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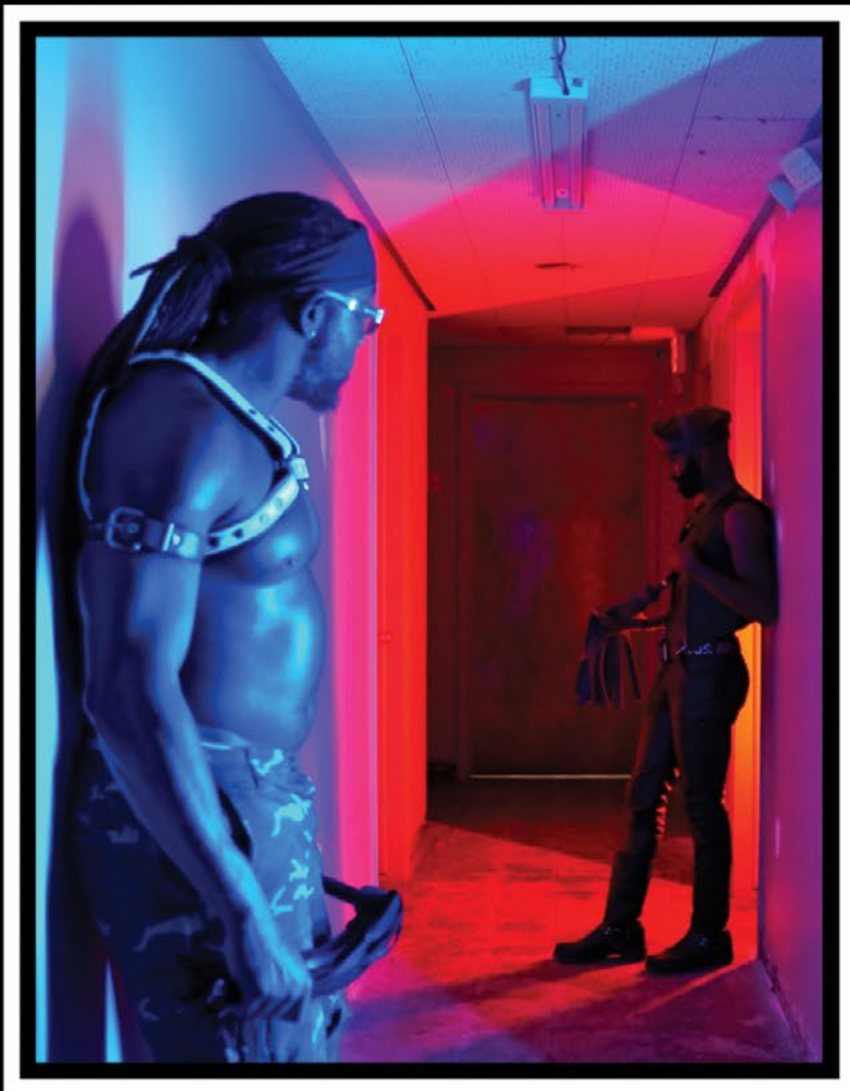
Night

A New Queer-Created Exhibit in
Ann Arbor Celebrates the Rich
History of Drag Elders
By D'Anne Witkowski

NEW QUEER CINEMA
It Paved the Way for
LGBTQ+ Films, But at
What Cost?

OUT OF THE CLOSET A JOB
Why Mohamed Abdou
Is Suing a
Michigan School

'SCREAM' IS QUEER
And Here's Why,
According to Gay Creator
and Neve Campbell



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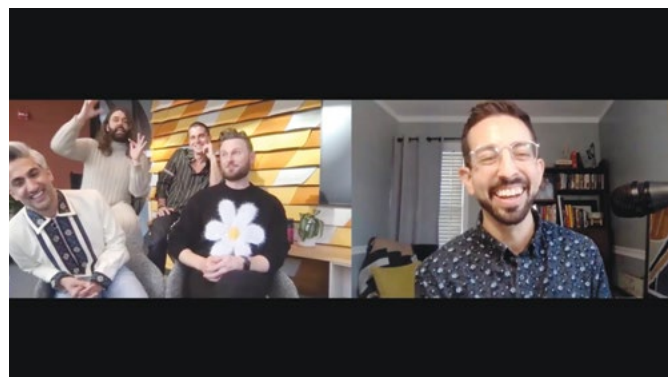


8 COVER STORY

Photo: James Hosking

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Find Pride Source on YouTube to check out all of our latest videos, including new interviews with the "Queer Eye" cast, Neve Campbell and "Somebody Somewhere" star Bridget Everett.



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY JACKIE JONES

Here's to a new year and a new COVID strain! Right? Of course, an ongoing pandemic is not ideal, but it's not going to halt our joy.

You'll find plenty of safe and virtual events to keep the good times going, from a six-time Tony award-winning musical to a virtual support group focused on healing. Keep these five queer-friendly events on your radar.

Experience Disney's 'The Lion King' at The Opera House

Explore "the circle of life" in this six-time Tony award-winning musical. For a limited run, Disney Theatrical Productions and Broadway In Detroit bring "The Lion King" to the Detroit Opera House. Jan. 27 to Feb. 20, experience the musical adaptation of the 1994 Disney classic. Watch as Simba, a young lion prince who must come to terms with his past, navigates through growing pains. In an excerpt from the book "The Lion King: Pride Rock on Broadway," Julie Taymor, the original musical director, said that the stage format adds time to "deepen" Simba's character while also highlighting his "arduous path" to self-discovery. A negative COVID-19 test or proof of vaccination is required for entrance.

Visit [Broadway in Detroit's website](#) for more information.

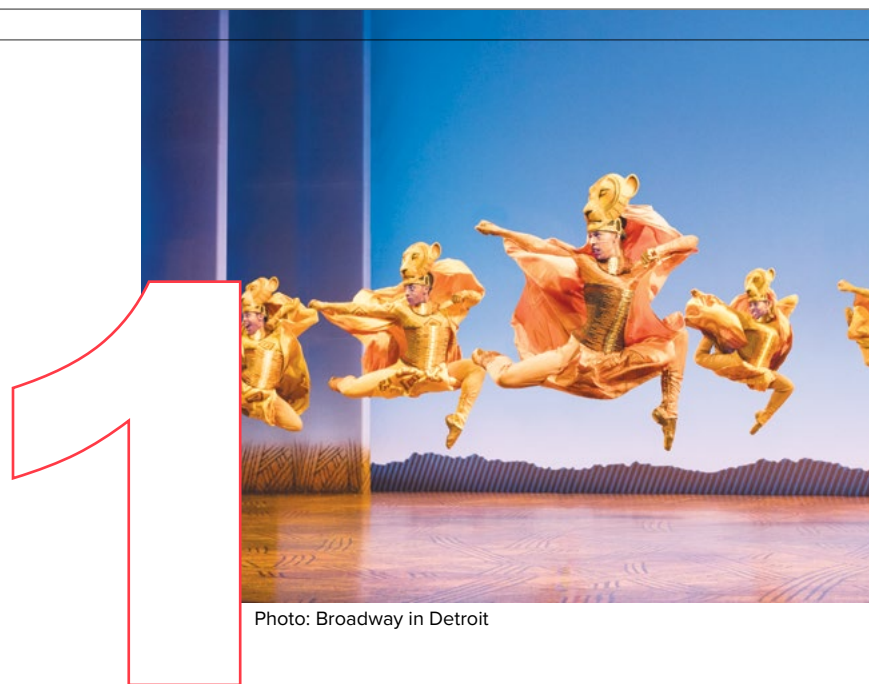


Photo: Broadway in Detroit



Photo: Sidney de Almeida

Heal from Religious or Spiritual Trauma

Ditch the archaic practices, step out of your compromising religious shackles, and embrace a safe LGBTQ+ space. Affirmations' weekly recurring group Healing from Religious and Spiritual Trauma is a virtual meetup for LGBTQ+ individuals navigating their spiritual and religious journeys. Brenden Bell, the group's facilitator, spent most of his life in ministry and decided to start this group after his religious path started to "feel damaging." "I felt like for myself, when I was coming out, there weren't a lot of spaces or resources for queer people struggling with their religious identity," he said. "[I wanted] to provide a space to process it all."

The virtual support group meets from 6:30-7:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Email bbell@GoAffirmations.org for the link.



Photo: Rob Meyer-Kukan

Soothe Yourself With Art and Sound Healing

As we look ahead to a potential third year of living through a pandemic, it's impossible not to feel some stress. Take time to focus in and decompress with the serene hymns of a singing bowl and art at the Ann Arbor event, Art and Sound Healing. Whitepine Studios and 7 Notes Natural Health, an LGBTQ-owned sound studio, have partnered to bring a meditative approach to group painting. "Art and Sound is sort of a meditative focus on paint and pours [that] deepens [the art and sound] practice," said Rob Meyer-Kukan, owner of 7 Notes Natural Health. Kaili Dence, creative director and co-owner of Whitepine Studios, will lead the group in painting while Meyer-Kukan delivers soothing sounds from his singing bowls.

The event runs 7-8:30 p.m. on Jan. 22. Go to [Whitepine Studio's website](#) to register.



Photo: YouTube

Watch Freeform's 'Single Drunk Female'

Living is a trip. Freeform's "Single Drunk Female" reminds us of the nuisances and messiness of being human. After an embarrassing drunk scene at her job — a New York media company — alcoholic 20-something Samantha Fink, played by Sofia Black-D'Elia, is forced to sober up to avoid jail. Out actress Rebecca Henderson plays Olivia, an out lesbian, who crosses paths with Fink at their AA meetings.

Back-to-back episodes premiere on Jan. 20 on Freeform and are available to stream starting Jan. 21 on Hulu.

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5



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Champion for Women at Ellen Rowe's DIA Performance

A night of serenading for women — and only women. What's not to love? For the Detroit Institute of Arts' weekly event, Friday Night Live, jazz pianist Ellen Rowe will be delivering her compelling album "Momentum — Portraits of Women in Music." Attendees can indulge in original music rendered by eight women jazz artists. The night and project will honor female trailblazers in various fields that have inspired Rowe in multiple mediums such as jazz, politics, social justice, environmental advocacy and sports.

Rowe's performance starts at 7 p.m. on Jan 28. Go to DIA's website for more information.

Due to Omicron and the recent surge of Covid cases, events are more likely to be postponed and canceled last-minute. Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.



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(Subject: Stomp)



(Top) Olivia Hart, on her way to Aunt Charlie's Lounge in San Francisco. (Below) Hart gets ready at home. Photos: James Hosking

A New Queer-Created Exhibit in Ann Arbor Celebrates the Rich History of Drag Elders

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

It took Donna Personna a long time to get up the nerve to put on a dress.

"It took me 59 years to have the bravery to be who I really feel that I am: a female, a woman, a girl," she tells BTL by phone from her home in San Francisco.

What held her back was a fear of embarrassing her family and a longing for a "normal" life. "My father was a Baptist minister in San Jose and I didn't want to bring that to the family," Personna says. She was also singled out at school. "I was bullied. I was teased relentlessly, given a bad time by people and it was scary," she recalls.

"In school, the authorities took me aside and had me speak to mental health people and I didn't ask for that," she adds. It led her to the conclusion that "the world already sees that there's something 'wrong' with me. And I

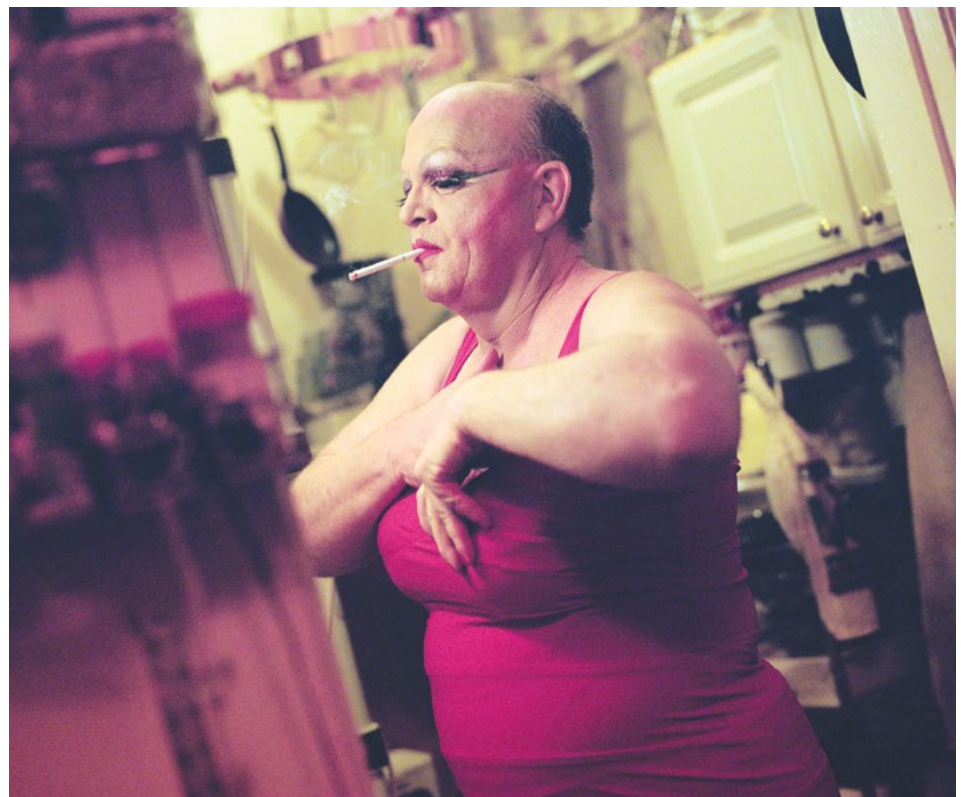
didn't want to make things worse for myself."

But today, at 75 years old, Donna Personna doesn't care what you think of her. Because the drag performer and transgender activist is living her best life. "I donned a dress and I never took it off," she says. "And actually, my name spun from that: Donna. I donned a personality. I put something on and it went from there."

Not only has she embraced her identity as a woman, but she also takes great joy in drag performance. "It's exciting; oh, I just love it, she says. "It's like a drug for me now, I guess."

Enter James Hosking, who lived in San Francisco for nine years. The photographer and filmmaker saw Personna perform at Aunt Charlie's, the last LGBTQ+ bar in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. "Her confidence is inspiring to me," Hosking tells BTL from his home in Chicago.

Personna and two other mainstays at Aunt



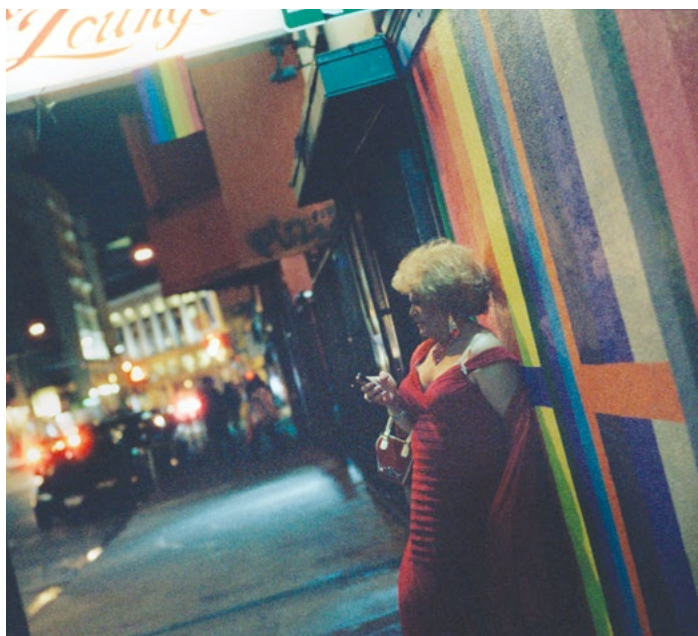
Charlie's, Olivia Hart and Collette LeGrande, are at the center of Hosking's multimedia project "Beautiful By Night," which features photography and a short documentary film. "The focus of the series kind of took shape over time of being about older drag queens," Hosking says. "I really gravitated toward their personalities and how they photograph and their outlook on life."

"['Beautiful By Night'] is also about labor and repetition and finding beauty," Hosking says. The film focuses on the act of transformation, the work that goes into drag, because there is so much more to it than what audience members see on stage. The film shows the protagonists in their homes applying makeup and getting dressed, we follow them to Aunt Charlie's and see them put on their finishing touches in a cramped backstage area, we watch them perform, and then we watch them return home. Much of it is not glamorous.

And yet: "They keep a sense of joy and excitement in it and there's something that pushes them to continue," Hosking says. "The confidence that all of them have is intoxicating and inspirational. I think we see that in the film in how they make their way in the world and how they interact with people."

"Drag completes me," Hart tells BTL by phone from her San Francisco home as she gets ready for a show. "I used to be a very shy person until I put a dress on and then I realized I don't have to be shy when I'm dressed as a boy, either." Hart says that she loves entertaining and "being able to make people laugh, or cry if they want to."

Hart describes Aunt Charlie's as a "good old fashioned hometown dive bar where everybody knows your



Olivia Hart stands outside Aunt Charlie's Lounge in San Francisco. Photo: James Hosking

name." "To me it's all about making people feel alive and happy," she says. "They paid \$5 to get into the joint, I want them to leave having a good time."

Amanda Krugliak, arts curator at the University of Michigan's Institute for the Humanities Gallery, used to live in San Francisco and knew of Aunt Charlie's. She is excited to bring "Beautiful By Night" to

See **James Hosking**, page 20



Donna Personna at home. Photo: James Hosking

Oh, honey...

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Lead support for *Oh, honey...* is provided by Alan Hergott and Curt Shepard and the University of Michigan Office of the Provost.

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Mohamed Abdou alleges he was fired from his job because he's gay. Photos courtesy of Mohamed Abdou

Michigan Teacher Who Claims He Was Fired for Being Gay Files Complaint with EEOC

ESL Coach Mohamed Abdou: 'I Tried to Work So Hard Not to Give Them a Reason'

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

When Mohamed Abdou was on the airplane taking a one-way flight from Egypt to the United States, he had a vision of what his future here might look like: "In six years I would find a boyfriend and start a family and have a little kid," he tells BTL via phone from his home in Hamtramck.

Though Abdou has been in Michigan for six years, that vision has yet to pan out. Where he finds himself instead is out of a job. He

was fired for being gay, he alleges, and filed a charge of discrimination with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Abdou, 33, was fired last year from Caniff Liberty Academy on Oct. 29, his birthday. He worked at the academy as an English as a Second Language (ESL) coach.

In a termination letter dated Oct. 29, 2021 and signed by Dr. Cory J. Merante, the Human Resources Manager for Education Management and Networks (EMAN), Merante

writes that reasons for Abdou's firing include "inappropriate language in front of students" and "inappropriate images on your phone seen by students."

Abdou denies these claims. Instead, he says, he believes he was fired for being gay.

A call to EMAN found that Merante no longer works at the EMAN office, but does work for Caniff Liberty Academy. Attempts to reach Merante were unsuccessful. A phone call and email to the Office of Public School Academies for comment were not returned by press time.

Abdou was initially hired to teach at Oakland International Academy, which, like Caniff Liberty, is an EMAN school, in January 2020. He says the OIA was initially pleased with his work and work ethic and renewed his contract. The following year, however, the school hired a new teacher who, Abdou says, told others at the school that she suspected Abdou was gay. He does not believe that this teacher was trying to get him in trouble or get him fired. However, once the rumor started to spread, Abdou says he felt a change among his coworkers.

Abdou says that "school employees started treating me in a different way" and that people questioned him about his position on homosexuality. After being subjected to similar lines of questioning when he lived in Egypt, he says, "I just don't want to answer those questions anymore."

Abdou left Egypt because gays there are persecuted and tortured. As a part of mandatory military service for men beginning at 18 years of age, Abdou says he was subjected to "anal virginity tests," a practice that has no medical basis but is used to weed out and intimidate homosexuals. While Abdou officially came to the U.S. to study at Wayne State University, he applied for and received asylum.

And so he answered truthfully: "I just told them that it's OK to be gay. What's wrong with that?"

Once he began noticing a pattern of his coworkers treating him differently, he says he approached the school principal. Although the principal seemed sympathetic, Abdou says he was discouraged from filing a complaint with EMAN. Over the summer, that principal left and was replaced by Mohamed Elnatour, a less sympathetic figure, Abdou says.

The advice that he got from Elnatour was "try to be professional" and "try not to give anybody a reason to say something" about Abdou being gay. Abdou claims he was told "how bad I am," that "you need to change who you are" and that he was a poor role model for kids.

"He didn't like the way I dress," Abdou says. "The little gay touch in the colors maybe. He told me you've got to change the way you dress. I've been dressing this way for a year and a half and nobody told me anything."

"The only thing I could do is file a complaint with HR," Abdou says, adding that he felt like he was in danger of losing his job. A meeting with Merante from HR, Abdou says, led to a misconduct notice about talking politics at work, something Abdou denies aside from

when someone from the school "quizzed him" about the Quran. "I didn't even answer his questions," Abdou says.

Abdou says that Merante told him, "We have complaints from other teachers that you're a problem here so we're going to move you to Caniff Liberty Academy in Hamtramck."

The principal at Caniff Liberty, Abdou says, "gave me a very disrespectful, icy treatment." "He didn't really get to know me or work with me or see what I can bring to Caniff," Abdou says. "He knew, and I knew that it was a matter of days" before Abdou would likely be let go.

"I tried to work so hard not to give them a reason [to fire me]," he says. Abdou worked at OIA for 18 months and CLA for only 50 days.

The EMAN employee handbook states that employees must report discrimination "that employee believes does or may constitute harassment or discrimination of any nature, including but not limited to sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, age discrimination, racial discrimination, religious discrimination or any other discrimination."

"EMAN harassed and ultimately terminated Mohamed due to his sexual orientation," says Jack W. Schulz, Abdou's lawyer. "Federal law protects LGBT individuals from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. In short, [EMAN] harassed and terminated Mohamed



solely because he is gay. Their bigotry is unlawful."

Schulz, who is based in Detroit, was referred to Abdou's case by a colleague.

"Shockingly, the issue of whether or not an employer can legally terminate an individual due to their sexual orientation was unsettled until last year," Schulz continues. "In the 2021 Bostock case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Title VII covered sexual orientation and, therefore, it is unlawful to discriminate against an employee based exclusively on their sexual orientation. Phrased differently, as of last year, federal law now protects LGBT individuals from discrimination by private and public employers."

Currently Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act does not protect LGBTQ+ employees from discrimination. However, there is a case pending in the Michigan Supreme Court regarding this issue. Schulz says a decision is likely later this year.

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New LGBTQ+ Cryptocurrency Announced, Met With Mixed Reactions

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Is a new cryptocurrency benefiting the LGBTQ+ community as intended, or is the initiative doomed to fail thanks to an ill-conceived name choice?

“Maricoïn,” the first cryptocurrency specifically targeted toward LGBTQ+ investors shares a similar name to an anti-gay Spanish pejorative (maricón). The similarity is eliciting mixed reactions.

In a story for TheStreet, University of Massachusetts Amherst economics professor Lee Badgett said, “LGBTQ+ activists have figured out how to harness the economic power of LGBTQ+ workers and consumers in many other ways using standard government-issued currencies.” Badgett added, “It’s not obvious to me what this new cryptocurrency adds beyond providing a new opportunity to talk about

constantly discriminated and oppressed by #capitalism?” he asked.

Inarguably, the LGBTQ+ community has buying power. According to a 2018 study by Kantar Consulting and Hornet, it is estimated that the LGBTQ+ community’s buying power in the U.S. is \$1 trillion — nearly equal to that of African-American or Hispanic people.

Francisco Alvarez, CEO of Miami-based Borderless Capital, which is backing the venture, told Openly, an LGBT+ world news source, that 8,000 people were on a waiting list to buy Maricoïns before the currency even started trading. The plan is that the LGBTQ+ cryptocurrency will be accepted at businesses such as restaurants and shops and hotels.

To be able to accept Maricoïn, the businesses will have to sign an “equality manifesto” defending the right of LGBTQ+ people “and everyone suffering from exclusion.”

“The establishments that accept our coin will be listed on our map, which will work as an LGBTQ+ guide for anyone visiting any city in the world,” Alvarez said. “If they violate any of the points of our anti-discrimination manifesto, for example, if they fire a pregnant woman because of her pregnancy, they will be expelled from Maricoïn.”

The benefits to the LGBTQ+ community, said Alvarez, will be global.

“We’ll be able to give microcredits for people to set up a small LGBTQ-friendly cafe in Colombia

or to support projects helping queer refugees flee countries where they’d be stoned to death,” he said. “We’re looking forward to changing the world.”

Maricoïn co-founder Juan Belmonte told TheStreet.com that the idea for the LGBTQ+ cryptocurrency came up at a Pride party in Madrid last July.

“Since we move this economy, why shouldn’t our community profit from it, instead of banks, insurance companies or big corporations that often don’t help LGBTQ+ people?” Belmonte told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.



the importance of economic inclusion for LGBTQ+ people.”

But Badgett, author of “The Economic Case for LGBT Equality: Why Fair and Equal Treatment Benefits Us All,” said that the name isn’t necessarily problematic as the LGBTQ+ community has reclaimed homophobic slurs before. “[That’s] where ‘queer’ and ‘dyke’ came from, for example, and many LGBTQ+ people now use those terms,” he said.

But across social media, opinions vary. One Twitter user, Diogo Pereira, posed the following question:

“Can a form of advanced capitalism such as #cryptocurrency actually help [marginalized] communities that are



Ferndale Pride, Ferndale Community Foundation Announce \$24,000 in New Grant Awards

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Several local organizations will benefit from recently announced grants issued by Ferndale Pride (FP) and Ferndale Community Foundation (FCF).

FP will award \$10,000 worth of grants to the following local LGBTQ+ organizations:

- Affirmations LGBTQ+ Community Center will receive \$4,000.
- Gender-identity Network Alliance, Matrix/MAC Health, TG Detroit and Transgender Michigan will receive \$1,500 each.

FCF will grant \$14,500 to three Ferndale-based organizations:

- Affirmations, Ferndale Housing Commission and FernCare Free Clinic will receive \$3,000.
- The Ringwald Theatre and Ferndale Seniors will receive \$2,000.
- Southeast Oakland Coalition will receive \$1,500.

“When we started Pride in 2011, the plan was to give back to nonprofits every year,” FP Executive Director Julia Music told BTL.

Music said when the pandemic started she didn’t think they would be able to fully complete that mission, but even a pandemic can’t keep LGBTQ+ Pride down for long. “It’s wild to think that we were able to donate a record-breaking amount this year given all of the constraints put on us that were far out of our control,” she said. Music explained that the organization “got creative and found ways to stick to the promises” they made to the community.

“Ferndale really comes together from sponsors like the Candle Wick Shoppe, LIV Cannabis and Green Buddah to folks donating to online and in-person fundraisers,” Music said. “Ferndale Pride was able to accomplish its goal. We look forward to being able to continue the momentum and legacy of Ferndale Pride.”

The presentation of grants will take place at the Jan. 24th Ferndale City Council meeting at 7 p.m. at Ferndale City Hall.

This year’s Ferndale Pride, the 12th annual, is scheduled for June 4, 2022.

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The New Queer Cinema Movement Paved the Way for Today's Mainstream LGBTQ+ Films. *But at What Cost?*



Nathan Lane and Robin Williams in "The Birdcage." Photo: Metro Goldwyn Mayer

Says U-M Professor: 'You Sacrifice Something With a 'Love, Simon''

BY GEORGE ELKIND

"We're not like them," says one man to another, laying atop him on a dirty roadside. "We don't have as much time — so we've got to grab life by the balls and go for it."

The top in question is Luke (played by Mike Dytri), an erratic, roving drifter, pressing Jon (Craig Gilmore), newly diagnosed as HIV-positive, to stop daydreaming of any kind of normalcy or broad acceptance. The film is Gregg Araki's cynical, sharp-edged romance "The Living End," which played Sundance, currently in its 44th year, in 1992.

As part of the New Queer Cinema, more a bright moment born of shared circumstances than a movement conceived deliberately, Araki's film played alongside works by Derek Jarman ("Edward II"), Todd Haynes ("Poison") and Tom Kalin ("Swoon") at Sundance that year. Enabled both by the success of Jennie Livingston's "Paris Is Burning" there the year

before and by the new availability of cheap, consumer-grade equipment, these works responded to the violence of the Reagan era and especially the AIDS crisis, with barbed, subversive visions of queer political identity. Whether working in fiction or in documentary, set in America or outside it, the filmmakers pressed ideas of queer experience that hinged on embracing a shared, de facto outsider status with a sense of relish that's been all too rare in the years since.

According to Hollis Griffin, an associate professor at the University of Michigan in Communication and Media, Sundance helped — as a leader in a blossoming field of film festivals increasingly hospitable to queer work — to give the films it screened a form of credibility that didn't negate the rebel status they held at that time.

"I think it legitimized [New Queer Cinema] in certain ways. Insofar as Sundance is obviously a major player," says Griffin of the festival and

arthouse film circuit. "It gave New Queer Cinema an exhibition space and an audience that it would not, or might not, have found otherwise."

Riding a wave of independent productions flowing from the surprise success of works like "Sex, Lies, and Videotape" in the late '80s, film festivals then helped bring independent — and at times subversive, confrontational — works into public view. In the case of New Queer Cinema (a term coined by the scholar and critic B. Ruby Rich in *The Village Voice*), this meant exposing them to a new, wider and not solely queer audience, a function different from that of explicitly queer film festivals. This all happened at a time when a home video market existed as more than just a niche, when underground and arthouse cinemas could still have genuine hits, and film held a more central place in global culture than it does today. These realities broadened the number of ways that low-budget work could gain commercial footing. In this

climate, a wave of queer filmmakers largely disinterested in profit acted with a sense of uncommon abandon, resulting in more creative, fiercely personal work.

"In the '90s, we were more sort of experimental and weren't really thinking about things like: 'Oh, this movie is going to be a stepping stone to my Hollywood career.' It was more like, 'This is the movie I want to make and I don't care if it makes any money or anything.' For me, that's the kind of filmmaking I like; that's what I still do," says Todd Verow, whose oft-protested adaptation of Dennis Cooper's "Frisk" played at Frameline and Sundance a few years later. Since that time, he's worked under the aegis of his own production company, the New York-based Bangor Films.

But in the case of New Queer Cinema, this disinterest in a market (even as it gained one) proved aesthetically freeing. When Luke, Araki's drifter in "The Living End," says "I don't care about anything anymore" or waves a gun around, it's not just posturing, even if the feeling may pass. His sentiments are voiced from a place outside the bounds of mainstream society, requiring an acceptance of a kind of precarity mandated from the highest levels of power in the world on down. This kind of existential recklessness born of circumstance colors a hearty portion of this work, and with good reason; for Araki's peers Marlon Riggs and Derek Jarman, the AIDS crisis ended both their lives and careers, and such specters hung over the movement as a whole.

"I think it was about an urgency to make work and to not conform or try to get money to do it, just to use whatever means you have available and make the work that you want to make," recalls Verow of working at that time. "It was about not making compromises for a mainstream audience or a straight audience, or you know,



See *New Queer Cinema*, page 19



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Censoring the Censors

How You Can Fight Back Against Conservative Attacks on Inclusive Books Across the Country

BY DANA RUDOLPH



Preschooler Heather is no stranger to opposition. Lesléa Newman's 1989 "Heather Has Two Mommies," the first picture book to depict happily coupled same-sex parents and their child, faced opprobrium from conservatives since its publication. Now, the book is one of a record number of other books for children and teens, largely focused on people with

marginalized identities that have been under attack across the country.

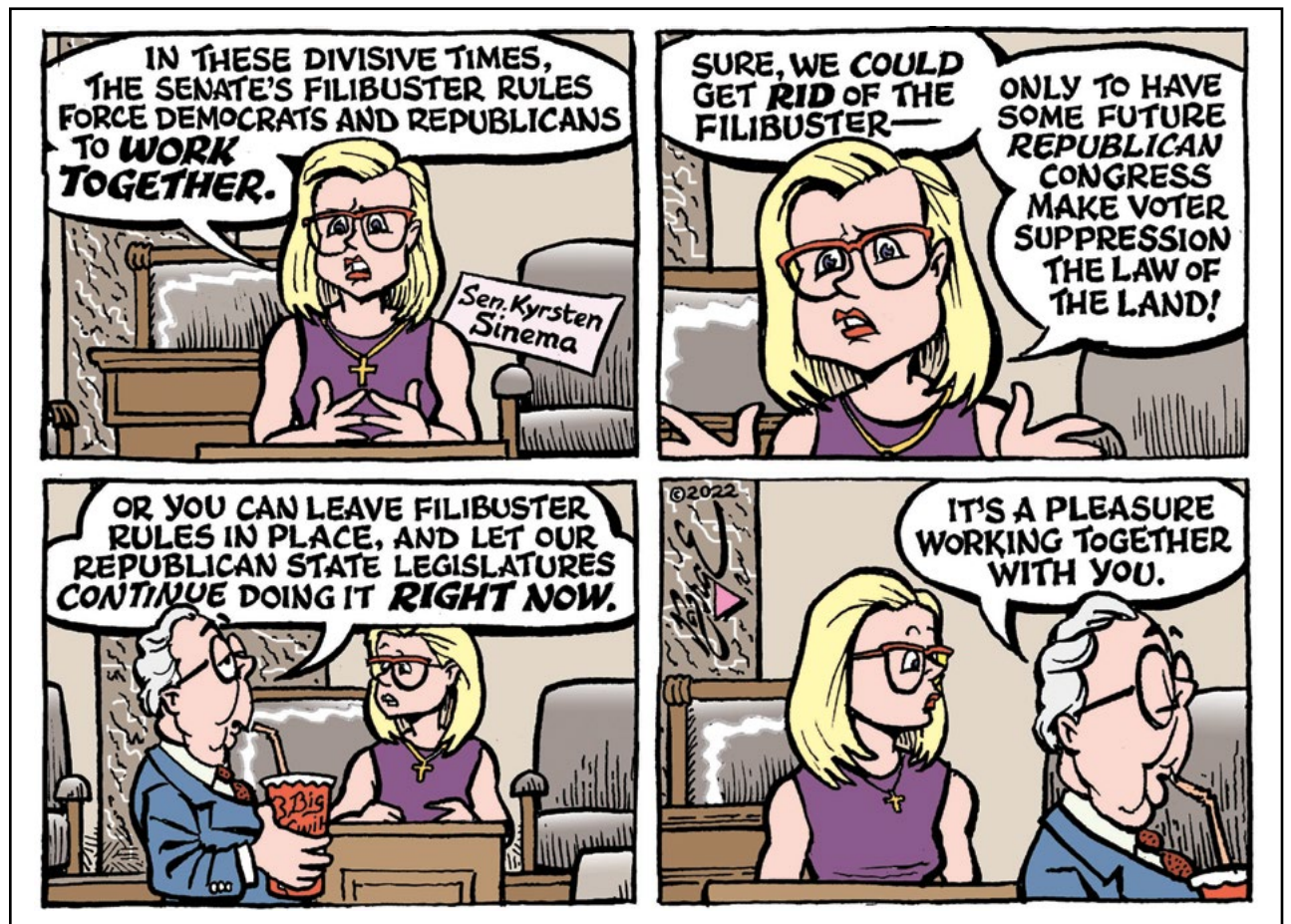
In 1992, "Heather" and Michael Willhoite's "Daddy's Roommate" (1990) were used as examples of "the militant homosexual agenda" by an Oregon group campaigning to allow anti-gay discrimination. The same year, both books were part of a proposed "Rainbow Curriculum" in New York City about respecting all types of families, but were removed in the face of hostility. "Heather" ultimately garnered a top-10 spot on the American Library Association's (ALA's) Most Frequently Challenged Books list for 1990-99. Most librarians supported it, though, Newman told me in a 2015 interview, and it mostly stayed on shelves.

Challenges continued, however. "Heather" was among the ALA's Top 100 Most Banned/Challenged Books for the decade 2010-2019, along with more than 20 other LGBTQ-inclusive children's and young adult (YA) books (which also spoke to the growth of the genre). And this past December, leaders of Pennsylvania's Pennridge School District removed "Heather" from all elementary school libraries. They also told school officials that all books about gender identity (which "Heather" doesn't explore) should be removed from shelves and placed in a separate area, only available to parents or guardians upon request, reported WHY.

This is only one of a rising number of efforts across the U.S. to ban or restrict children's and YA books with characters who are LGBTQ+ or people of color or that deal with topics like gender, race, and racial justice. "We've seen a three-fold increase in the number of daily book challenges being reported to ALA compared to the same period last year," the ALA tweeted on Dec. 30.

Private individuals and groups, sometimes backed by national organizations with long ties to anti-LGBTQ+ activism, have made these challenges, but so have elected officials.

Last October, Texas State Rep. Matt Krause (R) asked schools across the state to tell him whether they hold any of about



850 books that he is concerned "might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex." And South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster (R) in November asked the state superintendent of education to investigate "the presence of obscene and pornographic materials in public schools," triggered by parents in one district concerned about "Gender Queer: A Memoir," by Maia Kobabe, which has also seen bans or

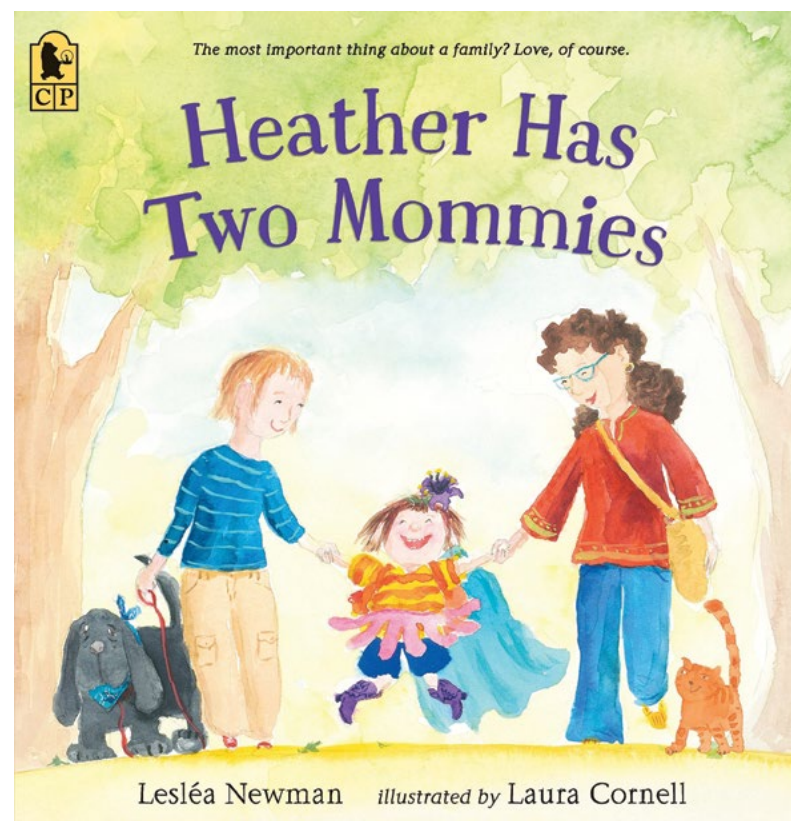
challenges in at least six other states. The book has the ALA's support, however; in 2020 it won the organization's Alex Award, given to books written for adults that have a "special appeal" to young adults.

Many people and organizations are pushing back against the wave of challenges. In December, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), an alliance of more than 50 national non-profits, released a statement with other LGBTQ, civil rights,

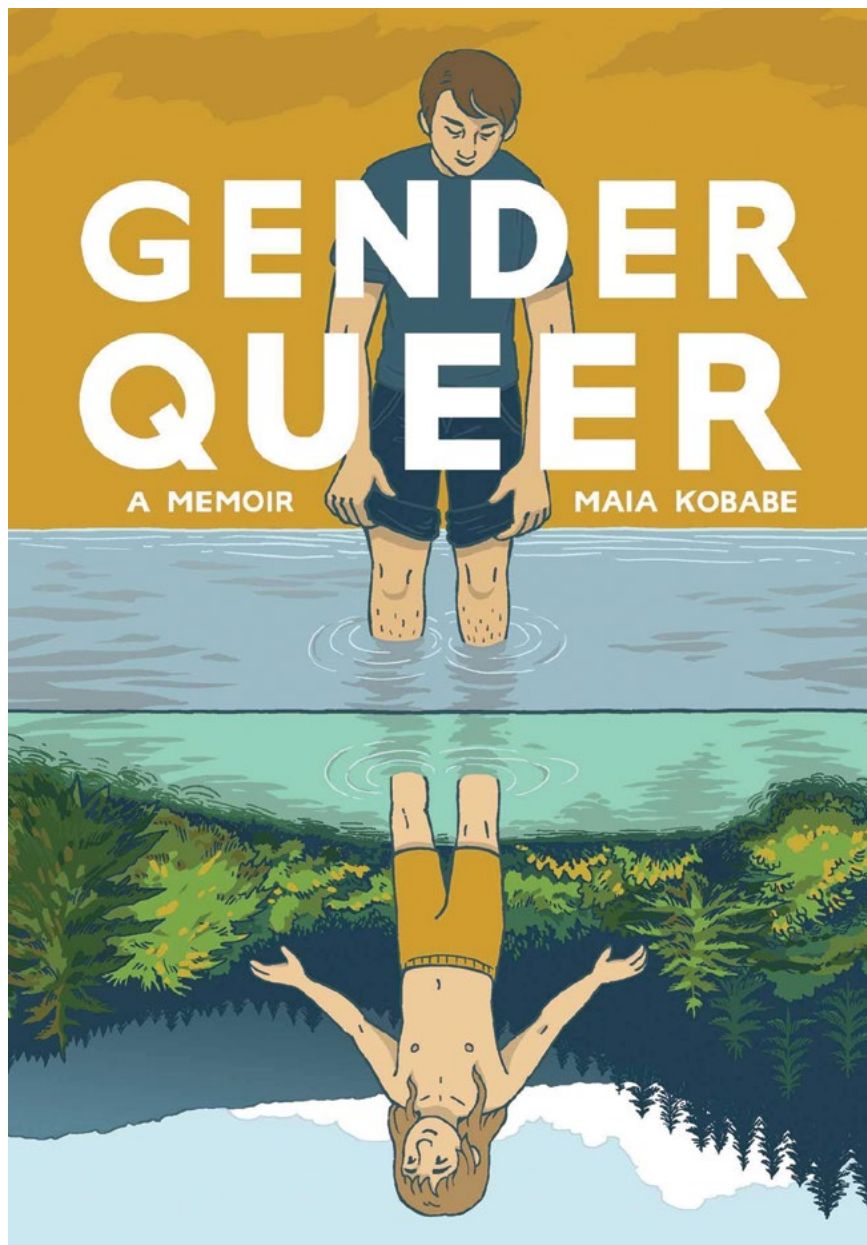
faith, literary and youth organizations, as well as major publishers, book agencies, independent bookstores, authors, teachers, librarians and others (including myself), condemning the "organized political attack on books in schools."

NCAC explains, "Libraries offer students the opportunity to encounter books and other material that they might otherwise never see and the freedom to make their own choices about what to read. Denying young people this freedom to explore—often on the basis of a single controversial passage cited out of context—will limit not only what they can learn but who they can become."

Banning or restricting books because of their characters' identities or experiences is akin to saying that people with those identities or experiences don't deserve a place in our communities. Diverse and inclusive books can help young people know they are not alone and guide them in navigating the situations and emotions they — or their peers — may be experiencing. Keeping such books in schools and libraries is vital, and in some cases lifesaving.



See **Book Ban**, next page



→ Book Ban

Continued from previous page

How can we help? This is a multi-pronged problem, but as a start:

- Confidentially report censorship that you see to the ALA and/or to NCAC
- Buy children's and YA books about LGBTQ+ and other marginalized people if your means allow, or borrow them from your local library (recommend them if they're not there); share about them on social media and leave reviews at online booksellers
- Participate in GLAAD's #BooksNotBans social media campaign
- Stay tuned in to your local politics and participate in city/town and school board meetings
- Vote in every election, including those that only include local issues and offices

Let us take heart, too, from "Heather's" resilience over 30 years and multiple

editions (most recently in 2015), and from the flourishing of the genre that she helped propel.

LGBTQ-inclusive books for young people of all ages now include characters across the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and their numbers, once a trickle, have skyrocketed since about 2017. Many have been honored for their literary merits as well as their inclusive content. Books about characters with other marginalized identities have similarly flourished despite obstacles. Opponents will, I hope, find it increasingly difficult to make compelling cases for their removal. That will in turn make it easier for all young people to feel that they belong.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, with a searchable database of 800+ LGBTQ family books, media, and more.

Creep Of The Week

During National Blood Shortage, FDA Still Calls Gay Blood Icky

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Are straight people OK? And before you answer, just let me say: No. No, they are not.

Case in point: I just read an article about how there is a national blood supply shortage and then minutes later came across an article about Machine Gun Kelly (MGK) and Megan Fox drinking each other's blood to celebrate their engagement. And apparently, Travis Barker and Kourtney Kardashian spent last year sharing sexual-innuendo-laden photos of blood vials on Instagram.

Am I saying that the blood shortage could somehow be alleviated if MGK and Fox donated instead of drank that blood? No. I mean, as far as I can tell MGK and Fox didn't drink THAT much. But, hey, donating together maybe could have been a nice gesture.

But you know who can't donate together? Pete and Chasten Buttigieg. And, no, not because they are too busy raising their baby twins (though "I'm too busy raising baby twins" is honestly a good excuse for just about anything and BY THE WAY we really need paid family leave in this country).

No, the Buttigiegs can't donate blood because they're gay. Wait? Is the ban on men who have sex with men (MSM) donating blood still a thing in the U.S.? Why, yes. Yes, it is.

And during a blood shortage, no less.

According to CBS news, this is the first time the Red Cross has declared the low level of blood on hand a national crisis. Their statement reads, "If the nation's blood supply does not stabilize soon, life-saving blood may not be available for some patients when it is needed." Yikes!

I don't know about you, but I'm much more comforted by the idea of bleeding out and dying than I am in receiving life-sustaining blood that came from a GAY.

Sadly, that twisted view is not hyperbole for some. And so, the ban on MSM blood remains.

According to ABC News, "The Food and Drug Administration bars people who have had sex with gay or bisexual men from donating blood for three months following the most recent sexual contact because of fears of HIV in the blood supply."

Granted, the ban isn't as strict as it used to be. It went from a total ban to a year of required abstention. The COVID-19

pandemic ushered in the three-month version in 2020.

Anyone who isn't a homophobic AIDS-panic weirdo understands that blood testing has come a long way since the ban was first enacted in 1983. For Pete's sake, Pete Buttigieg was born in 1982! We've come a long way, baby.

Which is why a group of 22 Democrats, including Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), have written a letter to the FDA saying, "Stop being bloody stupid."

"We write to express our alarm at the nationwide shortage of blood and blood products, which has placed patient care and safety at risk," the letter, which is dated Jan. 13, begins. "We urge the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to quickly act on the best available science and update its outdated and discriminatory blood donor deferral policies for men who have sex with men (MSM)."

But thankfully it's entirely within one's own control whether or not they have a catastrophic event, whether it's a car accident or a complication in the operating room, and most people will do the patriotic thing and say, "Not today, Bloodloss." All so we can keep a policy that protects no one.

"Any policy that continues to categorically single out the LGBTQ+ community is discriminatory and wrong," the letter continues. "Given advances in blood screening and safety technology, a time-based policy for gay and bisexual men is not scientifically sound, continues to effectively exclude an entire group of people, and does not meet the urgent demands of the moment."

Unfortunately, we've seen how receptive people in the U.S. are to things that are scientifically sound, not to mention meeting urgent demands in the moment. So I'm sure this whole MSM blood ban will get fixed right quick without anybody getting hurt.

But at least the Trump Administration isn't at the helm? Maybe there is hope?

I don't know. But in the meantime I have some bespoke artisan blood vials to sell out of the back of my minivan. It's for sale only to Internet celebrities who vow to use it only for completely self-obsessed purposes. As God intended.

Sir Apocalypse to Heat Up Cold As Hell



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Walter Houston loves listening to Motown music just like anyone who was born and raised in Detroit would. But when he's ready to play, you'll find him cranking up some Judas Priest, Kiss and Alice Cooper.

"When I'm playing, I have heavy metal or hard rock playing in the background," Houston says via phone to BTL. "It puts me in the head space, the adrenaline rush." It's a fitting soundtrack for a man known as Sir Apocalypse.

Sir Apocalypse is returning to Detroit, virtually at least, as a host of LGBT Detroit's annual Cold As Hell, which the organization describes as "Detroit's winter Pride event" and "a one-of-a-kind, sex-positive digital experience" that will provide "education on Black leather and kink culture."

"In the leather culture I am a Sir," Houston explains. "In the culture there is a hierarchy of roles that we have. For example,

the roles of Master/Slave, Sir/Boy, Trainer/Pup, Dominatrix/Servant, whatever the case may be. We all have [titles]."

Houston goes on to clarify that the terms most people are familiar with when it comes to BDSM, "dom and sub" or "dominant and submissive," are "just sexual roles. Those are not titles. Anyone can be a dominant in any type of play they choose or you could be a submissive in that play. That's just a role."

One thing Houston wants to make clear: the culture is not a free-for-all, anything goes, no-rules kind of thing. While titles like "Sir/Boy" may seem foreign to those outside of the leather world, they are anything but arbitrary.

As a Sir, Houston teaches the core values of trust, honor and respect in the leather culture, which includes BDSM, fetish and kink. There exists a tradition of etiquette and protocol to follow.

"That is what the culture is," Houston says. "There are a lot of strict rules, and that's about safety, physical and emotional safety. Knowing what the culture is, what roles you are, where you fit, finding safe and secure spaces to enjoy yourself and having

people you can go to if needed."

As a Sir, Houston trains "men in the culture, and they are my own leather family." And family looks out for each other. This is a primary tenant of Onyx, "a leather, kink, and fetish organization that is geared around men of color: Black Latino, Asian, Arabic, Native, what have you." Members identify as gay, bi or trans men. There are chapters across the country including Onyx Great Lakes, which includes Detroit, and Onyx Lonestar, which includes Houston's current home of Dallas, Texas.

"My role as 'Leather Dad' is to mentor and to guide men who are in the culture," he says. "To guide them, to mentor them, to answer questions, to make sure they are correct in how they live in this culture. The difference in my organization [Onyx], outside of other leather and fetish and kink organizations, is that we teach the culture and we make sure that people aren't out here alone and that they have people around them to mentor

Meet the Other Cold As Hell Hosts



Xir Oya

Xir Oya, Mr. Maryland Leather 2020-2021, was born and raised in Baltimore. According to their Twitter, Xir Oya is "Pro Dom. GNC. Leather.

Educator. Free Spirit. Kinkster. Fetishist. Qing. Pansexual. Existentialist. Philanthropist."

The performer is "Head-of-Household" for the Tribe of Mount Saint Oya, a "tribe" of LGBTQ+ people who share cultural commonalities and interest, including a diverse range of alternate sexual practices. On the Mount Saint Oya website, Xir Oya is described as a "Millennial Leather Classicist and kink prodigy." Xir Oya was a co-host at LGBT Detroit's 2nd annual Cold As Hell Event in 2021 and is now returning for 2022.

Find Xir Oya on Twitter, OnlyFans, Instagram and at conferences, festivals and other educational events.



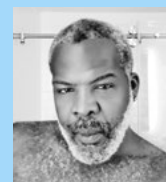
Dame Sadie

Said to be the love child of Okoye and Maleficent, Madame Seduction aka Dame Sadie (she/her/they) is a Black, polyamorous, queer, fem dom, artist,

bourlesque performer, kinkster, educator, coach and community healer. Their combination of seduction, intelligence, natural leadership skills, and presence will make you want to learn from her, submit to her, or both.

A certified mindfulness and meditation teacher, Reiki practitioner, crystal healer and Master Life Coach, Dame Sadie has a goal to increase awareness around the healing power of pleasure.

Dame Sadie's Instagram describes the performer as a "Kinklesque performer, FemDom, Pussy Savant, Pleasure Doula, Erotic conjurer and BDSM educator" who teaches sex and kink education classes that are "educational, interactive, and lit AF"



Boy Panthro

Born and reared on Detroit's east side, Boy Panthro (aka Henry K) has been a part of the leather scene for more than five years.

Though Boy Panthro had considered BDSM 10 years ago, he says it was asking the right question to the right people that put him on the path for the "enlightenment of his life." Today, he finds himself most comfortable as a submissive and finds "exhilarating pleasure" when submitting to someone with whom he can build lasting trust.

Boy Panthro is an experienced teacher — he has taught and demonstrated various aspects of fetish and kink such as spanking and sounding at a variety of events.

them and not put them in an unsafe environment.”

Houston's desire to foster a safe environment for his leather family stems from his own less than ideal introduction into the culture at the age of 19 at the behest of an older man, a situation he called “unfortunate.”

Houston was “of adult age, but still too young,” he says. Especially since the man was a person of authority. “A former teacher, as a matter of fact.” At 18 or 19 years old, Houston says, “Your intentions for me is not to be a boyfriend. I'm not your equal. I'm not your contemporary.”

He points out that a teenager doesn't have the same things as an older man. “They don't have money, especially a poor kid from Detroit,” he says. A teenager also doesn't have the experience of travel, a career, or other important life experiences.

“As a grown man, I know the difference,” he says now. “I know what that is, and I use the word ‘unfortunate’ because that is not correct.” That said, even though his experience with that older man wasn't positive, “the enjoyment I kept,” he says, and he wants to make sure that others can experience that enjoyment, too — safely.

Houston says his job “is to not let people be out here alone like I was.” He wants to weed out predators or people engaged in something inappropriate or dangerous. “I believe in making sure that anyone that I associate with... understands that there are rules behind this,” he says. For example, if someone is into spanking and wants someone to spank them, it's important to not go into that situation blindly.

“What I would advise someone who is a newbie is to make sure they almost interview that person, that they are who they say they are,” Houston says. “And that they know what they're doing and make sure that there's an out. That if you say no, that means no. [That] you're not being blindfolded and gagged and you don't know who you're with.”

Houston doesn't want to see people get hurt and wants to

foster an environment where people feel safe to explore their kinks and desires.

“People like me who've experienced [the culture] for many years understand the danger of what you can walk into,” he says, explaining that in the past “it was a free for all, and it was madness” with “drugs, alcohol and sex.”

It was an especially perilous environment for a person of color as many of the spaces were populated mainly by white men. “Being a person of color in those spaces, we're already fetishized for being every hue of black and brown and olive,” he says. “People don't respect us automatically.” He recalls going to spaces where, as a younger Black man, “older white men would target me.”

He now teaches those in his charge to prevent themselves from becoming targets. “You be the person in charge instead of them,” he advises. “Especially the smaller boys or the younger boys who are new to the culture and know nothing about it. We want to make sure they have power when they walk into those spaces.”

Houston also encourages readers to support LGBT Detroit. He's known LGBT Detroit's Executive Director Curtis Lipscomb for many years. “I know that they service the community that they live in,” he says, “making sure that there's a voice for the [Black LGBTQ] community,” who are often marginalized in other LGBTQ+ organizations, even those that strive to be inclusive.



Walter Houston aka Sir Apocalypse.

And Houston doesn't care if someone is offended by an organization for people of color.

“We make our own table. Instead of going to the table, we make our own table,” he continues, explaining that LGBTQ+ people of color deserve to be more than just diversity in marketing images. “I represent myself and I represent our culture and I don't need anyone to put me in a space to make sure they have diversity in the room.”

In case it wasn't clear, Houston is not afraid to say what he means in any facet of his life. “I hold this today: When I say no, I mean no, when I say yes, I mean yes. I'm blunt. I mean what I say.”

What he hopes people will take away from *Cold As Hell* is knowledge that transforms into power. Houston wants people to know that “the leather fetish culture is not the boogeyman. It is not about taking advantage of anyone. It is not about getting someone to do something that they're not interested in. It's not about coercion. It's about people with similar interests playing together and we make sure that we protect those people and that they are safe, sane and secure in our environments.”

For more information about *Cold As Hell*, which is at 9 p.m. Jan. 31, visit <https://www.lgbtdetroit.org>.



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Do You Believe in Life After Coming Out? This Emmy Winner Does

Openly Gay Michigan Anchor David Custer Celebrates 20 Years as a Broadcaster



David Custer. Photo courtesy of Amber Henry Photography

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

David Custer, now an Emmy-winning out anchor in Michigan, is confident in who he is today, but it wasn't always that way.

Custer, who covers Flint, Saginaw and Bay City on WNEM during the 5, 6 and 11 p.m. news, stayed in the closet until his sophomore year at the University of Michigan-Flint when the double life he was leading caught up to him. He had a boyfriend at this point. In the car with his mother on the way to a birthday dinner at his favorite Italian restaurant, she suddenly asked about the necklace he was wearing. It had a rainbow flag on it.

"I started crying and she started crying," he recalled. "I asked her not to say anything when we got to dinner. So it was my dad and two brothers, and it was the most awkward dinner ever. We were both trying not to break down again."

Custer grew up in Goodrich, Mich., about 10 miles outside Flint. As a kid, he said he had posters of Whitney Houston all over his room. He knew he was different, which made living in a small town difficult to navigate. And being closeted until college made it even worse.

"I had a hard time in high school," he said.

"That was 20 years ago, and there weren't a lot of people to turn to or people I could identify with."

Out and on the air

By the time Custer earned his bachelor's degree in communications in 2001, he was more confident in himself.

"My first job in Alpena, I think I maybe downplayed who I was," he explained. "But when I came to the Fox affiliate in Flint, I worked with a great group of people, and I just decided when I walked through the door, having known these people for a week, that I was going to be my authentic self."

Custer did well at WNEM. He won seven Michigan

Emmys for his reporting work. And in 2016, Custer was promoted to anchor. Now, he has won his first Michigan Emmy in that category.

Being on the job — and on the air — has not always been easy, however. Custer said he's received cruel calls and hate mail over the years.

"We had a woman call the newsroom," Custer remembered. "My coworker [longtime WNEM anchor Sam Merrill] had just passed away from a heart attack. And this older woman called and was insisting that I must have sneezed on him and given him AIDS and that was the true reason he died."

Some of the hate that came Custer's way was downright comical.

"I had a gentleman telling me I should stop shopping for ties at the 'gay store,'" he said. "And it became a running joke that we all wished we knew where this 'gay store' was because it sounded amazing."

As he approaches his 20th year as a broadcaster, Custer said through it all, the good has outweighed the bad. Still, as social media has evolved over the past several years, he said it's been easier for strangers to access his personal life.

"I've noticed that most of the criticism I receive online or in online forums is about me being gay," he reflected. "It's not criticizing my work. It's just about me being gay. But on the flip side, I've had moms reaching out to me asking what they should do because they believe their son might be gay. I carry a letter with me from a man who said I saved his life.

I cling to those things, and I don't read the comments anymore."

Meeting his icons

The first time Custer spoke with Cher was when she donated 100,000 bottles of water to Flint. When she came to Flint on Halloween in 2016, while also campaigning for Hillary Clinton, Custer got to conduct a one-on-one interview with her. He must have left an impression because a year later he was invited to go backstage at a concert in Washington, D.C. and chat with the legend again. This time without a camera crew.

"They allowed me to take my good friend and my husband [salon owner Dan Buccilli] backstage," he recalled. "She again brought up Flint and how much she liked our mayor. She asked us how things were going with the water crisis. So that was an experience that was just unbelievable and incredible for someone that I had idolized my whole gay life."

Then there was the time in 2012 that Custer got to go on national television and appear on "The Wendy Williams Show" to share Twinkie recipes.

"That was when she was talking about saving the Twinkie," he said. "So because I had done a Twinkie recipe she had me come on her show and share what I had come up with. That was an incredible experience. She was fantastic."

Custer's appearance on "Wendy Williams" was a hit. "The segments ended up being funny," said Custer. "We were talking about how my grandmother used to make chicken with Doritos and fry it. Wendy sidetracked because then she wanted to talk about my grandmother's chicken."

Other memorable experiences on the job range from skydiving to interviewing then Vice-Presidential candidate Kamala Harris. "My job has just allowed me to do so many different things I don't think I would have done in any other industry," he said. When not working, Custer said he is happy to spend time at home with his husband. "He's incredible, and he has to put up with my crazy career and being in the spotlight. He's been the shoulder for many of my tears for the criticism. But he always gives the best advice and makes me feel better."



(From left to right) Dan Buccilli, David Custer, Cher and Jake Custer, David's brother, backstage at a concert in 2017 at MGM National Harbor. Photo courtesy of Amber Henry Photography

→ New Queer Cinema

Continued from page 12

the marketplace; it was about making work that was important, or political or artistic, that didn't give a fuck about making any money or getting any money to make it. Because of AIDS, I think there was an urgency to get work done."

But these works didn't just magically appear. They emerged from global aesthetic traditions influenced not just by Hollywood or the more pop-subversive work of Jean-Luc Godard, but by gallery-based and underground filmmaking, which had long carved out niches hospitable to queer work, and which included a range of filmmakers Verow cites as precedents to his own artistry. Kenneth Anger, John Waters, the Kuchar Brothers, Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey figure for him and others as influences — as did the German auteur Rainer Werner Fassbinder. For a crop of directors straining to make something from almost nothing, there were ample lessons in these directors' work.

"Coming from a sort of underground, low-budget [production], everyone's sort of pulling their own weight and more: filming outside in a street without permission and using the headlights of cars to light exterior scenes, just having to work with what you got. And also shooting on film, so you can't just shoot endlessly and have got to plan stuff out," says Verow when asked what tied together New Queer Cinema works. "I think it's a sort of underground punk-rock aesthetic — but queer — that united them all, really."

In response to the same, Griffin points to those working methods but also to a shared set of thematic preoccupations:

"From the vantage point of 30 years later, the stuff I find interesting about New Queer Cinema is a real attempt to square with history, and with systems of representation. [Cheryl Dunye's] 'The Watermelon Woman' and [Isaac Julien's] 'Looking for Langston' are attempts to think about Black queer history, and to think about Black queer history and its relationship to dominant systems of representation," he says, voicing an admiration for a recurring investment in "the problematics of history" as a way of grappling with identity in complex ways.

Griffin also points to Tom Kalin's "Swoon," a charged and graphic examination of the doomed romance between Leopold and Loeb, two real-life child-killers, as a demonstration not only of New Queer Cinema's preoccupation with history, but of its willingness to confront viewers with the ugly, frank and often kinky sides of intimacy and desire: a stark contrast to more congenial, flattering efforts in queer representation today.

"Everything has to be pleasant and loving, kind and politically progressive in all of the conventional ways." But that contemporary vision of queerness comes, says Griffin, "at the expense of understanding desire and sexuality as bound up in not-necessarily pretty, progressive things."

"Desire can be really dark," he continues. "Desire undoes the subject and sometimes in wonderful, world-making ways. But I don't think that we're living in a moment that can handle a lot of times a complicated take on sexuality, that would understand desire as a complicated category."

In the past few decades, says Verow, it's not just audiences but festivals, too, that have become more orthodox and even

"At the end of the day, queer sexuality is fists and spit and overturning staid ideas about what bodies do, what identities do."

chaste in their aesthetic tastes. Much of the shift, he suggests, comes from an effort to appease imagined audiences.

"All the rough edges [of a film] have been smoothed away by going to labs, getting opinions from other people. So you're left with the sort of shiny, happy end product that when you started out was [once] maybe a lot more interesting and dark and had something to say. I think that's the main compromise," he observes. "I think if you're doing things really independently that you're not thinking about the audience — you're thinking about the film that you want to make."

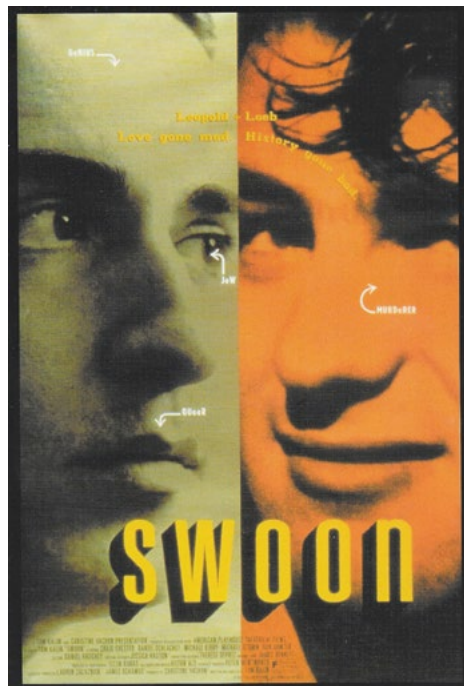
While the endpoint of New Queer Cinema can certainly be debated, its moment seems to have dissipated now. Though Griffin's unresolved on just what caused this, he observes that it may have created a market that was quickly overrun by more commercialized production.

"I think there was a desire to stay an outsider in New Queer Cinema, and there was never the claim to cultural centrality or the desire to claim cultural centrality in the kinds of media that followed in the years after," says Griffin. "New Queer Cinema created a consumer demographic that then was infiltrated by more commercialized cultural production."

The suggestion is that these small, scrappy, early '90s works couldn't compete as time went on with bigger-budget material in a market they basically created. The "Milks" and "Philadelphias" and "Birdcages" that came just a few years later were works that showcased queer life, sure, but they had bigger budgets and fewer subversions, and so lacked a lot of New Queer Cinema's rough edges. They didn't speak in the same way from a marginal place situated on the roadside: one off the beaten path of accepted mainstream culture. Whatever gains

might have been made in negotiating for those gentler textures and trade-offs in representation, something was lost, says Griffin.

"At the end of the day, queer sexuality is fists and spit and overturning staid ideas about what bodies do, what identities do. You sacrifice something with a 'Love, Simon.' You sacrifice a more capacious understanding of the body's relationship to the world, the body's relationship to power, the body's relationship to desire, when you stop at them holding hands on the Ferris wheel. You just do," Griffin says. "And I'm not saying that there's no place for it. But I'm saying that that can very conveniently become an endpoint in ways that are stultifying."



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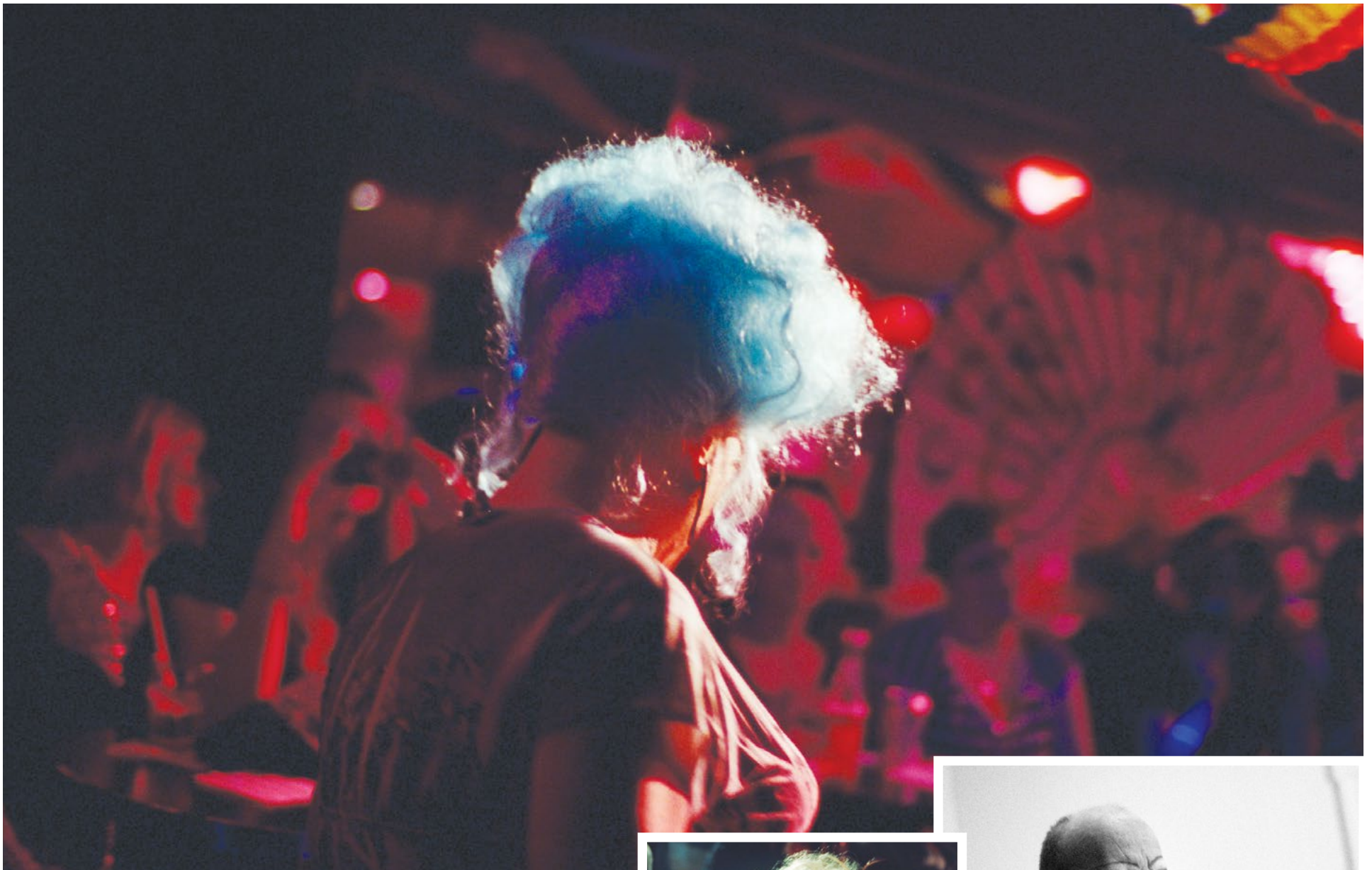
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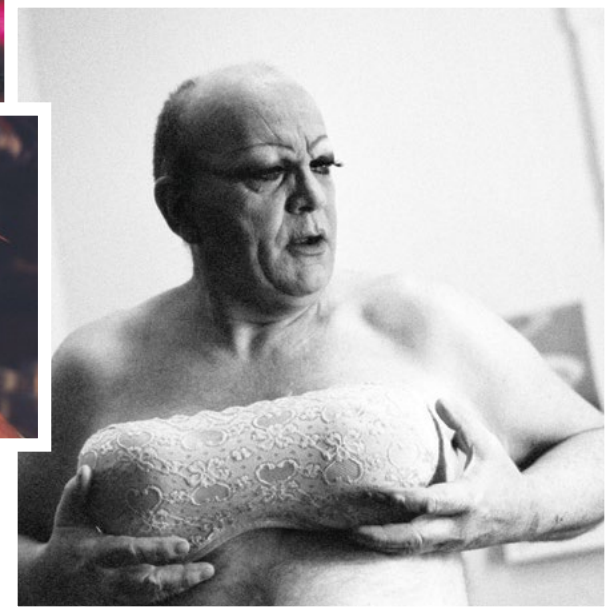
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Joan Said



(Top) Collette LeGrande performing at Aunt Charlie's Lounge. (Below, left to right) Donna Personna backstage at Aunt Charlie's. Olivia Hart gets ready at home.



→ James Hosking

Continued from page 7

Michigan. "The work is very sensitive in the way that [Hosking] is not exploitative or invasive. It's very clear that he has a close friendship with these people. He's not a voyeur," she says.

Originally, the exhibit opening was to coincide with a speaking engagement featuring Detroit queens Maxi Chanel (House of Chanel), Nickki Stevens and Lady T Tempest. The event, part of U-M's School of Art and Design's Penny Stamps Speaker Series, has been postponed in light of the recent COVID-19 surge.

"I'm so excited for all of it to come together in the theater," says Chrisstina Hamilton, director of the Penny Stamps Speaker Series. "The event in the [Michigan Theater] will also be this sort of celebration harkening and beaconing this exhibition around the corner at the Institute of Humanities."

Personna, Hart and LeGrande are living history and are beloved fixtures in the San Francisco drag scene. "In San Francisco, there

is a great sense of appreciation for gay elders and I think that comes through at Aunt Charlie's in the way that the crowd reacts," Hosking says.

Being elders is an asset, Hamilton says, and the rich history they share is a great fit for the Penny Stamps Series. "I think it's really important to see and be able to celebrate these people who have dedicated their lives and have the long view to share with us. In certain societies, older folks are really celebrated and lauded, but in the U.S. that's not always the case," Hamilton says. "We have to remember that age and wisdom are valuable."

That's part of what motivates Personna to continue to do drag. "I want people to say to themselves, 'Oh it doesn't end' or 'You can be 75 years old and do this.'"

"Beautiful By Night" captures an important piece of LGBTQ+ history. During his time in San Francisco, Hosking saw a number of LGBTQ+ bars close. "I wanted to capture a place that I wasn't sure how long it was going to be around," he says of Aunt Charlie's. "Places

close and then it's gone forever and there's no documentation."

"When he told me the concept of 'Beautiful By Night,' I appreciated what he was trying to do to let everybody know a lot more about what drag performers are," Hart says.

Hart and Personna are both looking forward to one day meeting the students at U-M who "are going to show some interest in what [drag] was, what it still is, and what drag can be," Hart says. "I love the idea that I'm going to do something on a stage for an audience and for a group in school, I just love that," says Personna. "I want the world to know there is no expiration date on living a vital, purposeful life. It's never

too late to come to inhabit one's authentic self."

And, of course, both artists want to perform as much as possible.

"Honey, this is my first tour," Hart says. "I'm going to be like Cher and never stop."

The exhibition runs through Feb. 21, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.



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WHY "SCREAM" IS QUEERER THAN YOU THOUGHT



Kevin Williamson created "Scream" character Sidney Prescott as a manifestation of surviving his gay trauma. Photo: Paramount Pictures

Openly Gay 'Scream' Screenwriter on What Sidney Means to Him

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

If you're still wondering about those homoerotic undertones 25 years after Billy Loomis and Stu Macher terrorized Woodsboro in Wes Craven's "Scream," you've been on the right track all along.

Ahead of the new "Scream," out now, openly gay screenwriter of the first "Scream," Kevin Williamson, confirmed that Billy (Skeet Ulrich) and Stu (Matthew Lillard), who are thought to be queer by many LGBTQ+ fan theorists, were based on infamous mass murderers Nathan Freudenthal Leopold Jr. and Richard Albert Loeb, both of whom reportedly admitted they were gay and in a relationship.

In May 1924, Leopold and Loeb, who've been called the "LGBTQ+ prototype for Bonnie and Clyde," killed 14-year-old Bobby Franks as an act of intellectual superiority. It's been called the "perfect crime," one that has influenced Alfred Hitchcock's "Rope" as well as the 2002 crime thriller "Murder by Numbers." Both are noted for their homoeroticism.

Now, nearly three decades after "Scream" came out, theorists can officially categorize "Scream" in that same queer-coded realm.

"It's very sort of homoerotic, in the sense that there were these two guys that killed this other person just to see if they could get away with it," Williamson said, drawing parallels between the Leopold and Loeb case and Billy and Stu. "And one of the reasons that one could get the other one [to follow] is because I think the other one was secretly in love with him. And it was sort of a fascinating case study on double murderers. If you Google 'Leopold and Loeb,' you will see. And you'll read about it and you'll get, OK, that's Billy and Stu."

This wasn't lost on "Scream" queen Neve Campbell, who has starred as the film's Ghostface-fighting heroine mainstay Sidney Prescott. When asked about Billy and Stu in a revealing new interview with BTL, Campbell acknowledged a "burgeoning love relationship," before elaborating on exactly what that means.

After calling them "pretty confused guys," she said, "Maybe some of their anger comes from not being allowed to be who they want to be, if you wanna go there." Was Stu more in love with Billy than Billy was with Stu? "Yeah, yeah. Yes," Campbell answered definitively.

"One was the follower and one was the leader," Williamson

said. “And that alone sort of sets up the dynamic of a hidden relationship.”

“Is Stu secretly in love with Billy? Maybe. Did Billy manipulate that? Possibly,” added Williamson, who created “Dawson’s Creek” and wrote the screenplays for “I Know What You Did Last Summer” and “The Faculty.” “It’s all left up for you

to wonder, because clearly Billy’s the one who was leading. Billy was the one who had the mother. Billy was the one who was sort of orchestrating it. And Stu was the person who helped carry it out. So it sort of put Stu in that position of, what was his feelings toward his best friend? That we do not know. It’s just left to keep you wondering.”

Not everyone wondered. Some just knew. The 2000 comedy “Scary Movie,” which parodied scenes from “Scream,” picked up on the queer vibes between Billy and Stu. In one scene, Ray (Shawn Wayans), based on Stu, and Bobby (Jon Abrahams), based on Billy, joke about being gay, divulging to a Sidney-like character called Cindy (Anna Faris) that, “That’s right, Cindy, I’m gay. And in case you haven’t noticed, so is Ray.”

Williamson admits that when he wrote the original “Scream,” which was released in 1996, he was “very hesitant to present the gay side of me in my work,” resulting in the queerness of characters Billy and Stu being “a little coded and maybe accidental.”

Now, he said, “maybe I’d be braver. Maybe I wouldn’t be that shy little gay writer who felt like he couldn’t get away with it.”

Williamson grew up in the South in both Texas and North Carolina, places where he understood “that fight for survival that you feel, like you’re trying to hide yourself. And then just trying to survive until you can get out of that small town and be yourself and express yourself.”

Recently, in an interview with The Independent, Williamson confessed that the “Scream” movies are “coded in gay survival,” with Sidney being, essentially, a manifestation of his struggles as a gay person.

“It’s always the survival tales that connects us,” he told BTL last week. “And so I think that’s one of the reasons Final Girls are so important to us as a gay audience.” Before he wrote Sidney, he related to Jamie Lee Curtis’ Laurie Strode in “Halloween” because, being gay, “he understands the ‘plight of the Final Girl.’”

“I know what it’s like,” he added. “I think gay kids everywhere understand that survival element that we have to sort of create in ourselves. And when we’re watching that Final Girl have to prove herself and rise to the challenge and save her life, I think that’s something gay kids anywhere can relate to.”



Stu (Matthew Lillard) and Billy (Skeet Ulrich) in the 1996 film “Scream.” Photo: Dimension Films

Touched by how many LGBTQ+ people have felt inspired by Sidney, Campbell said her heroic character “gives people that confidence that they can overcome” and that she understands why “it makes sense certainly for the queer community and gay men. But I think also just for anyone who has struggled with bullying or challenges, and in their youth especially.”

And then, of course, there’s pushy, stubbornly pertinacious TV journalist Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox) who, Williamson said, “would fit right in with the ‘Will & Grace’ crowd.”

“She represents one side of my voice,” he said, “which is part of who I am.”

In the new installment of “Scream,” titled the same as the original that was released to massive and ever-growing fandom 25 years ago, Williamson is reveling in the fact that there’s an openly queer woman of color, Mindy (played by Jasmine Savoy-Brown, a queer actor of color) among the new teen cast. Battling Ghostface alongside the new teens is the legacy cast, which includes Campbell, Cox and, returning as deputy sheriff Dewey Riley, David Arquette.

Of course Mindy is a result of a shift in LGBTQ+ representation — now, to queer-code characters would be an embarrassing step backwards — but Williamson also attributes the character to a shift in his own growth as a gay man. That growth, he said, led him to write the character of Jack McPhee, an openly gay teen who appeared as a “Dawson’s Creek” series regular starting in 1998.

“I felt empowered,” he said. “I felt like, OK, now I can start expressing myself and really write that part of me that I really want to write.”

With Mindy in “Scream,” he feels great affection for the character who he says “just exists.”

“We’re in a place now where she’s just part of the group,” he added. “And it’s just part of life. I think that was beautiful.” Campbell, too, agreed it was “a beautiful thing.”

When Williamson received the director’s cut of the new “Scream,” he watched it with his partner. His affection for Sidney runs so deep that, as he watched her appear for the first time onscreen, jogging down the boardwalk with her baby carriage, turning to the camera to answer a call from Dewey, he cried.

“I did,” he said. “I teared up.”



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A Survivor to Scream About

Neve Campbell on How Sidney Still Inspires the LGBTQ+ Community

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

As Sidney Prescott, fierce fighter of the knife-wielding Ghostface since the mid 1990s, Neve Campbell has represented strength and survival to generations of LGBTQ+ people. When she first appeared in Wes Craven's groundbreaking "Scream" in 1996, Campbell's Prescott wasn't like other teen girls seen in slasher whodunits, ones who inevitably meet their demise.

Sidney was virginal, knew better than to run up the stairs, wasn't saved by a hero, and quickly learned that horror movie villains never die an easy death. She hasn't demonstrated just physical strength, but also, now five movies in, an aspirational internal strength that keeps her fighting the evil force (sometimes forces) against her. It makes sense that the character — a smart, strong heroine — was created by openly gay screenwriter Kevin Williamson.

Ten years after "Scream 4," Sidney returns to Woodsboro again in "Scream" — the fifth film — after some horrific kills also draw back deputy sheriff Dewey Riley (David Arquette) and TV journalist Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox). They're the legacy stars (which, in true meta "Scream" style, is acknowledged in the film), showing a new young cast of Woodsboro high schoolers how to survive the sick, twisted games of Ghostface. Gruesome games that Gale, Dewey and Sidney know all too well.

Though queer-coding has been noted in the franchise, particularly the longtime fan theory that original Ghostface killers Billy and Stu may have been closeted lovers, the new "Scream" knows this isn't 1996 anymore. Consequently, there's no reading between the lines, as one of the teens, Mindy, openly identifies as a queer Black woman (the actress portraying her, Jasmin Savoy-Brown, is also a queer Black woman).

While sharing her opinion on whether she thinks Billy and Stu were actually in love, Campbell celebrated the new film's explicit queerness and talked about LGBTQ+ fans finding the confidence and strength in Sidney to fight their own battles.

This is one of those rare moments for me when I can honestly say, if you told little, gay Chris at 15 years old that he'd one day interview the

person who played someone who represented survival and perseverance to him, he wouldn't have believed you.

Wow, honey. Thank you.

You must get that from gay boys.

I do, I do! But it's always really lovely. It means a lot.

Did you ever expect that you would reach that demographic when you did the first "Scream"?

I had no idea what demographic I would reach. Honestly, I had no idea of the success of these films or the impact that these films would have on people. I mean, listen, it's an honor to play such a strong woman and someone who's not a victim and someone who takes over and holds her own and won't allow life to get away with her. But to realize the impact that has on other people's lives and that it's had a positive effect on people is the cherry on top.

We feel this way about Jamie Lee Curtis as Laurie Strode in "Halloween," obviously, as well. So why do you think Scream Queens like yourself are revered so much by seemingly gay men in particular?

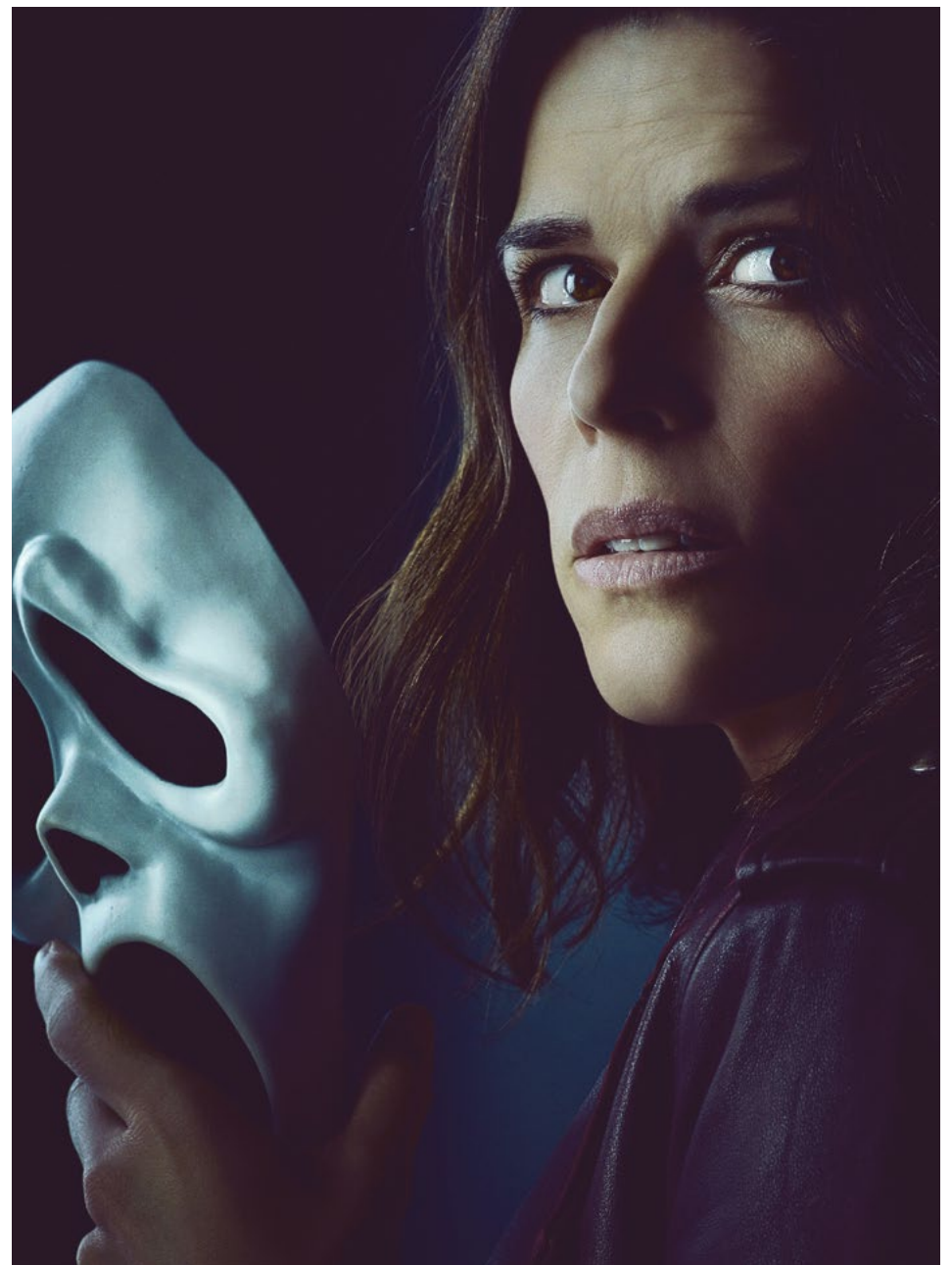
Yeah, but also I think it's not just gay men. I think it's people who have felt shut down in some way in their life or felt they've had [to] sort of push a glass ceiling or been misunderstood or been bullied. So I think it makes sense certainly for the queer community and gay men. But I think also just for anyone who has struggled with bullying or challenges, and in their youth especially.

It's the underdog rising above, right?

Yeah, absolutely. And as Sidney does that or Laurie Strode does that, it gives people that confidence that they can overcome.

And you know — you play this character who carries this trauma with her.

Absolutely. And I certainly had a level of bullying when I was a kid and struggled a lot, so perhaps that comes through in the character. And, of course, that is carried with



Neve Campbell as Sidney Prescott in the new "Scream." Photo: Paramount Pictures

us for the rest of our lives. But it's sort of not letting it live you. That can be your history, that can just be a part of our tapestry, but that doesn't have to be our present story.

It's recognized in the new "Scream" that you are inspiring other young people.

Yeah, which is lovely. I mean, what's great about these films is they're very self-referential and they take a look at the genre itself, then they start to take a look at the characters within the film becoming icons themselves or characters that are portrayed in films. There's always a level of that.

I'm happy that Kevin Williamson recently divulged how the "Scream" movies are coded in gay survival. It's obviously something that some of us have known for a very long time. Did you know from the beginning that Sidney was a manifestation of Kevin's personal experiences as a gay man?

Not necessarily. I think you always know that

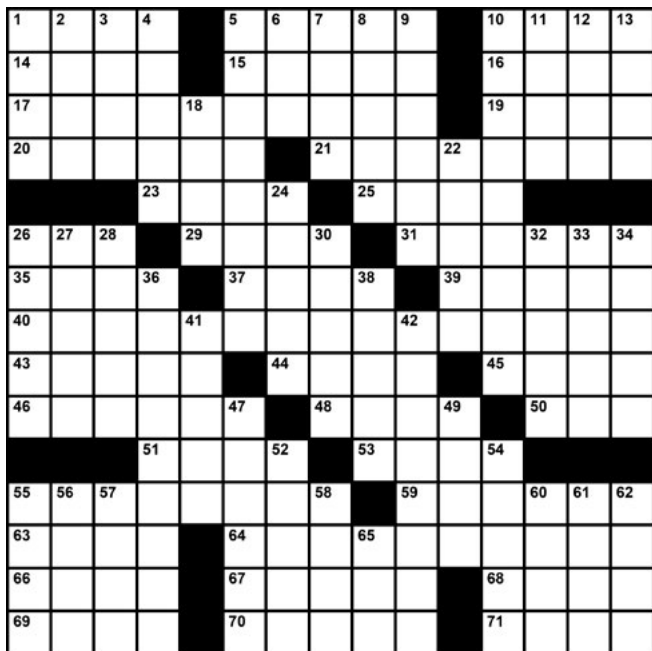
a writer is writing from something personal, some kind of experience that they've had. I mean, good writing always comes from something intimate, or meaningful, or a part of a person's story. So I had a suspicion. But he never said it clearly to me.

Had there been conversations on any other "Scream" movies following the first movie, given the fact that now he's opened up about it?

We were actually just talking about it at a dinner a few weeks ago, and it was really the first time he revealed it to me that succinctly. I think he's become clearer about it as well over the years. Probably because he's been discussing it and talking about it, he's able to express it more clearly.

I obviously talked to a lot of queer friends of mine before our interview. They had a lot to say about the character as well, but a friend of mine

See Neve Campbell, page 26



- 40 More of what she said
 43 Joe Cocker's "You ___ Beautiful"
 44 What Washington couldn't tell
 45 From A to B, to Debussy
 46 Worked hard
 48 Got some dirt in the skirt, in "A League of Their Own"
 50 Grounded fast flier
 51 Peter Doyle's partner Whitman
 53 Sulu's counselor on "Star Trek"
 55 End of what she said
 59 Joan
 63 Subject of autoerotic fantasy?
 64 Words from Cooper Anderson
 66 WWII machine gun
 67 Ted Casablanca's tidbits
 68 "My Cup Runneth Over" singer Ed
 69 Loose lady, in the land of Auden
 70 "God loves everybody," to Jane Spahr
 71 Oz visitor Dorothy
- 10 "H.M.S. Pinafore" and more
 11 Didn't go straight
 12 It serves Tel Aviv
 13 Say, "We're just friends..." perhaps
 18 "Beatle Bailey" dog
 22 Like Emma Donoghue
 24 Italian seaport
 26 The I's of Socrates
 27 Stallion's sound
 28 Direct elsewhere
 30 Heart partners
 32 Number of bulbs
 33 High-tuition schools
 34 Offer an apple to Adam and Steve?
 36 Dropping from a will
 38 Clown's pole
 41 "Vertigo" actress Kim
 42 Most queer, to straights
 47 Bring out
 49 Rub out
 52 U.S. investment
 54 Where to see Tom, Dick, or Harry
 55 Hunter and namesakes
 56 Take the mound
 57 Nonheterosexual conception
 58 They were under Hoover
 60 Isherwood's "___ Camera"
 61 Baseball great Hershiser
 62 NASDAQ rival
 65 Mrs., to Colette

Joan Said

Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 A fairy godmother waves it
 5 Remove the top from
 10 Got a little behind
 14 Personal lubricant ingredient
 15 Oktoberfest dance
 16 Rainbow flag site
 17 One of the Village People's outfits
 19 Wolfson of Freedom to Marry

- 20 Start of what Joan said
 21 More of what she said
 23 Without a date
 25 Kind of loser
 26 Land of the cut (abbr.)
 29 Unrefined metals
 31 Boob
 35 Like a straight line, for short
 37 Mireille of "Hanna"
 39 Prevent, with "off"

Down

- 1 "What ___ thinking?"
 2 What there oughta be
 3 Black, to Bonheur
 4 Where the salami is hidden
 5 Had anal sex with?
 6 Sixty-nine and others (abbr.)
 7 Crime-solving game
 8 "Camille" screenwriter Zoe
 9 Best Picture of 1970

See p. 19 for answers

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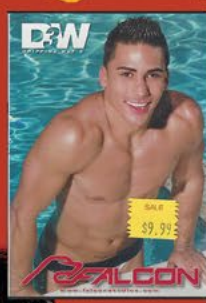
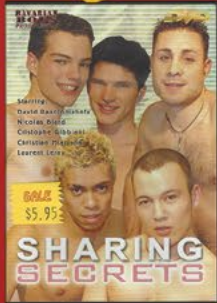
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Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox and Kevin Williamson on the set of the new "Scream." Photo: Paramount Pictures

→ Neve Campbell

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wanted me to ask you: What do you have to say for yourself for bringing out all the baby queers in the '90s?

Very proud, very proud of it. [Laughs.] Listen, you know, I grew up in the dance world, so I was in National Ballet School by the time I was 9 and, to be honest, the majority of the boys in my class were gay, because a lot of your community are drawn to the arts and drawn to that world and feel more accepted and *are* more accepted in that world. So that's been my upbringing. Also, I grew up in Toronto, which I think [has] the second highest gay community in North America, so, you know [laughs]. I love Toronto for that. So listen, if I've had an impact in that way on that community, it means a great, great deal to me.

Yeah, and let's note here that it's not just with "Scream," but "The Craft" too.

"The Craft" as well, I know. And "Wild Things" and "When Will I Be Loved." There's a slew of movies. [Laughs.]

There are so many theories about "Scream."

I'm sure you've heard them all at this point, but there's one in particular that I wanted to ask you about: the dynamic between Billy and Stu in the first "Scream." You're looking at me like you know where I'm about to go with this.

Are you wondering whether there was a burgeoning love relationship going on there?

Of course.

Perhaps, perhaps. Yeah, it's very much a possibility, and now that Kevin's out and talking more about that, I would imagine that's a big part of his thinking.

When you say "perhaps," what makes you think that it's possible?

Well, I don't know clearly, 'cause Kevin hasn't said to me clearly that's what it is, but it is a possibility, right?

If you were to theorize...

If I were to theorize, I would say that there was perhaps some confusion with them. Pretty confused guys. [Laughs.] And that maybe some of their anger comes from not being allowed to be who they want to be, if you wanna go there. [Laughs.] What do you think?

I do want to go there. And I think Stu was hotter for Billy than Billy was for Stu.

Yeah, yeah. Yes.

At the very least we can say that the first film was queer coded, and we don't live in a world anymore where that's acceptable. And that's something I really appreciate about the new "Scream" — that there's a queer woman of color in it and her sexuality is so matter-of-fact. What are your thoughts on seeing the progress we've made throughout five "Scream" films?

Well, thank god, right? We needed to get to this place where it just becomes fact and it just becomes true, then we accept the fact that we're all different, and we're all here. We don't need to pretend that certain groups don't exist anymore. It's a great progression. But at the same time, I was reading an article on BBC yesterday about that Bert and Ernie cake in Ireland that was ordered. It was a man who wanted to have a birthday cake and have Bert and Ernie represent his gay openness and strength, and the bakery refused to make the cake for him. It became a big court case and he won the first court case, but he just lost the second. So, we're not necessarily there yet, obviously, in every country. Hopefully that will shift in the future. But at least, in some places, it's getting better.

The new "Scream" is an important step, culturally speaking. I think about how many people there are like me who are young and will see this movie and feel like, "That's me on screen."

Yeah, absolutely. And being represented clearly and openly and without shame — yes, a beautiful thing.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity. Read the full interview at PrideSource.com.



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