

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

# Between THE Lines<sup>TM</sup>

SUMMER OF PRIDE

**PRIDE VIEWPOINT**

**Slap a Flag on It:**  
Have Corporations  
Taken It Too Far? 🏳️‍🌈

**QUEER LIBRARY IS OPEN**  
17 LGBTQ+ Must-Reads  
to Get You in  
the Pride Spirit

**PLUS**

**Corktown Health:**  
A Merging of Two  
LGBTQ-Inclusive  
Health Orgs

**THE INTERVIEW**  
Leyna Bloom Is  
Changing the Game  
for Trans Women  
of Color

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- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now: Pride Edition
- 6 Michigan Senate Recognizes Pride Month for the First Time Ever
- 10 Penobscot Building Gets Lit for Pride
- 10 Gov. Whitmer, Lt. Gov. Gilchrist Mark June as Pride Month, Michigan LGBTQ+ Leaders Weigh In
- 12 Parting Glances: Rally Round the Pride Flag!
- 12 Pride Viewpoint: Slap a Flag on It
- 13 Creep of the Week: Happy Pride Month! Go Choke on a Rainbow, Tony Perkins
- 14 Detroit Queer Love in Color
- 16 The Queer Library Is Open: 17 LGBTQ+ Must-Reads to Get You in the Pride Spirit
- 26 Corktown Health: A Merging of Two LGBTQ-Inclusive Health Orgs
- 28 In Full Bloom: Leyna Bloom Is Changing the Game for Trans Women of Color



- 32 Affirmations LGBTQ+ Center to Call Ringwald Theatre and MCC Detroit Home, Among Other Updates
- 33 The Ann Arbor District Library Goes All Out for Pride Month
- 34 Deep Inside Hollywood: 'Ailey' Dances into Theaters This Summer



**14 COVER STORY**  
Photo: Jamal Jordan

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**PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP**

www.pridesource.com  
Phone 734-263-1476

**PUBLISHERS**  
Benjamin Jenkins  
benjamin@pridesource.com

**Publishers Emeritus:** Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

**DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**  
Tom Wesley  
tom@pridesource.com

**EDITORIAL**  
**Editorial Director**  
Chris Azzopardi  
chrisazzopardi@pridesource.com

**News & Feature Editor**  
Eve Kucharski  
eve@pridesource.com

**News & Feature Writers**  
Lawrence Ferber, Ellen Knoppow, Jason A. Michael,  
Drew Howard, Jonathan Thurston, D'Anne Witkowski

**Columnists**  
Charles Alexander, Michelle E. Brown,  
Mikey Rox, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, Dana Rudolph

**CREATIVE**  
**Cartoonists**  
Paul Berg

**Contributing Photographers**  
Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen, Roxanne Frith, Tih Penfil

**ADVERTISING & SALES**  
Tom Wesley, 734-263-1476  
tom@pridesource.com

Ann/Andy Cox, 248-613-2513  
anncox@pridesource.com

**National Advertising Representative**  
Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

**MEMBER OF**  
Michigan Press Association  
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Macomb County Pride Chair Phil Gilchrist. Courtesy photo.

**Macomb County Pride: Making Strides Despite Setback**

By Ellen Shanna Knoppow

**City of Trenton Flies Pride Flag in June for the First Time**

By Jason A. Michael

**Anti-Trans Youth Sports Bill: 'A Solution in Search of a Problem'**

By Ellen Shanna Knoppow

**Take That, Chick-fil-A: Burger King Unveils New Gay Chicken Sandwich For Pride With Proceeds Benefiting HRC**

By Jason A. Michael

# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

June's here, and we all know that means Pride season. If you're doing it right, it's a given that it'll be super queer — just like that new “Cruella” movie.

As we navigate vaccinated pandemic life during this time of continued uncertainty, we can count on one thing: the LGBTQ+ community knows how to get creative when it comes to get-togethers in June. Where there's a will, there's a way, as I always say (I have never said that before now). And, of course, Pride events are no exception.

1



## Experience Pride Night Under the Lights at Comerica Park

For many, summer starts with baseball, and after the New York Yankees were swept by the Tigers in a three-game series for the first time in 21 years this May, that's a very promising start. While I can't confirm, I'd like to believe it's because Comerica Park has been christened by The Gays™ as an accepting and affirming place. What I can confirm is this: proceeds from each purchase of discounted tickets for Pride Under the Lights will support the LGBTQ+ allied business community. Kevin Heard, the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce's board president, said that the organization is “extremely excited to host Pride Night” on June 11: “This year will be amazing, especially after the year we had. This is the first Friday game with restrictions lifted. However, we want guests to still adhere to guidelines and respect personal space for everyone's safety,” Heard said. “The chamber is excited to continue the tradition of Pride Night that we started in 2016.” During this Friday's game, on June 11, former BTL co-publisher Jan Stevenson will throw the first pitch.

*A pre-networking event, which will include a game ticket, food and a cash bar, will be held at 6 p.m. at Comerica Park. For more details, visit [detroitlgbtchamber.com/pridenight](http://detroitlgbtchamber.com/pridenight). Register for the event through this link: [fevoo.me/lgbtcc21](https://fevoo.me/lgbtcc21). For groups of 10 or more, contact [hannah.mcgowan@tigers.com](mailto:hannah.mcgowan@tigers.com). Event on [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).*



2

## Take the Kiddos to Family Pride

Since COVID-19 has forced Ferndale Pride to postpone its 10th anniversary (again) to the fall (which truly is OK since we all know that LGBTQ+ people do fall and Halloween better), organizers have gotten creative and set up ongoing Pride events throughout the month of June. Family Pride at Ferndale Project Brewery is one of them. Family Pride Event Chair Julia Music says the kid-friendly day will be filled with unique Pride treats, merch and family-focused activities: “This event is going to be an event that celebrates all types of families,” Music said. “There will be sidewalk chalk on the patio and coloring pages. And there will be a special dessert for kids to decorate with Pride toppings celebrating families and family diversity.” Non-alcoholic beverages will also be available for purchase.

*Family Pride at Ferndale Project is all day Wednesday, June 16. Learn more about this free outdoor event online on the event's Facebook page.*





Photo: Staley Munro

### Enjoy a Drag Brunch Cookout With Nina West

Pride without drag queens just doesn't make sense. After all, many say it was Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson who threw the first brick at Stonewall all those years ago. Today, because of those strides made toward equality, the glitz and glam that is drag performance has become a lot more accessible. Case in point: you can see Nina West, "RuPaul's Drag Race" Season 11 alum and bona fide "Miss Congeniality," join the ever-popular Drag Brunch Cookout at Royal Oak's Five15 Media, Mojo, and More. This edition will be special, too, since Miss West will add a "Musical Drag-stravaganza" element to the traditional show. "I am so excited to come back to Detroit and celebrate with my friends at Five15," West told Between The Lines. "It has been a long 15 months, and I can't wait to get back on the road and do what I love."

*The show is scheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday, June 13. Tickets start at \$35. Visit [five15.net](http://five15.net) to reserve a spot today.*







# Michigan Senate Recognizes Pride Month for the First Time Ever

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The Republican-controlled Michigan Senate, for the first time ever, recognized June as LGBTQ+ Pride Month by adopting a resolution that was the brainchild of openly gay State Sen. Jeremy Moss. The effort had bipartisan support. All 16 Democrats signed on as co-sponsors as did two Republican senators, Jim Stamas (R-Midland) and Wayne Schmidt (R-Traverse City).

“The people of Michigan understand, appreciate and value the cultural, civic and economic contributions of the LGBTQ communities to the greater community of the state and affirm a celebration of love, living authentically and accepting ourselves,” the resolution reads in part.

“We have a lot to celebrate as a community, especially a year after the historic Supreme Court ruling last June that upheld federal

employment protections for the LGBTQ Americans,” Moss said in a statement. “We must also remember that Pride Month began not as a celebration but as a liberation against decades of harassment, embarrassment and discrimination that the LGBTQ community faced. There is work yet to be done and we must amend Michigan’s Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights act to include sexual orientation and gender identity among the existing protected classes.”

Moss, a first-time senator, introduced similar resolutions in 2019 and 2020 and the Senate failed to adopt either.

“I do hope that this statement today that LGBTQ lives are valid and contribute culturally, civically and economically to the state of Michigan is a sign of increased willingness to learn from our lived experiences even though they might not be your own,” Moss said on the Senate floor. “I appreciate this first step on that journey.”



## Tune in to The Lavender Effect's Star-Studded 2021 Virtual Pride Parade

Kicking off Pride month with style is The Lavender Effect, a nonprofit dedicated to educating the world about the LGBTQ+ community's history and achievements. The nonprofit has wrangled up allied and LGBTQ+ celebrities to tip their hats to all that was LGBTQ-oriented in 2021. Comedian and actor Alec Mapa hosts, while celebs like Judith Light, Lily Tomlin and Kathryn Hahn show their support to the community, all while raising funds to keep The Lavender Effect afloat.

Visit *The Lavender Effect's* YouTube page to see the whole event: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpbogTnGf\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpbogTnGf_U)

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Between her activism, podcast, speaking engagements and published writing (some of which has appeared in BTL), Michelle Brown doesn't stop. On Thursday, June 17, see Brown in action when she addresses the virtual audience at Great Lakes Bay Pride, which will host a Zoom webinar called “Learning from Our Past: How the LGBTQ+ Community Builds Back Better.” “Now is the time to use our words to speak up for what is truth, to find common ground, say thank you and be generous,” Brown said of the webinar. “It's also time to call out the BS and the perpetrators complicit in the crimes against our humanity — not just over the past four years but in the past.”

Visit [greatlakesbaypride.org](http://greatlakesbaypride.org) to register for the webinar.



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# 'You Can See This Light Further Than Any Other City Building'

# Penobscot Building Gets Lit for Pride

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

**DETROIT** — A major Detroit landmark will be getting a colorful makeover in honor of Pride month. The iconic orb on the top of the Penobscot Building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, will be lit up in rainbow lights for the month of June.

According to Building Manager Alex Loewy, this is the first time the orb has been lit in rainbow colors.

Kevin Heard, board president and founder of the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, says he is excited that the building will be glowing with Pride. He says it's a show of support and solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community as the Chamber works to create an LGBTQ+ business district in the city.

"Almost every major city has an LGBTQ district," Heard says. "These areas are filled with a combination of services, stores, restaurants and more. The goal is to have Detroit be a destination for an LGBTQ traveler but also

attract great talent from around the country to live, work and play here."

Heard says that for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs and professionals looking to start a business, Detroit is a great place to do it.

"Neighborhood office space is still available and affordable and there are many organizations like Invest Detroit and [the Michigan Economic Development Corporation] that provide additional funding opportunities for new ideas," he says.

Heard points out that Detroit is a place of fast business growth for many communities, including for businesses owned by Black women.

"Proof being Good Cakes and Bakes, our LGBTQ Small Business of the Year," Heard says about the Detroit bakeshop, which is owned and operated by married couple April and Michelle Anderson.

In business, just like in politics and media, representation matters.

"The most important thing is having visibly owned LGBTQ+ businesses," Heard says.

"We understand that representation is very important. We want to have young LGBTQ youth know that entrepreneurship and being LGBTQ+ is a real thing and in any field. They too can accomplish so much because they see representation."

And while many will see the rainbow-lit orb this month, the orb hasn't always been a reliable glowing beacon during its 90 years atop the Penobscot Building. The building's website even includes a quote attributed to Dan Austin from Historic Detroit that reads, "The orb, which is 12 feet in diameter ... can be seen 40 miles away — when it's working, anyway."

In 2015 about half of the orb's 128 neon tubes had to be replaced, according to the Detroit Free Press, and required a two-month-long endeavor involving rewiring and replacing custom-made tubes, all while 650 feet off of the ground.

Such a feat was not required to light the orb in rainbow colors thanks to a new advanced LED lighting system.

"With neon tubes, we had very limited color choices," Loewy explains. "We have replaced the old neon tubes with a brand new, state-of-the-art LED lighting system. The new system is connected to a lighting controller which now gives us the capabilities of making the orb many different colors as well as display different effects. We are honored to commemorate Pride Month with the lighting of the Penobscot Building's iconic orb ... in rainbow colors."

A rainbow on top of one of the most iconic buildings in Detroit shows solidarity, Heard says.

"You can see this light further than any other city building. Detroit is an inclusive and welcoming place," he says. "I like to consider the orb our proverbial Bat Signal. It's a Pride Signal now."

*The Penobscot Building is located at 645 Griswold St. in Detroit. For more information about Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce visit [detroitlgbtchamber.com](http://detroitlgbtchamber.com).*

## Gov. Whitmer, Lt. Gov. Gilchrist Mark June as Pride Month, Michigan LGBTQ+ Leaders Weigh In

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

**LANSING** — On June 1, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist issued a proclamation marking June as Pride Month to recognize the accomplishments of LGBTQ+ Michiganders.

"LGBTQ+ Michiganders are an essential part of who we are, and they make our state a better place to live and work," Whitmer said. "Members of our LGBTQ+ community deserve full protection under the law so they can live their authentic lives. We still have work to do to make Michigan a truly inclusive state and we must expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act because the vaccine for discrimination is legislation. I encourage all Michiganders to recognize and celebrate the contributions of the LGBTQ+ community this Pride Month."

Lt. Gov. Gilchrist took a stand as well, noting the more than 370,000 LGBTQ+ Michiganders living across the state.

"We must continue to fight to make sure LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe, valued, and know that their state will invest in their health and potential," he said. "Making connections, listening and understanding the personal stories of LGBTQ+ individuals around you is something every Michigander can do to honor Pride Month. I will continue striving for future generations to see Michigan as a

place to be whom they wish, love whom they want, and be proud."

Lesbian Attorney General Dana Nessel, whose work was instrumental in securing marriage equality in 2015, noted her election as the first openly LGBTQ+ person to be elected to statewide office. She said that she looks forward to both celebrating Pride month this June and that it serves as a "call to action" for Michiganders.

"We must work year-round to fight for equal protection under the law," Nessel said. "I have dedicated myself to supporting the LGBTQ+ community and ask the people of this great state to step up as allies well beyond the month of June. A more inclusive future is dependent upon our collective efforts."

June 2021 celebrates Pride Month to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, an event recognized as a catalyst for the modern LGBTQ+ Civil Rights Movement.

"We have a lot to celebrate as a community, especially a year after the historic Supreme Court ruling last June that upheld federal employment protections for the LGBTQ+ Americans," said Sen. Jeremy Moss, who is gay. "We must also remember that Pride Month began not as a celebration but as a liberation against decades of harassment, embarrassment and discrimination that the LGBTQ+ community faced. There is work yet to be

done and we must amend Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity among the existing protected classes."

Bisexual Rep. Laurie Pohutsky agreed with Moss, adding that she hopes her "colleagues on the other side of the aisle finally recognize that this change is long past due."

As much work as remains to be done, Michigan has made several notable and historical strides toward advancing civil rights for LGBTQ+ people. First, with the nation's first non-discrimination ordinance passed in 1972 in East Lansing, and second with the nation's first Civil Rights Commission to independently recognize that discrimination "because of sex" includes sexual orientation and gender identity in 2018.

Whitmer, for her part, has called upon the state's Legislature in her first State of the State Address to expand the state's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. Whitmer was also the first governor to fly the Pride Flag on a State of Michigan building in 2019. She also signed Executive Directive 2019-09 to expand protections for LGBTQ+ state employees and issued a statement of support regarding the



State Sen. Jeremy Moss poses with Attorney General-elect Dana Nessel in 2018. BTL photo: Jason Michael



Laurie Pohutsky. Courtesy photo.

Supreme Court's historic ruling on LGBTQ+ protections, which deemed that the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination based on sex.

Equality Michigan Executive Director Erin Knott called Whitmer a "staunch champion for equality." She noted the roadblocks in the way to equality.

"Unfortunately, the Michigan Legislature is the last place where bias is accepted. For 38 years, the Legislature has refused to prohibit discrimination of LGBTQ+ people. Fighting back against discrimination takes tenacity and strength. I am honored to stand with strong leaders like Gov. Whitmer who will hold the line with me, and who will not support a license to discriminate, as all Michiganders deserve to be treated fairly and equally," Knott said.



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## Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

### Rally Round the Pride Flag!

Caitlyn Jenner plans to run for governor of California. However, support for her bold-faced political endeavor so far have been rather tepid, to say the least.

Actually the first openly LGBTQ+ politician to be elected in California was Harvey Milk, who in 1978, running as an openly gay man, was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

Milk challenged his LGBTQ+ voters in San Francisco to kick open, so to speak, their closet doors. This became a rallying cry that echoes still to this day: Come out, come out, wherever you are!

A little-known fact about Milk is that he also was responsible for foreseeing the need for a display banner or flag as a symbol for rallying Pride. His foresight led him to donate \$1,000 to fellow SF artist and friend Gilbert Baker to create a voter stimulus-to-action flag.

There's no question that Milk and Baker were well-teamed. Today the rainbow Pride flag is everywhere to be seen. Everywhere! Especially during Pride Month in June 2021. (Speaking of which, June 14 is Flag Day.)

Obviously, Milk's donation to Baker was money paid back 100,000 times and then some, but Baker — who soon earned the nickname Busty Ross — was himself a gifted display artist, flag and multi-media designer. He was also an active member of the high-camp, semi-drag Daughters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Baker created design work or flags for the premier of China, several presidents of France, Venezuela, the Philippines, the King of Spain, Dianne Feinstein and the Democratic National Convention.

To his credit, Baker refused to trademark his Pride flag design or variations, thereby himself not earning any profit from its use.

The first Pride flag, hand-stitched by Baker himself, was raised at the SF Civic Center on June 25, 1978. It had eight stripes. Two stripes were later removed because of the availability of color — hot pink and turquoise — or material costs. The stripes stood for sex and magic respectively.

Today, there are many Pride flag variations of several stripes indicating pansexual, intersex, nonbinary, genderfluid, bisexual, transgender and even more orientations.

Gilbert Baker was born on June 6, 1951. He died in his sleep in New York City at age 65 in 2017. He is honored on the Stonewall Memorial Listing as being among the first and most important heroic leaders of the universal LGBTQ+ Movement.

Wherever you look around this Pride Month 2021, remember Harvey Milk and Gilbert Baker. Rally around their Flag. It waves for all of us!



"I GUESS I MUST'VE INCLUDED MY PREFERRED PRONOUNS ON SOME FORM OR OTHER. NOW I'M GETTING JUNK MAIL ADDRESSED TO 'THEY THEMTHEIR.'"



### Slap a Flag on It

BY GWENDOLYN ANN SMITH

This Pride season, I have a new enamel pin on my jacket, displaying the five stripes of the transgender Pride flag. They are within the shape of Mickey Mouse's head.

I've been a life-long Disney fan, and two of my closest relatives worked at Disneyland, so as soon as I heard there was a trans-specific piece of Disney memorabilia, I was ready to throw money. At the same time, I find myself questioning this product.

Pride-based merchandise is nothing new, nor are critiques of that merch. Finding rainbow-festooned items have been common with retailers for quite a number of years now, and the changing political landscape post Obergefell v. Hodges has only fueled this. Pride parades are typically sponsored by companies ranging from Budweiser to Deutsche Bank, after all, and corporate American wants to cash in.

Including, yes, Disney.

While some brands are still content to provide a handful of rainbow-themed items, maybe going so far as to include words like "Love" to the mix, it is becoming more and more common to see retailers expand their line — including the Philadelphia or progress Pride flags — and open up the line to designs beyond merely the rainbow flag. For example, that Disney pin came in not only in the aforementioned trans Pride flag, but also in lesbian, bisexual and the Philadelphia

### Pride Viewpoint

Pride flag variant with its black and brown stripes.

Finding the trans representation is a game of "Where's Waldo?" for me, as I look for brands that may have gone beyond simply slapping a rainbow on their logo and calling it a day.

For example, Stolichnaya put out a Harvey Milk limited edition bottle, featuring a drawing of Milk based on a photo from the 1978 Gay Pride Parade in San Francisco. The image, however, has been altered. The sign in Milk's hand is updated to a modern slogan, while the crowd behind him has been altered and made more modern in appearance. Oh, and yes, flags were added, with the rainbow flag and trans and bisexual flags added to the side.

Target also put out a diverse selection of items in their stores. Unsurprisingly, most are simple rainbow designs, ranging from dress shirts with little, understated eight-color rainbow ice cream cones on a navy-blue background to garish suits jackets in bold rainbow stripes. They also provided shirts featuring Stonewall survivor Marsha P. Johnson, and bandanas in a rainbow, bisexual, pansexual, trans, lesbian, nonbinary and asexual variants.

You won't find these in my local Target, though. When I visited their section, only the most basic rainbow-wear was available, including an "Ally" T-shirt and rainbow-adorned



“Somewhere out there may be a young trans child who may come across, for the first time, something trans Pride-related. It could show them that they are not alone, or even that their life is worth living. It could signal to them, thanks to this one pin or cheap bandana that a popular culture brand finds they have value, even if company is really only seeing that value in cold, hard cash.”

shortalls. Not all stores carry things beyond the basics of the set, which meant that they failed to earn a whopping three dollars from my potential bandana purchase.

As I see the trans merchandise start to join the expected rainbow goodies on major retailer's shelves, however, I find myself of two minds. As you could gather from what I've already said, I question the inclusion of these companies and their products shoehorned into Pride month.

I would like to think that my local target set up their Pride display in the far back corner of the store, somewhere to the right of sportswear, as a way to avoid controversy. That the cardboard rainbows on display were mostly disconnected from the sign above the display was simply to protect their profit margins.

I suppose, too, that I should be happy they even bothered to put out anything LGBTQ-related. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first year they did so. Plenty of other retailers also don't put out anything Pride-related, and few have gone beyond rainbow-themed goods.

That said, they could be doing us what corporations do for breast cancer awareness and use Pride as a cynical ploy to show themselves performatively celebrating Pride, all the while providing assistance to those who would stand against the LGBTQ+ community in other ways.

In fact, companies such as AT&T, Comcast, General Electric, Home Depot and UPS, among others, were called out by the Reclaim Pride Coalition in 2019 for doing exactly that, donating big money to politicians who voted against LGBTQ+ rights while festooning their logos with pro-LGBTQ+ messaging during Pride month.

At the same time, I go back to this Disney pin, or even those Target stores who are carrying their full line. Somewhere out there may be a young trans child who may come across, for the first time, something trans Pride-related. It could show them that they are not alone, or even that their life is worth living. It could signal to them, thanks to this one pin or cheap bandana that a popular culture brand finds they have value, even if company is really only seeing that value in cold, hard cash.

So, in the end, I find myself of two minds. How much corporate co-option of Pride is worth it knowing that this could help people see that we do have a place in this world, especially in a year marred by some much hatred in the statehouses of this country?

I don't have an answer, but seeing the trans presence in more and more visible ways feels heartening. It seems a strange, small victory, but a victory nonetheless.

Gwen Smith tweeted at Disney in past years for a trans-themed Mickey antenna ball. You'll find her at [www.gwensmith.com](http://www.gwensmith.com).

## Creep Of The Week

# Happy Pride Month! Go Choke on a Rainbow, Tony Perkins

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Aside from women daring to make their own reproductive decisions, there's nothing right-wing conservatives hate more than Pride Month. The "rainbow deluge" the Family Research Council's professional hate monger Tony Perkins calls it. Honestly, Rainbow Deluge sounds like the name of a bar with a wild foam party night.

Perkins is very mad at the Republican National Committee. Is it because the Republican party thinks that the Jan. 6 attack in D.C. was no big deal? Is it because Republicans worship Trump like a god? Is it because Republicans refuse to put party over country?

Ha. No. Of course not. Perkins is mad at the RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel for putting out the following message on Twitter: "Happy Pride Month! The GOP is proud to have doubled our LGBTQ support over the last four years, and we will continue to grow our big tent by supporting measures that promote fairness and balance protections for LGBTQ Americans and those with deeply-held religious beliefs."

Utter bullshit. You can't balance protections for LGBTQ+ people and the deeply-held religious belief that LGBTQ+ people are sinful perverts who don't deserve protections. But the GOP probably is sincere about being proud that they've doubled their LGBTQ+ support because that means more people are willing to have their authentic selves denigrated in order to elect racists. Clap, clap, clap. Such progress.

Perkins called it "an alienating tweet that irritated everyone," and I agree!

Perkins posted a response on the FRC's website on June 4. He said that McDaniel and the RNC were pitting themselves against those "racing to stop LGBT extremism."

"If McDaniel was looking for a way to end her party's record-breaking fundraising, she nailed it," Perkins writes.

Honestly, I've never wanted Perkins to be so right. It would be awesome if the RNC were tanked by a completely disingenuous Pride tweet. That would be so beautiful. Like gold at the end of a rainbow.

Further dragging McDaniel, Perkins writes, "Right now, there are few things she — or any Republican — could have said that would have been more tone-deaf and offensive than applauding the woke agenda her base is trying to combat."

Oh, I can think of a few things that the GOP base would find more tone-deaf and offensive. How about "Black lives matter" or "What happened on Jan. 6 was an affront to everything this country stands for and we must get to the bottom of it" or "Joe Biden is the duly elected President of the United States"?

Perkins acknowledges that McDaniel's tweet didn't make anyone happy. "The Left will never be pleased by these half-baked GOP olive branches," he writes. So true!

The Pride tweet wasn't really intended for "the Left," nor



Photo: Facebook

was it intended for the GOP base, most of whom aren't even on Twitter (there are around 68 million users in the U.S. which means very few Americans are on Twitter in the grand scheme of things).

McDaniel's tweet is intended to appease groups like the Log Cabin Republicans who need something, no matter how

small, to point to in order to justify their support for a party that truly, madly, deeply hates them. It's also to provide for plausible deniability. A tiny alibi for a party going off the ideological rails hell bent on destroying Democracy with the most extreme anti-American agenda in modern history.

It really cannot be overstated how radically dangerous the Republican Party is right now. That people like Perkins think that a transgender person using the bathroom at Target is this country's greatest challenge shows you exactly where he stands. He's for it. Burn down Democracy and install a Christian Dominion President who will tear down the remaining laws between church and state. You know, like the Taliban. Also worth noting that Trump is probably the top pick for such a role even though he isn't really Christian, because the whole "loving God" thing is secondary to these folks if it's even important at all.

The scary thing is, plenty of Republicans don't think that the party is crazy enough.

"According to a new poll by Rasmussen, GOP voters think it's past time for their leaders to reacquaint themselves with the party's values," Perkins writes. "In numbers that ought to chagrin headquarters, half of all Republican voters think the party's leaders aren't conservative enough."

Yikes. DO YOU HEAR THAT JOE MANCHIN? GET RID OF THE FILIBUSTER. JFC.

If anything, Republicans have been pretty clear about what they value. And it isn't "law and order," it turns out. That just means policing Black people. Right-wing conspiracy theorists completely out of touch with reality who storm the Capitol resulting in deaths? They're just excited tourists. It isn't "protecting women" unless that means protecting them from the completely made up risk of transgender predators rather than addressing the fact that violence against women is a real problem and if only there were, say, a Violence Against Women Act they could support that would address that. And it isn't "protecting life." That just means forcing women to have babies whether they want to or not. Republicans can't call themselves pro-life since they just stood back while over 600,000 people in this country were killed by a virus that many of them claim isn't real.

Perkins writes of Pride Month that "the air of LGBT pride is so suffocating that people could choke." My advice to him? Wear a mask.





Detroit's Mike Petross and Phil Pugh, together since 1967. Photo: Jamal Jordan

# Detroit Queer Love in Color

Journalist Returns to Detroit — ‘A Very Special Place in My Heart’ — to Capture Local LGBTQ+ Couples of Color

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Jamal Jordan traveled all over the world while making “Queer Love In Color,” a book of photos and essays. But one place was particularly notable: Detroit.

“All the couples in Detroit were very cool for me because Detroit has a very special place in my heart,” Jordan, 31, tells *Between The Lines*.

Detroit is well represented in Jordan’s book, which features seven different LGBTQ+ couples of color. The New York-based photographer’s parents live in Detroit currently; he lived in Southfield between the ages of 13 and 18. He also attended The University of Detroit Jesuit High School.

As a teen, he attended the youth drop-in program at Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center. “That shit made my entire life,” he says, noting that the first time he went he wore a shirt and tie and brought his mom along. “It was really just the first time that I could hang around queer people and be like, ‘Hey, do you want to play pool?’ Suddenly you’re not isolated anymore.”

Jordan says that his family was very supportive when he came out. Together, he and his mother would watch “Noah’s Arc,” the Logo drama about Black gay men living in Hollywood.

While back in Detroit to shoot photos for the “Queer Love in Color” project, he had a goal of meeting “at least one older couple.” Indeed, one of the couples in the book to generate a lot of attention online is Mike Petross and Phil Pugh, together since 1967. “People are really not used to seeing older couples,” Jordan says. “It drives the internet crazy.”

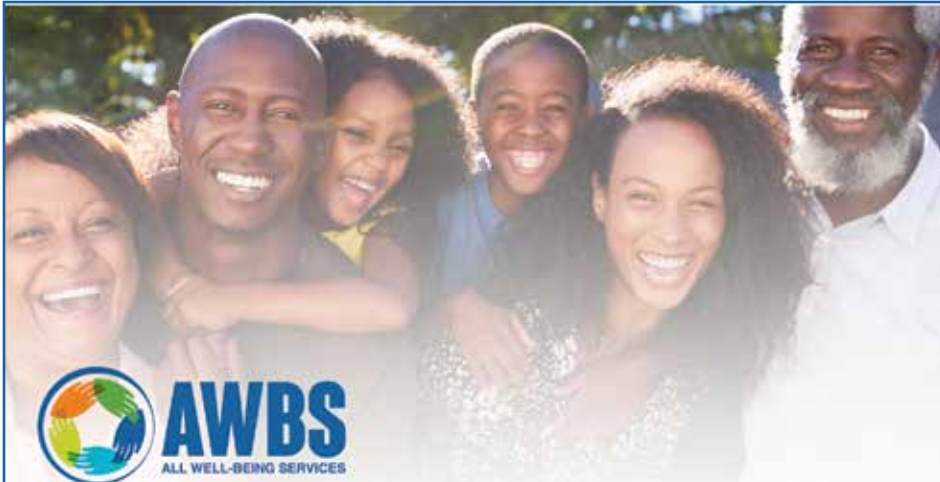
“We’ve spent every night together for over 40 years,” Pugh says in “Queer Love in Color.”

Jordan also photographed LGBT Detroit Executive Director Curtis Lipscomb and his husband Willie Jew. He chose to shoot the photo in part of the LGBT Detroit building that is currently under construction because he thought it would be “cool to have that image” to look back on once the renovations are complete.

Also featured in the book are April and Michelle Anderson, owners

See *Queer Love in Color*, page 18





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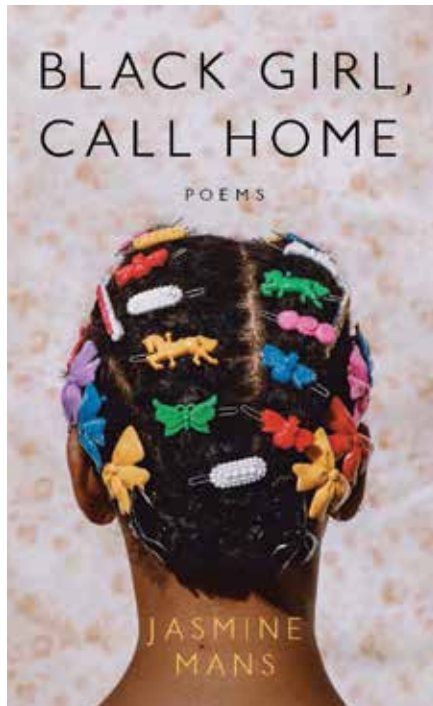
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# The Queer Library Is Open

## 17 LGBTQ+ Must-Reads to Get You in the Pride Spirit

– MEMOIR –



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Finding LGBTQ+ books used to be a challenge. You couldn't just Google "lesbian romance novels" or "books with trans characters." But now, luckily, that's no longer the case. Especially with Pride season in full swing.

Whether a breezy-beach read is your thing, or you're more of a heartfelt memoir kind of queer, or you're looking for books that tackle social justice, there's something for everyone.

### ***Black Boy Out of Time***

HARI ZIYAD

The struggle to reconcile faith and queerness is at the heart of this intimate and sharply observed memoir of growing up queer and Black in Cleveland, Ohio. As Ziyad, who identifies as nonbinary, grapples with the pain they've experienced and the pain they've caused others, they search for their identity amidst a backdrop of racism, family rejection, heteronormativity, faith and the deeply rooted need to be understood.



### ***Broken Horses***

BRANDI CARLILE

When Grammy winner Brandi Carlile opens her memoir, she's a 4-year-old with meningitis living in a trailer and things don't look good. But she survives, and if you've ever wondered where she gets her emotional material from, her vulnerability in "Broken Horses" will have you wondering no more.



### ***Leaving Isn't the Hardest Thing***

LAUREN HOUGH

Lauren Hough grew up in a cult, but for years she didn't want anyone to know. For her, coming out as a lesbian was easier to do, even though she was forced out of the military when she did. But now she's bursting that closet wide open. Whether she's recounting her time as a bouncer at a gay bar, meeting Dick Cheney and lonely housewives while working as a cable guy, or dealing with sexist assholes in the military, Hough is honest, funny, self-effacing and unafraid to be vulnerable.

### ***How Y'all Doing? Misadventures and Mischief from a Life Well Lived***

LESLIE JORDAN

You may remember him from "Will & Grace," but today's Instagays know Emmy winner Leslie Jordan from social media, where he laughs about his failed diets and shares his thoughts on Kim and Kanye. During the pandemic, his nearly 6 million IG followers have given his career new life. There are a lot of dumpster fires in the world today, but Leslie Jordan is a goddamn delight. So, as an act of self-care, "hunker down" with this one.



– POETRY –

### ***Black Girl, Call Home***

JASMINE MANS

Behind every woman is the girl they used to be. And poet Jasmine Mans wants to make sure those girls are heard. Especially the Black girls who love girls and get their hearts broken by girls. Mans's book explores growing up in an America that is racist, that is deadly, that is dangerous. And how love can be the way out of pain, while also being the way in. These poems pulse with heart, shimmer in beauty.

– FICTION –

### ***It Had to Be You***

GEORGIA CLARK

"She used to enjoy herself at weddings. She used to enjoy herself." But that was before Liv's husband and business partner died suddenly and willed their wedding-planning operation to the girlfriend she didn't even know he had. And then said girlfriend shows up on Liv's porch, expecting to run the business together. Something Liv would never do, if she wasn't desperate and hard up for cash. Reading Clark's celebration of all kinds of love, you'll feel like you crashed a wedding reception and a hot member of the wedding party just handed you a glass of champagne and a slice of cake.

See **Queer Library**, page 22

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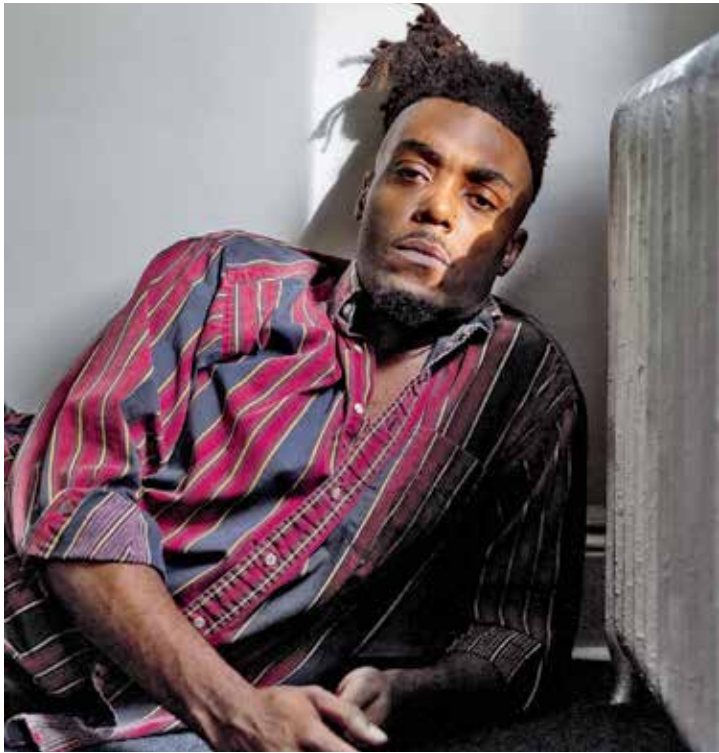
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Journalist and photographer Jamal Jordan.



not seeing representation is psychologically harmful, especially for queer identified youth who “have a hard time projecting themselves into adulthood because there’s so little representations of them as older people.”

When queer people of color are media subjects, he says, the scope is frequently limited and negative. “When I look at the larger media landscape for queer people of color [today], it’s mostly about trauma or lust,” he says. News stories about doubly marginalized communities are too often about “murder or death or how a community is being taken advantage of by a powerful entity.”

“I wanted to emotionally engage on the level of whimsy, joy and love,” he says of “Queer Love In Color.”

The project began in 2018 when The New York Times, where Jordan was working as a digital editor, published his photo essay that explored the question: “Why do no gay people look like me?” He photographed and interviewed a half a dozen couples. The piece went “super, super viral,” Jordan recalls.

“It kind of caught me by surprise,” Jordan says about the concept for “Queer Love In Color.” He was about three months into his job at The Times when he found himself in a meeting with other staffers about a special Pride section the paper was putting together. “They asked for stories,” he says, “and sent

## → Queer Love in Color

Continued from p. 14

of Good Cakes and Bakes in Detroit. They have been together since 2009 and were married in 2012.

“I didn’t expect this bakery down the street from my high school to be lesbian-owned,” Jordan says referring to how much things have changed since he was a teenager.

Anderson enjoyed being interviewed for the book but was not as enthusiastic about being photographed. “I hate taking pictures,” she says. “I just critique myself too much.”

Anderson says her experience coming out was difficult, as her father is “very southern and old and conservative.” But after she and Michelle were legally married “something clicked” in him. He came around, even though he “still has a little hesitation,” she says.

When Anderson showed her father Jordan’s book, opened to the page featuring April and

Michelle, he said, “This is sweet.”

“I really think [the book is] a great visual expression of Black love,” Anderson adds.

Other Detroit couples include Keisha Watkins-Dukhie and Sandra Dukhie who are pictured in an embrace on page 201 in the book’s epilogue, entitled “Conclusion: The Work Begins,” next to the words, “Radical self-love changes everything.”

In the photo of Danielle Woods and Patricia Little, who met while working at the Detroit Police Department, Woods is in her patrol uniform. Woods serves as the department’s LGBTQ liaison. Theirs is a story about opening yourself up to love and to be loved. “You have to make the choice to trust the person you’re with,” Woods told Jordan.

Cynthia and Tracie Howard are wearing matching outfits of black pants and orange shirts in their photo taken at their home. The

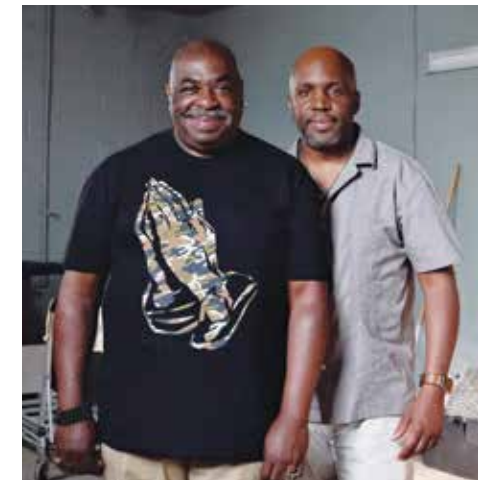
couple shares a strong faith in God. Cynthia says in the book, “You need to see you can be Black, you can be gay, you can be Christian, you can be married, and you can be happy.”

Also featured are Amar Rushing and Thomas Williams, who met on Grindr in 2014. Their relationship progressed from texting to FaceTime to finally meeting in person. They quickly fell in love. Thomas describes it in the book as being like “falling off a mountain.” Their playful photo features the two of them, with Thomas in a purple Prince t-shirt, springing into the air.

“Queer Love In Color” began as a way to fill a void. When Jordan was growing up, images of queer people of color were scarce. In fact, they’re still scarce. But Jordan’s work is helping to change that.

“It really shocked me how difficult it was for me to find evidence that queer couples exist through media,” Jordan says, adding that

“I really think [the book is] a great visual expression of Black love.”



“Queer Love in Color” subjects Curtis Lipscomb and his husband Willie Jew. Photo: Jamal Jordan

See **Queer Love in Color**, page 20



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“Queer Love in Color” subjects Danielle Woods and Patricia Little. Photo: Jamal Jordan

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## → Queer Love in Color

Continued from p. 18

San Francisco, Atlanta, Orlando and Detroit. International locations include Toronto, Canada and Cape Town, South Africa.

us on our way.” He came back with the idea to photograph queer couples of color.

He calls his book “an extended photo essay.”

“I really love photo and text journalism,” he explains. He says the book is “like a lovingly extended piece of what you’d read in the Sunday Times.”

“I never wrote the article and thought, ‘This is going to become a book,’” he says. But the response to the story was so positive and other people began reaching out with their stories. “About a half a year later I decided to make this book and I took [a] sabbatical from work to travel around to do that.”

Jordan traveled across the country and internationally to find queer people of color in love. Within the U.S., he went to Chicago,

“Every city I went to I’d speak to whatever the local queer friendly church or religious organizations were. There’s a lot of organizer and community leader energy in the book. It was quite the reporting adventure.”

– Journalist Jamal Jordan

“It was a year and a half of just talking to people. I would often see couples in the street and chase them down,” he says, which he did in both Miami and New Orleans. “Every city I went to I’d speak to whatever the local queer friendly church or religious organizations were. There’s a lot of organizer and community leader energy in the book. It was quite the reporting adventure.”

Jordan followed his instincts and says he was guided by this question: “What energy needs to be in this book?” That energy organically came to life while meeting the couples, and when he photographed them hugging, holding hands, smiling with their children, this was how he did it: “I don’t say ‘I’m taking your picture’ — I say, ‘I’m making a picture with you.’”



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## One Last Stop

CASEY MCQUISTON

After August moves to New York City, her experience there has been, well, mostly meh. That is until she sees the Girl on the Train. No, not the book or the movie. A real person. Or is she? August is determined to find out who this hottie in the leather jacket is, and maybe even find love. If you read McQuiston's "Red, White & Royal Blue," then you know exactly what you're getting: a sweet, charming queer love story.



## The Chosen and the Beautiful

NGHI VO

I had to read "The Great Gatsby" in high school and I... did not love it. OK, yes, the writing was beautiful, but I just didn't care what happened to the characters. If only I'd have been given "The Chosen and the Beautiful," a retelling of "Gatsby," to read instead: gorgeous prose that is faithful to the original, but with a queer Asian as the central character, thereby complicating the themes of wealth, excess, class and human connections that are at the heart of this story. The result? Magical.

## The Kingdom's Sandcastle

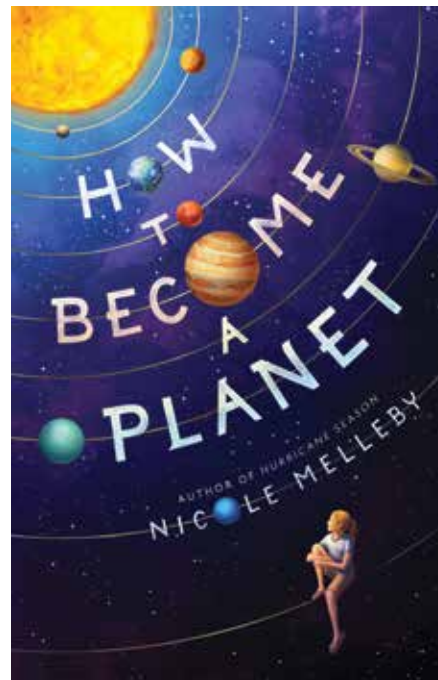
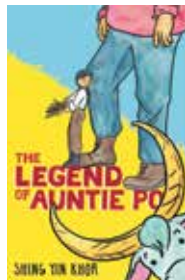
LUAI QUBAIN

"The Kingdom had me in her steely clutches in that closeted purgatory," thinks Louie, the narrator of this first novel in a series based on true events. That Kingdom is Jordan, a country where homosexuality can be a death sentence. But trying to stay hidden can also be a death sentence, and Louie grapples with this paradox as he faces blackmail and abuse, not to mention a deep well of grief after his mother's death. Who can you trust when revealing your identity is a terrifying gamble? And yet finding someone to trust is his only way out of a crumbling castle.

## The Legend of Auntie Po

SHING YIN KHOR

Imagine Paul Bunyan as a Chinese woman and you've got Auntie Po who, along with her trusty ox, guides 13-year-old Mei through life in the lumber camp where Mei and her father work feeding the lumberjacks. Mei is trying to navigate her relationship with Bee, the foreman's daughter, who may be more than just a friend. She's also dealing with racial tensions in 1885, just three years after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned Chinese people from immigrating to the U.S. When a logging accident shakes the camp to its core, Mei needs Auntie Po more than ever. But will she come to the rescue? (Out June 15)



## Fifteen Hundred Miles from the Sun

JONNY GARZA VILLA

Julián Luna spends a good deal of time and energy "keeping himself in check," which entails making sure that he's not called a "joto" at school. (He gets enough grief for being a vegetarian.) But one night he drinks way too much and reveals even more on Twitter. Thankfully he's got a support system of loving friends, but not everybody is so accepting of the news. As he navigates life outside of the closet, he gets closer and closer to Mat, a guy he meets online. But no matter how close they get, they're still separated by 1,500 miles too many.

## How to Become a Planet

NICOLE MELLEBY

Lambda Literary Award-nominated author Nicole Melleby says her goal for this book was to "write a story that normalizes childhood depression and makes those readers feel



less alone." It's the story of Pluto. Not the planet, but the person. And Pluto has just been diagnosed with anxiety and depression and is trying to figure out how to get her "old" self back. Her support system grows from just the person on the other end of the Hayden Planetarium Astronomy Question and Answer Hotline to include a therapist, and a new non-binary friend with a strong gravitational pull. This one's an astute and much-needed portrayal of mental illness in young people.

## The Witch King

H.E. EDGMON

Setting: Asalin, which is ruled by the fae. Witches like Wyatt, who is trans, are oppressed in Asalin. "Wyatt's struggles as a witch mirror many of the struggles queer people, especially trans people, face in the real world," the author writes in the book's forward. Wyatt's ex-fiancé, a fae prince, is basically the definition of a boyfriend from hell. Only this one has magical powers and is determined to get him back.

## Can't Take That Away

STEVEN SALVATORE  
(YA FICTION)

Carey Parker worships divas like Mariah Carey and Freddie Mercury and dreams of strutting across a stage with the lights turned on them, belting out songs that make the audience roar. But Carey is a high school student, not Mariah herself. Still, music is a current running through their veins, and they use it as armor against homophobic bullying and as a way to communicate with and connect to the grandmother they are losing to dementia. Then they meet Cris. Buoyed by this new spark, Carey braves tryouts for the school's production of "The Wizard of Oz." But there's a real-life wicked witch aiming to snuff out Carey's newfound light.



See Queer Library, page 24

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De Nada, Renata p. 35





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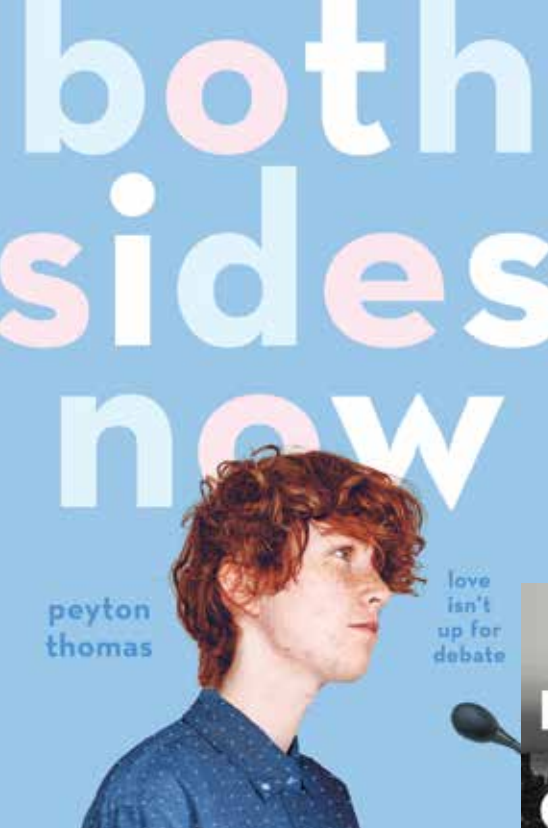
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Continued from p. 22

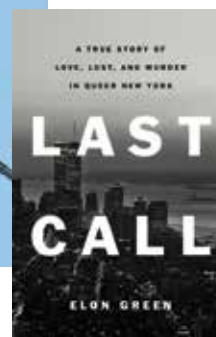
**Both Sides Now**

PEYTON THOMAS

High school debate champ Finch Kelly is on his way to Nationals. A win here would be a big help when it comes to getting into college in D.C. But he's ready. Until he learns that the topic of debate will be transgender rights. See, in debate, winning isn't dependent on arguing your truth with moral conviction. It's more technical, meaning that sometimes you have to argue something you don't actually believe. And Kelly is trans. This is an excellent, engaging read. And I just can't help but feel a particular affection for a kid who dreams of egging Mitch McConnell's house. (Out Aug. 24)

— NONFICTION —

**Last Call** ELON GREEN



Most true-crime tales focus on the criminals more than the victims. Not this time. "Last Call" is a harrowing picture of the danger of being closeted in the 1990s. When you can't be honest about who you are, who you are spending time with, and what you've been doing, you're relegated to the margins of society. Which makes you an attractive target for criminals — in this case a serial killer who targeted gay men. Homophobia and fears of AIDS colored the investigation, if you're wondering why this story isn't more widely known.

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# Corktown Health: A Merging of Two LGBTQ-Inclusive Health Orgs

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Health Emergency Lifeline Programs (HELP) and its Corktown Health Center announced Wednesday that the two agencies were merging for marketing purposes and that henceforth they would be known as one sole organization to be called Corktown Health. HELP was started some 35 years ago as a pioneering AIDS service organization focused on meeting urgent financial and end-of-life needs for individuals with HIV/AIDS. HELP launched the Corktown Health Center, a first of its kind health clinic focused on providing services to the HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ+ community, in 2017.

“Rebranding our organization to Corktown Health brings all of our services under a single umbrella encompassing what we do today and what we will do tomorrow for our patients and community,” said Corktown Health President and CEO Anthony Williams. “It’s an exciting time for our entire team as Corktown Health reflects the ongoing growth and evolution of the organization.”

A new, distinctive and modern logo has been unveiled as part of the rebranding effort, representing the organization’s forward-thinking approach to improving health care for the community. The graphic features concentric circles that symbolize diverse individuals working,



living and thriving in harmony. The rebrand to Corktown Health also features a new Corktown Health website, social media presence, and plans for additional health and wellness services in upcoming months.

There will also be new services added that Corktown Health Center didn’t previously offer, such as a dental clinic.

“That’s an entirely new service that we will

present to HIV-positive and LGBTQ people and allies,” Williams said. “All of the values that are a part of HELP and Corktown Health Center will be a part of the dental clinic. So it’s providing care for people who are HIV positive and we are able to leverage all of our knowledge and our relationship with patients’ needs in terms of that population.”

“We’ll be able to do the same for the LGBTQ community,” Williams continued. “And allies

will benefit from the affirming and supporting environment that is part of the DNA of HELP and Corktown Health Center, which is now Corktown Health.”

Another new service coming to Corktown Health is the Corktown Health Institute, which will debut in the fall. The institute will provide expanded education and training to health care providers, organizations and municipalities, equipping them with the tools, resources and insight to effectively and compassionately treat all patients in an affirming and inclusive manner.

“The opening of Corktown Health Center in 2017 was a first step in a much broader mission for the organization,” said Corktown Health Chief Operating Officer Teresa Roscoe. “As we expanded our focus to healthcare delivery, we also identified the need to contribute to the training and education of the current and future healthcare workforce. We established a collaborative relationship with the Wayne State University School of Medicine and serve as a community rotation site for physician residents and medical students. Through this relationship and other training partnerships, we are helping to better prepare new generations of professionals to provide compassionate care and address the diverse needs of LGBTQ patients.”

For more information, visit [corktownhealth.org](http://corktownhealth.org).





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Photo: Elena Kosharny

## Leyna Bloom Is Changing the Game for Trans Women of Color

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Leyna Bloom made a splash this year for being the first Black and Asian openly trans woman to be featured in the annual Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition, out in July. But even before reaching that historical milestone, the 27-year-old Chicago native was changing the game both on the runway and on the screen.

In 2019, Bloom was the only transgender woman of color to walk Paris Fashion Week in 2019 at the Tommy Hilfiger x Zendaya fashion show as part of an all-Black female runway. Then there's her drama "Port Authority," which features Bloom making her major movie debut in a prominent role, positioning the model, actress and activist as the first trans woman of color to lead a feature film at the Cannes Film Festival in the festival's 72-year history. After first premiering at Cannes in 2019, "Port Authority" is now available on VOD.

In writer-director Danielle Lessovitz's romantic drama, which was executive produced by Martin Scorsese, Bloom plays Wye, a trans woman of color and "femme queen" who

encounters Paul (Fionn Whitehead) after he's kicked out of his home in central Pennsylvania. Set against the backdrop of New York's vogue houses and kiki ballrooms is their blossoming love. Bloom's next film, "Asking For It," a film focused on sexism that stars Kiersey Clemons, Ezra Miller, Vanessa Hudgens and Gabourey Sidibe, will premiere this summer at the Tribeca Film Festival. The actress can also be seen as ballroom figure Pretentia Khan in the third and (allegedly) final season of Ryan Murphy's "Pose."

During our recent conversation, the rising trans vanguard got emotional reflecting on making Cannes Film Festival history with "Port Authority." Bloom also talked about drawing on legendary house mother Carmen Xtravaganza for her role on "Pose," her dashed dreams of being in the Navy like her father, and being celebrated for her groundbreaking Sports Illustrated shoot.

**When were you first interested in acting and modeling?**

My great-grandmother was a model. My grandmother and my auntie, her daughters

were both models. And my auntie was a dancer; she danced for Sammy Davis Jr. So dance and performing have always been in my blood. I come from two backgrounds, Nigerian and Filipino, which has a very rich background full of dance. So my ancestry and my creativity is all inside my body asking to be released constantly.

Acting has always been kind of part of the plan, just like, "When am I gonna get there, and what script and what project will be the best project for that opportunity?" When "Port Authority" arrived, it was right on time because it was just a dream opportunity to play that character because it is literally the voice and the story of so many trans bodies. So, I'm glad that that was the first opportunity given to me to show the world the future.

**"Port Authority" is the first film in Cannes Film Festival's 72-year history to feature a trans woman of color in a lead role. How do you feel knowing that?**

To be able to do something like this, which is my ancestors' wildest dreams, is truly monumental. Why has it taken so long? And

what can we do with this moment to make sure that it doesn't take that long for the next person? That's where my mind is always going to be wrapped up in. Because I may be the first, but I will not be the last. I think it's just powerful because just 72 years ago, Black and brown bodies and queer bodies were nonexistent in this space. I think it's just... I don't know. I'm getting so emotional thinking about this.

**Who are some of the people who paved the way for you to feel comfortable to be who you are?**

A lot of beautiful women. Carmen Xtravaganza. Halle Berry. Tyra Banks. Tracey "Africa" (Norman). You know, Tyra Banks was the first woman of color to be on the cover of Sports Illustrated, so I'm standing on her shoulders. It's very powerful and I'm so happy that ("Port Authority," a story about love was the first reason why we made history. It wasn't about war, it wasn't about pain. It was about love. It was a love story that made history about two people, (featuring a) trans woman, that has been missing in society. That is why it is so important, and that is why we



need to continue having more moments like this.

**How much of your own ballroom experience is the experience of your character, Wye, in “Port Authority”?**

My experience is very similar. Wye’s character comes from a ballroom family where she is getting ready for balls and she is helping her family get ready for balls. Paul’s character is actually helping her get ready for balls, so that is very familiar to my lifestyle over the years. I’ve been (doing) ballroom since I was 15 years old, so I’ve gotten ready for many balls and prepared myself for many different competitions through the circuit. It’s very real, it’s very raw, and I love that Danielle wanted to just bring that authenticity to the film.

**I chuckled at the line, “I mean, you could be a model or something,” which Paul says to Wye after she tells him that she was in the Navy. Was that based on your own real-life experience?**

My dad was actually in the military. He was a Marine. I was raised in that environment, I was raised around my dad and us living on base, and us traveling to many different bases around the world, and officially being a Marine brat. That was something that we wanted to add to the character. I also wanted to be in the Navy at one point in my life, but because I am trans and because the system is not set up for me to serve my country, I could not do that. So I thought that was a beautiful little piece of nuance.

**How did ballroom culture shape who you are today?**

Ballroom just allowed me to see myself in my rawest state and understand that if I wanted to change, it’s up to me; it’s not up to anyone else. Ballroom is a place where you can find harmony in yourself, in your community. Where you can feel the vibrations of the people that are feeling the pain that you’re feeling and can heal together because of that. So ballroom holds lots of raw energy and power that the world has been exploring at a very small rate. But now ballroom is going to homes around the world, and people are redefining the ideas about themselves and what’s around them.

**As for “Pose,” were you a fan of the series before you starred in it?**

I actually auditioned for “Pose,” and a lot of my friends on the show auditioned and got the part. I was a huge fan of any project that was about Black and brown trans women being the centerpiece of the glory of television. So, I’m a huge fan of that show, and I’m so happy I got a chance to be a part of (this) last season.

**How would you describe your character, Pretentia, and what was it like embodying her?**

I have so many ideas about her character. Pretentia is kind of like Carmen Xtravaganza, this amazing ballroom icon woman that is Spanish and Black African, and she just

inspired me growing up. I wanted to just really bring Carmen back to life through Pretentia. She’s just a combination of a lot of different strong women that I just grew up loving. She reminds me a lot of Sharon Stone. She had a lot of really strong alpha characters, and I wanted to bring that to Pretentia.

**Tyra Banks has been such a huge supporter of yours. How important is it to have prominent cis people, like Tyra Banks, lift up the trans community? And what does it mean for you to have people like Tyra in your corner?**

Honestly, it’s full circle for me. I was that kid that was watching “America’s Next Top Model” first season, jotting notes to use in my everyday life. Tyra was this woman that was giving us access to free information about her lived experience. And, to one day be aligned in some way, shape or form — aligned to what she has created — is truly powerful. And for her to acknowledge that is even more powerful.

I grew up reading Sports Illustrated, and knowing that Tyra was on the cover many times was truly powerful for me as a young trans woman. Seeing a beautiful Black woman that was full bust — big smile, beautiful personality, in tune with her femininity — was really powerful for me to see. When I did Sports Illustrated and



Photo: Kim Geronimo

it was announced, I immediately hit her up to acknowledge her as like, “I would not be here if it wasn’t for you,” like I did when I did “Pose.” I hit up those women that I told you (about): Carmen, Tracey “Africa.” I hit up these women to acknowledge that, “I’m doing this because you allowed me to see something

See *In Full Bloom*, page 30

A large graphic for "30 days of PRIDE". It features a large rainbow flag on the left side. The text "30 days of PRIDE" is prominently displayed in the center. Below it is the URL "AADL.ORG/30DAYSOFPRIE". At the bottom, there is a list of activities: "POETRY", "QUOTES", "ARTS &amp; CRAFTS", and "HISTORY". The background has a wavy pattern.



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Leyna Bloom stars in "Port Authority," now on VOD.

## → In Full Bloom

Continued from p. 29

that changed my life, that now I can be a part of, and I would not be able to do it if it wasn't for you." And (Tyra) acknowledged me. We're texting here and there, and she's sending me words of affirmation, and I'm moving to Paris soon. She's like, "Oh, that's where I was at; my career started in Paris." So she's a huge inspiration of mine, but she's also a mentor, and you know, like a mommy also. I'm one of her babies. (Laughs.)

### Who else reached out to you acknowledging how big of a deal your Sports Illustrated shoot was?

So many people hit me up. People from all different walks of life. A lot of white men reached out to me, and not fetishizing or sexualizing me but acknowledging the fact that the world is changing and the decisions that Sports Illustrated is making allow me to not only just be a part of Sports Illustrated but to tell my story through them. (It) was truly monumental for them. They acknowledge that the world needs to change, and why has it taken so long? A huge, prominent person in sports, (NBA star Dwyane) Wade, who is also from Chicago, reached out to me and congratulated me, sent me some bottles of wine — shout out to D-Wade! He's raising a young trans daughter, and it was just truly powerful to know that the world is really changing in this moment.

### What do you think it will feel like when you get your hands on a physical copy of the magazine?

I just... I honestly, oh my... even seeing a billboard of me anywhere just gives me chills. Because that was part of my vision board, you know? I would go to these places and see these billboards and just dream that one day that could be me. So the idea that there's a magazine that's on the level of Sports Illustrated that is acknowledging my life and

what I do in this world with my life, wants me to be something, or sees something inside of me, that's just truly powerful to me. This new generation of people, you ask them the names, you tell them the stories, and it doesn't really click with them. But for me, who comes from that era of understanding before social media how powerful these spaces are, it's just out of this world. I just pinch myself every time.

### When it comes to trans women of color leveling the playing field both in and out of Hollywood, what's next? What do you want to see leveled up next for trans women of color?

I want to see education level up. I think it's important for me to pass on information just like information was passed onto me. Since we are in a time when education is always going to be a powerful tool, I definitely want to see how I can work in that environment, whether it's me opening my own school or building a curriculum in a school to develop some type of information and data so people like me can have resources that I didn't have when I was growing up.

### What's next for you?

One of my mentors, Carmen Xtravaganza, I'm writing her story. That was one thing she wants to leave on this Earth: just information and ideas and wisdom, and I want to put it in a book. After I write her book, I'm going to be writing my own book.

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

*Chris Azzopardi is the Editorial Director of Pride Source Media Group and Q Syndicate, the national LGBTQ wire service. He has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.*



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# Affirmations LGBTQ+ Center to Call Ringwald Theatre and MCC Detroit Home, Among Other Updates

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Its doors haven't been opened back up to the public yet, but big things are happening at Affirmations. In a virtual town hall meeting Tuesday, Affirmations Executive Director Dave Garcia shared some exciting news about the center's future.

First off, a couple of new groups will be calling Affirmations home. Ferndale's popular Ringwald Theatre is moving to the center and all of the theater's productions will now take place there. Also moving to Affirmations is Metropolitan Community Church — Detroit. Though the church called Ferndale home base for many years, for the past few years it had been sharing space with a Methodist church in Clawson.

"COVID-19 has shown us that the church is not a building," said the Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow, the church's senior minister and teacher. "We have been looking for a permanent space ever since we left Ferndale. There are some places we can afford but they're either in Pontiac or Dearborn. So it's not in the preferred area that our membership stated."

Talks about moving to the center had been ongoing for some time.

"Dave Garcia actually reached out to us right before COVID and, at that point in time, I was a little unsure that being in the community center would fit us well. But it really



Roland Stringfellow, MCC Detroit's senior minister and teacher, says moving to Affirmations is "the most perfect place for us to be." Photo: Andrew Potter

has changed and I think this is the most perfect place for us to be," Stringfellow said. "We want to be more connected to the community and being at Affirmations we'll be feet from the street, so we're excited about the kind of outreach we can provide and being more integrated with the community than we have been in the past."

In other center news, and there's still plenty of it, Affirmations plans

to reopen its doors to the public this summer.

"We are preparing for a back to normal open for the community, Aug. 1," Garcia said. "Now, in July, we will be open for appointments only. And we have the telethon on June 26, which is a big deal. It will be our second telethon. We want to wait until after the telethon to start a broader opening. We have to get all of the volunteers ready for the

front desk. There's a lot to do before we start back normal."

Garcia also announced that for the first time, the board will have co-chairs.

"When I got back from Los Angeles in 2019, we changed the bylaws to make it possible that, if we wanted, we could have co-chairs of the board," Garcia said. "We don't have to. We just made it possible so that we have the option in our

bylaws to do so."

The board decided to exercise that option and now Brianna Yuille and Anthony Sherman will be the new co-chairs. Donnie Johnson will also be the treasurer.

When the center reopens, it will also be with a licensed master social worker on staff.

"We've secured funding to hire an LMSW that will actually be on our payroll and be able to take insurance so that anyone will be able to see a therapist," Garcia said. "This is a part of our health and human services expansion."

And finally, Affirmations is bringing back the party.

"We are going to go ahead with the black-tie event, the Big Bash, on October 30 at the Dearborn Inn Marriott," Garcia said. "We are going to move forward as if we will be able to have 500 people at the Marriott in late October. Worst-case scenario, there's a new variant or it isn't safe, we will refund everyone's money. But we have to start planning now if we're going to make it happen."

The center will also once again host a wine party in December. The event will double as a retirement party for former Between The Lines co-publishers Susan Horowitz and Jan Stevenson.

Learn more about the center at [goaffirmations.org](http://goaffirmations.org).

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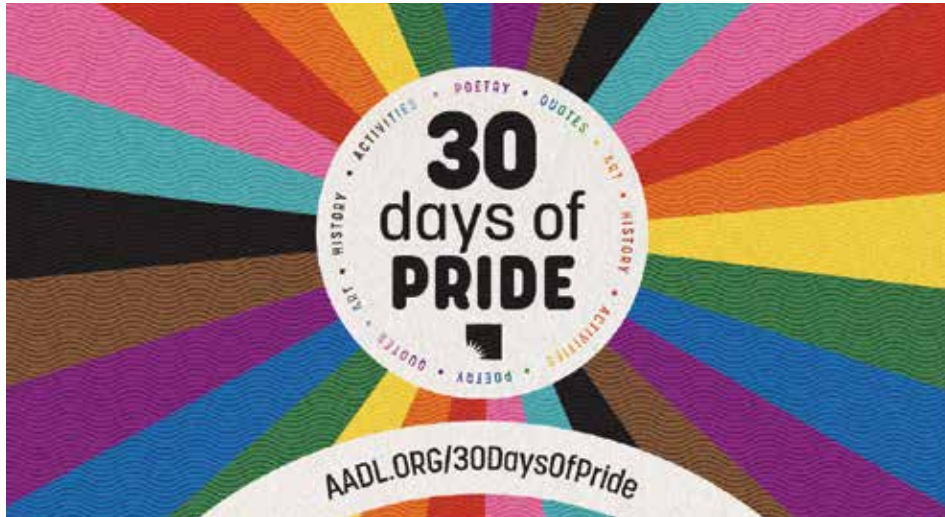
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# The Ann Arbor District Library Goes All Out for Pride Month



June 21-25. And capping it all off is the Drag Variety Hour featuring Jadein Black, Hershae Chololatae, Ani Briated and Austin Black. The show will feature performances, music and dance, along with a story and a short cooking lesson. (Briated will demonstrate how to make her famous cheese enchiladas.)

And because you're never too old to learn a little queer history, the AADL is also featuring 30 Days of Pride, a variety of daily LGBTQ programming on their AADL TV channel.

"We chose the 30 Days of Pride lineup to be a mix of family-friendly 'fun' things like clay figures and also more serious quotes related to the struggle for acceptance and human rights," said Huston. "We wanted to represent as many different communities under the Pride flag as possible, while centering and giving voice to some of the most marginalized groups including people who are Black, Indigenous, trans, non-binary, and/or two-spirit, particularly after our yearlong Black Lives Matter book discussion series and Stop Asian Hate programming. We wanted to create a space that at least attempted to capture some of the magic of the queer community."

For more information, visit [aadl.org/30daysofpride](http://aadl.org/30daysofpride).

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The Ann Arbor District Library has several events planned in celebration of LGBTQ Pride Month. From virtual kids' events to teen book talks to a Drag Variety Hour, the month is packed with plenty of Pride options.


"My coworkers and I felt it was important for the library to celebrate Pride in such a visible way for several reasons," said Marisa Huston, Ann Arbor District Library technician. "It's our month, too. We are everywhere and want to see LGBTQ programming and representation mainstreamed into all our programming and collections.

"This is suicide prevention," Huston elaborated. "There are many vulnerable kids out there who are figuring out their identities. The Trevor Project reported

that LGB youth are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth and 40 percent of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt. If our programming — not just our Pride programming, but all of our queer programming — helps just one person feel more comfortable, accepted, understood and loved, then I will consider this a success."

The Pride programming includes a lot for kids, starting with Hooray for Pride: LGBTQ Children's Books. This will be a virtual event airing on AADL.TV on Thursday, June 17. The show will offer recommendations for children's books that feature LGBTQ characters and themes that you can enjoy all year long.

Teen Pride Book Talks will take place June 16, 23 and 30 and will continue after June. There will also be a special week of Pride-themed story times from




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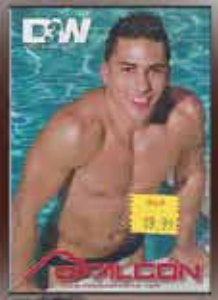


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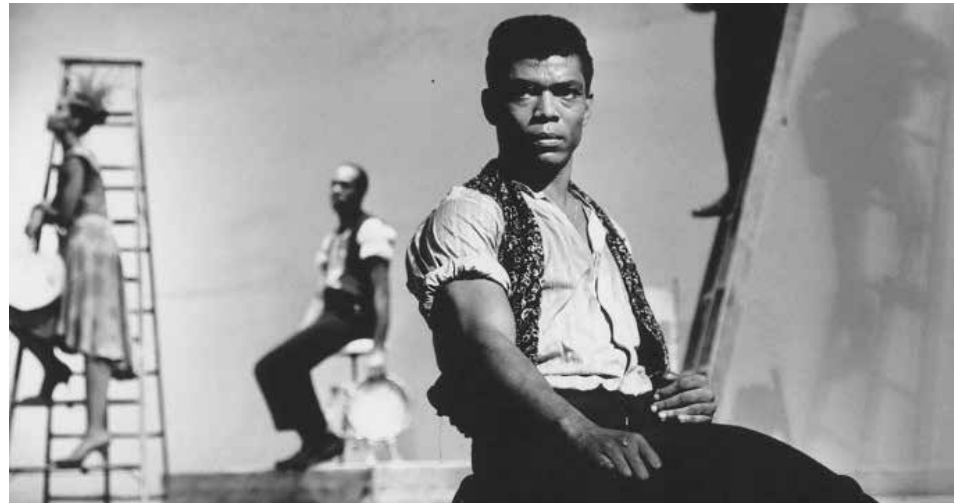


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# Deep Inside Hollywood



"Ailey" is set for a summer release. Photo courtesy of Sundance Film Festival

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

## 'Ailey' dances into theaters this summer

A towering figure in the world of dance, the legendary black choreographer Alvin Ailey formed the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and blazed a trail through contemporary dance before his death from AIDS in 1989. Now a fitting film tribute, the documentary "Ailey" from director Jamila Wignot, will see its post-Sundance Film Festival arrival this summer from Neon Releasing. Built around a treasure trove of archival footage, much of it featuring Ailey's own words, as well as interviews with colleagues, the doc covers Ailey's life and career, from the lack of opportunities for work due to racist practices in the dance world, to the formation of the AAADT and the fight to break down barriers for Black dancers and Black choreography. This immersive look at the man behind the legacy comes to theaters July 23 and deserves to be seen on the biggest possible screen.

husband leaves her 87 billion dollars. Rodriguez will play the executive director of the non-profit funded by her obscenely rich boss. That's all we know, but we're in. And until we get to lay eyes on it ourselves, we'll be content with Rodriguez's debut summer single, the Earth

Wind & Fire-ish "Something to Say." Oh, did you forget she sang on "Pose"? Well, catch up, because she can do this.

## 'John Wick 4' gets a vital dose of Rina Sawayama

If your 2020 pandemic listening habits involved relying entirely on the disco-dominated albums from Dua Lipa and Kylie Minogue to get you through it, then you slept on queer Japanese-British pop star

Rina Sawayama and her critically acclaimed full-length debut, "Sawayama." You have time – such as right now – to correct this lifestyle error, and when you fully absorb her witty, stylish, assertively feminist music, you'll be even more pleased to learn that your new favorite wickedly talented artist who writes love songs to women is joining the cast of "John Wick: Chapter 4." And if you've also still not caught up on the thrillingly violent "John Wick" series – it's about a man named John Wick (Keanu Reeves) who's very angry that bad guys killed his dog – then you have time to fix that, as well. We don't know who Sawayama will be playing, but we hear it's a major supporting role, and her casting announcement hit just before the inclusion of martial arts superstar Donnie Yen to the cast. There hasn't been a dud in the "John Wick" series and our excitement for this next installment just grew by a hundred percent.

Romeo San Vicente is well acquainted with a variety of auto mechanics.

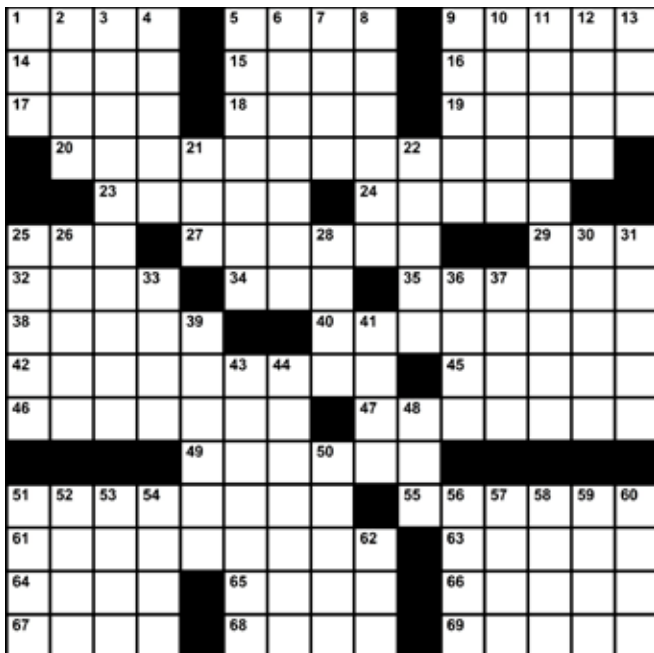
## Mj Rodriguez joins Maya Rudolph for Apple+ comedy

"Pose" is gone, so long live the careers of its luminous cast of trans women. That's the collection of Pride Month wishes we sent out to the universe, and already one of those wishes has come true: Mother Blanca Evangelista, aka Mj Rodriguez, has a new series ordered at Apple+ that will co-star Maya Rudolph. The untitled comedy (sometimes known as "Loot") from Emmy-winning creators Alan Yang ("Master of None") and Matt Hubbard ("30 Rock") follows Rudolph's character as her



Mj Rodriguez.





- 35 Where people don't sleep with the opposite sex  
 38 Top floor  
 40 Start of a quote from Renata  
 42 End of the quote  
 45 Irene of "My Favorite Wife"  
 46 "Tangled" hair, for example  
 47 Means of access  
 49 Embarrassing situation  
 51 Have an orgasm in the vicinity of?  
 55 What you do in a Cole Porter song  
 61 She played Renata  
 63 Renata's married name  
 64 Cry after getting the shaft  
 65 Peace Nobelists Wiesel  
 66 Will and Grace shared one  
 67 They push big boats  
 68 Queen of Carthage  
 69 Endora portrayer

- 11 Lea Delaria, for one  
 12 Plumb, and others  
 13 Aachen article  
 21 Lake, to 50 million Frenchmen  
 22 Big name in China  
 25 Rock Hudson movie of 1956  
 26 Line of Rupert Everett  
 28 "Spamalot" writer Idle  
 30 City on the Rhone  
 31 Rob on the screen  
 33 Ellen and Vance, e.g.  
 36 Construction co. project  
 37 George Frenn, in many a still photo  
 39 Plane name  
 41 Party big shot  
 43 Emulated Chris Meloni's hairline  
 44 One from the land of the cut  
 48 St. of Liberace Museum  
 50 It's for sweaters  
 51 Coagulate  
 52 "From Here to Eternity" setting  
 53 Bean type  
 54 Lesbos love  
 56 Abbreviated musical?  
 57 Jackie's designer  
 58 James of "East of Eden"  
 59 River of northern France  
 60 "A Room of \_\_\_ Own"  
 62 Keanu in "The Matrix"

**Down**

- 1 Former govt. watchdog  
 2 Melville's whale hunter  
 3 Alanis, who performs gay weddings  
 4 City suffix  
 5 Real stallions, for example  
 6 Calls to duty  
 7 Pre-kiss insert, perhaps  
 8 Gaily colored flower  
 9 Gay rights supporter Sally  
 10 Grant of "Weeds"

**De Nada, Renata**

**Across**

- 1 Shakespeare's foot  
 5 Stone of "Easy A"  
 9 Came to grips with  
 14 Cabbage, to Cocteau  
 15 Teacher's surprise  
 16 "\_\_\_ Paris"  
 17 Singer Vikki  
 18 Sch. for your first mate

- 19 Recipient of Bugs' kisses  
 20 HBO miniseries with Renata  
 23 Classic western  
 24 Pulled the plug on  
 25 "Jumpin' Jack Flash," to Jagger  
 27 Some like it hot  
 29 Notre Dame is on one  
 32 Tops a dessert  
 34 Cold War letters

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