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SUMMER OF PRIDE

IN REFLECTION
Hotter Than July
Helped Me Share
How Proud I Am to
Be Bisexual

THE INTERVIEW
Detroit's Getting a Lot
More Violet Chachki

BACK IN ACTION
Affirmations: A Long
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Vincint

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By Charles Alexander



VOL. 2932 • AUGUST 5, 2021

ISSUE 1180

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 and Features Editor

Jackie Jones

News & Feature Writers

Lawrence Ferber, Ellen Knoppow, Jason A. Michael,
Drew Howard, Jonathan Thurston, D'Anne Witkowski,
Jill A. Greenberg, Eve Kucharski

Copy Editor

Sarah Hunt

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
National LGBT Media Association
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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Now that we're deep into that Pure Michigan summer, everyone knows it's the law (it isn't, do what you want) that you have to enjoy the state's great outdoors. But when the sun gets so hot that even the lakes aren't cooling you down, here are five queer-friendly activities to turn to that'll switch up your summer plans.

1 Play UNO With Other Michigan Queers

Look, yelling "Yahtzee!" and flapping your wrists when you win is not gay — it's just the proper way to play (no matter what Brian Griffin says). Whatever reaction you have while playing board games, you can feel comfortable knowing that you're in an LGBTQ- and ally-affirming space at this weekly Hazel Park game night. "We could play anything from UNO to Yahtzee to Monopoly to a trivia game, and people can bring a game to share if they like," host Jeffrey Olivier tells BTL. "Right now, UNO seems to be the exciting thing."

Email Olivier at redbellysenegal90@gmail.com for more information about the regular Thursday night event, which occurs weekly from 7 to 9 p.m. at Hazel Park's Country Boy Restaurant, 821 E. 8 Mile Road. Olivier also hosts a social meetup at the Hazel Park Community Center on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

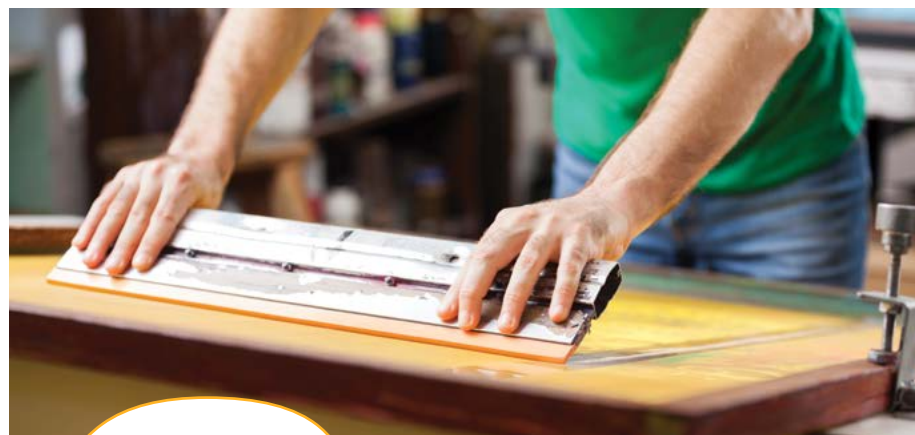


Photos courtesy of EQMI

2 See Tyler Oakley and Gov. Whitmer in the Same (Virtual) Room

Okemos native and gay YouTuber Tyler Oakley will be the keynote speaker for Equality Michigan's 2021 Mission Equality fundraising reception at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 6. He'll be joined by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a longtime LGBTQ+ ally. Obviously we stan a supportive queen and orgs like EQMI, a statewide organization working to ensure equal rights for everyone in the LGBTQ+ community. "The inspiring work of individuals like Tyler and contributions from our supporters drives us to continue doing this challenging work. I hope to see you all virtually on August 6," EQMI Executive Director Erin Knott tells BTL.

Register online at equalitymi.org/missionequality. Contact Caitlin O'Rourke at caitlin@capitolfundraising.com or (517) 980-1104 with any questions.



3 Take Your Date Somewhere Cute

Yeah, it was nice when you decided the local brew pub would be your Friday night spot, but let's face it, it's getting stale. Step your dating game up and take a stab at screen printing together at the Ann Arbor Art Center with instructor Rachel Derocher. "You will have a great time trying out a new skill and spend the rest of your evening in the heart of beautiful downtown Ann Arbor," Derocher says.

This 18+ event will be held 6-8:30 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 12. Register online at annarborartcenter.org

Turn Your Big Ideas into a Quilt

Detroit queer artist Mother Cyborg believes that technology, in combination with compassion, is the key to "collective liberation." At 10 a.m. Aug. 7, visit Cyborg's Data Criminalization Quilting Bee workshop, which is sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. There, you'll hand-stitch a quilt whose collaborative design will involve the high-level solutions you and other participants discuss to solve technological problems.

This event is held at Mike Kelley's Mobile Homestead, which is a permanent artwork by the late artist on the grounds of MOCAD located at 4454 Woodward Ave. in Detroit. Learn more at mocadetroit.org.



Photo of Mother Cyborg by Ara Howrani

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at Hodges...



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Connect With Your Emo Roots

OK, not everyone who listens to these bands had an emo moment in high school, but seeing a Green Day, Fall Out Boy and Weezer concert certainly brings back memories of that subgenre's style. Heading to Detroit's Comerica Park on Aug. 10, the trifecta will headline The Hella Mega Tour, which is the perfect way to honor the bands that paved the way for more LGBTQ+ inclusion within the realms of emo and punk.

For details on the tour, visit hellamegatour.com.



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The Rising Gay Star Opens Up to BTL Before Performing Aug. 7 at Ann Arbor's Virtual Pride

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Pride 2021 is special. It's special because it coincides with humans finally emerging from their homes after nearly two years of isolation, seclusion and uncertainty. Special in that we are also emerging from four harrowing years living under the anti-LGBTQ+ Trump Administration and finally have a president who sees and supports LGBTQ+ Americans. Special in that some Pride events are going forward, some have been canceled, some are still being done via Zoom.

The rainbow at the end of the tunnel isn't simply visible. It's bright. And Vincint's "Higher," from his new album "There Will Be Tears," is the soundtrack for it all.

It turns out Vincint, a Los Angeles artist who weaves his golden voice into dance-floor pop anthems, is the Grand Marshal we needed all along. He will perform Aug. 7 as part of Ann Arbor Pride's virtual celebration.

"This summer has truly been one of the best of my life because I didn't expect for all this to happen, but I'm so glad that it did," Vincint tells Between The Lines from New York via Zoom. "Because the song ['Higher'] has made so many people happy. It's made so many people feel so wanted and joyful and alive again, and I think it's what we deserve after what we just went through."

That said, Vincint wrote "Higher" and the rest of "There Will Be Tears" first and foremost for himself.

"I wrote this album as a catharsis for myself to move past a lot of things, but also to re-experience the joy and come back to being a human being, and I think that's what everyone is looking for after these last two years," he says.

"Everyone kind of needed that moment of, 'Wow, I want to stand in the middle of a room with a whole bunch of people and scream out really, really happy lyrics about falling in love and being so high off the ground that it feels like I'm flying and you're next to me,' whether it be a friend or a lover or someone you had lost and feel like, 'I'm next to you, and I'm with you, and this is a moment for all of us,'" he explains. "And I think 'Higher' kind of filled that void."

If you're unfamiliar with Vincint's music, you might be wondering what "really happy lyrics" could possibly be included on an album titled "There Will Be Tears."

But the album's title is not so much a premonition as it is a revelation that Vincint had



Vincint Will Take You Higher

while listening to the yet-untitled album with a good friend trying to find a single line that would encompass the whole project. “We listened to the album from front to back, and I look over, and he’s crying; I’m crying,” Vincint says. “And I realized, this is it. That’s what I want.”

Vincint clarifies that the “tears” in the album’s title are not a reflection of a simplistic notion of happiness or sadness.

“It’s the sense of letting go of the pressure you put on yourself all the time, of all the things you worry about, that you talk about, that you thought you wouldn’t get through, or you couldn’t overcome,” Vincint explains. “So I realized at the end of most things that we all go through as human beings, there is gonna be this moment where you will fully cry.”

“You will not know why you’re crying. It’ll happen, and you’ll wipe your face, and you’ll go, ‘That was weird, and that was crazy,’ but that’s your body saying, ‘Hi. We can let this go now. You’re good. You just needed to get it out.’”

Vincint has come a long way since slaying Radiohead’s “Creep” on Fox’s singing competition “The Four” in 2018. His performance literally had judges like Sean “Diddy” Combs and Meghan Trainor slack-jawed.

“That song just spoke to me in the moment,” he says. “It’s OK to feel a little bit out of place and a little bit weird. That doesn’t mean you don’t belong in certain spaces; it just means you have to scream a little bit louder.”

Needless to say, Vincint isn’t shy about what he wants. In fact, he thinks the world of himself, which he attributes largely to his mother and the other “no-nonsense kinds of women” he was raised around.

“I don’t know any other way to be,” he says. “I just got really lucky with a lot of amazing women who are like, ‘Hi, you’re the shit, and you’re always going to be the shit, so you better think that all the time,’ and it really worked out.”

This confidence is crucial in the field of pop music, where he says most people think of “white women with blonde hair” like Britney Spears and Taylor Swift.

“That’s not all that pop music is,” he says. “And especially having me be in the room now it’s like, ‘Oh, there’s something new here, and can he stand up for himself in these rooms?’ and my entire life I’ve been told you can do whatever you want to do. You’re supposed to be in the room, you know? The meeting’s for you.”

Vincint thinks you should think the world of yourself, too.

“Everyone struggles with self-confidence.



Photo: Liam Graham Haehnle

Everyone struggles with having a little bit of a time where they don’t feel like 100 percent a boss. And that’s fair, that’s human,” he says. “But make sure that you are the first person you talk to in the morning before you step out of your house, or your room, or your special place, and you build yourself up, so when someone else comes and tries to knock you down, you already have your weapons with you.”

This philosophy comes as a result of lived experience. By the time Vincint was 16, he had come out to everyone in his family and was greeted with love and acceptance. But school was another story.

“Coming out for me was easy at home but intense in the world because I went to Catholic school from kindergarten through 12th grade,” he says. “But I got really lucky in having people in my life at home build me up. I was never put down for who I loved, or who I liked, or what I was into, or how I talked, or how I dressed. And so having that kind of confidence at home let me go out into the world and be like, ‘OK, you don’t like this? That’s a personal problem because my family really loves me, and so that’s on you.’”

If you don’t love Vincint yet, you’ll get a chance to fall in love at Ann Arbor Pride’s virtual celebration. “Just some cute little songs, nothing too crazy,” he says about what viewers can expect. “It’ll be cute, trust me.”

Oh, and in case it wasn’t clear, Vincint has a new album out. “The album is out. It’s out. Listen to the songs, send it to your mom, send it to your boyfriend, send it to your ex, you know? Just send it around and have fun with it,” he says.

“And also remember that it doesn’t have to be sad when it ends. It just means something else new is starting.”

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- ▶ Have any other health problems.
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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- ▶ **The most common side effects of BIKTARVY** in clinical studies were diarrhea (6%), nausea (6%), and headache (5%).

These are not all the possible side effects of BIKTARVY. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking BIKTARVY.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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 **GILEAD**



Hotter Than July Helped Me Share How Proud I Am to Be Bisexual

BY TIANNA BURTON

Growing up, I followed in my mother's footsteps. Like many single Black women raising a child, she represented diligence and poise. I performed femininity out of example, an obligation of what I knew womanhood to be watching her as a kid.

Then I met someone unlike me. She was uninhibited, something I desired to be. I was curious about this freedom of rules and expectations, and it led me to explore what I had no language for. It was as instinctual as my attraction for boys. I made the first move, enamored by the possibility of who I could be outside of the rigid constraints of Black girlhood. In that moment, I was recognizing my bisexuality.

Then, in the summer of 2009, I took the next step: I acknowledged it.

I remember being home from college. I was in my room while my mother was in the kitchen, a feeling of wholeness coming over me. Fearlessly, I marched down the stairs into the kitchen, took my stance on the opposite side of the island and announced that I was bisexual. Her response: "I already knew." She said she had assumed after noticing that I had stopped taking my birth control. (Because I wouldn't dare come home with a baby, so I must be gay.) Needless to say, her assumption had some validity. But with pronunciation, with acknowledgement, came ease.

I was growing more confident in who I was, which led me to humbly attend my first Pride, Hotter Than July, in 2009. I didn't want to go alone, so I took my little cousin. He didn't know where we were or what was going on, but the vibrancy that filled Palmer Park was enough to bring us both comfort. Hotter Than July was unlike anything I had ever seen. It also felt familiar. And it was during that first Pride I experienced Black queerness joyfully. My adolescent self didn't know it then, but being able to celebrate my truth in a way that felt loving would help me grow monumentally. That level of representation gave me something to aspire to. I knew then that I would never shy away from who I am for anyone else's comfort.

It was affirmation that if an entire community of people could live and share in their truth, I could too.

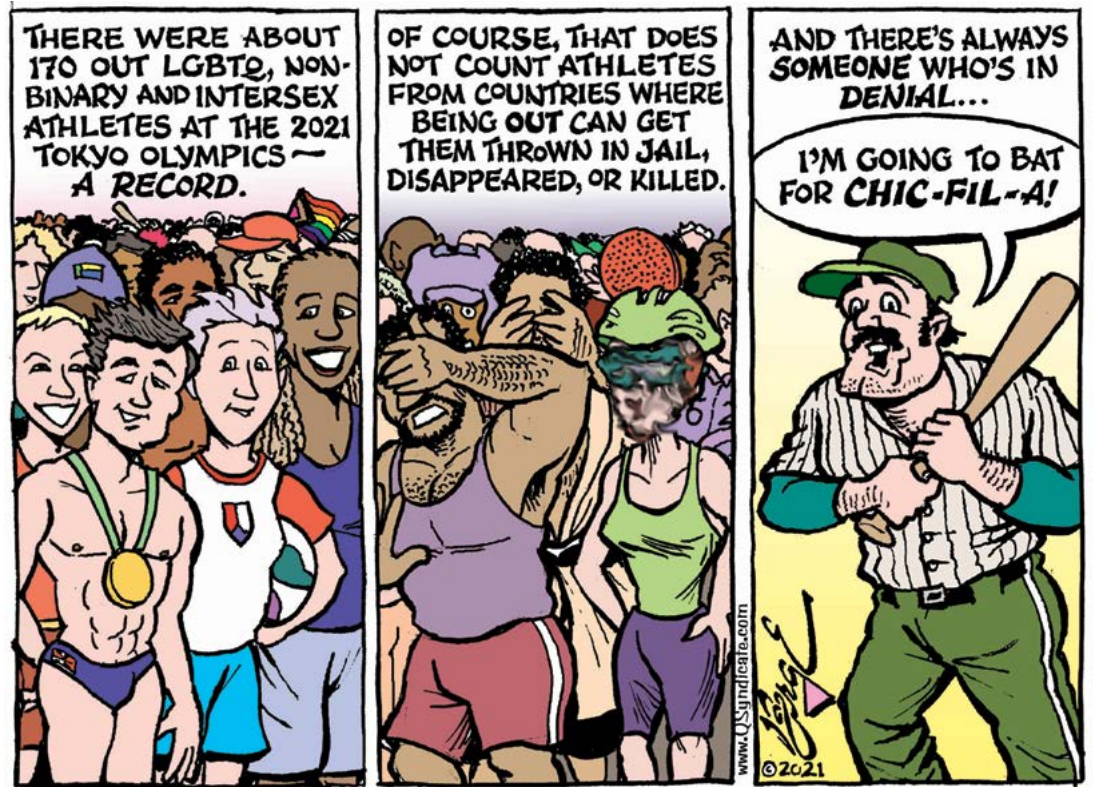
I've lived in the Midwest, the South, and on the East Coast. I have attended Pride events domestically and internationally. Detroit, Atlanta, Miami, Windsor. I understood why Pride was necessary. But feeling a part of something bigger than myself only manifested at home in Detroit.

"I was growing more confident in who I was, which led me to humbly attend my first Pride, Hotter Than July, in 2009."

HTJ has a long history of supporting the LGBTQIA+ community, and it's even made history as the longest-running Black Pride in North America. Rooted in education and advocacy, LGBT Detroit, the organization that produces the event, has been providing safe spaces throughout Southeast Michigan since 1994. And for 26 years, LGBT Detroit has been committed to hosting a week-long celebration of Pride with HTJ, serving as a social barometer for community development while also providing a multidimensional forum to advocate for equality and social justice. This year's event took place July 23-25. I was there, a full 12 years after my introduction to the event.

HTJ's programming offered virtual and in-person interactions. Most memorable was the art show on July 23, an interactive experience fusing photography installations, journalism displays, musical performances, panel discussions and an awards ceremony. During the awards ceremony, the host asked the three awardees what Pride meant to them. Their responses varied, but within each were valuable threads about visibility, life and documentation. And, for me, their words carried

See HTJ, page 18



'Every Michigander Should Have an Equal Chance to Succeed': Fair and Equal Michigan's Message to Supporters

BY FAIR AND EQUAL MICHIGAN

The Michigan Bureau of Elections recently released a report blocking Fair and Equal Michigan from moving forward on its first-ever LGBTQ rights bill, despite acknowledging at least six errors in its review of citizen signatures.

We oppose the Bureau's handling of this review, which has implications far beyond our fight for equal rights. This moment calls for public engagement, and we want our supporters and people throughout Michigan to understand what is at stake.

The implications of the Bureau of Election's recent actions are significant for any future petition issue – Republican, Democrat or Independent.

Rooted in fairness

Fairness is at the heart of how we treat one another, especially when it comes to the availability of basic government services, employment, housing or education. For generations, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have been treated differently – without the same rights as everyone else under the law.

In November of 2019, Jey'nce Poindexter was driving to the store when she received a call from citizens with an idea: Let's start a petition to finally pass Michigan's first LGBTQ+ rights law. For her, it was a resounding yes: "We've lost too many," she said, referring to the nearly dozen trans women of color who had been lost to murder, targeted for their identities. In fact, when Jey'nce got the call, she was on her way to purchase

memorial plaques, in bulk, for the families of the fallen.

Our grassroots, citizen campaign set out to create good public policy for Michigan – choosing the initiative petition to introduce a citizens' bill. We believe there is more that brings us together than forces us apart. This is why our initiative includes Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Our unifying statement: Every Michigander should have an equal chance to succeed.

The Bureau's handling of our petition

Under Michigan's Constitution, "all political power is inherent in the people" of the State of Michigan. This is significant as it offers citizens the ability to petition and make laws. And for citizen petitions, the government should "facilitate rather than hamper the exercise by the people of these reserved rights." Put simply: No one cannot hinder, obstruct or otherwise get in the way of a citizen petition.

From the beginning, when we filed our initiative, the State's informal process, established in the 1970s, began to change on the fly. The Bureau opted to re-write the language of our citizens' bill rather than discussing changes with us, as was customary. And as Fair and Equal collected its 100,000th signature, we asked the Bureau for guidance after government issued quarantines due to the pandemic. We received no response.

We took our case to court, where the Bureau vigorously objected to any guidance or assistance for Fair and Equal, writing in a public brief that the burden

of the health orders on citizens was “not severe under the circumstances.” Further, the Bureau argued, the Governor’s March 10, 2020 Declaration of Emergency “by no means required or even suggested that [Fair and Equal] must suspend their signature collection efforts.” By that point, two of Fair and Equal’s leadership co-chairs had become increasingly sick and later tested positive for COVID.

A judge agreed with Fair and Equal’s arguments and extended the petition timeline. Accordingly, Fair and Equal submitted 483,461 signatures on October 13, 2020 — a figure that represents a safety net of 143,421 extra signatures.

What’s a ‘valid signature’?

In 2012, Michigan lawmakers amended the Administrative Procedures Act of 1969 to remove ambiguity and protect against midstream changes at the hands of the Bureau. The Legislature added language requiring the Bureau to create administrative rules aimed at establishing uniform standards for signature validation.

Put simply, the Bureau was tasked with creating a transparent set of rules and making them public so that citizens can petition successfully. Unfortunately, the Bureau — under multiple Administrations — never took action and remains in violation of the Administrative Procedures Act today.

Why does this matter? Because without notice, at 4 p.m. on July 8, the informal process used since the 1970s changed on the fly — again. The Bureau, without holding any discussions with the campaign or returning our calls, announced our petition would not move forward.

The Bureau opted for a new standard to not even talk to the campaign before the report was issued. Their rationale? Not enough valid signatures. Their evidence? A sloppy report that we now know, as conceded by the Bureau, was filled with errors.

The Bureau’s report

Reporters and media outlets knew of Fair and Equal’s obituary, written by the Bureau, before our own team. When we were finally informed, the Bureau provided 16 business hours to respond.

The Bureau, according to their own procedures, prefers to not check every signature. Instead, in the 1970s, they chose a sampling method based on examining as few as 500 and up to 4,000 signatures (which it has done for other campaigns). With no apparent rationale, the Bureau chose to review just 502. Each sampled signature equated to around 1,000 signatures. Essentially, the smaller the sample, the more risk to Fair and Equal.

For petition sheet 14980, our team of experts found no errors. The Bureau found it was invalid based on a category called “Miscellaneous.” In all, 19 signatures, representing 19,000 signatures in total, were invalidated with no rationale.

Under the Bureau rules, Fair and Equal had no ability to adequately respond to allegations of invalidity, which included several questionable decisions. For example, the Bureau invalidated one petition sheet because the signer wrote: “Detroit, MI, Wayne 48203” and the Bureau argued the signer could have meant another place that was not Wayne County, such as Wayne City, MI. For Petition Sheet 32143, they wrote the date 8/12/2020, but because the final “0,” while completely closed, was slanted with a trail from the pen, the Report invalidated it, apparently, because they claim it could be read as 2026.

The Bureau’s lack of standards and the record-breaking delay to review our signatures provided an extraordinary opportunity for anti-equality forces. Challengers typically have about six weeks to complete this review — our challenger was given nearly 10 months.

A dangerous precedent

The Bureau, through sampling and its report, has effectively thrown out close to 75,000 signatures for reasons to which we take exception. This nightmare scenario is why the Legislature mandated that there be written rules, including uniform standards, in place.

We believe this ignores the “facilitate rather than hamper” requirement under state law and sets a dangerous precedent. Opposing this Bureau Report is not something we take lightly. We are doing so with the deepest respect and love for our Constitution and our great state.

We are challenging the Bureau’s flagrant violations of the Administrative Procedures Act and asserting the Bureau is setting a dangerous precedent in hampering, not facilitating, a citizen petition review as set forth in our Constitution. You can join us at FairAndEqualMichigan.com and contribute to our legal fund.

For us, we’re not just another petition campaign. This is our humanity.

— *The Co-Chairs of Fair and Equal Michigan: Dr Mira Jordan, Jey’nce Poindexter, Brandon Dillion and Trevor Thomas*

Creep Of The Week

People! Are! Still! Dying! From! This! Virus! Seriously, Get Vaccinated.

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

What an incredibly stupid time to be alive. Every day Republicans and their network, Fox, are telling people NOT to get vaccinated. That COVID-19 is either a hoax or just not a big deal. That being required to wear a mask is akin to living in Nazi Germany. That being unvaccinated is patriotic.

But it’s not. It’s idiotic. People! Are! Still! Dying! From! This! Virus! And the vast majority of deaths at this point are among unvaccinated people.

There are plenty of people who can’t get vaccinated, including kids under 12 and people with compromised immune systems or serious health conditions. Which is why the willfully unvaccinated people are especially awful. A living example of selfishness and stupidity.

Honestly, it’s a strange strategy to tell your base to NOT save themselves from a deadly virus. Then again, Republicans believe that dead people vote, don’t they? Oh, wait. Dead people only vote for Democrats.

Being sick sucks. Even a mild cold can ruin an entire week, let alone COVID-19. Look, I’ve had cancer. Twice. And if I could get a shot that would help protect me from getting it again, I would do that. But it’s not an option. But I can, and did, get a shot to protect me and everybody else from COVID-19.

People are scared of cancer. They believe it’s real. Well, most people do. There are always going to be people on the fringe who believe that every health problem is a conspiracy by Big Pharma to make money. It would certainly help if Big Pharma didn’t legitimately have skeletons in its Big closet.

But when I was diagnosed, everything happened so fast. I got a referral for a surgeon, had surgery on my birthday, and was promptly sent to a medical oncologist where my body was pumped with really horrifying medication, frankly (one of the medicines I got was a very bright red, like I was getting an infusion of Faygo Red Pop). I lost all of my hair. Then I was sent to a radiation oncologist where I was microwaved like a bag of popcorn.

To make a long story short, it was not fun. But also through it all there wasn’t a sizable population of Americans claiming that cancer was a hoax and that everybody being treated for it was a dupe. Cancer hasn’t been politicized like COVID-19 — not on a national level with one of two major political parties egging on their followers to die to own the libs.

It bums me the fuck out, frankly. And it’s scary.

I mean, the folks who are the loudest and most adamantly anti-vaccine because they say it’s government overreach and mind control and against our freedom are the same people who say that the people who stormed the capitol were just tourists. Which is to say, the very people who are crying fascism are also cheering on fascism.

Instead of fighting the virus, we’re fighting each other. And each side is not armed with the same arsenal. On one side, you’ve got people who are like, “OK, I’m going to defer to the scientists and medical experts on this whole COVID-19 thing” and then you have people who will beat the shit out of a grocery store clerk (or worse) who asks them to wear a mask. There is no middle to meet in here.

We’ve all lost a lot in the past 18 months. Hundreds of thousands of Americans lost people they love, and yet somehow that’s not a motivation to the anti-vax creeps. They would rather scream maskless about shutdowns than do anything to alleviate the cause of the shutdowns. But instead of coming together in order to achieve a common goal during a time of crisis, we’re coming apart at the seams. And one side believes seams exist, and the other doesn’t.

I’m getting on a plane for the first time in well over a year. I am not excited about it with the Delta variant and all, even though I’m vaccinated. And I am hopeful that there is no one on my flight who throws a fit over the federal transportation mask mandate. But if there is, I’ll do my best to film it, adding to the archive so that our children’s children will one day be able to relive this very, very stupid and selfish time.

If you’re not vaccinated, then get vaccinated. If you are vaccinated, then encourage people who aren’t vaccinated to get the shot. It’s the patriotic thing to do, if you’re into that. It’s the moral thing to do. It’s the only real way out of this.

The Republican response to COVID-19 is eerily similar to their response to HIV/AIDS in the early ‘80s. They ignored it, made jokes about it, and didn’t care about the people who were dying. That they are doing the same thing during another health crisis should disqualify them from holding public office.

Vote them out.



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Rendering of the Raymond E. Shepherd House. Photo: City of Ferndale

Coming Soon to Michigan: LGBTQ-Friendly Affordable Senior Housing in Ferndale

Local LGBTQ+ Groups Working Together to Bring Project to Life

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow, senior minister and teacher of Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit announced recently that the church was partnering with Affirmations and SAGE Metro Detroit to bring affordable LGBTQ-friendly housing for older adults to Ferndale. The three groups are working in conjunction with Full Circle Properties and have recently secured tax credits from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

“We started this process back in 2018, and it has taken this long to find the right property,” Stringfellow told *Between The Lines*. “Receiving these credits is crossing a huge hurdle in obtaining the funding for this project. There’s still more hurdles to jump over because we have not purchased the property yet. But that is what we are eying.”

Stringfellow declined to give the address of the potential property. He was happy, however, to talk about the vision of the project.

“The key thing about this is it’s going to be affordable housing, unlike The James, which is at market rate,” he said, referring to the luxury senior apartment complex already in the city. “None of these units will be at market rate. It will be affordable for low-income seniors.”

Once converted to residential units, the building will be named the Raymond E. Shepherd House or The Shepherd House for short.

“Raymond was a longstanding member of MCC-D and a frequent visitor to Affirmations,” Stringfellow said. “He also utilized some of the services at SAGE Metro Detroit, so he is an individual that kind of captures those three communities, and it made sense to name the building after him.”

Inside the house, there will be a room usable by all three organizations named after local artist and longtime *Between The Lines* columnist Charles Alexander.

“MCC-D will have worship services there also,” said Stringfellow. “And the room, itself, will be dedicated to displaying art from local LGBTQ artists.”

The groups hope to have the building purchased by this fall and have set a target opening date in late 2023.

“We know that there’s a lot of need in our community, especially for older adults, to have affirming housing,” said Kathleen Redmon, director of programs for Affirmations.

“As older LGBTQ adults age, many of them lose resources and have to go back in the closet. So having a place that is affirming, that has resources and programming on-site can make them feel supported.

“To have their needs met is essential,” Redmon continued. “We’re hoping that this is a great opportunity to meet the needs of our community and create some solid infrastructure for people to access.”



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I Went to a Detroit City Football Club Game. I Walked Away an Even Prouder Queer Fan.

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Trans-cendent Values p. 27



BY TOM WESLEY

Alex Wright, DCFC co-owner and Chief Creative Officer of the Detroit City Football Club (DCFC), describes the atmosphere during Pride Month as one of the most electrifying, intense experiences that any fan could have. “The game starts, the crowd is packed, everyone is decked in rainbow gear, and then the rainbow smoke pops,” he said. “I don’t think there’s anywhere on the planet that’s celebrating sport and Pride in that way.”

As for myself, I wasn’t expecting to be swept up in a sea of rainbows, rouge and gold as I made my way into Keyworth Stadium for a recent Detroit City Football Club (DCFC) men’s team match. But it was a welcome surprise.

I was excited to see DCFC take on the visiting Los Angeles Force, a team I had grown fond of as an L.A. resident before

my recent move to Southeast Michigan. It was exciting to see some of my familiar Californians in my hometown, though I was having second thoughts about my wardrobe choice that day — a t-shirt supporting the visiting Force.

I later described my experience to Wright as simultaneously the most welcoming environment for visitors and the most angry environment to a visiting team I had ever experienced.

I explained to him that, after being lead through the Northern Guard supporter section, I covered my shirt with my jacket despite the warm weather — not to attempt to pass better in a traditionally heteronormative space but so that my visitor status would be hidden. My fears were put to rest when a stranger covered in rainbow bandanas and plenty of DCFC apparel turned around and welcomed me.

This happened multiple times throughout the match — someone saw my shirt and welcomed me, asking how I was enjoying the experience. There was a general scoff at supporting the

visitor team, but I was inducted quickly into the supporter ranks. Before long, I was joining the crowd in cheers, jeers and dances.

Wright said the experience I had was “on purpose and intentional.”

“What you experienced was the result of a couple different things,” he said. “Those of us who started the club see ourselves as stewards of this. We’re hosting the party, but it’s not our party. We set ground rules for behavior, for speech, and for treatment for your fellow spectators that, as long as folks adhere to those



Photo: Jon DeBoer/DCFC

standards, whatever else people say goes, right?”

Wright added, “You’re going to hear a bunch of swearing, but you can’t be mean to other people based on their identity.”

Wright shared that the intentionally inclusive environment at DCFC games evolved from the teams’ roots as the Detroit City Football League, which focused on its neighborhood involvement within the city of Detroit in response to a community desire to participate in a soccer experience that felt “sporting.”

“You had a bubbling, passionate soccer fan base without a team,” Wright explained. “You had an entire group of people who not only love sports, but also felt unfilled by current sporting options.”

Wright shared that the genesis of DCFC was through a co-ed soccer league based around Detroit neighborhoods and that it was a competition built of wins, losses and community service hours.

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See DCFC, page 20



Affirmations fully reopened on Aug. 2 after a 15-month closure due to COVID-19. Photo: Andrew Potter

Affirmations Could've Saved My Sister's Life. Now That They've Fully Reopened, They Can Still Save Others.

BY JACKIE JONES

While most open spaces exude an emptiness, Affirmations' 17,000-square feet in Ferndale doesn't feel like that at all. It feels like a safe space the moment I enter it.

Like many there for Affirmations' reopening on Aug. 2, this is my first time back in the LGBTQ+ community center since its closing in 2020. The first thing I notice is the ceiling to floor windows, the light pouring in illuminating both the space and its patrons. And like an "Oprah's Favorite Things" episode, people are freely hugging. An array of LGBTQ+ flags hang proudly on the wall. And through CDC-recommended masks, smiles still radiate — the kind that kiss cheeks to eyes.

Undoubtedly, Affirmations gives off a particular aura. But, oddly, while all this is occurring, I feel paradoxical. I do a mental check-in: the community is warm, welcoming and genuine, and it's this mixture that makes me feel immense pride and sadness.


It has nothing to do with the people around me. Nothing to do with the volunteers who speak so passionately about the center's resources. And certainly nothing to do with Affirmations' newly initiated programs.

It has everything to do, however, with the fact that a place like Affirmations would've helped my sister in her time of despair.

In 2018, my sister, Jozalynn Jones, took her life. She was gay, transgender, Black and a sexual abuse survivor who was trying to

See *Affirmations*, page 26

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Detroit's Getting a Lot More Violet Chachki

Photo courtesy of The Syn

How the 'Drag Race' Winner Finds Power in Performance

BY CHENE KOPPITZ

It takes a preternaturally confident kid to read a homophobic slur about themselves and think, "Oh my god, people are talking about me." Especially while standing at a urinal in a Catholic elementary school.

But most queer kids don't grow up to be Violet Chachki.

That story, which Chacki shared with Teddy Quinlivan on the latter's inaugural "Unholy and Curious" podcast earlier this year, came in response to the question, "What was it like growing up as the biggest homo in Georgia?" As their smile eventually gives way to laughter, the "RuPaul's Drag Race" seventh season winner tells Teddy, the first openly trans model hired for a Chanel beauty campaign, that seeing the words "DARDO (Chachki's legal surname) IS A FAG" made them

"feel really special actually," which to them meant "people are obsessed with me."

They weren't wrong, then or now, and that certainty of self is what likely caused some of their fellow Season 7 cast mates to vote Chachki "Shadiest Queen" during the DESPY Awards episode. Their aplomb, when mixed with an encyclopedic knowledge of fashion iconography, mad runway skills and a silhouette often punctuated by a near-microscopic waist, made the then Atlanta-based queen a formidable competitive force, one which intimidated some and angered others. Katya, with whom Chachki was paired in the Prancing Queens challenge during their season, called the younger queen "the most visually intelligent person I know."

Chachki was raised in Atlanta, where they performed at

See **Violet**, page 22

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First-Ever Hazel Park Pride: A New Tradition for Increasingly Inclusive Metro Detroit Community

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The first-ever Hazel Park Pride (HPP) celebration will take place Sunday, Aug. 15 in Green Acres Park. COVID-19 caused the inaugural event to be pushed back a year, and organizers are now more than ready to go.

In a recent official statement, Hazel Park City Manager Ed Klobucher said, "After being delayed for over a year, I'm happy that the organizers are now able to hold a Pride Celebration in Hazel Park. We're hoping for good weather and a successful event."

City Councilmember Mike McFall said he is excited about the "first-ever Pride event in our friendly little city." McFall noted that Hazel Park has a sizable, growing LGBTQ+ community. "This event is one more way our city continues to demonstrate how welcoming Hazel Park has become," he said.

Event organizer Tim McKee-Zazo, who runs Menjo's in Detroit, said he is honored and excited to support the event. "It's great to see Hazel Park's rising prominence in Oakland County with many LGBTQ+ residents, families, and business owners as the new norm in this community," he said.

HPP will take place from noon until 7 p.m. The festivities will include outdoor activities in three covered pavilions located in the center of the park.

In the vendor pavilion, attendees can shop for Pride merchandise and get their fill of traditional barbecue favorites, candy, snacks and adult beverages. The entertainment pavilion will

feature more than 50 entertainers performing on stage, including live deejays. Finally, the family pavilion will offer face-painting, drag queen story time, classic board games and a host of carnival-style games.

"Having Hazel Park's first LGBTQ Pride is a dream come true," Jeffrey Olivier, a long-time Hazel Park resident, told *Between The Lines*. "In 2001, LGBTQ was not even talked about. But now people can come out and be who they are and know Hazel Park is accepting and safe."

Robert Zurenko told BTL he has only lived in Hazel Park for about three years.

"The best thing about living in Hazel Park are the parks and the community," Zurenko said. "I'm excited about HP Pride because it shows the city's willingness to work with its diverse range of inhabitants."

"I'm excited about the many activities we have planned," Olivier said. "And just to meet other LGBTQ people in our community and everyone just being able to enjoy themselves."

It was Olivier who helped get McKee-Zazos on board as event planner.

"He asked me to help him plan what was going to be a small picnic," McKee-Zazos told BTL. "It's turning into something larger."

McKee-Zazo, who has lived in Hazel Park since 2016, said he was "looking forward to an all-inclusive and diverse, beautiful summer day in the park celebrating our differences as well as embracing them."

Admission to HPP is free but donations to support LGBTQ+ organizations are encouraged.



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→ HTJ

Continued from page 10

strength. For Black queer folk, our lives demand visibility in a world that says Blackness and queerness cannot coexist and therefore must be documented. It was in that moment I took notice of what Pride meant to me too.

To experience Pride is to experience joy. But to experience Black Pride is to heal. Pride for Black folk is a purposeful experience: It's acknowledging trauma and choosing to heal. It's being excluded and paving a new way. It's loving ourselves without expectation of love in return. When we hold space for one another, we grow closer. My commitment to growth, exploration and authenticity led me to serve the community in the same way I sought support when I was 19, when I still trying to recognize and acknowledge my bisexuality.

Since first attending HTJ, I've grown into

a community advocate. I've volunteered with HRC of Alabama. I've been president of the queer sorority, Alpha Kappa Pi. I've been a campus and culture liaison for Amplified at Alabama State University. I've been a diversity liaison for the Graduate Student Association for Liberal Studies at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. I'm the founder and creator of The Bi Queer, and now a queer leadership mentor with LGBT Detroit's Leadership and Protege Academy. I'm not just recognizing and acknowledging who I am anymore. I'm sharing it.

Native Detroiter Tieanna Burton is a Black feminist, community storyteller and visual designer with a passion for social impact and equitable community programming. Her writing explores gender, sexuality and the human experience as a radical form of healing and expression.

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→ DCFC

Continued from p. 14

"You had to be out in the community, taking pictures and sending it back to the league if you wanted to be a part of this," he said. "That was baked into the DNA into the DCFC before we started DCFC. As we grew, we became more focused and committed to supporting organizations who are doing good in our community."

Wright said DCFC supporters, especially the Northern Guard, responded to the blueprint the organization had laid out. "We gave them the space to be creative and to express themselves in what they cared about and allowed them to support soccer in a way that their own support voice compelled them to," he explained. "One of the many, many outcomes of that is Prideraiser. Once we were made aware of it, we were like, let's go all out."

The campaign raised \$21,650 dollars — that's \$2,706.24 per goal scored by the DCFC women and men's teams while in their home stadium. According to the campaign website, 239 individual donors signed up to donate.

Wright also highlighted DCFC's partnerships

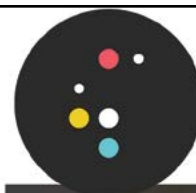
with the Ruth Ellis Center, including helping trans youth perform a public declaration of their name.

"It's like old-timey laws that you have to have a 'public declaration,' like you have to post your marriage in this town square. And we helped them because a soccer game is a public declaration," he said.

"That moment is the sort of thing you work for when you are trying to create a sporting culture. Most of the time you're trying to win soccer games and sell tickets, and that's really hard to do in a post-COVID world. But you can do those things and be a successful business and still find these moments where you're actually changing lives in ways that no one could possibly expect," he said.

Wright said DCFC sees itself as "of this moment" — a part of Detroit's growth. "A big part of that is recognizing the humanity of other people," he said. "We are all here together because we love soccer, but we are in a community that if we work together, we can change for the better. Lifting up our neighborhoods and our city are as important to us as lifting up this game."

Since my first DCFC experience, the men's team has gone on to win the 2021 NISA Championship against the Los Angeles Force. I attended that match wearing DCFC colors.



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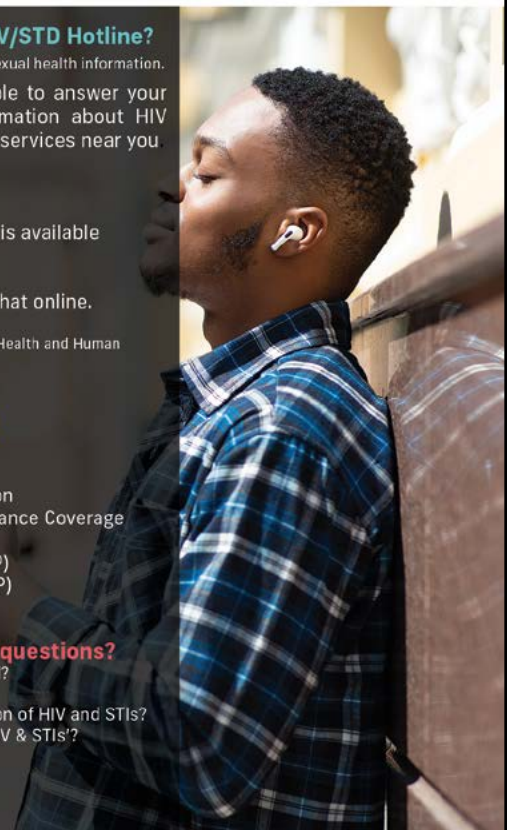
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→ Violet

Continued from p. 16

the Jungle, a now-defunct gay club, before appearing on “RuPaul’s Drag Race.” Although they began a fashion design program at Savannah College of Art and Design, they later dropped out to focus on drag.

The queen may have left college, but the lessons learned remained. Just as likely to discuss subverting the binary — genderfluid, Chachki uses she/her and they/them pronouns — as they are to chat about post-Pride partying, they indeed embody a thing of beauty that folx hold dear.

Coming from a legendary drag epicenter pushed the multi-hyphenate to make their current show, fittingly named “A Lot More Me,” just that: a equally hyphenated extravaganza that includes not only fashion and burlesque, but highlights their aerial acrobatics as well as stand-up skills. Detroiters can see it all come together when Chachki performs the show Aug. 21 at Sound Board at Motor City Casino and Hotel.

“Some nights, I come off stage and my crew says, ‘You are so funny!’ and I think ‘I’m hilarious!’ and it all works,” Chachki tells Between The Lines. “Other nights, it just doesn’t. But that’s why (the show) is always evolving. I’m making adjustments daily. But why not try it? I’m not saying I’m a comedian; it’s not a stand-up show. But my sense of humor is part of the process.”

They cite audience reaction, here at home as well as abroad, for the significant influence it has on content. European audiences are “easier and more forgiving” than their American counterparts, says Chachki. They see the difference in the way Americans consume drag as both a readily available commodity and an omnipresent cultural influence. Fans outside of the Americas don’t have Atlanta or New York or Los Angeles and the respective collection of drag styles with which to engage; they’re “happy to see a show.” U.S. crowds, however, are “more critical, but that’s what drives me to make changes. Well, that and me being me.”

During their season, Chachki’s wins bookended a season that they, along with others, see as a sort of “beginning of the end.” Being crowned Season 7’s winner has Chachki squarely in the middle of the at-present 14-cycle franchise that’s been on three networks, spurred

countless spin-offs and international versions, and seen its queens go on to intercontinental tours, haute couture runway walks and beauty campaigns, and first-ever appearances at legendary events, such as Chachki’s 2019 Met Gala attendance, alongside RuPaul and Aquaria.



Photo: Albert Sanchez and Pedro Zalba

As someone who acknowledges the influences from which they pull, including mid-20th-century Hollywood glamour, Irving Klaw’s paradigmatic fetish photos of Bettie Page, designers like Christian Dior and Thierry Mugler, and femme style icons from Raquel Welch to Deee-Lite’s Lady Miss Kier, Chachki recontextualizes to create their seamless aesthetic signature. One that, as they and Teddy conferred back in February, “leaves no one out” in the LGBTQ+ lexicon. It’s here, as they discuss and at times defend their being, that their trademark confidence is writ large.

The misinterpretation of their boldness as brash conceit, on the walls of a school bathroom, in the RuPaul workroom, or in the greater world, is what Chachki views as the flawed binary coming to the fore for femme-presenting people. “If a man is assertive, speaks his mind, asks for something in a straightforward way, he’s praised. He’s fulfilling his masculinity,” they tell Between The Lines. “If a woman does the same thing, states the same wants and needs, she’s demanding; she’s a bitch; she’s cunt. I want to be part of changing that.”

Being seen as a termagant has proved problematic for femmes, but Chachki derives power from spaces others might find painful, drawing intersections between fashion and bondage, Catholicism and liberation, bullying and adulation, all of which reminds them that the “special” treatment they’ve received is often couched in the complex emotions of others — confusion, frustration, and ultimately admiration. In “A Lot More Me,” Chachki is serving a signature performance art cocktail of élan, one that amuses as it empowers, upending gender norms along with notions of what drag was, is, and may be.

“I felt special most of my life and, in a lot of ways, especially when I was younger, still in high school, people treated me the way I felt,” Chachki says. “After 2020, not just with the pandemic, everyone needs to feel special. Escaping to beauty, to fashion, to feast visually, to laugh, we all need that and that’s what I’m here to bring.”

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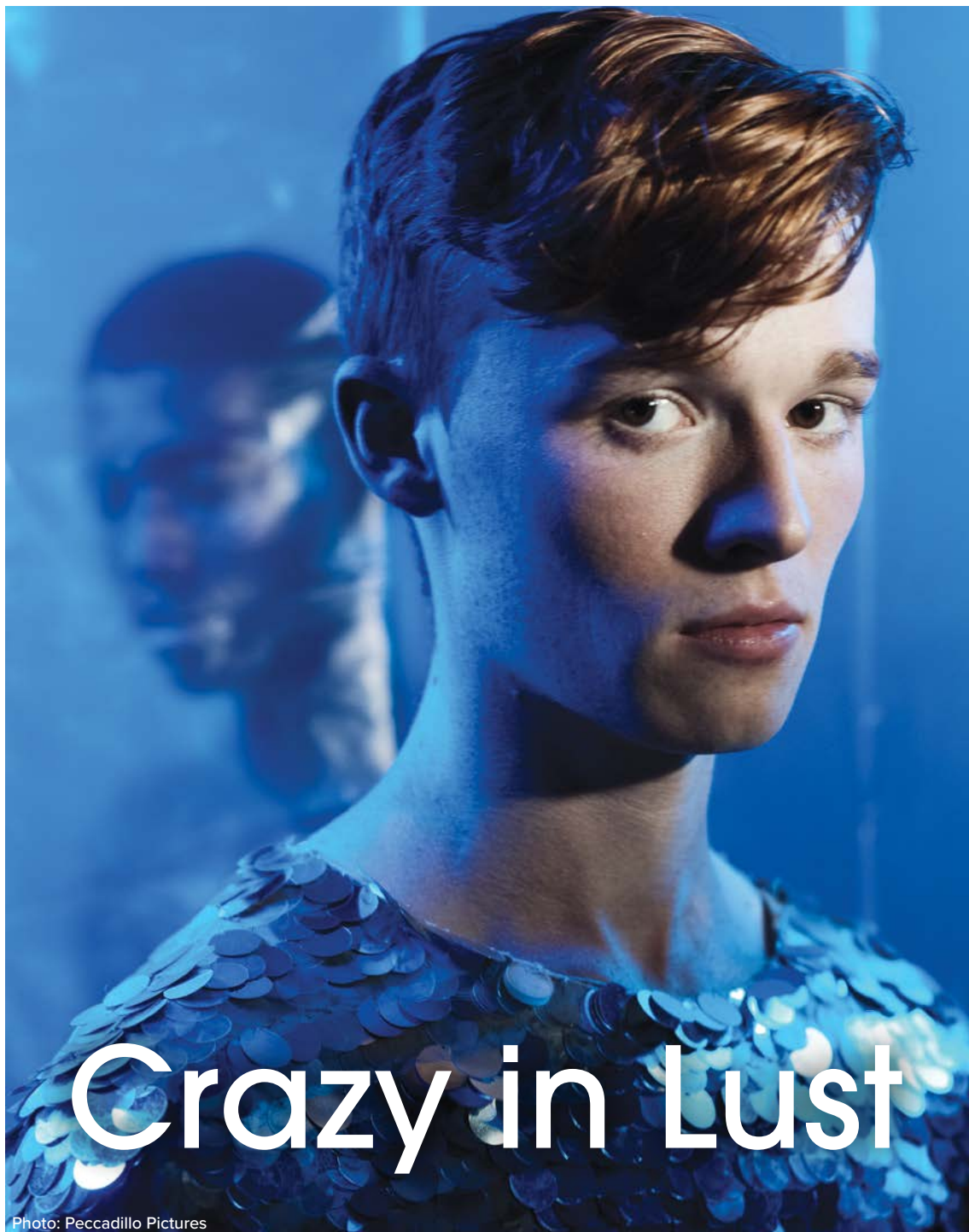


Photo: Peccadillo Pictures

Crazy in Lust

‘Sequin In a Blue Room’ Star Conor Leach Talks Playing a Slutty Queer Teen

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

Raging hormones barely explain the behavior of Sequin, a gay 16-year-old high school student who wears a shirt embossed with glittery discs while hooking up with anonymous guys in the director Samuel Van Grivsen’s audacious, erotic and suspenseful feature debut, “Sequin in a Blue Room.”

Played by Brisbane-raised bisexual actor Conor Leach in a fearless breakout performance, the secretive Sequin lives with his well-meaning, patient single father (Jeremy Lindsay Taylor) while screwing strangers on a strict one-time-only basis (once out the door, he deletes their respective profiles from his hookup app). Yet when Sequin’s invited to a sex party, he connects with a young Black guy (Samuel Barrie) on a level he hasn’t

felt before and finds himself wanting seconds. This leads Sequin to break his cardinal rule and meet again with B (Ed Wightman), an older man who can lead him to the mysterious hottie again but soon proves manipulative, dangerous and determined to keep Sequin for himself.

At least in conversation, Leach, comparatively loquacious and well-adjusted, is nothing like the enigmatic Sequin. The actor earned a theater

degree at Melbourne’s Victorian College of the Arts in 2017, scored an agent through a graduate showcase, and will next appear in the Aussie TV miniseries “New Gold Mountain.” Here, Leach chats about the film, hookup apps and the status of that sequin shirt.

The film’s been called a “coming-of-age thriller.” Do you agree with that description?

Yeah, I think that’s pretty accurate. In the end it’s a film about someone trying to find their way out of loneliness. In that way, it’s “coming-of-gay.” It’s funny, because we filmed so much material that didn’t make it to the final cut that made it more of a drama. But seeing it for the first time I was shocked by how much of a genre film it is. It’s a thriller through and through and amazing to see a queer story told through those conventions.

Can you elaborate on the material that was cut out?

Sam cut out a whole storyline, actually, that aimed to give a little more context around the character. I remember he said he edited the film back to how it originally was in the first draft, which was a thriller, quick and fast, to shock the viewers. Some of the scenes that didn’t make it were beautiful and, in a way, it’s unfortunate they didn’t make it. But the final product, I think, is better for it.

Hello Blu-ray extras! How are you most like Sequin?

I struggle with this question, because I get asked how I relate to the character a lot, but I think part of acting is (thinking) nothing that this human (I’m playing) does is alien to me. If I was in these circumstances, I would do these things. But what I related to most was he just fears loneliness and a lot of us are afraid to admit that. I look back on who I was when I was 16, and I needed connection and love and we all still do, and I also wanted to appear strong and resilient. He wants to appear he has everything under control, and I definitely wanted to seem that way.

Conversely, how are you most unlike Sequin? Clearly you’re not as economical, shall we say, with your words!

Yeah, I was watching the film thinking, “Sequin just does not speak! Use your words!” I’d say I’m more of a rule abider. I don’t like to rock the boat. On the surface

I’m much more subservient to authority, and I can’t see myself doing anything as reckless as Sequin when I was 16.

I assume that means you weren’t trolling the apps during high school, either.

No. I was a goody-goody. I was a teacher’s pet! On the surface I was very different.

Why does Sequin cut people off, both the guys he hooks up with and even his own father, whom he keeps in the dark about what he’s up to despite the guy’s clear desire to love, understand and protect his son?

While we were shooting I developed a detailed backstory that shined a light on how Sequin became like this. I wanted to know what happened and what motivated his actions. I genuinely can’t remember too much now, but I think Sequin loves the power it gives him. The sense of being desired after the encounter. You see that in the scene with B, when B says, “I’d love to see you again,” and Sequin says, “I don’t really see people twice,” and B asks, “Is that everyone or just me?” Sequin gets off on that, and it’s exactly what he wants. The sense of power and control it gives him — the sense of power that’s been robbed of him in other aspects of his life, I guess.

I read that Sam had his own idea of Sequin’s backstory and you compared notes after shooting and they “differed wildly.”

Sam never actually talked to me in too much detail about his vision for the character’s past. My imagining of Sequin’s upbringing was quite different in terms of the amount of privilege he had, his relation with his mum, even what his real name is. He gave me that creative license. I remember explaining my ideas to him after the film and he was like, “Oh my goodness, I would have been worried if you expressed all this to me before the shoot!” But that’s all work the audience doesn’t need to see. That’s for the actor. So I was very thankful we didn’t need to speak of it during the shoot.

To prepare for the role, did you spend a lot of time on hookup apps or ask friends about their crazier app experiences?

Yeah, I definitely looked into it. Oh goodness me. I heard some absolute doozies.



Bad Romance

Healthy LTRs are great IRL. But in movies? Meh. As “Sequin” goes to show, some of the most irresistible, gripping and memorable LGBTQ+ flicks involve seriously fucked-up complications, manipulation and dysfunctional connections — from teens to 20-somethings to retirees. Here are five musts for your streaming watchlist:

THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY (1999)

When tasked with persuading a wealthy American family’s jazz-loving douchebag son, Dickie (Jude Law), to return home from Italy, queer con man — and burgeoning serial killer — Tom Ripley (Matt Damon) falls in love with him. Things don’t go well for the pair in this beautifully shot movie of Patricia Highsmith’s novel, which spawned four additional books and even more cinematic adaptations.

Where to Watch: Cinemax (or via Amazon Prime Cinemax Channel)

THE WITNESSES (2007)

A stunningly cute teenager from the French countryside, Manu (Johan Libereau) falls in with and causes rifts between a group of Parisian friends during the early 1980s. Among them: a 50-something

doctor, Adrien (Michel Blanc), who develops a major crush on Manu, and a married bisexual police inspector, Mehdi (Sami Bouajila of “The Adventures of Felix”), whom Manu secretly begins an affair with (which Adrien doesn’t like one bit). When the mysterious new illness AIDS enters the picture, things truly get complicated, fraught, and even deadly. A masterpiece.

Where to Watch: Amazon Prime’s Strand Releasing channel

IN THE HOUSE (2012)

One of the most entertaining, accessible works by French enfant terrible François Ozon sees a married high school teacher, Germain (Fabrice Luchini), become obsessed with a student, Claude (Ernst Umhauer), whose series of essays — which may or may not be true — involve stalking and seducing a fellow student (Bastien Ughetto) and his mother.

Where to Watch: iTunes, Amazon

STRANGER BY THE LAKE (2013)

At a remote French lake where gay men congregate and cruise, a 30-something (Pierre Deladonchamps) becomes fixated on a mustached hunk (Christophe Paou) he sees commit murder in this sexually explicit, Hitchcock-ian, slow-burn thriller.

Where to Watch: Shudder

TWILIGHT’S KISS (2019)

A closeted 70-year-old Hong Kong taxi driver (Tai-Bo) who cruises restrooms when not with his wife and family starts an affair with a fellow elderly father (Ben Yuen) in director Ray Yeung’s bittersweet romantic drama.

Where to Watch: iTunes, Vudu

Would you be amused to learn that someone had a profile with your photo and Sequin’s name on Grindr now?

(Laughs.) Power to them. You do you.

You’re wearing a nice ochre-toned sweater today, Conor, but I’ve got to ask: Where’s the sequin shirt, and do you ever pull it out on occasion?

I did not keep it. Sam kept it and lost it — for a little while, it went missing — but it was so smelly and rancid. I cannot stress enough: It was rank, because it couldn’t be washed! It was meticulously sequined and lined; it was so stinky. But Sam keeps it hidden away so people don’t convulse, I guess!

Sequin gave off a mermaid vibe, almost, by wearing that shirt. And there’s even a bit where B discovers one of its “scales” left behind on the bed. What was the intent?

It’s kind of an abstract choice that asks the audience to have their own associations and resonances. I very much developed my own backstory of how he might have come across this shirt or made it, but I don’t think

I regarded it in quite that abstract associative way. They had it made for the film, though. It was still being finished on day one of the shoot! It took ages!

Has the film caused any controversy in Australia because the character is 16 and already has a prolific sex life? After all, the country has seen waves of moral panic about teenage sexuality over the years, notably some specifically over the work of acclaimed photographer Bill Henson.

I don’t think it’s caused controversy. I know there are people in Australia who wouldn’t like it. But we’ve been thrilled with the response it’s had in Australia. The conversations it’s started are amazing. Festival screenings are incredible. When I read the script, I thought, “I haven’t read something this bold and ambitious, let alone in Australia.” There’s still deep, deep conservatism here, so I’m very proud of how the film addressed something that needs to be addressed.

“Sequin in a Blue Room” is available to stream on Amazon Prime.



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→ Affirmations

Continued from page 15

gain control over a mental health disorder. So, while I was touring the center with John Joannette, director of development, many times I thought, "Joz would've felt comforted here."

My thoughts went back and forth between my sister and the present moment, wherein I grasped Affirmations' rich history and new programs. Dedicated to their mission to "provide a welcoming space where people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and cultures can find support and unconditional acceptance, and where they can learn, grow, socialize and feel safe," Affirmations continues to grow to fit its community's needs.

So, when the center was forced to shutdown due to COVID-19, it was an uncertain time for many.

"When we shut down, I didn't know what to expect," reflects Dave Garcia, executive director.

"I thought, 'I'm going to have to lay off some staff.' Nobody knew. I mean, how do you run a community center without the doors open?"

As expected, the center and staff adapted.

"We shifted everything online," Garcia continues. "Now we'll never go back to normal because we're reaching too many young people in rural areas, trans people from all over the country. Lots of our groups are going to be a hybrid — either face-to-face or online."

Now that the world is opening back up, the center's vast space is open to all. In fact, every floor of the center is utilized to help the community in some way.

Housed on the main level is a cafe and cyber cafe, which is completely free and open to those who don't otherwise have access to a computer or printer.

"We may be the LGBTQ+ community center, but we're really just a community center for all," Joannette explains. "Lots of our allies are always coming here for programs, and they can come in here to use our cyber center."

Next to the cafe is the gallery and tucked down the hall toward the back door exit is where The Ringwald Theatre is transforming an underutilized conference room into a theater.

"We're thrilled about our partnership with Affirmations," says Brandy Joe Plambeck, media director and co-founder.

Like many community theaters, when COVID hit, the Ringwald was forced to close. Their partnership with Affirmations came just in time, says Plambeck.

"This is going to be our new home, so we're outfitting it slowly but surely," he continues. "We put some lights up and transformed the space."

As I continue on my tour, I move on to the center's basement, which provides many family and personal resources, including a rec room

filled with a pool, air hockey and more.

Further down the hall, through a vast, empty space is the STI/HIV testing facility. As we walked through, Joannette revealed the center's plans to use the empty space to expand their behavioral health offerings.

"We're talking about renovating this space into a medical suite for primary care, so you'll be able to come and get all your mental and physical needs taken care of all under one roof," he explains. "[It will be] a safe space with compassionate and accurate medical care for



Photo: Andrew Potter

our community."

My final walk-through concludes on the second floor, where the majority of Affirmations' meeting rooms and office spaces live. There, they host Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Sex Anonymous meetings for the community — important resources for many of their recovering patrons.

"I come here every week, twice a week — once to volunteer, once to lead a recovery group called Smart Recovery at 10 a.m.," says Todd Smit, a volunteer. "Smart Recovery is helping people to recover from any type of behavior. There are all sorts of folks in the meeting, and it's a cognitive behavioral approach, an alternative to traditional approaches."

Along with the theater opportunities, behavioral health resources and new in-person and online programs, Affirmations has also added a Sunday church service led by Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit (MCC-D).

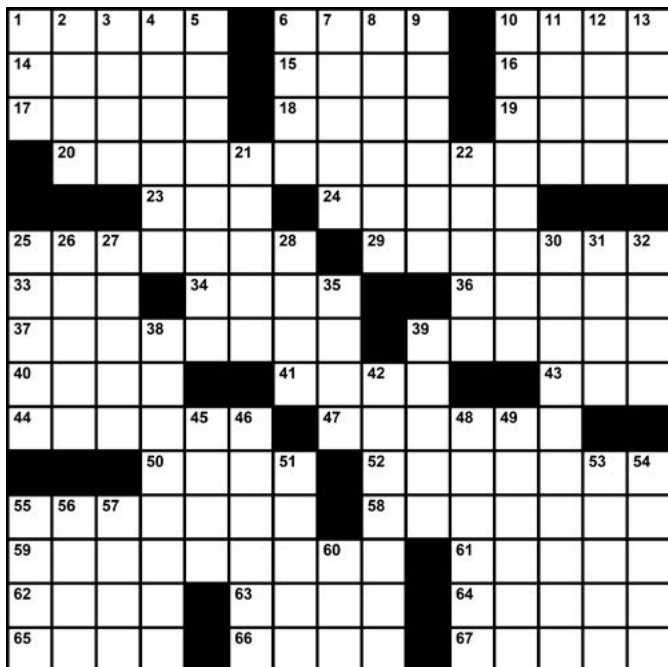
Affirmations community center is a true beacon of hope.

"Having this open means so much to the community," says Jennifer Johnson, a board member. "We just need to have this space for all of our intersections to come together."

While wrapping up my time at the center, it's Johnson's final few comments about her deceased brother who was also transgender and Black that brings me back to my sister.

As we finish our conversation about the center's programs, she says she wishes her brother had known about Affirmations because "they would've known that there's a space for them."

Again, I think of my sister. And I couldn't agree more.



- 34 Words between "Oscar" and "Renta"
 36 Sounds like the Lion King
 37 Character played by 20-Across
 39 Some poplars
 40 "___ Little Kindness"
 41 Thailand, formerly
 43 In an excited state, perhaps
 44 Eyed impolitely
 47 Stop the flow of
 50 Souls, to Foucault
 52 Michelangelo, for one
 55 Place where you can get a boner?
 58 He sang Cole Porter's "Night and Day"
 59 NBC comedy-drama about 3 moms
 61 Used stopwatches
 62 Material for a drag queen
 63 Debussy's deity
 64 Tape over a video
 65 Barely made, with "out"
 66 Make less difficult to bear
 67 Lord of La Mancha
- 8 Results of nongay sex
 9 Waterway for heteros?
 10 Bit of precipitation
 11 Soprano Gluck
 12 Fruit homophone of a couple
 13 Tickle pink
 21 Take out, perhaps
 22 Singer Holly and family
 25 You have them in the hole
 26 Turn inside out
 27 Patty Hearst's SLA name
 28 Some lodge members
 30 She plays Annie, mother of 37-Across
 31 Composer Thomas
 32 Oral attention getter
 35 Label on a lemon that's not a fruit
 38 Went raiding
 39 Valuable strings
 42 Up for debate
 45 Web info source
 46 Abuse orally
 48 City on the Loire
 49 Danes of "My So-Called Life"
 51 Lebanon neighbor
 53 Joe Cocker's "You ___ Beautiful"
 54 George of "Robot Monsters"
 55 Stare at
 56 Long bath
 57 Those who like it hot
 60 "___ Miz"

Trans-cendent Values

Across

- 1 "___ Song Trilogy"
 6 Hunter and namesakes
 10 Emulates Eminem
 14 Words after "The end of"
 15 Do a nocturnal activity
 16 Toward shelter
 17 Three-masted vessel

- 18 Singer Vikki
 19 Bowie married her
 20 Trans actor who plays a trans teen on 59-Across
 23 No. in a little black book
 24 Drew back
 25 Thaw with Nureyev's land
 29 Guide for Commander D'Acy
 33 Madonna's Peron role

Down

- 1 Take a toll on
 2 R.E.M.'s "The ___ Love"
 3 Stonewall Jackson's troops
 4 Dream up
 5 Estate for Frida
 6 Stage crew worker, briefly
 7 Stock up on

See p. 14 for answers

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Keyuna Nance, MSW

There is a difference. We're a patient-friendly Private Practice small enough to individualize care by a staff that knows you and large enough to manage all of your Primary Care Needs.

- HIV Prevention (PrEP), Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), STI testing & treatment
- Hormone Affirming Therapy for HIV positive and negative transgender individuals
- Evening Clinic Hours Monday-Thursday, most Saturdays, and Same Day Appointments
- Full-time Patient Navigator/Advocate Social Worker on site
- Most Insurances accepted
- Ryan White Provider
- Medcart Pharmacy on Premises
- Group Medical Appointments (available soon!)
- Tele-Medical Visits (available soon!)