedicated to works by trans filmmakers, as signs that both

submissions and selections are changing. That goes not just for filmmakers and subjects featured but also for the tone of works submitted.

"I used to work for an LGBTQ-specific film festival back when I lived in Washington, D.C. called Reel Affirmations. And this is a long time ago now," recalls Donovan. "For whatever reason, back in 2015, 2014, all the submissions really were about pain and sadness and really accepting negative emotions, and focusing on those moments of violence and sadness. I definitely think now — and maybe it's just because these are experimental or avant-garde filmmakers who are fanciful by nature — there is a collective will to create queer spaces through the powers of filmmaking and cinema that feel safer, that feel more affirming, and that feel queerer."

While keenly aware of the hardships often

See **AAFF**, page 14

Transgender Michigan to Host Virtual Day of Visibility Open Mic, Chat Events

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

On March 31, the 11th-annual International Transgender Day of Visibility will be observed. While every year since its inception the event has drawn celebrations around the world, locally, Michiganders can commemorate the day with its founder, Transgender Michigan Executive Director Rachel Crandall-Crocker. This year, Crandall-Crocker is preparing to host the event virtually on March 30, at 12 a.m. to March 31, at 11:45 p.m. — a second time since COVID-19 restrictions came into effect around this time last year.

“People have been real lonely. So many things are canceled, and I really want people to have a chance to get things off their chests,” she said. “I’m really excited about that. We don’t cancel things at Transgender Michigan. We are having the chat and, hopefully, in a few months, we can have live events — we are a determined bunch.”

At the event, attendees are encouraged to “drop in any time,” and they can participate in an open mic that will allow guests to feature poetry, storytelling, music and more.

“Call to poets, storytellers, musicians and artists: Send us your video of your performance to show on our stage,” wrote event organizers. “See our Pride stage [at transgendermichigan.org] for examples of what we are looking for. Send your YouTube link or video to susan@transgendermichigan.org.”

Crandall-Crocker added that attendees can also attend a Transgender Visibility Day Chat on Sunday, March



Rachel Crandall-Crocker is the founder of the International Transgender Day of Visibility and Transgender Michigan. She is eager to host this year’s virtual event, and she hopes to be able to do in-person events again soon.

28, from 2 to 3 p.m. They can use the online space to connect with fellow members of the trans community to talk and learn about issues they’ve been facing during this period of isolation. That element of connection, even from miles away, is why Crandall-Crocker is eager to continue the virtual component of TDOV long after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

“Even if we’re able to have it live this year, I want to have an online component, too, like a chat,” she said. “We want to have affirming events, and that’s what sets it apart from the Day of Remembrance. We want to have life-affirming events.”

And while she isn’t sure that the annual August Transgender Pride in

the Park event will be able to happen in 2021, which was 300-strong just two years before, Crandall-Crocker said she’s eager to use events like these to raise visibility of not only the community itself but the activism Transgender Michigan is doing.

“I’m also doing some consulting for the Michigan Department of Corrections,” she said. “They want me to help them change some policies, and I’m pushing for everyone who deals with trans people in prisons or in jails to have training.”

This work, Crandall-Crocker said, is vital. Especially in light of recent events like the Michigan’s Camp Boomerang rejecting the membership of trans men, the trans-exclusionary “super straight” trend and the lawsuit against MDOC by a trans woman who was raped after being forced to bunk with a cisgender male. She’s eager that all attendees will feel affirmed after attending.

“We want to celebrate being alive and being trans,” she said.

Learn more about each event online at transgendermichigan.org or by following its Facebook page.

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A still from "Mother Bunker."

→ AAFF

Continued from p. 12

embodied in queer experience, this year's Out Night selections, which feature robots performing in drag revues, sunlit LA bike rides and hopeful visions of better futures, mark a decided contrast to the fest's lone queer feature-length selection.

"Instructions for Survival," Yana Ugrekhelidze's politically sharp and narratively lean nonfiction film, features a trans man, Alexandre, living under a kind of deep cover before fleeing his native Georgia (a distinctly queer-phobic environment) with his wife, who agrees to become a surrogate mother to raise money for the move. Less dour than it sounds, the film's arc evokes shades of Maggie Nelson's perpetually musing "Argonauts," drawing out shared transformative currents between pregnancy and trans identity in terms of medical and social experience. Even so, the aura of Out Night's programming this year seems broadly optimistic by comparison, even utopian:

"This particular collection is more fanciful, more devoted to a utopian imaginary of what queer could look like — or what what kinds of queer intimacies people can find in their lives," says Donovan. "Watching all of these, it feels almost like a reaction to the very grim year that we've had in this country and around the world in a rather universal way, but certainly in ways that touch on LGBTQ lives specifically."

For Donovan, themes of "imagining what a queer recovery looks like" prevailed among the often diaristically narrated and intimate selections, something he appreciated as both a programmer and a viewer.

"For me, I live alone; I've definitely had the strange kind of pandemic experience of wondering what to do most days," he says. "In a year that has been so isolating, that has people sectioned off in their own homes and missing a lot of the larger sources of queer community that people might be used to, watching these films, for me, was a reminder of queer community that does exist, even if it's abstract and nebulous and not something

“Watching these films, for me, was a reminder of queer community that does exist, even if it's abstract and nebulous and not something physically here next to you.”

physically here next to you.”

The selection of shorts, like experimental filmmaking generally, offers what Donovan frames as a welcome path from the kinds of conversations and ideas circulated (and recirculated) surrounding more mainstream films, and even in mainstream culture more broadly. This road, he suggests, offers rich new ways of understanding queer identity, aesthetics and experience.

"Experimental film's incredibly vital as a way out of tired and familiar debates about what constitutes LGBTQ representation. That kind of paradigm rarely applies very well to these kind of experimental films, which are finding entirely new filmic languages to try and translate what the queer experience is," says Donovan. "And I think that kind of imagination — and willingness — to work outside of established forms is incredibly necessary to kind of revitalizing queer culture, making things more exciting."

Passes for the 59th AAFF are now on sale and include access to all the festival's programming including over 100 films in competition, juror programs, special programs, salons, expanded cinema performances as well as Q&As with the filmmakers. Tickets for each event will be available as a sliding scale with a suggested price of \$12 and a minimum of \$2 per ticket (the \$2 minimum covers platform fees).

George Elkind is a writer and media critic based in Metro Detroit.



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Hazel Park City Council Introduces LGBTQ-Inclusive Human Rights Ordinance

BY BTL STAFF

The Hazel Park City Council last week introduced Ordinance 01-21, a Human Rights Ordinance that would prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and public services on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, age, height or weight, marital status, familial status, national origin, disability and sexual orientation.

The ordinance's first reading passed unanimously, and it will be entered for a second reading at the Council's next regularly scheduled meeting on March 23. It is expected to advance to a third reading and be adopted in April.

The Human Rights Ordinance was introduced by Councilmember Luke Londo, a recent appointee to the Council.

"Hazel Park has consistently played an oversized role in the pursuit of equality for the LGBTQ community," Londo said. "As a proud Hazel Park resident who is also bisexual, I am honored to play a role in moving our community forward, and cementing our status as a leader in the fight for LGBTQ rights."

Two Hazel Park residents filed suit in 2012 challenging Michigan's ban on adoption by same-sex couples. They subsequently amended their complaint, additionally challenging Michigan's constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

The suit, *DeBoer v. Snyder*, was eventually

consolidated with three others as *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which culminated in a decision by the United States Supreme Court requiring all states to grant same-sex marriages and to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, who represented the couple in *DeBoer v. Snyder*, commended the Council's action.

"The ongoing struggle for LGBTQ civil rights requires bravery, and the fortitude of those in a position to inspire change to do so," Nessel said. "Just as two courageous residents did before them, I applaud the Hazel Park City Council for standing up and doing the right thing."

The Hazel Park Human Rights Ordinance includes the same protected classes within the Michigan Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, and expands it to include disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. It mirrors ordinances adopted in nearby communities.

City Manager Ed Klobucher, who has served Hazel Park since 2003, recognized the City's unique history in LGBTQ efforts.

"Hazel Park voted against Michigan's same-sex marriage ban in 2004, two of its residents helped achieve marriage equality nationwide, and now the City Council is seeking to eliminate discrimination against the LGBTQ community within our borders," Klobucher said. "I am proud of our newest councilmember, Luke Londo, for

introducing this ordinance — and of the rest of Council for their foresight in advancing it forward."

The introduction of the Human Rights Ordinance occurs amidst a renewed interest in expanding the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include provisions for sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. A ballot question committee, Fair and Equal Michigan, is currently awaiting certification of petitions for a legislative initiative by the Michigan Department of State. Successful certification would place the proposed initiative in front of the Michigan legislature, which further defines "sex" within the Act as encompassing gender identity and expression, as well as expanding the Act to include sexual orientation.

"There continues to be a need for statewide protections for the LGBTQ community, and we will only get there with the ongoing support of Michigan residents, businesses and other organizations," said Fair and Equal Michigan Chairman Trevor Thomas. "We are grateful for cities like Hazel Park who share our vision and passion for the pursuit for LGBTQ civil rights."


If the legislature fails to adopt Fair and Equal Michigan's proposal within 40 days of certification, the matter will go in front of voters in the November 2022 general election. Councilmember Londo sits on the honorary leadership committee of Fair and Equal Michigan.

Additionally, Michigan Sen. Jeremy Moss — one of three openly-gay legislators and whose district includes Hazel Park — introduced a bill, SB208, in the Michigan Senate that would amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. A similar bill, HB4297, was introduced in the Michigan House by Rep. Laurie Pohutsky.

"Tonight's action by the Hazel Park City Council further demonstrates that LGBTQ discrimination has no place in our cities or our state," Moss said. "I am proud to represent communities who understand the importance of advancing LGBTQ equality, and implore my colleagues to do the same."

Hazel Park City Council has issued proclamations recognizing June as LGBTQ Pride Month since 2018. Additionally, the City has raised an LGBTQ Pride Flag outside City Hall annually since 2018, and held its first "Pride in the Park" event in 2019.

The proposed ordinance was seconded by Councilmember Alissa Sullivan and supported by Councilmember Mike McFall, Mayor Pro Tem Andy LeCureaux and Mayor Mike Webb.



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Julia Music (right) married her wife Jenna Parks on their front porch. The couple's wedding was officiated by Oakland County Judge Jacob Cunningham. Courtesy photo.

A Case for the Porch Wedding

Ferndale Wedding Officiant Busier Than Ever During COVID-19

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Perhaps as a side effect of her time as the Ferndale Pride event chair, Julia Music got used to a regular question: “Will you marry us?” Not qualified to do so, she’d politely decline. But over the years, the requests only kept coming.

“So, one night at midnight, I decided I was going to [become a wedding officiant],” she said. “Because why not?”

As if on cue, a friend asked her to do a

day-of wedding ceremony soon after, and since getting a license in November 2018, Music has regularly married couples across Michigan. Yet despite falling marriage rates due to COVID-19-related postponements, Music was busier than ever marrying couples in 2020.

“When I got my license I thought, ‘Maybe I’ll do one or two in my lifetime. I don’t think people will be that interested,’” she said. “Now, I’m looking at my seventh [ceremony], and I have two more lined up for later in [2021].”

Due to pandemic-related safety restrictions, the couples that Music has married have all had socially distant ceremonies. And, while Music recovered from an accident that left her temporarily unable to walk, for a time, couples had to have their wedding ceremonies performed on Music’s front porch — including her own.

“My wife and I also got married on our porch. [Oakland County] Judge Jake Cunningham actually performed our wedding,” she said. “We were planning to

get married, we had a date set, COVID struck and we couldn’t do our wedding. So, we were like, ‘Let’s just elope on our front porch.’ We’ve now had at least four weddings on our front porch.”

Music believes that despite COVID’s challenges, the pandemic helped people to “reprioritize commitments” and relieve the pressures of a large public ceremony.

“I think prior to COVID-19, at least the

See **Porch Weddings**, page 20

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→ Porch Weddings

Continued from p. 18

couples that I worked with, it was about being married and not the wedding,” Music said. “In my personal case, I throw a big party every year — I’m good with parties — and I love my wife and partner and I just wanted to be with her. So, it was just about, ‘Let’s do this ceremony and get this legal document signed so that we’re married and we have rights to whatever we need to so that we can be together.’”

For husbands Jason Misleh and Luiz Moreno, that was the aim as well.

“We were just ready and Julia had offered to do it,” Misleh said.

Misleh got to know Music after working with her for Ferndale Pride. A porch wedding didn’t seem so unconventional to him once he learned of a friend who married his Canadian partner over Zoom because of pandemic border restrictions. Misleh and Moreno tied the knot officially in September 2020.

“But we do plan to have another big pseudo wedding with friends and family, which Julia will perform the same ceremony for I think,” he said.

While couples have many reasons to get married, Music thinks that weddings among LGBTQ+ people became more popular in 2020



Jason Misleh (left) and his husband Luiz Moreno were married by Ferndale Pride Chair Julia Music.

because of the uncertain political climate. For one, only months ago did the U.S. Supreme Court gain a conservative majority and Justices Clarence M. Thomas and Samuel A. Alito imply that the 2015 nation-wide marriage equality ruling be

overturned.

“All the couples that I performed a wedding for were planning to get married, but they were all worried that because of the political climate, if they didn’t do it now, they might lose rights. So,

that’s kind of why I wanted to offer a free option for people,” Music said, who didn’t charge couples getting married during COVID-19. “I asked for donations to be sent to The Trans Sistas of Color Project in lieu of payment.”

Beyond providing political peace of mind, Music said that these small ceremonies added some scheduling stability for couples in an uncertain time as well.

“With restaurants and wedding halls having all sorts of shut-downs, it’s just really hard to try and guess what to try and do,” she said. “People are concerned about losing deposits and maybe their [chosen wedding venue] not being a viable business by the time their wedding comes around.”

Misleh agreed that, for him, a happy ceremony and a bit certainty in the time of COVID-19 was a huge plus.

“My sister is supposed to be getting married in May and their wedding date has been pushed a million times,” he said. “Seeing how she’s being upset over and over and over, I almost would say that if you’re doing a wedding for your friends and family, wait until it’s certain.”

But, for those couples looking to get married for themselves, a porch wedding might be just the thing.

“If you’re doing it for yourself and your partner, does it really matter when or where it is?”



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Garnet Lewis (center) and her business partners stand in front of Isabel's Market & Eatery.

LGBTQ-Friendly Douglas Gourmet Expands Catering Options

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When Garnet Lewis and her business partners decided to name their gourmet food shop in Douglas Isabel's Market & Eatery, they had a clear choice in mind. Their namesake was an area school teacher and principal who had been very charitable to the west Michigan community some 70 years ago. But after a little additional research, they found LGBTQ+ ties.

Isabel Graham was a lesbian.

This was more than a bit of useless trivia to the four gay women owners of the market and eatery.

"She and her partner lived here in Douglas down on Union St," Lewis explained. "Basically, in the various Census report documents they listed each other as 'partner,' and the next time, like in the '30s, they list each other as 'spouse.' Can you imagine? Back in the '30s. Serious to God."

Had they been alive in the present day, perhaps Graham and her partner would have had their wedding reception catered by Isabel's, which at first had a slow start due to COVID-related restrictions. Now, Lewis, her partners and staff are gearing up for larger events they've yet been unable to accommodate since purchasing the building in 2019.

"If you build it, they will come" is a truism when it comes to Isabel's: a retail survey revealed a strong desire of residents in the Saugatuck/Douglas area for an upscale grocery where they could purchase items like fresh

fish, bread and deli. Residents also wanted a shop that could benefit visitors from places like Chicago, Indiana and St. Louis, Missouri. Enter Isabel's that not only offers the above but catering, cooking classes, baked goods and space for sitting and enjoying a meal ordered from a sit-down menu.

With the exception of the fresh fish, bread and croissants, everything is made in-house. The deli salads are very popular, as are the cinnamon rolls, which Isabel's has become known for. Another unique feature of the market is a desire to educate their patrons.

"The other thing that we've really had a mission to educate and provide folks with the opportunity to learn," Lewis said. "Whether it's the pairing of a wine with a cheese, a plant-based meal, sheet pan cooking, helping them kind of learn and grow as they go, which is really cool. It's a comfortable environment for folks to go to come and learn, which I think many people appreciate. I know I always have."

If Isabel's sounds like an ideal wedding caterer, readers might wish to book their engagements soon, as Lewis said more than once that she expects the business to be "slammed" due to high demand for catering in the area. This need has been exacerbated by the pandemic, which left potential customers with few options. She talked about some of the smaller-scale events Isabel's has done and what she envisions for the future.

"We were fully intending, of course, to open with a fully functioning catering and events

See Isabel's, page 26



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5 Safety (and Style) Tips for Tying the Knot During the Pandemic

BY BTL STAFF

There's no doubt that keeping safe during the COVID-19 pandemic is a must, and science points to being quarantined at home as the safest way of doing so. However, now that Michiganders have been living in isolation for over a year, postponed plans like wedding dates are beginning to crop up on calendars once again.

For those who are faced with tying the knot during the pandemic, here are six tips to ensuring that the event is as safe as it can possibly be.

1. Whatever you do, start with professional advice.

The World Health Organization has advice for small events during COVID-19 for attendees and organizers. Check local safety regulations before attending an event, stay at home if feeling unwell and comply with these safety measures:

1. Maintain at least 1 meter (6 feet) of distance from other guests.
2. Wear a mask.

3. Cover sneezes and coughs with a bent elbow, immediately disposing of any tissues used in a closed container.

4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

5. Wash hands frequently with soap and water or by using a hand sanitizer.

2. Keep up-to-date on the latest safety regulations.

Perhaps one of the most useful tools for event planning or attendance on this list is the Gathering Guide from Plannie, an event management company: plannie.com/gathering-guide. This crowdsourced event guideline table gives a thorough overview of event and gathering restrictions by state and, in some cases, county.

3. Test, and test frequently.

Being aware of one's COVID-19 status is always good practice. At least 72 hours before hosting or attending an event, it's important to get tested to ensure that one will not pass along COVID-19. Wedding hosts should require it of

attendees as well. Immediately after an event, getting another test is important, too.

4. Have fun with the photos.

That seems like a given at any wedding, but it's possible that the social distancing requirements at events held during COVID-19 can be utilized as best as possible. On weddingpro.com, New Orleans wedding photographer Catherine Guidry shared ideas to capture the event safely.

"When it comes to photography, there are a few ways to keep your images beautiful and memorable while staying safe! Because your guests are going to be wearing masks, consider passing out masks that match the wedding colors so that, in your photos, it becomes a part of the aesthetic," she said.

The site also recommends thinking outside the box when it comes to honoring family and friends who cannot attend.

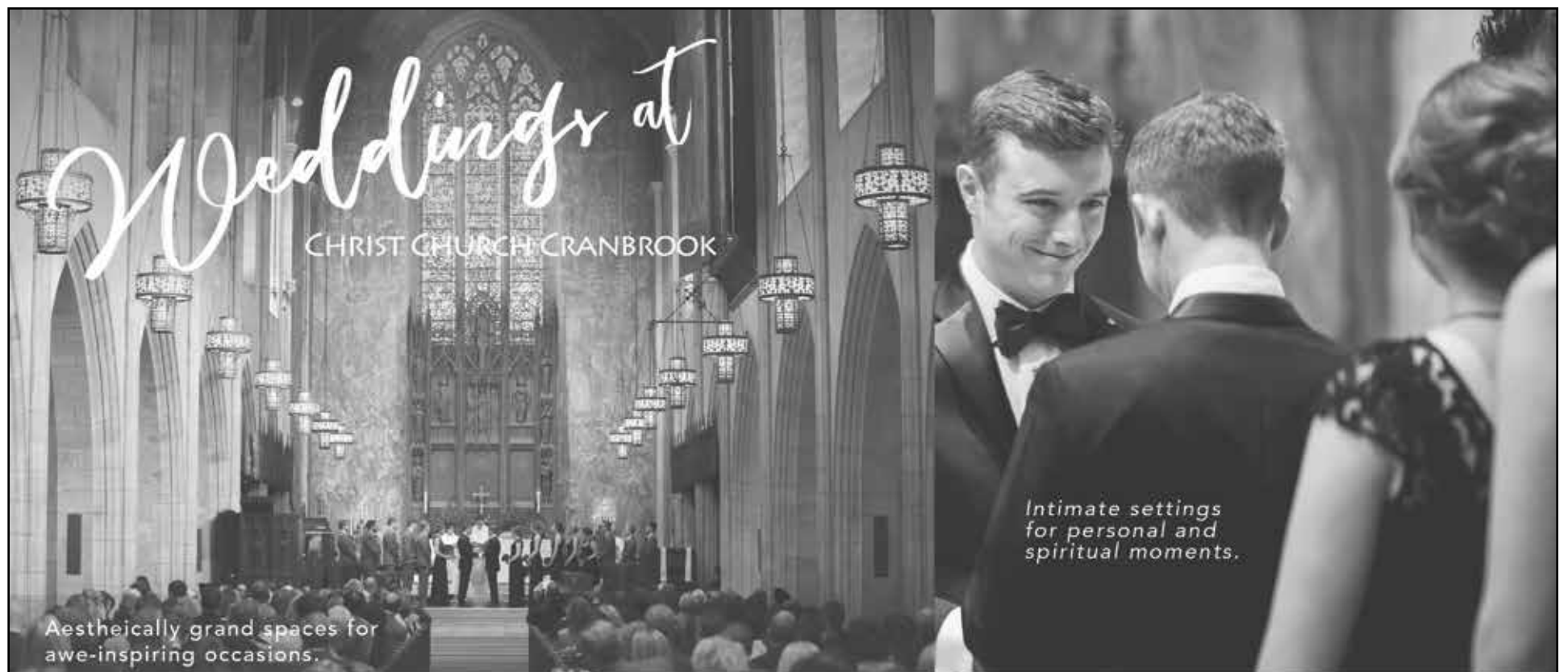
"... Think about creating a life-size photo cutout of any important family members who cannot attend! You can incorporate it into a portrait with you to show them how much you are

missing and thinking about them on your big day. Plus, it's sure to get some laughs!"

5. Incorporate Safety into your wedding's organization.

Beyond matching masks to the wedding theme, there's also ways of making social distancing requirements a potentially fun and tasteful experience. Dallas wedding planner Jacqueline Hill of Jacqueline Events suggested translating the aesthetic wedding mask design to markers around the event denoting social distancing.

"A wedding during COVID-19 doesn't have to be design compromised to be safe. We incorporated our bride's monogram and colors into vinyl markers instead of using bright yellow stickers," she said. "This allowed guests to know where to stand at the guest book and bars but matched the remainder of the decor so that they didn't stick out. Have fun with them or make them serious — either way, you can make them pretty!"



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→ Isabel's

Continued from p. 22

function, and COVID quickly shut that down," Lewis recalled. "We've done a few catering events; we did one the other day ... a breakfast event off-site. But we have a full catering license with a liquor license that goes with it. So, now that the occupancy issues are easing up a bit, it's allowed us to start doing some more catering events."

In-house events are an option, too: Isabel's has an atrium with a capacity of 79 people.

"Right before we really shut down again and all, we had a number of really neat events here in the atrium," Lewis said. "We had a baby shower, which was phenomenal, we had a birthday party, but have not yet had the ability to do any wedding receptions just 'cause of size. We had one booked for Labor Day, and, of course, that ended up being outside at their house, and we catered that event."

However, a few weddings are already planned for late spring/early summer.

When asked about the most popular catering dishes on offer at Isabel's,

Lewis insisted that it's entirely up to the customer: their chef will "cater" to their specific needs.

"Sometimes folks come with a set idea of what they want; other times folks really have no idea and they want to sit down with us ... and see what they can come up with," she said. "We've got a general manager who has helped cater and done weddings for many, many years. She actually did Vicki [Cobb's] and my wedding. She really runs a good show, and she'll sit down with each customer individually and help them set up their event specific to their needs."

However, one area of specialty Lewis mentioned was Isabel's pasta, because Isabel's main chef has a strong background in Italian cooking. Options abound for one's wedding cake as well.

"I know it's weird because folks are used to going in and being told, 'OK, this is what we serve: one, two, three: that's your options,'" Lewis said. "What's nice about having our own baker [is] she's very, very talented; she makes all of our cakes. So we can give a customer the option. You can either contract with someone to do your cake, or we'll have you do a taste-testing with our baker and we'll see what we can

put together for you. So that's the neat part of being flexible and able to do this."

Lewis added that if Isabel's is fortunate enough to have as much catering business as anticipated, the staff may have to become more regimented when it comes to menu choices.

For now, Lewis can be found at Isabel's in-person, sometimes in what has come to be known as "the dish pit" in the back of the house. That's because she and her business partners feel it's important to remain as hands-on in running the business as possible.

While technically in retirement, those who know Lewis' history might not be surprised to learn that she's started a business as she had a stint as a candidate for the Michigan State Legislature and is a current Saugatuck City Council member.

She had a clear answer to the question, "Is Garnet Lewis failing at retirement?"

"Good gravy," she replied. "I've so failed at retirement. It's not even funny."

Isabel's is located at 310 Blue Star Highway in Douglas. Learn more at isabelsmarket.com.



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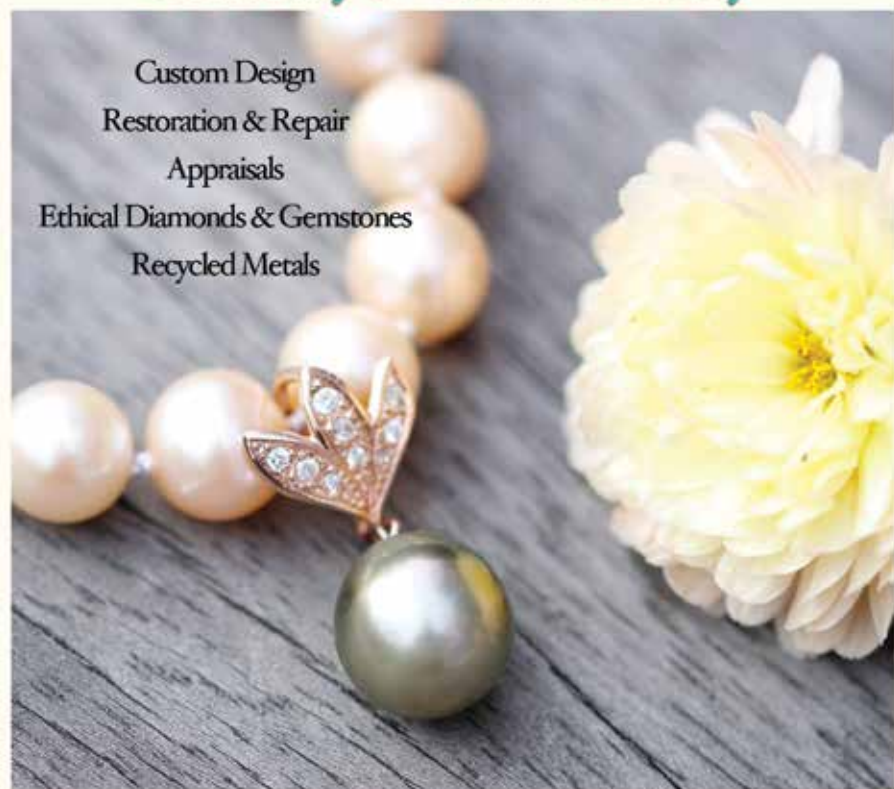
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A Trans Artist Wanted to See
a Trans ‘Badass’ Onscreen.

Now, in a New HBO Film, She Can.

Celia Harrison. Photo: HBO

BY GEORGE ELKIND

After years of collaborating on shorts films around the East coast, filmmakers André Phillips and Charles Vuolo shared a gut feeling: they were both ready to make a feature-length production. But they weren't sure what to make it about.

Then, they met trans artist Celia Harrison on the set of a music video in which she was performing in 2014. Still weighing a subject themselves, they asked her what kind of story she'd most like to see onscreen.

"I'd love to see a film with a transgender protagonist that's a badass," she told them at the time. Specifically, a trans character who wasn't framed as a victim. Or, at the very least, one that wasn't sad all the time.

And now, in their new film "Lupe," which is currently streaming on HBO Max and HBO

Latino, the creators are finally presenting a figure just as tough and fearless as they'd imagined.

Working with Harrison on the script (she also fills a key supporting role), they created a character for whom strength is a key component, embodied in the historically male-gendered practice of boxing: someone unafraid to traverse New York streets even in the dark — and who, while flawed, could serve as the hero of their own story.

Over the film's trajectory, Lupe (Puerto Rican actor Rafael Albarrán), a recent Cuban immigrant, searches for their missing sister Isabel (Lucerys Medina) while navigating both the world of low-budget sex work in New York and their own gender identity in the process. Featuring frank, sometimes harsh discussions of transgender and immigrant life punctuated with bursts of violence, the film presses on ideas

of gender by forcing its character to navigate the spaces of boxing and sex work both: two spheres often seen as male and female worlds.

"One of the most beautiful things in the film is that we're constantly going from masculine to feminine, and we see that some people are trapped in their masculinity and some people are trapped in their femininity," says Albarrán, who identifies as non-binary and uses he/she/they pronouns. "At the end of the day all these constructs are just traps. And it's really beautiful for the character of Lupe to really empower herself and look for what is authentic to her."

Preparing for the role — which involved whirlwind days rushing from Muay Thai training to fitting sessions for women's clothes before an initial two-week shoot — helped shape Albarrán's own trajectory as much as Lupe's.

"The more I was reading about the trans

experience — the more I was informing myself about gender and femininity — the more I started questioning those things," Albarrán says. "So that exploration that the character does in the movie: I feel that came really close to me because that was an exploration that I was doing myself."

For both directors, working with trans collaborators and creating an atmosphere that welcomed improvisation and exploration proved key in building out the film's emotional world. The main goal, often, was to stay out of the way of the performances.

"One thing we asked our crew, whoever we would work with: this is a film about humanity, this is about people," says Vuolo. "As much as I love beautiful dolly shots or beautiful crane shots of buildings, it's about Rafael, Isabel... It's about these characters, so get in there and get close. Don't worry about any of the typical

concerns. Just get close, get emotional, let them breathe.”

Working with trans collaborators was key for the directors. Harrison, who collaborated on the film throughout, did more than just fact-check. She took creative risks and often provided ideas that drove entire scenes.

“She was interested in doing things that we would never have done or been bold enough to do,” Vuolo remembers, citing a longer scene in which she appears nude in the bathtub and discusses intimate, personal details recalled from her own experience.

“You’re the one putting yourself out there, you’re the one lying there, you’re the one talking about this stuff. And we’ll film it,” Vuolo recalls telling her. “It sounds incredible and emotional and intense. But we would never have written a scene like that; we wouldn’t have known how.”

In editing, though, the production hit a snag. The loose 47-page shooting script (90-100 is customary for a short feature) that had created such a welcoming set environment left the team struggling to find a structure for the film.

“We had looked at moments and scenes 200 times; we couldn’t make heads or tails of it,” says Vuolo. “We ended up finding a phenomenal editor in Shiran Amir who just brought this thing to life. Not only did she bring the footage and all the wonderful performances that everyone gave us to life, she brought an entire post team.”

That team included Kerry Michelle O’Brien, who was moved to tears by what she saw as a rare, truly rounded trans character in one of Amir’s early cuts — so much so that she came on board as both transgender consultant and executive producer. As an advisor and an editor herself, her main suggestion was often to let scenes play out more fully, even ones that might feel uncomfortable to watch.

“There’s a couple of pivotal scenes in the film where the boys were quite worried about sort of letting it breathe. And me and Shiran were

pushing back and going, ‘No no, it needs more — we need to see this.’ Yes, it feels awkward and uncomfortable,” says O’Brien, “but that’s because it’s real. It’s that person’s truth for that moment. So please linger on it more. Because you know, unless you’ve been in that position where you’ve lost everything, everything’s just falling away, you don’t know who you are, where you’re going; you don’t even know who your friends and stuff are or anything, unless you’ve lived that.”

“The more I was reading about the trans experience — the more I was informing myself about gender and femininity — the more I started questioning those things.”

— Rafael Albarrán

Letting things simply exist onscreen, suggests O’Brien, is often the key not just in getting to the core of a scene, but to the heart of an experience.

“Let it be there, because it speaks to me as a transgender individual,” she says. “Yes, this point in the film may be quite visceral and hard to watch. But you know why it’s visceral and hard to watch? Because it’s a truth.”

George Elkind is a writer and media critic based in Metro Detroit.



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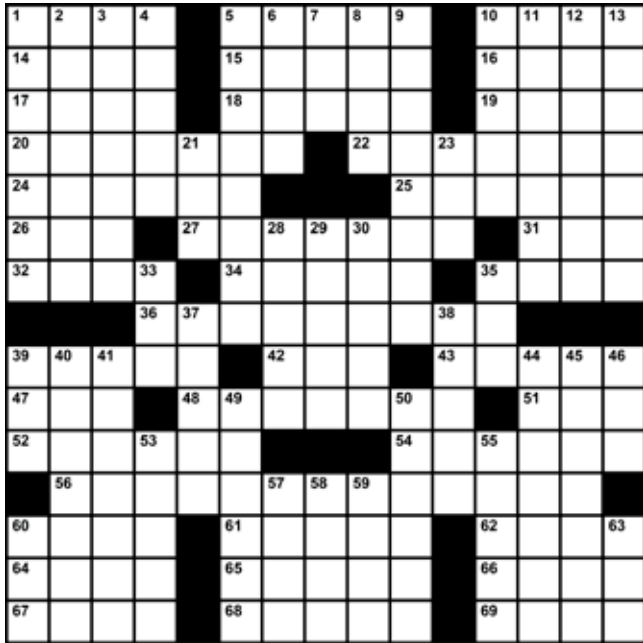
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Do You Get a Rush Out of Hate?

Q Puzzle

- 1 Irene who played Coco in "Fame"
- 5 S&M reminders
- 10 XXX, in Greek porn?
- 14 Give ___ to (approve)
- 15 Easily screwed
- 16 Trent of Mississippi
- 17 Circumcision, for one

- 18 Take steps
- 19 Rick's old flame
- 20 Hate-monger Ann
- 22 Hate-monger Sean
- 24 Heat and then cool
- 25 Pussies with sharp teeth
- 26 Caesar of comedy
- 27 What the tide does
- 31 ___ generis

- 32 Look for hotties in a gay bar
- 34 Stallion that's spotted
- 35 WW II gun
- 36 Hate-monger radio host
- 39 Last letter for Socrates
- 42 Geological span
- 43 Pics that penetrate your clothes
- 47 Bert, to Ernie
- 48 Most able to bend over
- 51 Urvashi has one
- 52 Like better
- 54 Mary Cassatt, for one
- 56 Hate-monger television host
- 60 Tool for Mapplethorpe
- 61 Assumption of the virgin?
- 62 Coup target, to Cocteau
- 64 Mireille of "The Killing"
- 65 Like "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me"?
- 66 "The Lion King" sound
- 67 "___ interesting!"
- 68 Tickle pink
- 69 Humorist Bombeck

Down

- 1 Unresponsive body
- 2 Negatively charged
- 3 The Capitol dome is its top
- 4 "Hello" singer
- 5 Dik-dik, for one
- 6 Singer Vicki
- 7 Hurry, to Shakespeare
- 8 Porter's "Well, Did You ___"
- 9 It can coldcock you
- 10 React to static
- 11 Most like St, Mary
- 12 "I'm being straight with you!"
- 13 Doesn't leave the closet
- 21 Middle X or O
- 23 Anais who went both ways
- 28 College social
- 29 "Have a ball!"
- 30 Emma of "Battle of the Sexes"
- 33 Worn-out horse
- 35 Abbr. of old in Tatu's land
- 37 Weapon pointed at James Bond's crotch
- 38 Bit player
- 39 Antonym (abbr.)
- 40 Sultry Dietrich
- 41 Lover of Franklin and Lorena
- 44 Amelia Earhart, for example
- 45 Affirmation to a drag queen
- 46 Go down
- 49 Shower with kind words
- 50 "No Exit" playwright
- 53 Like Albert, in "The Birdcage"
- 55 "___ Is Nothing Like a Dame"
- 57 Ryan of porn
- 58 Vincent Lopez theme song
- 59 Responder to "Bite me!"?
- 60 "Little Miss Evil" writer Raphael
- 63 Refrain syllable

See p. 28 for answers

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