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Don't just read our interviews with Justice Smith and Nico Tortorella in this week's issue — head to **PrideSource.com** and *watch* them!



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5 LGBTQ-Friendly Michigan Road Trip Destinations

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

As the weather gets warmer and summer months draw nearer, it won't be long before road trip season is in full swing. And since it will coincide with all U.S. adults becoming eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations, it'll be far safer to take a trip in 2021 than it was last year. There's more good news: leaving the state isn't necessary. It's not only possible to road trip within Michigan, our state's coastline, scenic drives and natural landmarks guarantee that it'll be beautiful.

At Pride Source, we've compiled a list of our top five LGBTQ-friendly road trip destinations from across the mitten. We even calculated the drive-time from our office in Ann Arbor for reference. You're welcome.



Downtown Detroit skyline from Hart Plaza. Leonid Andronov via Bigstock.

1. Detroit

Filled with historical structures like The Guardian Building, landmarks like Hart Plaza and must-sees like Eastern Market, Detroit has no shortage of social distancing-friendly sights for both vacationers and day-trippers alike. Called the Motor City for a reason, Detroit is filled with automotive history that can be viewed both on foot and comfortably on a drive. For history buffs, notable stops include the Ford Piquette Plant, the GM Renaissance Center, the Russel Industrial Center and the Indian Village neighborhood. Those who'd like a more nature-focused trip should check out the Detroit Riverwalk or take time to enjoy the nearly 1,000-acre Belle Isle Park.

And, of course, the city has plenty of LGBTQ-affirming nightlife options like Menjo's Entertainment Complex, The Woodward Cocktail Bar and more. It's also the location of Motor City Pride, Michigan's largest Pride celebration that draws thousands annually.

Drive time from Ann Arbor: 45 minutes

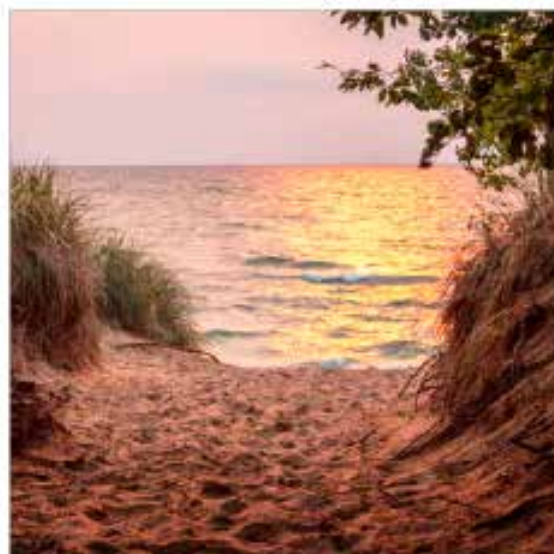
2. Saugatuck/Douglas

Arguably Michigan's premier LGBTQ-friendly getaways, the neighboring towns of Saugatuck and Douglas boast over 100 LGBTQ-owned and affirming restaurants, stores and lodgings.

"Whether it's scenic natural beauty, a thriving arts scene or disco balls and drag queens that you're looking for, you can find it here along with some amazing experiences you can't find anywhere else," reads the official Saugatuck website.

City-recommended, LGBTQ-affirming places to stay in Saugatuck include The Dunes Resort, Blue Star Motel and Hidden Garden Cottages. Once in town, fans of the arts might enjoy local galleries like Water Street Gallery or the Saugatuck Center for the Arts' ongoing array of events and exhibits. Or the more adventurous might try a Saugatuck Dune Ride. Beyond the city, beach lovers will certainly find a piece of Lake Michigan's coastline to enjoy, with Saugatuck recommending Oval Beach as especially friendly to LGBTQ visitors.

Drive time from Ann Arbor: 2 hours, 30 minutes



Sunset on Lake Michigan shot from the dunes of Saugatuck, Michigan. Photo by Michael Deemer via Bigstock.



Mackinac Island, Michigan, July 9, 2016. Photo by Michael Deemer via Bigstock.

3. Mackinac Island

Though this trip requires a tad more travel than driving, the quick ferry ride across Lake Huron is worth it to see Mackinac Island's bustling downtown, natural wonders like Arch rock and preserved historic buildings like Fort Mackinac. Since the island prohibits almost all motorized vehicles, road trippers can enjoy the fun of travel to the ferry and then take a trip back in time to enjoy bikes and carriage rides on the island. And while many take brief day trips to the island, Mackinac has options for nightlife and overnight stays, too. When asked if the island town is LGBTQ-friendly by Lavender Magazine, Executive Director of the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau Mary Slevin said:

"Because we are a tourist town, we open our eyes a bit more and learn from the people who come to visit. We are exposed to people from all walks of life and all over the world, so there is a certain wisdom that comes with the territory. There is a motto here with the year-round folks: If your head and your heart aren't connected, and you aren't who you are, then you won't make it here emotionally. I think it's a great motto for life."

Drive time from Ann Arbor to Mackinaw City: 4 hours

See **Road Trip**, page 7

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
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Photo: Colin Dangaard / Courtesy HBO

Dale Versus Goliath

How a Trans Auto Entrepreneur Took on the Big Three

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

It's the early 1970s in the U.S. There is an energy crisis with long lines at gas pumps, fuel rationing and station owners posting signs declaring that they're "bone dry." All this at a time when Detroit-born-and-bred muscle cars like the Ford Mustang and Chevrolet Corvette were still kings of the streets.

But as the energy crisis wore on, people began looking for an alternative to the then-popular, gas-guzzling behemoths. Detroit automakers were faced with a demand for smaller cars, and that demand was being met by foreign cars like the Volkswagen Beetle.

Enter the Dale, a car with three wheels that promised 70 miles per gallon and a price tag of only \$2,000. It seemed too good to be true. But was it? Or was the Dale exactly the right car at exactly the right time?

"When the Dale came on the scene the Big Three were all in their first generation of small cars," says Adam Bernard, president of the Detroit Chapter of the Lambda Car Club.

He said cars like the Chevy Vega, Ford Pinto, and AMC Gremlin "were all going after the

Beetle."

While these cars were more fuel-efficient, they had their problems.

"The Pinto had safety issues, the Vega had corrosion issues, and the Gremlin was the heaviest, so not super fuel-efficient," Bernard adds.

Perhaps that's why the Dale was so well-received when it was introduced to the public in 1974. People wanted something different, and the Dale was different, indeed. So, too, was the woman behind the Dale: Liz Carmichael.

Taking on Goliath

A transgender woman, she started the Twentieth Century Motor Car Corporation. It was the car company that sought to make the Dale the David that would take on the Goliath that was Detroit.

"Liz Carmichael suggested that she could build a car that would set Detroit on its ear," says Leslie Kendall, the chief historian at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles.

"Investors would flock to it, people would want to line up to buy one, and it would show Detroit

a new way of building cars."

And Carmichael was not shy about taking on Detroit. She declared that she was at war with the Big Three.

"I'm going to knock the hell out of Detroit," Carmichael told the press.

She also said that she would "kick the shit out of" General Motors and claimed that "the Dale will be the biggest thing since Henry Ford invented the Model T."

The saga of Carmichael and the Dale is the subject of a recent HBO documentary titled "The Lady and the Dale." It's a film that spans the gamut of true crime, automotive history and gender identity.

The documentary makes extensive use of past recordings and media interviews to allow Carmichael, who died in 2004, to tell her own story. In it she declares, "We're going to shock General Motors, Ford and the rest of them right out of their big overstuffed seats."

These were fighting words, sure, but they were especially shocking coming from a woman in a male-dominated industry. But Carmichael certainly didn't lack in self-confidence.

"I can do anything a man can do," she said.

The Dale's marketing materials reflected Carmichael's bravado: "A startling, aerodynamic innovation in design, construction and efficiency that has, at last, brought the automobile into the space age. The most exciting idea that ever happened to personal transportation."

Carmichael's claims about the Dale often seemed far-fetched.

"My automobile will be the safest in the world," she said. "I've driven one of the prototypes into a solid concrete wall at 30, 40 and 50 miles an hour and there was only superficial damage to the front. All that happened to me was that my face got scratched a little and I got a little bloody nose."

She also claimed that the Dale was bulletproof and that she once drove it into the ocean.

These claims were not only fantastical but also unnecessary. Carmichael had some of the greatest minds in engineering and design working on the Dale. There was genuine enthusiasm about the car from the press and the public. Was Carmichael a teller of tall tales, or was she just a woman facing an uphill battle

See **Dale**, page 9



Mackinac Island. Photo: Michael Deemer via Bigstock.

→ **Road Trip**

Continued from p. 4

4. Traverse City

Lovers of wine and spirits will have plenty to do in this town, as Traverse City is home to award-winning wineries, microbreweries and distilleries. Many of these locations also feature tastings and private tours that can be booked in advance. And for those who don't drink, a trip up Leelanau Peninsula offers breathtaking views and gives way to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Up North Pride calls Traverse City "one of the most beautiful, progressive and unique LGBT vacation destinations in the United States."

And for those looking to stay closer to town, Traverse City is filled to the brim with a mix of locally owned shops, restaurants and boutiques, so eager shoppers will have hundreds of options when buying keepsakes as well.

Drive time from Ann Arbor: 4 hours



Traverse City, Michigan. Photo: Bigstock.



Ferndale Pride 2018. Photo: Andrew Potter.

5. Ferndale

While only a quick drive away, Ferndale is easily one of Metro Detroit's most LGBTQ-friendly communities. Home to the Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center, the host of Michigan's second-largest Pride festival and filled with dozens of LGBTQ-owned businesses, visitors can feel safe that homophobia won't have a place on their trip. Filled with dining, theater and nightlife options, visitors can stop by to comfortably enjoy a day, or night, in an affirming city. In fact, it has consistently received a perfect human rights score from the Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index.

In a Royal Oak Tribune piece, Affirmations Executive Director Dave Garcia talked more about the city's acceptance and continued economic growth as a result.

"There's a reason Affirmations is here in Ferndale," he said. "It shows that cities that embrace the LGBT community thrive while those that don't do not thrive."

Drive time from Ann Arbor: 45 minutes

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General Motors Chairman and CEO Mary Barra addresses the gathering June 3, 2020, during a press conference of corporate leaders speaking out against racism and injustice at City Hall in Detroit. Photo: John F. Martin for General Motors.

GM CEO Mary Barra Accused of Racism by Leaders of Black-Owned Media Companies

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

A group of Black media leaders are still awaiting a meeting with General Motors CEO Mary Barra after alleging racism in the automaker’s advertising allotment. Seven disgruntled media outlet executives —

including Byron Allen, Junior Bridgeman, Todd Brown, Ice Cube, Earl “Butch” Graves, Don Jackson and Roland Martin — wrote an open letter to Barra in the form of a full-page ad in the March 28 edition of the Detroit Free Press. In the letter, the leaders accused Barra of being duplicitous.

“We were seriously offended watching you stand on stage, after the death of George Floyd, saying, ‘Black Lives Matter,’ when you have refused to acknowledge us and you have consistently, over time and after multiple requests, refused to take a meeting with the largest Black-owned media companies in America. Mary, the very definition of systemic racism is when you are ignored, excluded and you don’t have true economic inclusion.”

The letter went on to state that less than 0.5 percent of GM’s advertising budget goes to Black-owned media.

“This is horrendous, considering that we as African Americans make up approximately 14 percent of the population in America and we spend billions buying your vehicles,” it read.

Initially, it appeared that Barra was going to meet with the media leaders on April 1, but Barra backed out. A statement on the company’s website said GM would host a series of individual meetings with executives over the coming weeks.

“Earlier this week, Barra agreed to a Zoom meeting with Allen and the leaders of several other Black-owned media companies to discuss the automaker’s advertising spending strategies,” the statement read. “The group had taken out a full-page ad in this past Sunday’s edition of the Detroit Free Press accusing the automaker of spending only 0.5 percent of its marketing budget with Black-owned media

corporations and lambasted Barra for refusing to meet with the group over the matter.”

Barra was apparently irritated that even after agreeing to meet Allen his group ran the same open letter in the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post and the Michigan Chronicle. GM spokesman Pat Morrissey told the Free Press that Allen and his cohorts were trying to “advance a narrative of factual inaccuracies and character assault against our CEO.” Morrissey said that continuing to run the ad was “particularly perplexing given that the paid advertising appears after the GM team has had repeated meetings with Mr. Allen and his team.”

“General Motors aspires to be the most inclusive company in the world, and that includes how we allocate media spend. We have increased our planned spending with both diverse-owned and diverse-dedicated media across our family of brands. Additionally, we continue to develop and advance initiatives like the Chevrolet Real Talk, Real Change platform and support projects like ‘More than That’ with Gia Peppers, where we’ve partnered with the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters on a content series for Black American listeners produced and distributed by underrepresented businesses,” said David Caldwell, GM corporate relations manager. “In this same spirit, we will continue to have an open dialogue with Mr. Allen.”

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Photo: Colin Dangaard / Courtesy HBO

→ Dale

Continued from p. 6

in an industry that didn't want or accept her? "Being a woman attempting to revolutionize a business industry in the '70s ... if you didn't take that strong position, no one was gonna give you credit," Vivienne Ming, a tech entrepreneur interviewed in the documentary says. "It is her one chance to set all the past aside and do something truly meaningful. And no one else in the world is going to give her this chance. She just has to create it for herself."

Past problems

But the "past" that Ming referenced, well, that would ultimately catch up to her.

The HBO doc features Fox News host Tucker Carlson's father, Dick Carlson, then a reporter from KABC who started digging into the Twentieth Century Motor Corporation. He found that not everything was as Carmichael claimed. One of the biggest problems was the sale of the car to the public through deposits. Ultimately, that got Carmichael in trouble with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission because of apparent misuse of funds.

Carmichael quickly went on the defensive, accusing the State of California of harassing her. She was also convinced that the Detroit automakers were out to sabotage her.

But it didn't take long for more of Carmichael's history to be revealed. She claimed to have a mechanical engineering degree from Ohio State University and a master's in business from the University of Miami. But she didn't have either, as Carlson uncovered. And then he broke the news that before transitioning, Carmichael was living as a man — a man, it turns out, who was on the run from the law.

Carlson, like much of the media, seemed obsessed with Carmichael's gender identity and insisted on misgendering her.

"Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael is, in

reality, a 47-year-old guy by the name of Jerry Dean Michael," Carson gleefully declared from behind the news desk.

In the documentary, Carlson recalls speaking to a sheriff at the jail holding Carmichael after her arrest.

"I asked him, 'Where did you put this guy? Is he a male or a female? He's been saying that he's a female but, uh, does he have male equipment or female?' And [the sheriff] said, 'Oh no, he's equipped just like you and I are,'" the sheriff said. "He's a male."

As if gender were as simple as that.

"It was all some version of what now gets called the evil deceivers and make-believers trope or stereotype and that we're pretending to be something that we're not and that it's a deceitful act," says trans historian Susan Stryker, interviewed in the documentary. "To be non-consensually outed, it has to be considered as a violation. Something was disclosed about them without their consent that is going to have really powerful negative consequences for them."

Carlson, however, believed that Carmichael's identity was all part of a grand, nefarious plan.

"Elizabeth Carmichael was a supreme egomaniac," he says. "The fact she posed as a woman, it was a matter of disguising herself as a fugitive but also (it) was a way for her to garner publicity. It was very effective."

One could certainly argue that Carmichael was self-absorbed. In fact, she would tell you herself.

"I don't give one hoot in hell about ecology or the public welfare or the public good," she'd say. "I'm in business for only one reason: to make Liz Carmichael the most important person in the automotive industry."

But using her gender identity as a publicity stunt? Hardly.

"Whenever a trans story surfaced, the media would take it and run with it in the simplest possible terms, which was a man masquerading as a woman," says Sandy Stone, a gender and media theorist interviewed by the filmmakers.

"Liz had to combat the narrative in the media

that she was not a woman. How do you combat the media's narrative that you are not a woman? And the answer is: you don't."

Truth among identity

Despite all of the fraud and law-breaking and lying of her past, Carmichael's gender identity was one of her truths, as was her role as a parent. She loved her kids, and family was very important to her.

Candi Michael, Liz's daughter, who is interviewed extensively in the film, says she and her siblings were "all fine" with Carmichael's transition "because she was a great mom."

That's not to say Carmichael's less-than-upstanding past hadn't been hard on her family. But the Dale was supposed to change all that.

"I thought this would change our lives," Candi Michael says. "There'd be no more sleeping in cars on the side of the road, no more getting up in the middle of the night to move to another town, no more high-speed car chases on public roads. I thought this was the beginning of a real life where we could be a normal family. Because this is real. But my secret self was wondering when it was going to end."

And end it did. The family would end up on the run again, and the Dale would never become "the best car ever built."

"[Carmichael] claimed that the only reason that this car didn't live up to its promises, or

wasn't allowed to live up to its promises, was because Detroit was out to get her," Kendall says. "She thought that Detroit had a vendetta for her; she thought that Detroit knew that the car was so much more vehicle for the money than anything they could possibly produce. And that turned out not really to be true."

However, he says, "A lot of people believe that with sufficient development the car could have been a genuinely workable vehicle."

But even once Carmichael was out of the way, the Big Three she was so concerned about didn't end up stealing her idea for themselves after all. There has not been a mass-produced, three-wheel car, let alone one that can withstand brick walls and get 70 MPH.

In fact, as a country we continue to fight over the issues of fuel efficiency, energy prices and gender identity. Was the Dale a fraud, or was the Dale an answer to a problem that has never gone away? The Dale certainly wasn't a failure of imagination. But the very concept of the Dale, just like the very concept of a transgender woman at the helm of a major auto company, raised a lot of questions Americans just weren't ready to consider about who we are as a country. Are we not a country of proud macho men guzzling gas and kicking ass? The idea of gender fluid people tooling around in space-age, fuel-efficient vehicles is a threat to that image. It's a battle we're still having, and as long as we cling to the past, we'll continue to lose.



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See **Auto Listings**, page 14

How Do Auto Companies Measure Up on the Equality Scale?

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

The following auto companies earned a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, thus earning the distinction of being a 2021 "Best Place to Work for LGBTQ Equality." According to HRC, "These companies met all the criteria to earn a 100-percent rating [by taking] concrete steps to establish and implement comprehensive policies, benefits and practices that ensure greater equity for LGBTQ workers and their families."

Hyundai Motor America

"At Hyundai, we value inclusion and diversity and the positive impact it has on our business," Erik Thomas, senior group manager, Experiential Marketing, said in a 2020 statement. This South Korean auto manufacturer with its American headquarters in Fountain Valley, California, recently displayed its LGBTQ+ pride by sponsoring the Outfest Los Angeles LGBTQ Film Festival and being a Presenting Partner of the 30th Annual GLAAD Media Awards.

Subaru of America, Inc.

Subaru, a company known for its strong customer loyalty base of lesbians, has its American HQ in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Subaru has a long history of LGBTQ+ marketing and support. They began marketing to gays and lesbians in the '90s, literally before it was cool.

"It was such an unusual decision — and such a success — that it helped push gay and lesbian advertising from the fringes to the mainstream," according to an article in *The Atlantic*.

Subarus have been the essential lesbobile ever since and a mainstay of HRC's CEI list.

Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

Toyota's American headquarters is in Plano, Texas, and Toyota's LGBTQ+ workplace group, Spectrum, was considered for 2020 Employee Resource Group of the Year by Out & Equal. Lexus, the company's luxury vehicle division, is one of HRC's National Corporate Partners at the Gold level.

"We have to admit: We like perfect scores," said a company press release, "especially when it's for a national benchmarking survey

establishing and implementing policies that allow Toyota team members to bring their full, authentic selves to work every day."

Tesla, Inc.

Despite the fact that Elon Musk seems to be making a habit of disparaging the use of pronouns, Tesla has a perfect score on the CEI for the sixth year in a row. The company recently released its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Impact Report that outlined some of the things the company does that makes it a great place to work including offering "additional support to our transgender employees through the Transgender Inclusion Group" and providing "more inclusive opportunities for our LGBTQ employees to self-identify so that we may provide appropriate support. This includes adding non-binary and gender non-conforming options in our people management system."

The following companies all scored in the 80-90 range:

- Ford Motor Co.
- General Motors Co.
- Daimler Trucks North America LLC
- Volkswagen Group of America, Inc.
- American Honda Motor Co.

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→ Auto Listings

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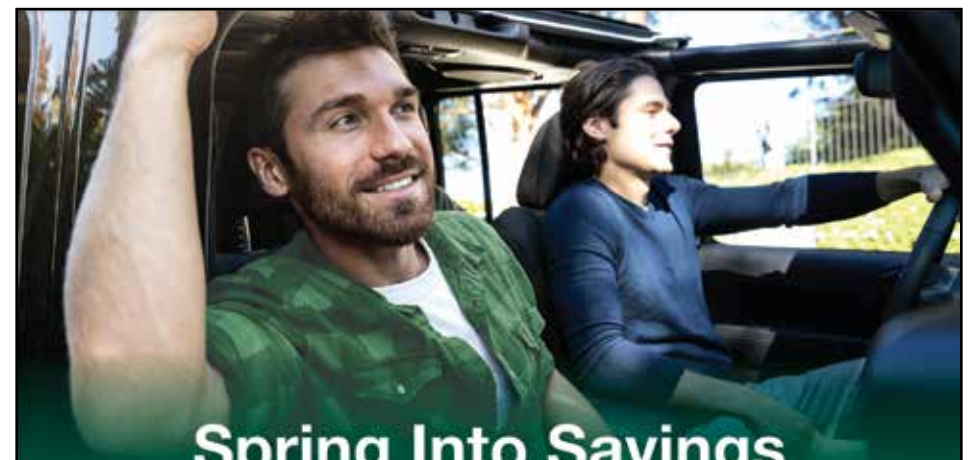


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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

How Time Flies

I was 19 when I borrowed a friend's ID to go with some of my lesbian friends to the Silver Slipper, a dyke bar on Grand River, not too far from downtown Detroit. Straight tourists and gay men sat downstairs. Lesbians sat in a restricted balcony area. Segregation of another kind.

For my 21st birthday celebration, I went with three of my Cass Tech gay art grads — Edward Flourney, Eddie Gonda and Gordon Bernard — aka Rita Hayworth. We celebrated that historic evening in my young life at the Flame Show Bar, located then at 4264 John R at Canfield, near Wayne University.

The Famous Flame roster included such giants as Billie Holiday, Della Reese, Etta James, Dinah Washington, B. B. King and Big Joe Turner.

The Flame Show Bar, opened in 1949, six years after Detroit's infamous race riot of 1943 — for which I was sent home for safety from Burton Elementary School — and was what was then called a "black and tan" club.

The nickname meant that whites were permitted and actually welcome to drink, listen and sway to the best of African American jazz musicians, vocalists and soloists.

The Flame had ample space for larger groups, including on my night of legal adulthood, a very special, daring and now-historic LGBTQ+ drag group: The Jewel Box Revue.

The Jewel Box — started by gay drag devotees and one butch, power-punch lesbian — was kicked into its long-lasting showbiz high heels in 1939.

Star of the Jewel Box Revue was Storme DeLarverie, who was 19 when they joined what many have called America's first gay community. Storme certainly was nice to look at and a first-class male drag persona.

"I think I could go straight for Storme!" quipped Ms. Rita.

"Make that two of us," added Gonda.

As for Storme, they were more than just a storm. Storme was an LGBTQ+ hurricane! Her now-legendary tussle with the police — "Hey, copheads! I'm not taking any of your cuffs or your friggin' bullhorns! Period! You got another thing a-coming!" — ignited the Stonewall riots in 1969. She was 40.

Storme was born in New Orleans to an African American mother and a white father. She's now remembered as an LGBTQ+ activist, gay civil rights icon and entertainer whose career included the Apollo Theater, Radio City Music Hall and many LGBTQ+ venues worldwide..

She worked for much of her long life as an emcee, singer, bouncer, bodyguard and volunteer street patrol worker, and, as she liked to ID her remaining years and status — died May 24, 2014 at 93 — "Guardian of Lesbians of the Village."

By the way, one of the lesbians of the Village at Stonewall Riots time was former BTL co-publisher, Susan Horowitz.

See next page



"GO ON, TRANS KID, CRY FER HELP! WE AIN'T GOT NO ALL-STAR GAME TO LOSE."



BY GWENDOLYN ANN SMITH

Through Trans Eyes

As I've spoken about many times before, we live in some unprecedented times when it comes to trans rights. Over 90 bills have been introduced in state legislatures to push back on trans rights in the U.S. While most of them are focused on transfeminine athletes in school sports programs — the most attractive target the right-wing has discovered recently — some go much farther afield, barring transgender people from getting health insurance that covers trans needs, preventing trans youth from securing or continuing puberty blockers and even charging our caregivers with a felony for doing so.

Much like the U.K., which is in the depths of their own anti-trans campaign that could see a trans version of their former "Section 28" law, which prohibited the "promotion of homosexuality" under the Thatcher government, the U.S. is seeing the media ramping up attacks on transgender people.

According to Media Matters, Fox News aired 19 different segments, totaling 51 minutes in coverage, from Jan. 20 through 27 mischaracterizing moves by the Biden administration to protect transgender Americans. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they spent much of that time focusing on transgender athletes, claiming that such moves would "destroy women's sports." This trend has not abated since, with dozens more pieces aired on Fox in the ensuing months.

Even stories unrelated to transgender issues — such as the ginned-up controversy over Hasbro's Potato Head toys — have

been cast as part of the very same "culture wars."

Fox, of course, is not alone in this, as right-wing outlets jump on the bandwagon, searching for stories to fuel outrage among their viewers. Many are bringing in anti-transgender "talking heads," such as author Abigail Shrier and representatives of far-right, anti-LGBTQ+ groups such as the Alliance Defending Freedom.

There is one voice you are not hearing much of on Fox or, frankly, any other news source: transgender people themselves. We are not being called upon to tell our own stories.

It's hard, sometimes, to understand why this is the case. For outlets like Fox, the reasoning is obvious. We are not going to be the voice they want to elevate in such a discussion. When so much of coverage of transgender people is centering around nebulous terms such as "trans ideology," having an actual flesh-and-blood person present to discuss their lives would get in the way.

Yet you will also not see us on CNN, MSNBC, talk radio, major news and opinion websites or the mainstream newspapers. While it wasn't entirely uncommon to see trans people covered a decade or so ago, we have all but vanished today.

Perhaps part of it is us. I can say from my own encounters that going on these shows was often a battle where the end goal was to simply hold your ground while a host or guest got to attack you. It was rarely a pleasant experience. For those

See **Viewpoint**, next page

“There are experiences around being transgender that are largely universal. We all have similar roads to realizing we are trans. We all have to fight a hostile world to be seen as who we know we are.”

→ Transmissions

Continued from p. 16

of us who went through it, we've grown tired of the game and wary of what that exposure will entail.

Meanwhile, there are likely less people will to take up those reigns and enter the fight. I can't blame them.

At the same time, you are not finding many within the media seeking out trans voices in the first place. Many have argued that this is because transgender people are automatically assumed — by being transgender — to be biased and, therefore, coming on with an agenda. This may sound familiar to our gay and lesbian siblings.

Instead, the media may pull in a “medical expert” or other such person who isn't trans themselves to speak on the issue, assuming their neutrality simply because they aren't transgender. Of course, this is also rife with people who have made a career out of being a “transgender expert,” all the while demonizing the very people they claim to represent.

It is in their best interest to co-opt transgender coverage, yet their biases are treated as inherently trustworthy thanks to their non-trans status.

Now I'll admit, no one trans person can speak to the whole of trans experiences. My experiences as a white, Gen X trans woman are going to be inherently different from those of so many others under the trans moniker.

Nevertheless, there are experiences

around being transgender that are largely universal. We all have similar roads to realizing we are trans. We all have to fight a hostile world to be seen as who we know we are.

What's more, our experience doesn't need to be universal to be understood. As I alluded to above, for many on the right, hearing the stories of transgender people defeats the notions that this is somehow an “ideology” or that this is some “agenda” being pushed by nefarious sources. We are just people, and our stories are worth hearing.

I would highly encourage those of us in the trans community to find our voices and — more than this — for the media to find us. Our stories are here to be told.

If you are covering the issue of transgender athletes, you need to be speaking to transgender athletes. If your story involved transgender students, then you find and speak to them. If you can't find them, reach out to groups like the Trans Journalists Association, or GLAAD, or even the National Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association.

The only way to fight true bias is to get our stories from us. You'll be surprised what you find.

Gwen Smith wants to see more trans faces in the media. You'll find her at www.gwensmith.com

→ Parting Glances

Continued from p. 16

The New York Times commented in Storme's obituary, “Tall, androgynous and armed — she held a state gun permit — Ms. DeLarverie roamed lower Seventh and Eight Avenues, patrolling the sidewalks and checking in at lesbian bars for what she called ‘ugliness,’ any form of intolerance, bullying or abuse of her ‘baby girls.’”

An unexpected birthday gift for me that memorable coming-of-age celebration was — compliments of fellow CT artist Edward Flourney — a well-lit

birthday cake. Gentleman that I was even back then, I declined to blow it out in public — especially in such a famous and decorous black-and-tan nightclub.

The best gift of all — still so very long-lasting in my memory — Storme later dropped by our integrated table and wished me a happy birthday, good luck to my round of friends and a long gay life!

P.S. I turn 85 this coming May. No pun intended, by the way.

“May all your jewel boxes be filled with glitter and be-proud good times.”

Creep Of The Week

Republicans Using Trans Kids as Political Pawns While a Pandemic Rages On

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Greetings from a pandemic that is still ongoing and getting worse in places. Here is a public service announcement: you don't need to be eating inside of restaurants right now even if your state says it's OK. It is a bad idea!

Other bad ideas include a laser focus on harming transgender kids by Republicans across the nation. Having decided that COVID-19 is a hoax and that Trump is still the president, Republicans are dealing with the real threat: gender non-conformity.

If it becomes impossible to tell the difference between males and females then what if a heterosexual man hits on another man because they thought they were a woman? And can't a guy even grab a hot broad's ass anymore without worrying about turning gay?

Earlier this month, North Carolina jumped on the desperate grasp to hold up the patriarchy wagon with Republicans introducing the Youth Health Protection Act, which is actually not concerned about protecting health at all!

According to The Hill, the act, “focuses on prohibiting minors from accessing various gender-affirming treatments, ranging from hormone blockers to sex reassignment surgeries.”

The reasoning behind this whole thing is that maybe transgender kids are just going through a phase and this is something they just wanted to try out like longboarding or drama club.

To be honest, this is a fair concern to have! Gender-affirming treatments on minors make a lot of people nervous. I mean, what if it were legal for minors to get tattoos? So many bad decisions would be made!

Of course, comparing gender identity to getting inked with “Space Jam”-era Bugs Bunny is, well, a bad comparison and disrespectful to boot. Gender identity isn't, after all, a quick decision made impulsively and without thought to the future.

Most importantly, the idea that a minor is going to “go trans” and then be trapped forever in that choice is based on a misconception, at best. The results of hormone blockers, for example, are not permanent.

According to the Mayo Clinic, hormone blockers pause puberty, “providing time to determine if a child's gender identity is long-lasting. It also gives children and their families time to think about or plan for the psychological, medical, developmental, social and legal issues ahead.”

In other words, the treatment for transgender kids isn't just some wild and

crazy experiment that doctors are doing for kicks. This treatment has been developed by thoughtful and intelligent professionals who care about kids, unlike the people who put their names on these anti-trans bills.

An especially alarming part of the North Carolina bill says that “government and school employees, among other professionals, are mandated to report to a child's parents in writing if their child is exhibiting any symptoms of gender dysphoria or gender nonconformity,” according to The Hill.

Got that? If your kid exhibits “gender nonconformity” then their teachers HAVE TO WRITE YOU A LETTER TO TELL YOU. They are mandated. Just like they are mandated to report suspected child abuse.

This is, clearly, nonsense. Literally no good can come from this. If a parent gets word from the school that their child has broken the sacred gender conformity pact, then maybe that parent will shrug and tell the school to go kick rocks, or maybe that parent will force their child into therapy to “cure” them.

Furthermore, what is the criteria for what counts as “gender nonconformity,” anyway? We live in a country where women were once not allowed to wear pants, FFS. Of course, I am well aware that a girl wearing baggy jeans isn't what extremist Republicans are worried about here. They fear gender non-conformity most when it comes from someone they see as male not adhering to the strict and narrow definition of what is “manly.” Nevermind that toxic masculinity hurts everyone. We have an entire political party dedicated to supporting the ugliest aspects of our culture.

This bill also bans medical professionals from providing treatment that would “facilitate a transgender person's desire to present themselves or appear in a way that is inconsistent with their biological sex,” which includes hormone treatment, puberty blockers or surgery according to NBC News. If they don't comply they could lose their licenses and face big fines.

In a statement, Campaign for Southern Equality Executive Director the Rev. Jasmine Beach-Ferrara said, “Transgender youth have the best chance to thrive when they are supported and affirmed, not singled out and denied critical care that is backed by virtually every leading health authority.”

In other words, maybe the people making decisions about care for transgender youth are doctors and not extremist politicians who claim that government should stay out of people's lives, but don't seem to mind the government getting into people's underpants?



DOJ Memo Contradicts Proposed Anti-Trans School Sports Legislation

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Last month Michigan Sen. Lana Theis, along with 12 Senate Republicans, introduced Senate Bill 218 that would bar transgender students from being able to participate in school sports in accordance with their gender identity — not unlike similar legislation presented in Idaho last year. Now, a Department of Justice memorandum has been released that undermines Theis' proposed legislation.

It states that the Supreme Court's LGBTQ-affirming decision that protected LGBTQ+ people from gender identity or sexual orientation discrimination in *Bostock v. Clayton County* is applicable to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 alongside President Biden's Recent Executive Order 13988.

"Executive Order 13988 sets out the Administration's policy that '[a]ll persons should receive equal treatment under the law, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.' Citing the Supreme Court's holding in *Bostock* that the prohibition on discrimination 'because of . . . sex' under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 . . . covers discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation," the memo reads.

It goes on to say that the executive order explains that the reasoning in *Bostock*

"applies with equal force to other laws that prohibit sex discrimination 'so long as the laws do not contain sufficient indications to the contrary,'" concluding that it should be applied to Title IX as well.

Jay Kaplan is the staff attorney on the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan's LGBT Project. He says this memo is a clear argument against Senate Bill 218 because "it's clearly discriminatory" against transgender athletes.

"We already know that the federal court has weighed in on this issue and it struck down Idaho's sports law saying that it violates Title IX and that it raises Constitutional concerns," he said. "We hope that that this memo will be persuasive, but we really do believe that the impetus behind this legislation is not about trying to fix the problem and it's not based on facts."

He added that while he is confident that Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer would veto Bill 218 if it crossed her desk, it's unlikely the issue is going away any time soon.

"This issue is going to be raised as a way to oppose LGBTQ civil rights, and so we do need to keep talking about this," Kaplan said. "And we need to expose the fallacy of these arguments in support of legislation like this, too."

Lawmakers Call for Ron Weiser to Resign from UM Board of Regents After Disparaging Comments

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Michigan GOP Chair Ron Weiser is facing a big backlash to cruel comments he made last month at a North Oakland Republican Club meeting. The comments, which The Detroit News first published online in a video format last Friday, showed Weiser referring to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson as witches.

Weiser was speaking about how Republicans could defeat the three in the 2022 election.

"Our job now is to soften up those three witches and make sure that we have good candidates against them, that they are ready for the burning at the stake," he said.

And as if the comments against the elected Democrat leaders weren't enough, Weiser took on two members of his own party, U.S. Reps. Fred Upton and Peter Meijer, who voted to impeach former President Donald Trump. When asked how the party could oust them, Weiser replied, "Other than assassination, I have no other way other than voting."

Weiser's comments were met with universal disapproval. Many called on Weiser, who also serves on the University of Michigan Board of Regents, to step down.

"I condemn any suggestion of violence against a duly elected state or federal official," said UofM President Mark Schlissel. "Such words are particularly abhorrent in a climate where so recently the use of language has engendered violence and attempted violence directed at elected officials, our democratic institutions, and the individuals who guard them."

In addition to Schlissel's comment, four of Weiser fellow members of the Regents Board have called for him to step down. They include Jordan Acker, Michael Behm, Mark Bernstein and Mark Brown.

"The recent comments by Regent Weiser were misogynistic, divisive and reckless," Brown said. "Degrading and inflammatory speech by any public official is inexcusable and should not be tolerated by good people."

Ultimately, Weiser did try to walk his statements back.

"I apologize to those I offended for the flippant analogy about three women who are elected officials and for the off-hand comments about two other leaders," he said in a statement. "I have never advocated for violence and never will. While I will always fight for the people and policies I believe in, I pledge to be part of a respectful political dialogue going forward."

The apology was not good enough for gay Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter, a Democrat.



"I'm disgusted that Ron Weiser came into Oakland County . . . and repeatedly insulted Michigan's top elected officials in crude and sexist terms and even advocated for violence against them and two Republican congressmen," Coulter said. "I get that politics is often a game of hardball, but in these times when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has been the target of a kidnapping plot by domestic terrorists and a mob invaded the U.S. Capitol looking to harm elected leaders, such language is dangerous and has no place in our political discourse."

Weiser has since been censured by the Board of regents, and he stated that he "will not be cancelled." U of M students have staged a mock renaming of the school's Weiser Hall, changing the name to the "Weiser Center for Voter Suppression, Political Assassination and Witch Burning."

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'Outrageous' Court Decision for Lesbian Parent Overturned



— they began a family. Using reproductive technology, Matthews and LeFever bore twins using LeFever's egg that was fertilized by donor sperm and implanted in Matthews' uterus. After co-parenting the children for several years, the partnership ended and a custody battle ensued. Until that time, both mothers' names were listed on the birth certificate. However, Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Melissa Cox who heard the case didn't see it that way.

"The court was raising the question as to ... who is considered to be a legal parent," said Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project. "And through some very kind of twisted analogy, the family court judge decided that this relationship was like a surrogacy parenthood agreement. And the gestational mom, because she wasn't related by genetics, that she was not a natural parent."

The judge ordered Matthews' name removed from the birth certificate. Going forward, she would be treated as a third party.

"In term of the custody dispute, it's a much larger burden for a third party to challenge the other parent's custody arrangement," Kaplan explained. "What was flawed about this in so many ways is that most state courts do not define a parent solely based on being genetically related. We have people who adopt children; we have heterosexual couples who use reproductive technology who might not be able to have children on their own."

Misinterpretation

The judge appeared to view the couple as having entered a surrogacy agreement where one contracts with someone to carry a child. In such agreements, the person who is the gestational mother waives her rights to parenthood. Kaplan emphasized that this was not at all the situation involving these two individuals.

In a majority opinion by Judges Kirsten Frank Kelly and Michael Riordan written April 1, the Michigan Court of Appeals disagreed with the lower court judge as well, stating the lower court "misapplied" the law and ordered the case returned to the Wayne County Circuit Court with Matthews once again designated a legal parent.

Kaplan said the Michigan Court of Appeals' ruling really is not a departure from business as usual in custody disputes.

"In my opinion, it was so blatantly obvious what the lower court did, how wrong it was, how wrong the conclusion was, and how the judge [incorrectly] reached this conclusion, that this decision needed to be overturned," Kaplan said. "The result was outrageous. You have a mom who's been co-parenting her children, has a relationship with her children for seven years, and the court's saying, 'Oh, no, sorry, you're not a parent because you're not biologically related to the child and, therefore, I'm going to strip you of your legal status as a parent.' And the analysis of how she arrived at that result was pretty tortured."

Kaplan said that this decision is a notable one because it highlights that in a same-sex relationship, where reproductive technology is used to bear children and one of the individuals is not biologically related, both deserve equal footing as parents.

"This decision makes it clearer in the realm of same-sex couples [that] you do not have to be biologically related in order to be a legal parent," Kaplan affirmed. "I think that's why

See **Surrogacy**, page 28

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

In what can be considered a win for LGBTQ+ parents and their children in the state of Michigan, the Michigan Court of Appeals has overturned a lower court's decision involving a lesbian couple's custody dispute.

When Lanesha Matthews and Kyresha LeFever were in a relationship from 2011 to 2014 — before same-sex marriage was legal



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BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

After Southwest Michigan First's controversial hiring of former House Speaker Lee Chatfield, followed by his tumultuous tenure and subsequent resignation, it's difficult to say whether 2021 started with a bang or a thud for LGBTQ+ Michiganders and their allies. But Equality Michigan Executive Director Erin Knott isn't distracted. In a wide-ranging interview with Pride Source, Knott shared what's on the LGBTQ+ civil rights organization's agenda for the coming year. She began with what one can take away from the Chatfield debacle.

"I think what we've learned is a couple of points," Knott began. "One is for those individuals that are currently serving in the Michigan Legislature that will be termed out in 2022, they need to do right by the LGBTQ community. Otherwise, they might find themselves unemployable when they leave their public service."

In addition, Knott said, businesses and institutions of all sizes are being put on notice that they will be held accountable for instituting inclusive practices: they've seen the backlash that can ensue. She believes it's no coincidence that Bethany Christian

Services amended its policies regarding foster care and adoption for the LGBTQ+ community shortly after what happened regarding Southwest Michigan First.

"I think you'll continue to see employers doing right by the LGBTQ community so that they're not going through the public kind of pressure campaign that Southwest Michigan First experienced a couple of weeks ago," Knott added.

Legislative priorities

Knott emphasized that the business community has great power and influence over lawmakers, often in the form of donation dollars. In turn, when it comes to the bottom line of those businesses, consumers — not to mention employees both current and prospective — hold sway, too. It's all interconnected; however, amending Michigan's civil rights law to include LGBTQ+ people remains at a standstill.

"We have polling that suggests over 75 percent of Michiganders supports modernizing the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation, gender identity and expression — and those folks are voters," Knott pointed out.

Dismissive of the notion that the

judicial system may ultimately resolve the issue before the Legislature acts, Knott stressed the importance of having an explicit law on the books. Yet she's realistic, and acknowledged it will be an "uphill climb." She returned to the outcry surrounding Southwest Michigan First.

"That's just a snapshot of what will happen once we have bills introduced and moving throughout the legislative process," Knott predicted. "I'm looking forward to, at Equality Michigan, a summer that's not as bleak as last summer in terms of the challenges with COVID, so that we're not only organizing online but we're out in communities doing accountability actions in districts where we have lawmakers that are absolutely being obstructionists to holding hearings or giving us that clean bill that our community so desperately deserves."

And there's more the LGBTQ+ community has to look forward to from Equality Michigan this summer.

"With municipal elections coming up, Equality Michigan is going to be helping pro-equality candidates, LGBTQ candidates, that want to serve at the local level," Knott explained. "And that work is just a springboard

See Erin Knott, page 26

Equality Michigan Executive Director Erin Knott Talks Goals and Accountability for Politicians, Business Leaders



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Lil Nas X (pictured) in his controversial “MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name)” video, which writer Emell Derra Adolphus says is “about 2,000 years overdue.”

How Lil Nas X Is Leading Black Queerness Out of Purgatory



BY EMELL DERRA ADOLPHUS

If it feels like Lil Nas X releases a new video for “MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name)” every day, it is because the Twitterverse and Lil Nas himself haven’t had a moment’s pause since the video’s premiere last Friday.

With each public pan or praise, Lil Nas has been able to extend the conversation around his intentions for the video’s visuals. That’s impressive for any artist today considering that the memes generated from

intellectual property generate more buzz than the actual source material. But for Lil Nas to achieve this while putting his full Black queerness on a spread-eagled display, he deserves much more than to be called by his name. He deserves some *respek* on his name from hip-hop, too.

As a song, “MONTERO” is only two minutes and 17 seconds long. But the blatant hidden agenda he’s pushing (Lil Nas’ thoughts, not mine) in the video’s imagery makes the song about 2,000 years overdue. Jesus was in his 20s then, and most of us doubt he was going around telling people that they are going to hell the way his disciples do today. Yet judging from the video’s thinly veiled critique of heaven and hell — who’s in and who’s out — it’s clear Lil Nas has been told he belongs in the latter, an inescapable experience for most Black boys (myself included) who have grown up to be anything other than straight.

From purely a fight-against-the-demonizing-of-gay-people perspective, Lil Nas X has won the support of the LGBTQ+ community. After all, it is his community, too, after publicly coming out as gay in 2019 during the height of his “Old Town Road” success. He shared again his thoughts on coming out immediately after the release of “MONTERO” in a message to his 14-year-old self — when he was just Montero Lamar Hill from Lithia Springs, Georgia.

While most LGBTQ people — I said most, not all — might see religion as a representation of oppression in the video, Black people at the intersection of queerness will see their childhoods. For this reason, Lil Nas will struggle to gain the support — the disapproval has already begun — of the same Black straight fans who love him for “Old Town Road.” But now is when he deserves it more than ever.

Anyone crying foul that they don’t support Lil Nas’s “MONTERO” video — not because he is gay, but because it pushes satanic imagery clearly — is blindly unaware or blithely asleep to how much the mark of the beast is all over rap music. In fact, there are entire courses on YouTube devoted to spotting devil worshippers in music. And if we go down that rabbit hole for Black artists, the results are really surprising, or unsurprising, depending on what you believe. Let’s see, there is: Three 6 Mafia, Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, Drake’s “The Six,” Kanye’s gothic gospel turn, Beyoncé and Rihanna, and even President Barack Obama. Not to mention the OG antichrist Madonna.

The point being, this is all a distraction from their talent. And if all Black lives really matter, we cannot afford to demonize and dismiss our own people the moment they step out of our comfort zones.

Yes, you’ve probably already heard that Lil Nas descends into hell on a stripper pole and gives a CGI Satan a lap dance in “MONTERO.” But I see nothing different from the lap dance-laced culture that is already prevalent in hip-hop today. He does not exploit women in his video, or exploit men for that matter. He exploits himself, taking back ownership of his sexuality and body, from a system that has continuously exploited Black men since our ancestors picked cotton. On paper, these are real steps forward, but internalized homophobia is holding us back from seeing anything but blasphemy.

Black culture and queerness is popular culture. It’s packaged and

presented in shows like “RuPaul’s Drag Race” and objectified in reality TV shows like “Love & Hip Hop” and “The Real Housewives,” which would be nothing without its Atlanta version (let’s be honest).

In the end, everyone seems to benefit from Black culture but Black people.

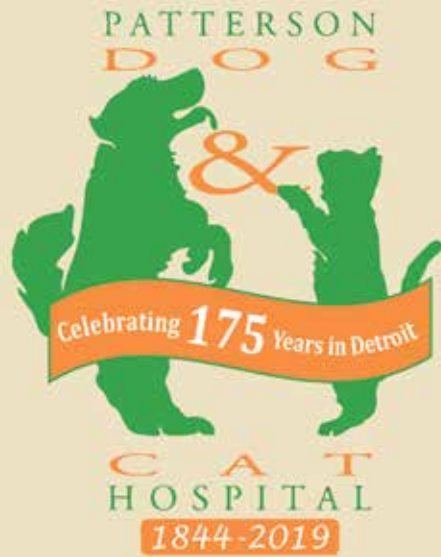
Black people are rarely presented as the object of sexual desire and standard of beauty the way Lil Nas has positioned himself in “MONTERO.” For this presentation alone, we should all worship him for that. But if you are only taking in Lil Nas’ body and skipping over his message, you are no better than the

“If you are only taking in Lil Nas’ body and skipping over his message, you are no better than the system we were marching against last summer. And a couple of summers before that. And that other time before that. And that big time before that.”

system we were marching against last summer. And a couple of summers before that. And that other time before that. And that big time before that.

Rappers like Cakes da Killa, Frank Ocean, Big Freedia, Young Thug and Pharrell Williams did not walk so Lil Nas could run. They walked so he could fly. And fly he will right to the top of the charts if we can see past the bait and see the Black boy who needs the support of *all* his communities. Sure, we won’t solve society’s problematic relationship with Black queerness overnight, but Lil Nas made one helluva start with “MONTERO.”

Emell Derra Adolphus is a writer from Detroit.



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→ Erin Knott

Continued from p. 22

for the work that will happen in 2022.”

Another legislative priority for Equality Michigan is continuing to pursue a statewide conversion therapy ban: until now, Michigan has only enacted a patchwork of bans in a handful of municipalities. While it is encouraging that Democratic legislators have introduced bills that would ban conversion therapy practiced on minors by healthcare professionals — and Equality Michigan has supported them — Knott acknowledged that said bills “sit and go nowhere.”

This year may be different, though, with the help of Gov. Whitmer.

“I’ve ... had conversations with the Governor’s staff,” Knott said. “These conversations actually began last year and the pandemic put a pause on them. She does have the ability to pass executive actions on this matter. It won’t be as encompassing as a legislative solution, but that’s a first step. There will be follow-up conversations with her team to talk about what that looks like in some of the other states that have recently passed executive actions, just so she sees what’s possible.”

Organizational changes

Within the organization, Knott was eager to share what’s new for Equality Michigan’s

department of victim services.

“That team did a phenomenal job transitioning their work to online services, just because we weren’t physically able to go in the last year to the sites where we have partnerships,” Knott said. “So that team is making the preparation to be back in our pop-up office areas as appropriate, but we’re also looking at expanding the net in terms of who we partner with.”

For example, Knott said, they are in the development stages of partnering with various YWCAs to have a formal arrangement where Equality Michigan would be the victim advocate for a member of the LGBTQ+ community who’s experiencing trauma. In the future, this would expand to a more diverse range of partnerships across the state.

With an increase in state grant dollars, Equality Michigan has also been able to increase their emergency funding for victims fleeing a domestic violence situation but who have left behind critical prescription medication.

“We also are in the position to provide resources and dollars so that our clients are able to receive counseling services,” Knott said. “This is new for 2021 and we’ll be rolling out more information about eligibility and process in the weeks to come.”

Not only are there new service offerings in Equality Michigan’s department of victim services, but there have been staffing changes, too. Brooke Lindley comes to the organization from the LGBTQ+ center OutFront Kalamazoo

and began last year by assisting Knott in the 2020 election cycle. Now, with a case manager position built into the budget, Lindley is assuming that role. Her work will focus largely on trainings in the community. With the same kind of experience working with the YWCA and OutFront, Knott called it “a perfect fit.”

“As she assumes the new case manager position, [Lindley] has goals of training, engaging with companies, universities [and] schools on diversity and inclusion [and] workplace education,” Knott said. “She’s also working with law enforcement agencies, as another example, so that they know how to strengthen civil rights of the LGBTQ people engaged with the criminal system and law enforcement. We’ve always done the training work; we now have a dedicated person that is out there marketing the offerings, making the connections and building the relationships, and we’re looking to do deeper training across the state.”

Currently, there is an open position for a victim advocate. Serena Johnson, most recently Equality Michigan’s director of victim services, temporarily returned to the organization in the summer on a part-time basis and will help Knott make a hiring decision.

Knott also commented on another new face at Equality Michigan, former state Senator Buzz Thomas, who now heads up the organization’s 501(c)(3) board of directors.

“It’s been energizing and exciting to get to know Buzz in this different relationship,”

Knott said. “He has a tremendous amount of connections, wisdom and expertise as it relates to coalition-building and relationship-building, and I’ve enjoyed his mentorship for the first quarter of the year as the two of us ... are working closer together.”

Finances and the future

In terms of the financial position of the organization, Knott was proud to call it “very strong,” due in part to a successful Mission Equality fundraising event, held online. Despite COVID, EQMI was able to raise the resources needed to sustain the operation and even expand the work of the previous year.

“We are looking to raise even more money this year,” Knott said. “My goal is that we end 2021 in a stronger position than we are right now so that we are hitting 2022 with the utmost momentum going into that election year, because ... everything is up in 2022 and it’s just gonna be critical for our community.”

Certainly, Equality Michigan is in a stronger position than just a few years ago. When asked whether there was any credence to the notion that the organization was considering combining operations with the Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center. Knott’s answer was a swift and unequivocal “no.”

“That’s not on the table,” Knott said. “That was something that was floated out there

See Erin Knott, page 29

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→ Surrogacy

Continued from p. 20

this decision is very significant.”

Kaplan also thought the concurring opinion of Judge Elizabeth Gleicher was worthy of note. She looked at the Constitutional issues, concluding that the couple had a constitutionally protected right to form a family using whatever method they chose to use.

First noting that in case law, also known as precedent, gestational mothers are always recognized as parents, Kaplan added,

“What [Judge Gleicher] opined was that ... even for same-sex couples who might not be able to avail themselves to that kind of reproductive technology involving an egg being placed in another mom’s uterus — even situations that might involve a sperm donor, or a male same-sex couple where neither one is going to be biologically related to the child — even they are parents, too.

“And that’s a constitutionally protected right,” he continued. “So that’s a concurring opinion, not the majority opinion. So, it’s not necessarily the law of the land in Michigan, but it’s relatively rare that in a state court the judges will weigh in on these Constitutional issues. I think that’s really significant.”

Future effects

Kaplan went on to explain how this decision could have an impact in terms of Michigan’s equitable parent doctrine.

“We’ve had some really bad court stuff regarding same-sex couples who couldn’t get married and they couldn’t do an adoption, and you had the biological parent as the only one is recognized on the birth certificate,” Kaplan said. “And when these couples broke up, you saw the nonlegal parent denied the ability to see their children.”

In 1999, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that one can only be an equitable parent if legally married. And because same-sex couples couldn’t get legally married at the time, they couldn’t have that status. So, for many years, one of the parents could lose custody and perhaps all contact with their children, and they didn’t have a legal remedy in court.

“After the marriage equality decision, we tried to go back in Michigan courts and we tried to get findings that some of these

mom’s were equitable parents and yet, those decisions were reversed by the Michigan Court of Appeals saying they weren’t married,” Kaplan said. “Well, they couldn’t get married because under the Constitution they were denied the right to get married.”

Although the majority opinion in the abovementioned custody case does not address that issue, Judge Gleicher’s concurring opinion does. Basically, she calls the 1999 decision, *Van v. Zahorik*, outdated and believes those parents should have been considered legal parents to their children.

“The issue with equitable parenthood, it’s not a law, it’s a judicial doctrine,” Kaplan explained. “We tried about five years ago to get that decision reversed by the Michigan Supreme Court, to take up the case. They refused to do so. Maybe there might be an opportunity now given this decision, someone might be able to try to make an argument that the court now needs to take a look at *Van v. Zahorik*”

Kaplan is hopeful that given the newly progressive majority on the Michigan Supreme Court as of the 2020 election, there may be progress in this arena.

“In fact, Chief Justice McCormack, she wrote a really strong dissent five years ago to the Michigan Supreme Court’s refusal to take up this case and she was talking about the harm that is done to children when they lose a parent unilaterally, based on the whim of the other parent,” Kaplan said. “There might be some way to revisit that issue of an equitable parent as a result of this concurring opinion.”

That remains to be seen. Returning to the Michigan Court of Appeals’ decision regarding *Matthews and LeFever*, the Court of Appeals concluded that “the circuit court shall award legal custody of the child based on a determination of the best interests of the child.”

Kaplan agreed with this, whether both parents are legal parents or one is considered in the eyes of the law a third party.

“I think if there’s evidence showing both of them were intended to be parents, both of them served in the role of parents, both of them are regarded by their children as their parents,” he said. “Yes, they should have equal footing.”

And he views it as good news that the case will go back to the Wayne County Circuit Court where both moms are recognized as legal parents.

“It is applying what’s in the best interest of the child, not putting one parent on a higher plane than the other,” Kaplan continued. “It’s certainly gonna be a better situation for these children, because both these parents have played and continue to play a role in their children’s lives. As it should be.”

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Agnes of WandaVision p. 35

Affirmations Launches Podcast That Offers a Peek Inside the LGBTQ+ Center

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center in Ferndale has created a new Spotify podcast. The podcast offers a view into the ins and outs of the center and features everyone from staff to volunteers and interns. So far, there three episodes of the podcast have been released online. The first kicks off with a new hire at the center, Programs Director Kathleen Redmon. Second up is Head Volunteer Bill Haycook and third is Sean Drate, a support group facilitator.

Interview subjects talk about their different roles at Affirmations, how they found out about it and what it means to them and others.

“Right now, we’re posting content monthly, probably a series of three interviews,” said Affirmations Development and Community Relations Manager Kyle Taylor. “It could be anyone from the organization. It’s just a way to tell the stories.”



For the center, which has been closed to the public for over a year now due the pandemic, the podcast is a good way to promote continuity and help people feel connected. The center hope staff hope to reopen Affirmations publicly soon, and they have announced that its annual Spring Bash is being moved to the fall. For now, all groups at Affirmations are still meeting virtually.

“I’m sure it helps hearing from familiar faces,” Taylor said. “Our new program director Kathleen was featured so it kind of connects people to her who might not be able to meet her. It’s sort of bridging the gap and keeping people connected and it’s fun. Podcasts are fun to listen to.”

Learn more online at goaffirmations.org.



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→ Erin Knott

Continued from p. 26

... in 2019 when Affirmations and Equality Michigan were experiencing some transition [but] that has not been a conversation that has ... risen to any credible level in some time.”

Knott added that she and Affirmations Executive Director Dave Garcia have a great relationship and talk on a regular basis. She also commented that Equality Michigan, the ACLU and the community centers across the state come together formally on a regular basis to exchange information, update each other on priorities and opportunities, and share best practices.

Not only is Knott executive director of the largest LGBTQ+ civil rights organization in Michigan, but she also sits on the Kalamazoo City Board of Commissioners and teaches college students part-time. She explained why she is so passionate about her work.

“It sounds cliched, but I am a workaholic,” Knott confessed. “If you were to ask my partner, I am constantly working. And I think the last year with COVID, because we were all at home,

“It’s maddening that there are individuals in positions of power that continue to weaponize or distort religious liberty as a license to discriminate ... My passion will continue to be fever-pitched until we’re able to tamp back some of these distortions and we’re protected and able to go about our daily lives without fear of harm because of somebody’s viewpoint.”

there were blurry boundaries as it relates to my work/life balance, and I saw myself working very, very long days. But until we have full equality, until the state of Michigan amends Elliott-Larsen so that our community is protected, you’ve just gotta roll up your sleeves and keep pushing.

“It’s maddening that there are individuals in positions of power that continue to weaponize or distort religious

liberty as a license to discriminate,” she continued. “My passion will continue to be fever-pitched until we’re able to tamp back some of these distortions and we’re protected and able to go about our daily lives without fear of harm because of somebody’s viewpoint.”

Learn more about EQMI and Erin Knott at equalitymi.org.

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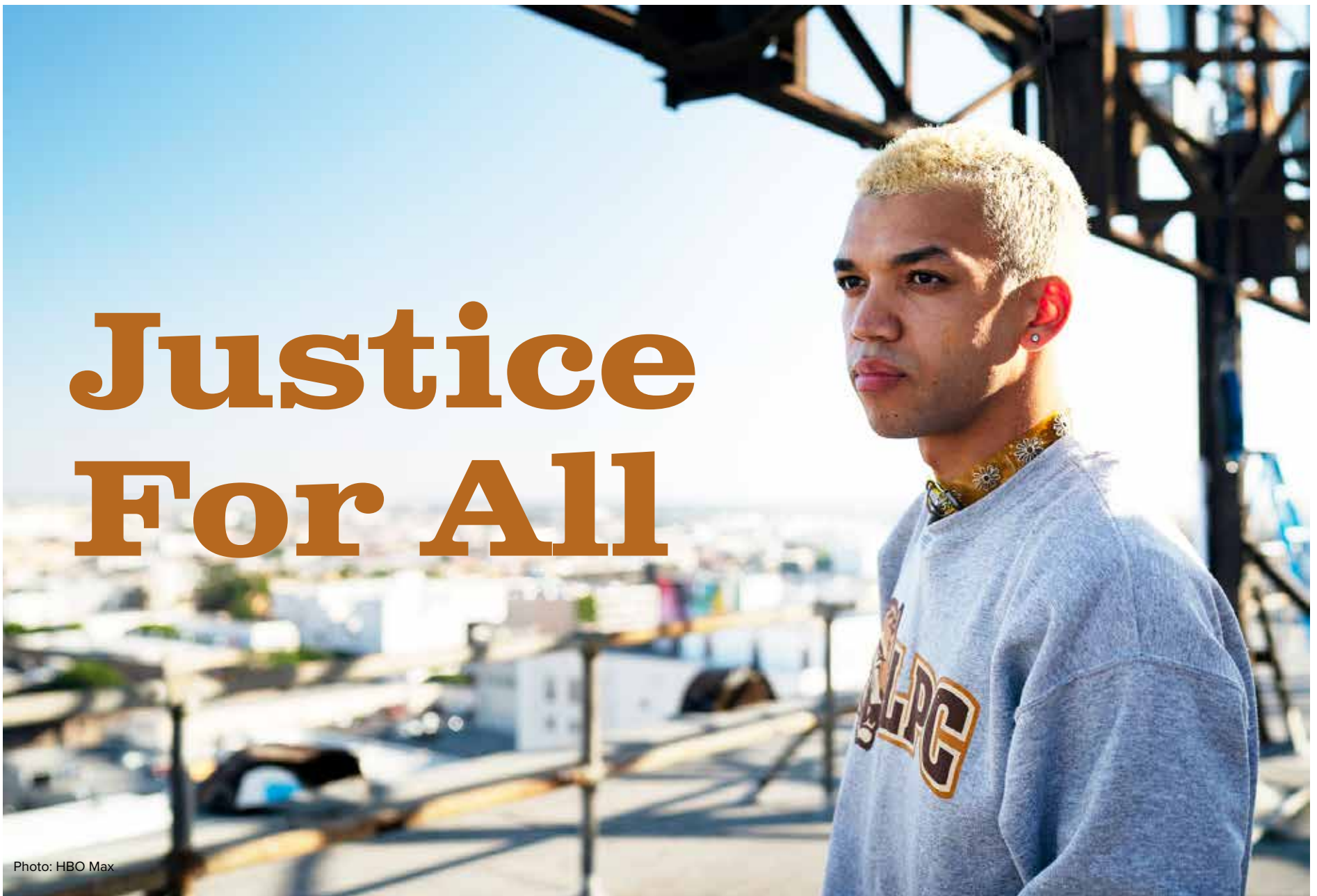


Photo: HBO Max

The Out 'Genera+ion' Star Is Happy Being an Example of Black Queer Joy

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Last summer, Justice Smith wasn't coming out but, instead, making a statement in solidarity with the Black trans and queer community. On Instagram, the 25-year-old actor posted a video while attending a protest against white supremacy and police brutality in New Orleans. He acknowledged he's queer, yes. And yes, he revealed he was partnered, with then-boyfriend and "Queen Sugar" star Nicholas Ashe (the two have since broken up, Smith told us).

Still, he didn't intend for the post to be about his own identity, exactly. It was more about visibility: "If your revolution does not include Black Queer voices, it is anti-Black," he wrote. "If your revolution is OK with letting Black

trans people like #TonyMcDade slip through the cracks in order to solely liberate Black cis het men, it is anti-Black."

Nearly a year later, the "Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom" and "Pokémon Detective Pikachu" actor is using the power of representation to continue these conversations with his role on HBO Max's supremely gay series "Genera+ion." On the show, he portrays Chester, a defiantly gay Gen Z'er who struts his high school halls in nipple-exposing crop tops — dress code be damned. In many ways, the series' commitment to LGBTQ+ storytelling is next-level teen queerness. Writing for MEL magazine, Joseph Longo described it as "post-'It Gets Better' TV," noting that, when it comes to queer representation on TV, "It's good we're finally seeing our messes splayed on screen, not excused."

Recently, Smith spoke about how Chester has emboldened him to embrace his femininity, being a role model for young Black queer boys to channel their Black joy, and going from being "so noticeably un-hot" to a half-naked heartthrob.

I think the most obvious question to start with is: How many mesh shirts has Chester inspired you to buy?

(Laughs.) Um, so far zero, but I definitely am looking at the racks and being like, god, I really wish I had the confidence to get that crop top or to get that yada-yada-yada. I will say that there's been a few hoodies in my closet that I am like, "This doesn't need the bottom half of it," and I just cut it into a crop. It's liberating wearing clothes like that, you know?

Has Chester been influential in not just your style evolution but how you look at your own sexuality?

Chester has really done a lot for my own sense of feminine power. I think that everybody contains masculine and feminine qualities. And I think as a man, you're taught to repress or hide your femininity, and I've realized by playing Chester, who is somebody who rejects labels in general and expresses himself through all means of the gender spectrum, he's given me a sense of my own feminine power. Something that I've kind of ignored because of how I have internalized the messages that I have received from society.

You've played a lot of quiet introverts, until Chester, of course. What was it like to step into someone who's unapologetically himself and

also unabashedly loud about who he is?

I feel like I have that quality in my personal life; authenticity is really important to me, and I am someone who, at least within my close-knit group of friends, is bold and loud and not afraid to ask for what I want. But for some reason I was getting cast (as) a lot of these characters who were meek and insecure and quiet, which, you know, I also have those sides.

I still do consider myself an introvert. But I knew that it was time to show the world that I have all of these different sides of me, and that's what I set out to do: being an actor I set out to kind of express the multitude of my being, and I think Chester was the perfect person to show that side of me, of this, like, boldness. It's also being in that 24/7. Like, every day I go to set being in that confidence and boldness, it's cathartic, it's inspirational. It just juices up that self-confidence that I felt like I already had but definitely ignored.

I love hearing that. A little different than running away from Tyrannosaurus Rex.

A little different, but marginally. (Laughs.)

Running away from toxic masculinity and the patriarchy.

(Laughs.) Yeah, exactly. They are essentially the same thing.

I have been loving how much attention you've been getting for this role. How do you process comments on Twitter, or beyond Twitter, that are like, "I want Justice Smith" or "I can no longer ignore how hot I find Justice Smith." There was another one that said, "Justice Smith, having a hot boyfriend. Mmmm, I wanna make it a throuple."

Oh, no. Oh, wow. I don't ... I don't even ... I didn't even know that that was a thing (laughs). I'm, like, blushing. It's so funny because you spend most of your life being so

noticeably un-hot and unattractive (laughs), and you're like, "I better develop a personality, because I don't really got anything else going for me." And then, I guess, as you get older, something clicks. I also do feel like a little bit is the way you hold yourself. Confident people just kind of are more attractive, so I think when they see me being confident on the show, they're like, "Oh, he's hot," but I'm like, "Nah." (Laughs.) In real life, no, 'cause that's like an energy thing that I'm doing.

There's something to be said about who you are on the show, you know, baring your midriff in almost every scene. I guess that's not you in real life, is what you're saying.

No, no, no, no. But this show has made me, at first, very insecure, but now very secure in my body, because it's like I have to work out all the time because Chester's an athlete, and I am nothing of the sort. But also, I remember when we first started out, I wore that crop top and I was just like, "Don't you fucking breathe, tense all your muscles, act like you're, like, chilled but actually, inside, you're freaking the fuck out." And now I tell our costume designer, Shirley Kurata, "This needs to be sluttier; we need to show more skin." (Laughs.)

In the pilot, I was not breathing. When I do that strip-tease thing, I didn't breathe for one second. I was like, "Suck in, tense all of your abs." (Laughs.) It was intense. I was so nervous. But now it's like, "I am so used to being naked on set." Because I do it all the time.

While spending your teen years in Orange County, were you surrounded by as many queer people as Chester is in "Genera+ion"?

Yeah, because I went to an art school in Orange County, I got — maybe that's a stereotype that, you know, "artists are just

See *Justice*, page 34



Photo: HBO Max

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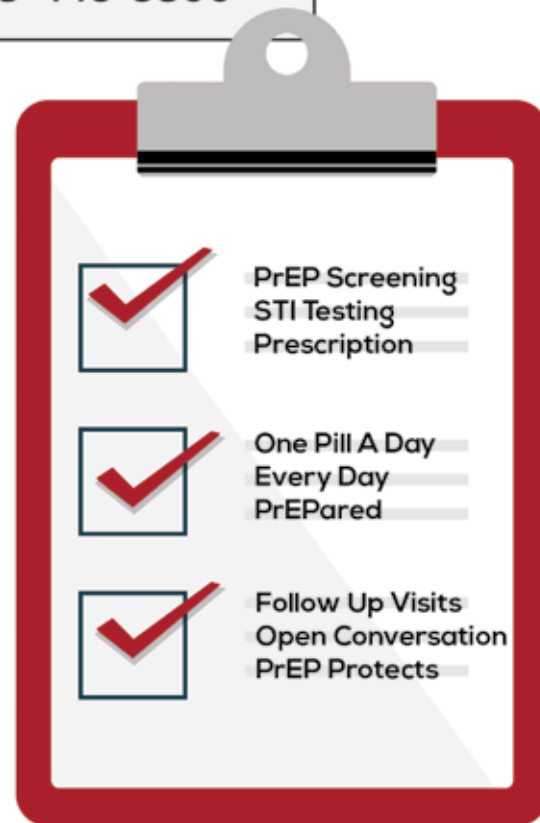




Photo: Paramount+

Manning Down

After 'Younger,' Nico Tortorella Is Ready for the Future of Masculinity

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

For six seasons, queer nonbinary actor, activist and author Nico Tortorella has starred as Josh, the delightfully brooding (straight) tattoo artist, on super-queer TV Land dramedy “Younger.” Created, executive produced and written by openly gay “Sex and the City” helmer Darren Star, the LGBTQ-inclusive series focuses on a single mom (Broadway’s Sutton Foster) who undergoes a makeover to appear, well, younger (much, much younger) in an effort to land a publishing job after her husband leaves her. Hillary Duff also stars, with Debi Mazar in, blessedly, a lesbian role. For its seventh and final season, the show moves from TV Land to ViacomCBS streamer Paramount+.

On Zoom from their home in upstate New York, Tortorella discussed the future of masculinity on TV in a post-Josh world and geeked out about starring as gay zombie fighter Felix Carlucci in AMC’s “The Walking Dead: World Beyond.”

After playing Josh for seven seasons, do you have a different kind of interpretation, or appreciation, or perspective on straight bro culture and the guys who inhabit that space?

Great question. I think that in terms of the medium of filmmaking in general, there’s a responsibility to write characters that are more than the stereotype. And I think that Darren has always done a really good job of that. But I think the way Josh came to life on this show in terms of his emotionality and his

heart and his openness — on paper, Josh is a straight bro, right? But he’s so much more than that. And it has been such an honor to bring that character to life. Just to see Josh cry. We need to see more men cry. We all do, right? I’m excited for the future of masculinity in general, the ways in which art can expand that notion and just the collapsing of binaries and divisions that exist in everything.

Do you have any real life examples of that and Josh’s influence on culture when it comes to breaking down these masculine norms?

I think that “the normal” fan of this show is a woman my age, right? Or a bit older. And I’ve had people come up to me, specifically men, who will say, “Ah, man, my girlfriend watched the show, and I started watching it because it was on...,” because they can’t admit that they started watching this show without them, right? But they found truth in this character and these storylines. And that’s just chipping away at the work that is being done and needs to be done.

So here we are seven years later. A lot of time has gone by. You’ve done a lot in between the beginning and end of “Younger.” How has the show changed your career?

Oh, man. It opened so many doors for me, both in the literal sense of my career and it allowed me to tap into other projects in film and television but also in publishing. I think I got a taste of the publishing world, and it was something that I had always imagined doing, but never really understood how to get there. And I got just a basic education of how the publishing world operates, and I was able to write a couple books, and I have a third one on the way.

What’s been the most gratifying part of bringing a queer superhero to life on “Walking Dead”?

We need more queer superheroes! This is just the tip of the iceberg. And I think it kind of goes back to what we were talking about earlier: flipping these stereotypes on their heads. There are so many ways in which Felix could have been written or could have been played. And there is a brute masculine force to Felix that is opposite, potentially, of what we would come to expect from a queer superhero. Then underneath that is this just fuckin’ raw emotionality and heart.

Moving forward for superheroes, or really just any queer character on television or in film, I’m excited for a future where we don’t rely on the violence that queer people experience in order to tell their stories. I wanna just see queer people go to the grocery store. I just want to see them live their lives in ways that other characters have been written, you know? And that goes beyond queer characters. Everyone deserves that space. You know, I watched “Ramy,” and that’s the first time we’ve seen a Muslim character really come to life in television, or a (Muslim) family, for that matter. Think about everyone else in every other story that’s worthy of voice

and time. There’s so much more that we can be doing. We’re getting there, but we still have a lot of work to do.

As Pride season approaches, I want to take a moment to reflect on this odyssey you’ve been on in regards to your sexuality since we spoke in 2017. How do you feel in your skin now versus when you first came out five years ago, in 2016?

I feel quite settled in my skin in a way that doesn’t feel tired. The word “settled” kind of has a weight to it. I’m complicit in it, but I feel really comfortable with the person that I am. Even just being off social media for the last few months, there is ... I’m currently living through this ego death of sorts and so much of my public persona and character in the last few years have been driven by this voice and this message. To let that go in a public space has been really interesting.

Not that I have let it go forever, but even just in the last few months I have focused on myself and what it means to me, rather than the access to other people. This year has been really difficult and introspective, just in terms of queer identity in general. Like, how much of our queer identities are actually tied to the relationships that we have or don’t have with other people? I have been living in a house with my partner (fitness and health expert Bethany Meyers), for the last year-plus, and there have been no external relationships. No secondary partners. No tertiary partners. Nothing. I mean, I’m kind of always living in this queer spiral, but how does the definition of queer change when we don’t have access to “other”?

What this year really has done for me, and this is just an extension of this queer spiral that I have constantly been living in, but: Is our ability to see queerness in everything that exists, rather than just our gender or sexuality? (Laughs.) I mean, going back to going to the grocery store: What is queer about going to the grocery store, you know? Like, specifically, in a conservative neighborhood that I live in, in upstate New York: How can I bring that with me? And what does that mean in the larger environment that I live in? It’s been beautiful, honestly, but, you know, difficult at times.

I’ve always appreciated that you have been frank about your sexuality and open in all regards. And when it comes to being a queer person inside of a grocery store, it’s like, queerness can just be an extension of who you are sometimes. That can be the statement.

Even just having queer conversation over this last year has been limited, and it’s refreshing to get on a call with someone who gets it. So, thank you.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.



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→ Justice

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queer, they are fluid." That's why I love artists. There's a lot of artists that are *not* queer, but sometimes young queer people are drawn to art schools.

Like at my high school, all the popular kids were queer kids and it was predominantly female, and there were a lot of straight people too, but it just was not uncommon for people to embrace who they were. It was a little bit of a bubble, which I am grateful for in some ways, because it shielded me from the way the world thought about queerness, and when I got out into the real world, I was like, "Oh shit, that's not good." But I had a lot of strength from being surrounded by queerness all (during) my upbringing.

Do you have a specific idea in mind of what you hope to accomplish in an industry that has been predominantly white and straight?

I was just talking to my little brother about this today: I find that the most radical protest is unapologetic self-love and self-acceptance, and that there is so much leading I can do by example, by putting my face on screen so that young Black and biracial boys can see themselves represented. It's unfortunately radical, but also, it shouldn't be a radical thing, just my existence, but it is. And the fact that I can utilize it and be like, "Well, then I am going to represent myself, and people who look like me and people who love like me, and make them feel less alone." That I realize is my greatest power in all of this.

I am just doing what I love; acting is what I love to do, it is what I've always set out to do, and I just happen to exist in a Black queer body. And while I am very invested in social issues, it's unfair that as a Black queer person I am almost forced to speak out about social issues, when people of the majority are not necessarily inclined to do so or obligated to do so. I hope that paradigm shifts, in that white, straight, cis people are obligated to talk about social issues just as often as BIPOC or queer people have to when they exist in the public zeitgeist.

But until that happens, I'm so cool with just being like, "This is my face, this is who I love." Like, "Kids, see yourself in me. I am here; you can do this too."

I know that a part of that is you putting your relationship out there. I mean, that is also making a statement saying, "Well, queer love is love." I wonder how conscious you are of making that kind of statement by making your relationship public, but also: Do you draw a line somewhere?

It's interesting, because I have thought about this. That relationship was incredibly expansive to me. We're no longer together, but it really opened me up as a person. I don't wanna go into it too much, which is ironic 'cause that is exactly what we are talking

about — how much I revealed about my relationship — but I think, moreover, there's so much Black boy, Black queer joy in my life, and there is so much Black pain in the zeitgeist, and I want to make sure that people know that I am aligned with this pain, and I am feeling this pain intimately, because I am a part of this community. But moreover, I want people to see the example of Black queer joy.

I was just talking to my little brother about this too: When you surround yourself (with) images of pain and tragedy and solitude constantly, or you internalize those messages that society gives you, it starts to manifest in your life. The minute you start to surround yourself with just images of joy, specifically of people of your community experiencing joy, it also shapes your brain, and it's like, "Oh, no, no, no, no; there is happiness for me out there. There is love out there for me, there is success out there for me, because I can see it. I see someone like me *doing* it." And so that was really important to me to just be like, I have all this Black boy joy, all this Black love, this Black queer love, and I want people to see it, so that other Black queers are like, "No, in all this pain there is light. There is love. There is happiness. There is joy."

But I do want to say, to answer your question, which I didn't (laughs), is that I am really private about my relationships. But I think that was more of a statement to my community, just to remind them of the good in all of this.

Your single "Bed" just came out. Can you tell me a bit about the song and how it came about? Also, are we going to get a full album at some point?

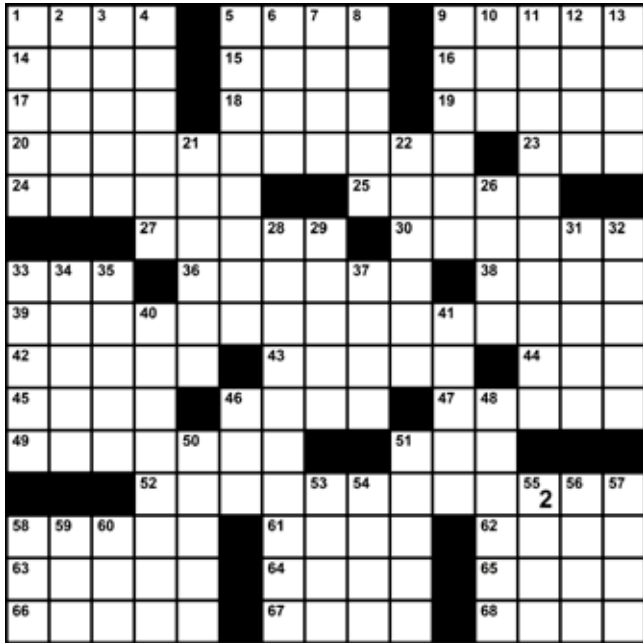
Yeah, the song I wrote about three or four years ago, about a relationship I was in, and I was really just in love with this person. I realized how much a relationship exists in the framing of a bedroom. Not just like in a sexual way, but how the bedroom is a place where you share intimacy, where you share conciliation, where you can be lazy with one another, where you can laugh with one another, you can sit around watching TV. You can argue, you can cry. It's the most private, pure form of a relationship when you are with your partner in bed.

And an album — yes! I would love to make an album. I have all these songs written. So I am just so honored that we get to share (this) with the world now, because it's something I never thought I would really do. But here I am.

You're going to have a lot of moments in your career when you are going to say that to yourself.

Yeah, that's true. That's very true. But that's always where the most growth happens: when you do the things that you thought you would never do.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.



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Agnes of WandaVision

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 17 Hopeless cases for Dr. Torres
 18 Unbending
- 19 "Three Tall Women" writer
 20 Milestone for a couple
 23 Copland capability
 24 Prefix with town
 25 Hotel customer
 27 Mistakes for Fosse
 30 Made use of
 33 Toon canine Scooby-___
 36 Frida's wrap

Down

- 1 Come as far as
 2 Téa of "Fun with Dick and Jane"
 3 Former Steeler Lynn
 4 Statistic for Sue Bird
 5 Mr. Katz, in a Lanford Wilson play
 6 Out and then some
 7 Don of radio
 8 Change labels


See p. 28 for answers

Prism of Possibilities

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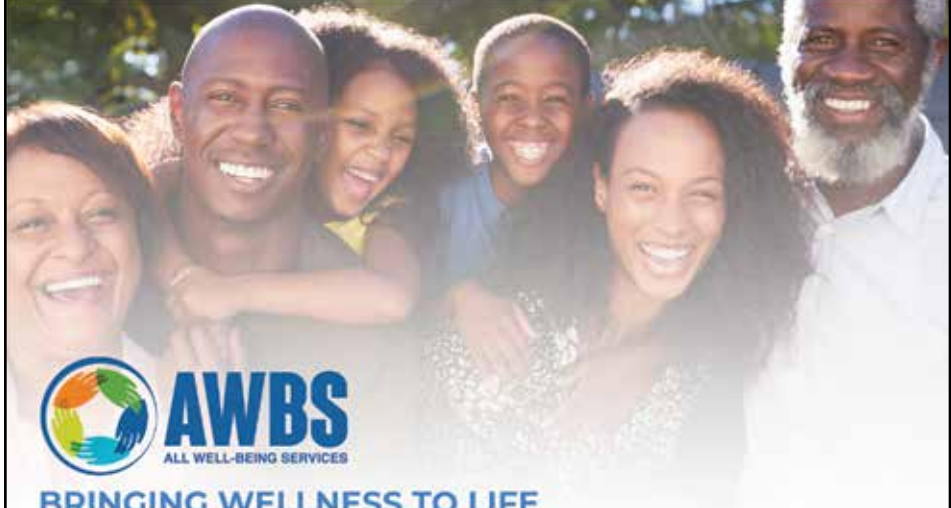
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