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YOUR 2023 PRIDE CALENDAR

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THE INTERVIEW

Hannah Gadsby on Their New
Feel-Good Netflix Special

PASSING THE TORCH

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New Executive Leadership

Living Her Dream at Ferndale Pride

Baddie Brooks, a Black Trans Michigan-Based Artist,
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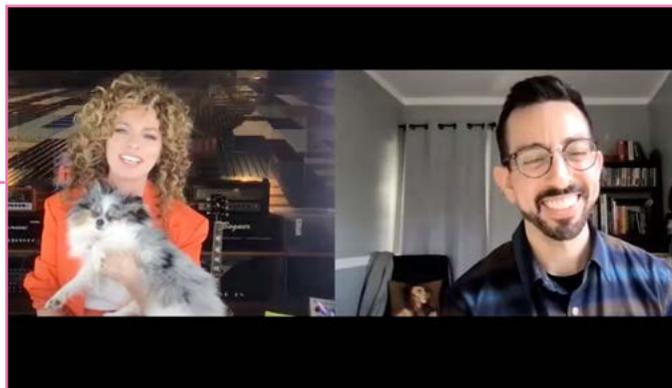
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Photo: Jermaine Moore

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Place yourselves, fam. The entire state of Michigan is virtually throbbing with Pride vibes this year, with events stacked up like endless hotcakes at IHOP. The good news is that there's something for everyone; the bad news is that you're only one person with only so many hours in a day. Choose wisely, stay hydrated and bask in a month set aside to celebrate, reflect, and gather together as an LGBTQ+ community. On tap this first week of June are several festivals in Southeast Michigan and beyond, the launch of a queer social group at the Royal Oak Library, a fancy fundraising gala, a chance to get sweaty while supporting a good cause and a sweet Pride event for the whole family in Madison Heights.



Celebrate Pride in Ferndale and Beyond

Ferndale Pride is the first large-scale event this season (the event kicks off at 12:30 p.m. Saturday, June 3 in downtown Ferndale). In addition to a vendors market, kids activities and street entertainment, you can check out live drag performances and music by Michigan's own Nervous But Excited and DJ Deanne. Ferndale is one of several Pride events happening across the state this week — other fests scheduled June 1-8 include:

- Saugatuck/Douglas (June 1-5)
- Trenton (June 1)
- Kalamazoo (June 2-3)
- Ypsilanti (June 2)
- Keweenaw Peninsula (June 3)
- Muskegon (June 3)
- Ortonville (June 3)
- St. Johns (June 3)
- Lowell (June 3)



Join a Fun Queer Club

Listen up, self-appointed weirdoes — this one's for you! Royal Oak Public Library invites you to join Queerdos, a "literary and just plain social club" for LGBTQIA+ and allies group for people who love books, graphic novels and other forms of media. The goal here is to simply meet and chill with like-minded folks in a safe space where, the library says in an announcement, you can "simply exist in a place where you don't need to worry about people just not getting it." Emotional support allies are welcome and coffee and tea will be provided. "Bring your iced coffees, your sweatpants, your septum rings...they're all welcome here," says Royal Oak Public Library in the announcement.

June 5, 6:30-8 p.m., Royal Oak Public Library (222 E. 11 Mile Road, Royal Oak). No registration required.



Don Your Finest Gay Apparel for a Good Cause

Celebrate Pride in style this year at the COLOURS Pride Awards Gala, hosted by the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce on June 16. Tickets are available now for the gala, which features Chamber members who visibly support the LGBTQ community. Funds raised will help the organization award grants to newly certified LGBTQ-owned and operated businesses and increase training and resources for young Metro Detroit entrepreneurs. "It is our hope to increase their non-borrowed capital, capacity and operations, the number of minority-owned LGBTQ businesses, and support the development of future LGBTQ entrepreneurs," the organization writes in a news release. The event will feature an appearance by Michigan Sen. Jeremy Moss, who will receive the Equity in Champion of the Year Award.

June 16, 6-10 p.m., Motor City Casino (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit). Ticket link at detroitlgbtchamber.com/coloursawards.



Create Arts and Crafts

Looking for a low-key, wholesome Pride event? Arts & Pride, a family-friendly festival set for June 4 in Madison Heights' Civic Center Park, is sure to fit the bill. The event, presented by the Madison Heights Human Relations & Equity Commission and Arts Board, will feature artists, games, snacks and music. Attendees are encouraged to bring a plain white t-shirt to decorate at this sweet event centered on joy and happiness.

June 4, 2-6 p.m., Madison Heights Civic Center Park (360 W. 13 Mile Road, Madison Heights).



Run, Walk and Stretch Your Pride

Sign up now to participate in the 3rd annual Welcome Home Yoga & Wellness Palmer Park 5K Run/Walk + Outdoor Yoga event, set for June 11 at Palmer Park in Detroit. The Pride-themed event raises funds for the People for Palmer Park organization, which focuses on the preservation, revitalization and viability of Detroit's Palmer Park, as well as Ruth Ellis Center and Affirmations. Sign up for the 5K run/walk and outdoor yoga event or participate in a virtual 5K run/walk. Onsite participants can enjoy complimentary treats from a variety of health food vendors.

June 11, 8:30 a.m., Palmer Park (1121 Merrill Plaisance St., Detroit). Sign up at welcomehomeyoga.com/palmer-park-5k.

Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.

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LIVING HER DREAM

Trans Michigan Artist Baddie Brooks Headlines Ferndale Pride on June 3

BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE

Playing the Tin Man in an elementary school production of “The Wizard of Oz” was just the beginning of Detroit-born artist Baddie Brooks’ performance career, which, it seems, is about to take off in a big way. Brooks is set to perform at two local Pride fests in June and is working toward the release of her debut album, “Reclamation.”

Brooks caught the music bug early, performing with her middle and high school bands and choirs, but it was her time as an undergraduate student at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) when she truly started to break through as a performer during campus events.

Brooks’ time at EMU was pivotal on a personal level, as well. It was during her final year there, in 2021, that she was finally able to come out as transgender. Brooks now uses they/them and she/her pronouns, and does sometimes identify as a trans woman, but feels most comfortable with the term “trans femme.”

“I would say that my time at EMU for me was very transformative. I feel like I made a lot of connections, specifically with being able to perform,” Brooks tells BTL. “EMU also helped me become more confident with doing solo performances.”

Brooks’ performances incorporate her many talents, including songwriting, singing and playing the trumpet and euphonium, while the music itself leans heavily on R&B, pop and house. Brooks’ stage presence as a multi-hyphenate will bring fresh style to the stage when she closes out Ferndale Pride on June 3.

“We’re particularly excited about Baddie Brooks because of her voice and her talent on the trumpet,” says Julia Music, executive director and co-founder of Ferndale Pride. “I think this summer is really just going to propel her forward to where she needs to be, so that’s really the exciting thing — having this person who has so much talent close out the stage and get a big spotlight on her.”

Brooks hopes that’s the case, too. Her goal is to inspire audiences at all of her upcoming shows, including Ypsilanti Pride on June 2.

“My performance is going to be very lively, the energy is going to be very high,” she says. “I feel like people are definitely going to be able to dance. And it’s going to be very upbeat and uplifting. I literally dreamt of performing at Pride and performing my own songs at



Baddie Brooks.
Courtesy photo

Pride since I was a teenager, so to be able to do this is a dream come true in itself because I just never thought I was going to be able to come out and do this.”

Through the most difficult times in Brooks’ life, music has been a constant avenue of expression.

“I would say throughout my life it wasn’t

easy not being able to grow up as myself,” Brooks says. “Music was always there as my comfort. I want to continue to create this album because I know I’m not the only person in that position.”

“Reclamation” has been in the works for five years, and her goal with the album is to encourage people to proudly claim who they

are. The three singles Brooks has already released have given listeners a glimpse into this theme. R&B ballad “Telepath,” Pride-packed pop song “Gworlz and Gayz” and transgender dance anthem “Buss Down Wig” all represent her expansive stylistic range as a musician and demonstrate her progression as an individual.

“I just feel like the different singles definitely reflect different stages of growth,” Brooks says. “The first single ‘Telepath’ definitely describes how I was before coming out. I was actually very shy, and that song is about wanting to approach a guy but wanting him to read [my] mind and just being too scared.”

Brooks says the second single “Gworlz and Gayz” encompasses a “celebratory moment” of how she felt when she was able to celebrate her first Pride, while “Buss Down Wig,” which was released alongside a music video filmed in Gigi’s in Detroit, focuses on the beauty of coming into yourself.

As she just started taking songwriting more seriously the last two years, Brooks says “Reclamation” will show her progression through the music, showcasing her experiences both before and after coming out. One song on the album, “13 Years,” signifies the amount of time, from ages 8 to 21, that Brooks had to repress who she truly is.

“In the fourth grade, I used the name ‘Demetra’ and temporarily felt like I was living authentically when I was in elementary school,” she says. “Once I began to hide my feminine persona out of concern for my own safety, it felt like I wasn’t living as my true self. My fellow students noticed that I was living a double life. I unfortunately began to hide that part of myself due to the pressure and discrimination I experienced from individuals who are not accepting of LGBTQIA+ identities.”

Throughout her time in college, the artist says the feeling grew more intensely, especially during Covid lockdown. “Having so much time to reflect on my personal identity made me realize that I could no longer hide, which I feel like many queer and trans people experienced during the Covid pandemic,” Brooks says. “I did not get to come out until I was almost 22 years old during my last year at Eastern Michigan University.”

Music has allowed Brooks to express

See **Baddie Brooks**, page 39



Pride Is Far From Banned in 2023

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

So much has changed since I penned my first freelance article for *Pride Source/Between The Lines* back in 2011, and I'm not just referring to our slow descent into a real-life version of "The Handmaid's Tale." In truth, many facets of daily life now are a lot more grim than they were a decade ago, even as Michigan emerges as a shining beacon of hope.

What propels many of us forward lately is the fierce, unwavering support of a queer community not about to let up, even in the face of unprecedented anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (aimed especially at our trans members). It's both life-affirming and not at all shocking that the *Pride Source/Between The Lines 2023 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar* includes a record-breaking 40-plus events across Michigan. As always, these colorful celebrations centered on LGBTQ+ voices will include visible displays of love, acceptance and joy, but what many allies and media outlets often miss are the core reasons Pride events have always existed: resistance and defiance.

Because Pride means *yes* in many ways. Yes to love, even when it doesn't look like the norm. Yes to self-expression, especially when it doesn't look like the norm. And yes to allyship. All are welcome here.

But Pride also means *no*. No to being pawns in the culture wars. No to book bans and school boards trying to erase our existence. No to tokenism, ableism and the old-fashioned racism that somehow still exists in 2023.

Pride events are being held all over

this state despite — and in response to — the shameful, conservative-supported vocalization of blatant homophobia and transphobia that has pervaded everyday politics in this country. The LGBTQ+ community isn't going anywhere, and the Pride movement is a collective, brightly colored middle finger to people devoting their time and money toward a goal of queer erasure.

If there's a unifying theme that ties together our forthcoming Pride coverage, which will shine a light on the rich diversity within the Southeast Michigan LGBTQ+ community and beyond, it might be "Pride Persists." LGBTQ+ Pride persists in tiny towns in the far reaches of our Upper Peninsula, in rural expanses in Michigan's midsection and in urban cores like Metro Detroit, Grand Rapids and Lansing. Pride persists in big stage performances featuring our dazzling, beloved drag queens and kings and in gatherings in small towns with a few dozen smiling attendees of all ages.

And Pride persists in everything we do here behind the scenes.

Our staff works together as a family focused on spreading LGBTQ+ joy, highlighting stories big and small that connect readers to our community, and navigating us all through the darker moments. We're thrilled to bring you this first issue of the 2023 Pride season, which has a special focus on Ferndale Pride. As Michigan's unofficial Queer Capitol, it's the perfect place to begin.

With love,
Sarah Bricker Hunt, Managing Editor

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Antonio Dave Garcia and Cheryl Czach. Photo: Steven Koss

Passing the Torch

Applying Lessons From the Past, Affirmations Plans a Seamless Transition as a New Executive Director Steps Up

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Although Antonio Dave Garcia is stepping down from his post as executive director of Affirmations, Ferndale’s LGBTQ+ community center, at the end of the year, he’s not exactly leaving. Rather, he’s stepping aside to take on other roles. The torch will be passed to deputy executive director Cheryl Czach, a familiar face to the “Aff” family since she began as a front desk volunteer at the center nine years ago and later joined the board of directors. There she would serve as president before ultimately joining the staff full time.

“I remember walking through the doors for the first time, feeling very nervous, which is something that I hear from people a lot,” Czach said. “I could never have imagined that eventually I would be leading the organization.”

When Garcia agreed to return to Affirmations in 2019 (he served as ED from 2012 to 2014), the center was on life support. After Garcia left for the Los Angeles LGBT Center to serve as director of policy and community building, the Affirmations board of directors conducted a national search that yielded two executive directors whose departures left a bad taste in the mouths of many community members.

The situation became dire. “Affirmations was in a state of turmoil,” recalled current board co-chair Anthony Sherman, who joined the board in 2018. “We had three full-time associates and the board of directors turned into a ‘working’ board to help keep the doors open.” By the time Garcia arrived, Affirmations had no budget and around \$30,000 in the bank.

Upon his return, Garcia discovered that grants were few and donations had dwindled. He would need to regain the trust of Affirmations’ past supporters.

“I called major donors and I said, ‘I’m not coming back if you don’t

come back,’” Garcia said. It was more challenging to convince the foundations. To get the ball rolling, Garcia went “on tour” to meet with GM, Ford and Chrysler as well as other former partners. The response was positive. Government grants for things like vaccination clinics were also secured.

Now in its 35th year, Affirmations is thriving. Today the budget stands at \$2.1 million. “It’s hard to look around the center and not see growth wherever you look — in all departments,” Garcia said, “whether that’s marketing and communications or, obviously, development. But from a

programmatic standpoint, health and human services has been our biggest growth.”

Expanding Affirmations’ mental health service offerings has long been a high priority for Garcia. Now the center has three licensed mental health therapists who can bill insurance.

New to the center is a food program, and the center can now guide community members with finding housing assistance and legal aid. There has been growth in the way the space is being utilized, too. Today, the Ringwald

See **Passing the Torch**, page 28

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Now, and Always, Why We Must Protect Trans People



BY JUAN MICHAEL PORTER II

We should fight for the rights of transgender people because it is the right thing to do

and because trans rights, like Black rights, queer rights and HIV rights are human rights — point blank, period.

I recently spelled that out to a former friend and fellow same-gender-loving man who asked why I kept getting “distracted” by supporting transgender folks. This person felt that I should stay in my lane and focus on HIV instead. He insisted — erroneously — that our trans siblings “don’t have it as bad as we did back in the day,” and were therefore less deserving of support.

It was almost as if he had transformed into a conservative commentator and forgotten about the existence of intersectionality — the overlay of existing discriminations that oppress various groups — and that we are all in this together.

Bigotry by any other name is still bigotry

After reminding him that he was mirroring the same coded language that xenophobic bigots have long used to deny aid to immigrants, I told him that I’d been hit with similar rhetoric from people who should’ve been standing in community with me: queer folks who have told me that people living with HIV “mess it up for gay people,” heterosexual artists who have claimed that my homosexuality was a perversion or that the only reason I was successful was because I am Black, and supposedly liberal — but actually racist — white gay men who’ve insisted that Black people “don’t have it as bad as [gay people] do and need to sit down.”

Not that the fight for collective liberation needs to be a case of the oppression Olympics, but it is obtuse to ignore the reality that if neo-Nazis show up, they are going to target Black folks first. Reductive comparisons aside, I speak of racism because the foundation for oppressing others in this country is rooted in anti-Blackness — equating

the richness of one’s skin with “dark evil,” all while connecting the notion of “pale superiority” with purity — and that this same ideology has been seized by homophobes to associate queerness and especially transgender existence with negativity. Hence the rush by right-wing extremists, such as the so-called Proud Boys, to target drag performers, who they equate with trans people.

What it all comes down to, I told my no-longer friend, is that there will always be a reason to hate people who are different — especially when it helps one to divide and conquer. Or as the activist and artist Qween Jean recently put it, “How are we fighting for Black liberation while denying it for our queer and trans siblings? The assignment was to dismantle the master’s house — not move into the guest house.”

But moving into “master’s guest house” — by becoming white supremacist adjacent and allowing proxy wars to turn us against each other — seems to be the name of the game for some people. And what’s it all about? Ultimately, the collective eradication of anyone who exists outside of white Christian

patriarchy’s ideal.

Arguing for freedom of thought while promoting genocide

Following our fractious discussion, I told my former friend that our relationship was over, at which point, he suggested that I was the actual bigot because I was judging him for holding a different opinion. I responded, “Harriet Tubman would have left you,” and walked away. Snappy retort and calm exterior aside, I felt sad about this breakup. I got over it by reminding myself that while I respect one’s right to disagree with me, I refuse to share my time with anyone who argues for the invalidation of another person’s right to exist — or who peddles anti-liberation talking points.

The most recent rush of anti-liberation (and decidedly anti-queer) hate seems to have broken past years of anti-trans bathroom and sports legislation and found a new standard bearer in the governor of Florida’s so-called “Don’t Say Gay” law — which

forces educators to out children who might be queer to their parents. The genesis for that law can be tracked to the Helms Amendment, which was introduced in 1987 by then-Republican Sen. Jesse Helms. That “no promo homo” law prohibited any funds provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from supporting HIV prevention materials and advocacy that might “promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activities.” This included mentioning anal sex.

Though Helms could be called the modern day progenitor of recent anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, its original blueprint was laid by a group of people who fled religious persecution in England, only to oppress others in this country — all while enshrining the rights of white Christian male landowners to eliminate Indigenous people, enslave and medically experiment on kidnapped Africans, and oppress their descendants. Presently, there is a move to erase this history because it might make white kids feel badly — all while ignoring how global

See **Protect Trans People**, page 44

Prom, Take Two

I Wasn't Out During My First Prom, But Affirmations Prom ReDeux Is a Chance to Reimagine That Special Night

BY ANTONIO DAVE GARCIA

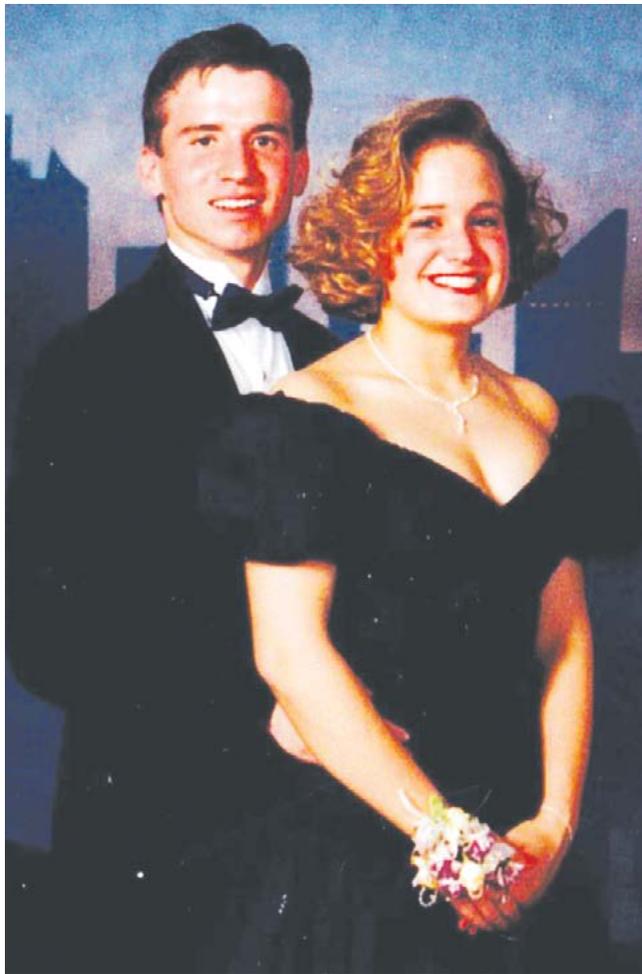
His name was Mike. We grew up down the street from one another. Of course, where I grew up, surrounded by corn fields and soy beans, “down the street” meant a good two to three miles.

Mike and I were close. We camped out together, spent the night at each other's houses, went on family trips and we definitely got into our fair share of trouble together. There was the time he stepped in to fight this huge guy that wanted to rip my head off for some wise-ass comment I may have made. Mike ended up breaking his hand on that guy's head.

Another time I was in a fight and he came out of nowhere to jump in and fight beside me. He ended up suspended. I, however, saw the principal coming and tried to get Mike out of there, but it was too late and, to the principal, it looked like I was actually trying to break up the fight and Mike (being Mike) would never sell me out.

He was amazing at mechanical stuff and growing up he would fix my bike and then, later, my car and I, in return, would write most of his book reports. I did talk him into reading “The Lord of the Flies,” and he liked it so much we took his first used car to go see the movie together when we were 16. I still wrote his report. He liked to race cars and play soccer, and I liked to sing and dance and play basketball.

There was no one



Dave Garcia and his prom date, Andrea. Courtesy photo

else I would have rather gone to our senior prom with than Mike, and we actually did go to prom together — just not as dates.

Two guys going to prom together in my small town was unheard of. I never even considered it an option. No one did. Instead, he went with his girlfriend Stacy, who was also a good friend of mine. In fact, I had set them up. I went with my beautiful and fun friend Andrea, and we are still good friends to this day. We did all the stupid crazy things young teens do at and after prom — including the obligatory sneaking away to drink Strawberry Hill Boone's Farm wine.

Mike was in love with Stacy. I was in love with Mike. Not an unfamiliar story for us

See **Prom, Take Two**, page 16

See the BTL staff's prom photos on p. 26

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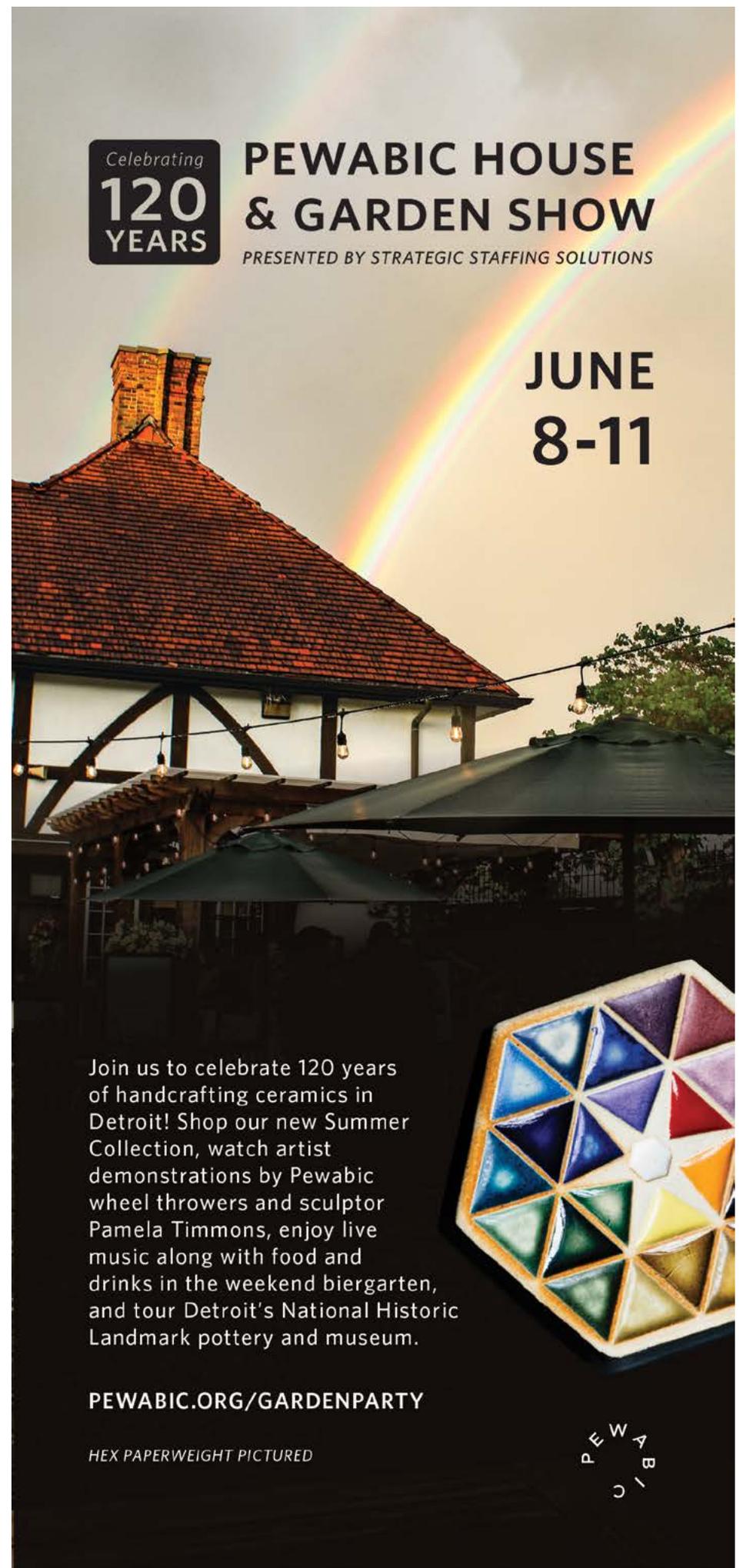
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Target CEO: We Are Giving Into Extremists Because That Always Ends Well



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Target is being, er... targeted by anti-LGBTQ+ extremists for daring to display Pride-themed merchandise in its stores. There are videos online of people throwing fits inside of Target stores over the rainbow-hued goods.

In one video, a man saunters down the aisle before he punches the Pride display sign and then knocks it down and stomps on it. When someone off camera is, like, WTF? He says, "It's disgusting" and "It's devil worship."

And it is to people like him that Target is capitulating by removing items from their Pride display and relocating their Pride displays to the back of the store in response to "threats impacting our team members' sense of safety and well-being while at work."

Keep in mind that Target has had displays of Pride merchandise for years. This isn't a new thing. What is new is the concerted right-wing attack on the LGBTQ+ community based on lies that we are a danger to children. This isn't a new argument. But its resurgence is particularly ugly right now as Republicans elected to legislative bodies across the country have made attacking transgender people, especially trans youth, their number one priority.

There are people in an uproar that there are children's Pride shirts and onesies. They say that this is proof that there is some kind of grooming campaign afoot. You know who buys this stuff? I do. LGBTQ+ people like me have kids. I have nieces and nephews whose parents support me and my family. It is not perverted for a baby to wear a onesie with a rainbow on it. And it won't make that baby gay or trans, either.

There is no concerted effort to "turn" kids gay or trans. That's literally not a thing. The fact is, the majority of LGBTQ+ people were raised by heterosexual cis gender parents along traditional (either/or) gender lines.

"The pride flag symbol, we need to make that toxic. We need to have companies think twice about it," Michael Knowles said on his

Daily Wire show on May 24. "And then once we make these things culturally toxic or as we're making these symbols culturally toxic, we've got to bring in the cavalry, we've got to come back in with more political force to ban some of this stuff."

This is the same guy who said that Democrats have "a bizarre sexual interest in children."

Here's the thing: Hate cannot be satiated. It is a bottomless void that no amount of concession will ever fill. The people fueling the Target uproar aren't just regular folks going into Target to buy milk, socks and a lawn chair. These are people who literally want us dead. They want to erase LGBTQ+ people. They want us gone forever.

To say that Target's response to this nonsense is troubling is an understatement. They have decided that keeping hateful people as customers is more important than standing up against anti-LGBTQ+ hate.

"Since introducing this year's collection, we've experienced threats impacting our team members' sense of safety and well-being while at work. Given these volatile circumstances, we are making adjustments to our plans, including removing items that have been at the center of the most significant confrontational behavior," Target said in a statement. "Our focus now is on moving forward with our continuing commitment to the LGBTQIA+ community and standing with them as we celebrate



“

Hate cannot be satiated. It is a bottomless void that no amount of concession will ever fill. The people fueling the Target uproar aren't just regular folks going into Target to buy milk, socks and a lawn chair. These are people who literally want us dead. They want to erase LGBTQ+ people. They want us gone forever.

Pride Month and throughout the year."

Standing with us, huh? Target might seem progressive and cool on the surface, but behind the scenes, they give plenty of money to Republican politicians who hate us. And that has far more consequence than selling a pair of rainbow stripe slide sandals.

That said, Target's Pride display has been a visible symbol of societal acceptance for years, and to see them cave like this shows us that they were only interested in co-opting Pride and selling it back to us.

Reports are that Target is now expanding its removal of Pride items, but it seems that artist Erik Carnell's items were the first to

be pulled due to the backlash, including a sweatshirt that read, "Cure transphobia not trans people."

"I've been told I'm going to hell since I was 11, if I was going to change I would have done it by now," Carnell said on his Instagram. "Please don't waste your precious time engaging with a stranger on the internet, I have not and will not respond to any of you. Instead, support your local community, take care of your fellow man. There's so much good you could be doing in this world, don't let your time go to waste."

Wise words, indeed.

What Does ChatGPT Know About LGBTQ+ Families?

Even If the AI Chatbot Can Write a Queer-Affirming Children's Book, That Doesn't Mean It Should



BY DANA RUDOLPH

ChatGPT, the artificial intelligence chatbot developed by OpenAI, has taken the world by storm, impacting everything from

college essays to call centers to computer programming. More than a search engine, it can create its own answers from the information it accesses. It is only as good as that information, however — and as with other technology solutions, may come with biases and errors from its human creators. This led me to wonder: What will ChatGPT tell me about LGBTQ+ families and resources for them?

I first asked it, “How do children do with LGBTQ+ parents?” It responded: “Research suggests that children raised by LGBTQ+ parents do just as well as those raised by heterosexual parents.” In fact, it said, studies have shown they may actually have some advantages: “They tend to have more diverse and open-minded attitudes towards sexuality and gender, and may be more accepting of diversity in general.”

It added, “The most important factor in a child's well-being is the quality of the relationship between the child and their parents, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. As long as children are loved, supported and provided with a stable and nurturing environment, they can thrive regardless of their parents' sexual orientation.”

That tracks with the research I know. I then asked, “What are the challenges of being an LGBTQ+ parent?” It listed legal challenges, social stigma, lack of representation, safety concerns and navigating healthcare. (I don't have space here to share ChatGPT's full descriptions, but you can see them at mombian.com.) It concluded, however, “Despite these challenges, LGBTQ+ parents are resilient and resourceful, and many find ways to build strong and loving families despite the obstacles they face.” Indeed.

I had to ask the counterbalancing question, “What are the good

parts of being an LGBTQ+ parent?” ChatGPT mentioned building a family on your own terms, teaching children about diversity, acceptance and the value of different types of families, creating a supportive community with strong networks of other LGBTQ+ parents and allies, challenging stereotypes and breaking down barriers, being more resilient and resourceful because of the challenges and developing a strong sense of advocacy for themselves and their families. “Overall, LGBTQ+ parenting can be a fulfilling and rewarding experience, just like any other form of parenting,” it said. I don't disagree.

I then tried a question about a specific segment of our community that I knew to have fewer resources, asking, “What are some resources for transgender men who want to get pregnant?” ChatGPT offered the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), Trans Fertility Co. and Family Equality, all relevant sites, plus one (LGBT Family Building) that does not seem to exist (though it is a page title within many other sites), and one organization for reproductive health that not only has no resources for trans parents, but is based in Nigeria, whose laws are very hostile to LGBTQ+ people. ChatGPT did conclude on this affirming note: “By seeking out resources and support, transgender men can take the necessary steps to start or expand their families in a safe and supportive environment.”

Can ChatGPT recommend books

for kids in LGBTQ+ families? It suggested, “And Tango Makes Three,” by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell; “Heather Has Two Mommies,” by Lesléa Newman; “George,” by Alex Gino (which it didn't know was renamed to “Melissa” a couple of years ago); “Julián is a Mermaid,” by Jessica Love, and “Red: A Crayon's Story” by Michael Hall (which isn't about LGBTQ+ identity per se, but ChatGPT rightly noted “has been interpreted as a metaphor for the LGBTQ+ community”).

These are great titles, but all are five or more years old. I ran the query with slight variation a few times, and ChatGPT mostly responded with on-target recommendations, even sticking with ones after 2019 when I asked for “recent” books. A couple of times it came back with titles that do not seem to exist, however.

I went further, and asked ChatGPT

if it could create a story about a boy with two moms. It did — and spun the tale of a boy named Alex who loved spending time with his moms. One day at the park, however, he overhears some other kids saying, “Alex has two moms? That's weird!” and “Don't you need a dad to be a real family?” His moms explain, “Families come in all shapes and sizes, and what matters most is that they love and support each other.” Alex tells the other kids he loves both of his moms, who take care of him and make him happy, and “That's what family is all about.” The other kids realize that “having two moms was just as normal and wonderful as having a mom and a dad.” Alex felt pride in his family from then on.

This storyline is affirming, yes — but it's one I've seen in numerous LGBTQ+-inclusive kids' books, particularly pre-2015 or so, in which having same-sex parents is problematized or questioned

before being shown to be just fine. It's perhaps the trope-iest trope of the genre. I don't think real authors will be put out of work by ChatGPT anytime soon.

Overall, then, ChatGPT seems to be appropriately inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ+ families, hearteningly reflecting the state of the broad information ocean from which it draws. It may not always give accurate recommendations for resources, however, and is not yet as creative as a human storyteller. As with much technology, it can be a useful tool, but still needs a human to confirm what it tells us.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ+ parents.



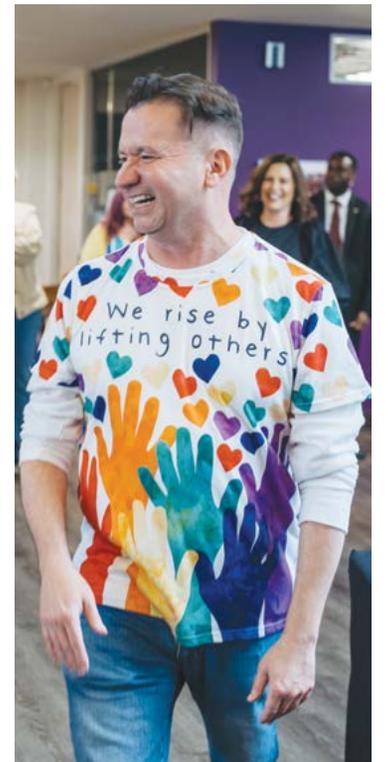
Why Not Keep Celebrating?

On the Heels of Pride Month, Another ELCRA Party



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer made it official back in March when she signed off on amending the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act amendment enshrining LGBTQ+ discrimination protections into law. Months later, the celebration is still going strong, including a joyous recognition event on May 20 at Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center.

Both Gov. Whitmer and Attorney General Dana Nessel were on hand for a ceremonial signing of the amendment, as were Michigan Sen. Jeremy Moss and Rep. Jason Hoskins, creators of dual bills introduced in their respective State House chambers. The event shined a spotlight on integral community members who helped usher in a bright new era for LGBTQ+ people across the Great Lakes State. Photos: Steven Koss (@stevekoss_)





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Pride Month Resolution Fails In Eastpointe

Equality Michigan Speaks Out on the City's 'Bigotry and Coldness'

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Perhaps the reason it's so disappointing that Eastpointe failed to pass a Pride Month resolution this year is because the city is believed to be the first to ever do so in Macomb County back in 2019. But that's what happened on May 16, when the Eastpointe City Council failed to pass the resolution by a 2-2 vote.

Councilmembers Harvey Curley and Cardi DeMonaco, Jr. voted in favor of the resolution. Rob Baker and Stacy Cobb-Muñiz voted against it. Mayor Monique Owens was absent from the meeting. The tie vote meant the resolution failed to pass. Owens had previously voted against a Pride Month resolution so it likely would have been a 3-2 no vote if she'd been in attendance.

Owens first voted no on a Pride Month resolution in 2019. At the time, she told BTL that "when this was put on the agenda, I didn't sleep for a couple days because I didn't know that we did not accept the LGBTQ community. Because as a family town, we've always accepted everybody. I didn't know we had to make a distinction on what that is."

In 2020, after Owens again voted against a similar resolution, Eastpointe resident Tim Kniaz told



Eastpointe City Hall. Photo: cityofeastpointe.net

“This comes at a time when many LGBTQ+ individuals and families, including queer and trans youth, have been hearing nothing but legislative violence across the country and here in Michigan. They are undoubtedly feeling very scared and alone. This is not leadership.”

— Erin Knott, Executive Director of Equality Michigan

BTL that Owens “basically shut out a whole entire demographic of people by not [voting for it].”

DeMonaco spoke to the Macomb Daily about his disappointment after the May 16 vote. “People want to love who they love just like

everybody else, and we need to support them and promote equality by supporting Pride Month in the city,” he said. “Hopefully we can consider that in the future.”

Chris Kipp is a member of Macomb County Pride. Kipp provided BTL with this statement written by the board: “It’s disappointing that the elected leaders chose not to recognize Pride Month this year,” the statement reads in part. “We are seeing an increase of

aggressive actions targeted to the queer community at school board meetings, such as Richmond and Romeo Community Schools, and residents attacking other districts such as Chippewa Valley Schools.”

“We know that teenagers especially are a vulnerable population and need affirming voices in their lives,” the statement continues. “We hope that teenagers in Eastpointe and Macomb County are able to find those voices — even if it isn’t coming from their city council.”

Erin Knott, executive director of Equality Michigan, was also

disappointed by the vote.

It sends “a clear message that LGBTQ+ people are not welcome, valued and safe in their community,” said Knott. “This comes at a time when many LGBTQ+ individuals and families, including queer and trans youth, have been hearing nothing but legislative violence across the country and here in Michigan. They are undoubtedly feeling very scared and alone. This is not leadership. This is bigotry and coldness, and it has no place anywhere in Michigan.”

◀ Prom, Take Two

Continued from page 11

unrequited queers.

Mike would soon head off to Ferris State and I'd head to Northern Michigan. We talked often, and I did my best to help him through his breakup with Stacy in those first few months of college. When Thanksgiving break came around, we were excited to see each other for the first time since heading off to college. I had finally

worked up enough courage to tell him that I liked boys. But, driving too fast in the rain, Mike would lose control of his new car and crash head-on into a concrete embankment.

Instead of coming out, I would be a pallbearer that week.

I've been thinking a lot about Mike lately as Affirmations plans our first ever adult prom. I wasn't out back then in high school and the idea of asking him — or any boy — to prom was impossible. Still, I wish I had. I'm sure many of

us in the queer community wish we could have asked the person we really wanted.

I'm not naïve. Mike didn't know I was gay and secretly thought I was dating his younger sister, though I assure you we were not and only had a mutual love for “Designing Women.” If I had asked Mike to prom, he would have thought I lost my mind. Times were different.

Affirmations' Prom ReDeux on June 24 is a chance for us to bring who we love. Or to bring that same-sex individual you're newly dating.

Or maybe it will be a first-time date with that certain queer someone you've been meaning to ask out for a while.

In any case, the punch bowl will be spiked, and the DJ will be cheesy and fun! I'm looking forward to seeing you there.

I'll bring the Strawberry Hill Boone's!

Antonio Dave Garcia serves as executive director of Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center.

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This Ferndale Pride Performer Knows Where Your Power Lies

Metro Detroit Musician Set to Spin on Dance Stage

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Ahead of her appearance at 6 p.m. June 3 on the Ferndale Pride Dance Stage, BTL spent some time getting to know DJ and music producer Alexa Rae Neff, aka RAEDY LEX, a 33-year-old Pittsburgh-born musician who has spent the past decade calling Metro Detroit home.

As a woman working in a male-dominated industry, Neff's success has been hard-fought and has required intentional efforts to break through the gender barrier. "Honestly, it is very challenging to work in male-dominated industries," acknowledges Neff, who uses both she/her and they/them pronouns. "But I do my best to focus on what I can control."

Neff says when she accepts a show, she makes sure there is at least one other woman or person of color on the lineup. "I make sure to encourage and support women and their projects so our voices are heard. I also make sure the men I am partnering with are allies willing to do the work to help women as a whole. I've been blessed to connect with some true allies who have helped me get to where I am today."

Neff's career has primarily focused on live DJ performances, but she's also been learning music production for the past few years. Her single "Like That" is available to stream everywhere.

In her own words, here are seven things you should know about Ferndale Pride performer RAEDY LEX.

1. It's [RAY-dee leks]

Yes, it's RAEDY not "ready." RAEDY LEX is a play on my name, "Alexa Rae." I chose to use that also as my performer name prior to me becoming a DJ. When I first began, I wanted my name to be different but still embody me, so I switched my middle name and first name with some adjustments and RAEDY LEX was born. I also love how it's a play on words. I use "RAEDY" instead of "ready" and "LEX" instead of "lets" in my branding — "RAEDY LEX goooooo."

2. Vegan and gluten-free

I follow a vegan and gluten-free diet, but man does this human like to eat. You can usually find a snack in my DJ bag, and it's generally the only request on my riders. I have an autoimmune disease called ulcerative colitis (UC), which makes me have to be very careful what I eat. I've been on a long journey of healing and finding comfort. I am currently on a daily medication and get infusions every eight weeks. I share this to let all who suffer know that we are not alone.

3. A passion for cannabis

So blessed to work in the cannabis space and to represent queer folks in the business. I am the Retail Marketing Manager for three brands: LIV Cannabis (we are so proud to be the

Naming Sponsors for Ferndale Pride this year!), Pure Lapeer Canna and Xplore Canna. It's an honor to know and to grow with our teams. I'm passionate about what cannabis can do for our planet. I speak adamantly about the power of the plant and how they work for my UC.

4. Flow Arts

Before I began DJing, I used to be heavily involved in Flow Arts. I've been a Lane Performer for Theatre Bizarre since 2018 and worked with larger productions such as Electric Forest and Dirtybird as well. Love getting to create and connect with LGBTQA artists. I am a proud and avid supporter of the arts as a whole. Julia Music, founder of Ferndale Pride, even let me do a fire performance back in 2017 at Ferndale Pride. So, so stoked to be back and to now have the opportunity to DJ at the Dance Stage.

5. Movement Electronic Music Festival

I've been going to Movement since 2005, when it was DEMF. This human loves techno and the city of Detroit. A friend of mine lied to my parents (my parents were very strict Christians and I was a horrible liar) and took me to Hart Plaza. Forever changed my life for the better and I've only missed two since Movement events then.

See RAEDY LEX, page 31



RAEDY LEX.
Courtesy photo



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Hannah Gadsby. Photo: Netflix

Hannah Gadsby Thinks You Deserve a Break

The Genderqueer Lesbian Comic Is Back With a Feel-Good Netflix Special

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

A lot has changed since Hannah Gadsby first took audiences on the unexpected journey that was “Nanette,” their 2018 career-making Netflix special. Yes, there was that whole Trump presidency situation and, oh, that global pandemic hiccup, but also, Gadsby got new glasses, an additional dog, created two more specials, put out a New York Times bestselling memoir (“Ten Steps to Nanette”), opened

an art show in Brooklyn focused on Picasso’s alleged misogyny (“It’s Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby”), and picked up a new descriptor along the way: beloved wife.

It’s that latter detail that Gadsby explores in depth in their latest Netflix endeavor, “Something Special.” Spoiler alert: A wild rabbit pays the ultimate price for Gadsby’s wedded bliss, but it’s totally not the rabbit’s fault. It’s just that, sometimes, the journey is

exactly the opposite of what you’re expecting, and maybe that’s the point of, well, everything.

The newly released special is a departure from Gadsby’s work on stage so far, which has focused on topics like neurodivergency (Gadsby is autistic), family dysfunction, mental health and other heavy topics. The comedian teases the audience that all the chatter about how this special would be more lighthearted than “Nanette” and “Douglas,” released in

2020, could be an elaborate ruse. Is existentialism and social reckoning right around the corner in this new show? Nah. Gadsby, as they remind us in example after example, is not a good liar.

This special, like the others, is about where Gadsby is at this moment in time. And, happily, this moment is a good one.

“I didn’t expect to get married,” Gadsby tells BTL in a recent Zoom interview. “So I thought that was an interesting enough place to begin.

Also, I believe my audience has invested in me. I shared my pain and my trauma and my difficulties, and I think it would be weird to hide my current state of joy. That would feel like a disingenuous approach. So I really wanted to share that.”

Gadsby’s marriage to producer Jenney Shamash, who the comedian calls “Jenno,” has been surprising in one way, the comedian says. “Being surrounded by straight, unhappy

See **Hannah Gadsby**, page 30



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Pride Stage

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Saturday, June 10, 2023

<u>Time</u>	<u>Act</u>
1:15pm	Breakfast for Dinner
2:00pm	Better Love
3:00pm	Sabin's Drag Revue
4:00pm	The Iron Roses
5:00pm	Boys of Fall
6:00pm	Sabin's Drag Revue
7:00pm	Siena Liggins
8:00pm	The Robyn Party
9:00pm	Stage Closes

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Noon	DJ CIV
1:00pm	PRISM Men's Chorus
2:00pm	Drag Show: Robin Fierce from RuPaul's Drag Race, Jasmine Kennedy from RuPaul's Drag Race, Sabin
3:00pm	Little Visits
4:00pm	Mama Yaya
5:00pm	Andrew Christian
5:30pm	JORDY
6:15pm	DJ CIV
7:00pm	Stage Closes

Festival Stage

Saturday, June 10, 2023

<u>Time</u>	<u>Act</u>
1:30pm	The Science Fair
2:30pm	Desert Sharks
3:30pm	Killing Pixies
4:30pm	Hayley and the Crushers
5:30pm	Rodeo Boys
6:30pm	The Idiot Kids
7:30pm	Synthia Looper
8:15pm	Stage Closes

Sunday, June 11, 2023

1:15pm	OneLineDrawing
2:30pm	The Dick Withers Band
3:30pm	Larah Helayne
4:30pm	CHECKER
5:30pm	Act of Violets
6:15pm	Stage Closes

Schedules are subject to change. Check the website

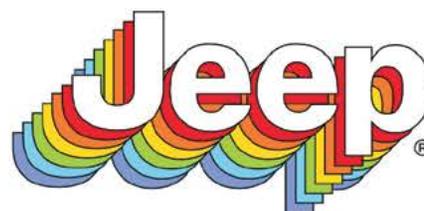
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Pyramid Stage

Saturday, June 10, 2023

Time	Act
2:00pm	DJ DigiMark
3:00pm	Bronsyn Sacker
4:00pm	THAY
5:00pm	Nugisy
6:00pm	Robert Bannon
7:00pm	Anthony J Fink
8:00pm	Stage Closes

Sunday, June 11, 2023

1:30pm	DJ Edward Alan
2:30pm	Sharp Lives
3:30pm	Crystal Harding's Drag Revue
6:00pm	Stage Closes

Riverfront Dance Stage

Saturday, June 10, 2023

Time	Act
1:00pm	HOUSECATS: HOTWAXX HALE and Jenny LaFemme
3:00pm	Jesse Cory B2B Ben Scott
5:00pm	TYLR_ and KASS DETROIT
7:30pm	Ladylike
9:00pm	Stage Closes

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Noon	Ashton Swinton and Garrison XR
2:00pm	Kindle
3:30pm	Mister Joshooa and LOREN DETROIT
5:30pm	John Collins
7:00pm	Stage Closes



SATURDAY
WELCOME GATES OPEN AT 1 P.M.

FESTIVAL EVENTS 1 - 9 p.m.

Four Stages of Entertainment Featuring over 50 Acts!

Over 140 Sponsors, Vendors, Non-Profits & Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+ people coming together for Equality!

1 - 5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games
Sponsored by Kroger

8 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes
(No Admittance or Re-Entry after 8pm)

9 P.M. Festival Closes

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SUNDAY
WELCOME GATES OPEN AT 12:30 P.M.

FESTIVAL EVENTS 12:30 - 7 p.m.

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NOON 2023 Motor City Pride Parade
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1-5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games
Sponsored by Kroger

6 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes
(No Admittance or Re-Entry after 6pm)

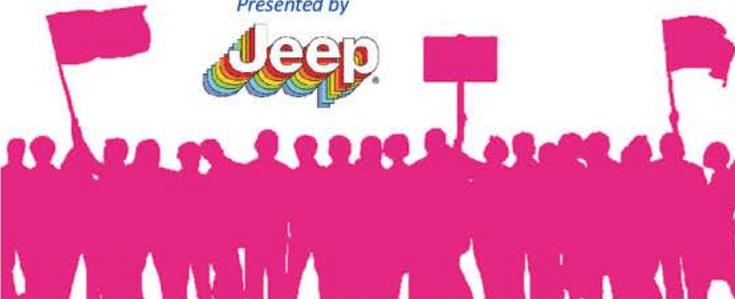
7 P.M. Festival Closes

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PARADE

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Sunday, June 11 Starts at Noon

Starts at the corner of Fort and Griswold

www.motorcitypride.org for any last minute updates.





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- Sunday Assembly Detroit
- Sunset Toys
- Support the T
- Swagger Is A Gift
- The Cancer Screening Project
- The Cathedral
- Church of St. Paul
- The Henry Ford
- THE ORIGINAL
- HOUSE OF DOPE
- The Spliff Bag
- Tna Blessed Llc
- To Write Love on Her Arms
- Tri-County Foster Care Coalition
- Twisted Willow Soap Co.
- Twistful Thinking
- Unified HIV Health and Beyond
- UNITEHERE! Local 24
- USF/DS
- Vicious Fruit Apparel
- Visions of Citrine
- Wayne State University
- Prevention team (WSUP)
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Saturday

JUNE 10TH
1:00-5:00 P.M.

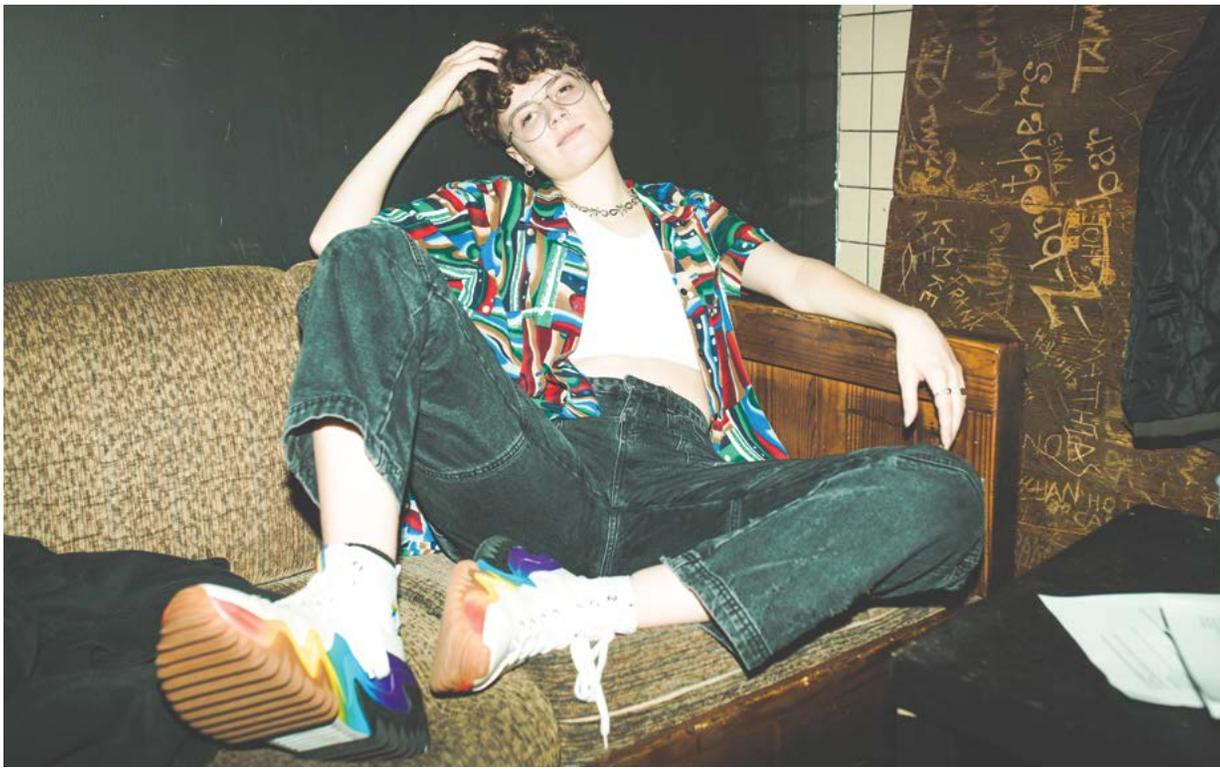
Sunday

JUNE 11TH
1:00-5:00 P.M.

Join other families as they participate in face painting, arts and crafts, plus much more!

PARADE MAP SUNDAY AT NOON!





Diana Graham. Courtesy photo

Meet 'The Little Sister of Detroit Comedy' Who Found Fame on TikTok

Engineer by Day, Joke-Teller by Night

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

In the world of standup, genderqueer comedians like Diana Graham represent a small but growing demographic.

On that list are Jes Tom, Lorelei Ramirez, Peter Smith, James Tison and Spike Einbinder. Count Graham among them. The Livonia native has been riding a wave thanks in no small part to platforms like TikTok (@dianagraham), where they have over 205,000 followers.

When they aren't working as an industrial engineer, Graham can often be found on stages throughout Southeast Michigan (they performed in April at the "Queens for a Cause" fundraiser in support of Affirmations), where they are fondly nicknamed "the little sister of Detroit comedy."

Temporarily relocated some 800 miles from home for work, Graham talked with BTL about the joys and challenges of both of their careers.

How in the world did you end up in Nebraska?

My job moved me to Nebraska for a second. So, I'm here till the end of June.

www.PrideSource.com

And my birthday is June 8.

Any birthday plans?

I've been thinking that I really want to put on a "hecklers encouraged" comic show.

A what now? I've never heard of such a thing.

It's kind of a Detroit thing. It's what I miss most about home. So I'm going to see if I can convince them to let me do that. Detroit has a few of them. Usually, it's an open mic ... and everybody is encouraged to heckle the comedian as you go along. It's like exposure therapy. It's to help you work out new material but also get used to hecklers. You become immune to it and don't let it bother you. I like it because it's so interactive. It's a lot of fun.

By day, you're an industrial engineer. Are there any similarities between your two jobs, or any overlap?

I think being a comedian, it helps me be smart. Engineering is just problem-solving. And I think comedy is almost the same. Comedy, at least the way that I do it, I'm very mindful. Why did they

laugh at that or why didn't they laugh at that? Or what do I want to be saying? I'm always asking myself: I love this idea but what's at the root of it? What's funny about it and what do I think they're going to like about it? You're constantly dissecting things and figuring out what works. And that's what I do as an engineer, too.

Take us back to your roots and tell us how your comedy career started.

I wanted to be a comedian ever since I found out what standup comedy was. I was about 12 and I was sharing my brother's Pandora account. I was listening to the comedy station and I was like, "Whoa, what is this?" Mind you, I probably didn't get most of the jokes. But the sheer concept, I had never been exposed to. So I got it in my brain that I was going to do it to some degree. But I never expected to do it at the capacity I do.

Do you remember your first time?

The first time I did standup was right

See **Diana Graham**, page 32



Hope in Montana
Puzzle on page 41



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Prom ReDeux

The BTL Staff Edition



Carolyn Cardenas
Director of Operations

Lived through the 90s and survived the hairspray bills! The fashion can come back, but please not the hair!



Sarah Bricker Hunt
Managing Editor

I'm here in front of my parents' fireplace mantel alone, but later I'd meet up with my high school boyfriend and future ex-husband. If I could tell 17-year-old me to run in the opposite direction, would I, though? That's the tricky bit about teenage memories — they're foundational, for better or worse.

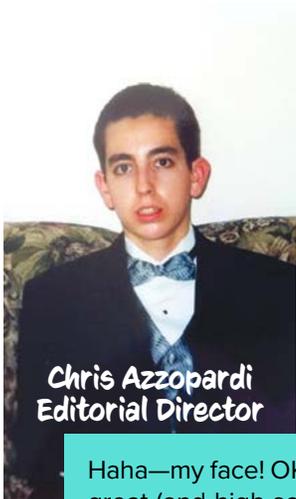
Ah, prom. Is there a more divisive four-letter word to describe high school memories? The way some adults tell it, prom was a magical evening set just on the edge of early adulthood, a soft launch into the promises of a golden future. Great music, great friends and damn, you looked fine all dressed up.

For others, prom was just another nightmare social experience among peers who didn't get you, set against an evening of music you hate in an outfit you hate more. Your mom probably made you go there. If prom is the precipice of adulthood, by the time it was over, you weren't sure you were looking forward to adulthood anymore. For queer folks, too often, something closer to this description rings more true. Even if you didn't exactly hate it, there's a good chance you weren't able to really be who you wanted to be at prom.

Whether your prom was the best night of your life or one you'd rather forget, consider this opportunity for a redo!

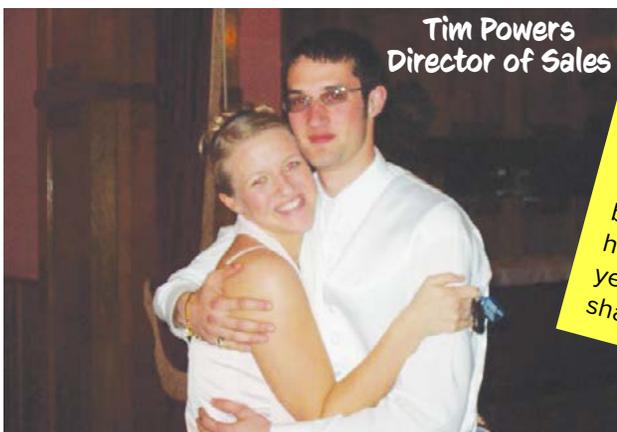
That's right, Affirmations' Prom ReDeux is on June 24. Ahead of the event, BTL staffers are sharing a few memories from their own enchanted (or less-than-enchanted) evenings.

So do as we are — look back at your younger self with some gentleness and good humor. Then consider Prom ReDeux. Because everyone deserves a special night out to celebrate exactly who they are.



Chris Azzopardi
Editorial Director

Haha—my face! OK, so pretending I was straight during prom wasn't great (and high school wasn't always great either!) but it definitely wasn't as bad as this picture of me on my parents' couch makes it seem.



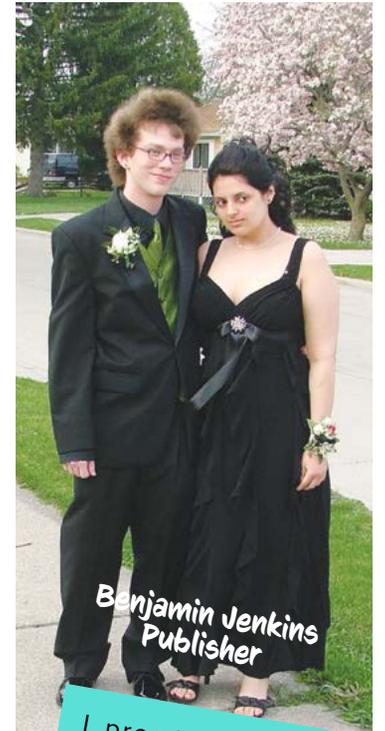
Tim Powers
Director of Sales

I wish I could tell myself to not worry about learning to shave and just let the beard grow. Could have avoided 15 years of being clean shaven!



Sarah Wolf
Graphic Designer

I'd love to wear this dress again, but I lost count of how many dress sizes ago this was!



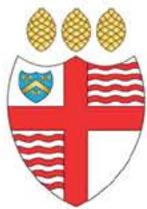
Benjamin Jenkins
Publisher

I promise I eventually figured out what to do with my curly, frizzy hair — embrace it!

PRIDE SERVICE

SUNDAY, JUNE 11 | 10 AM

AT

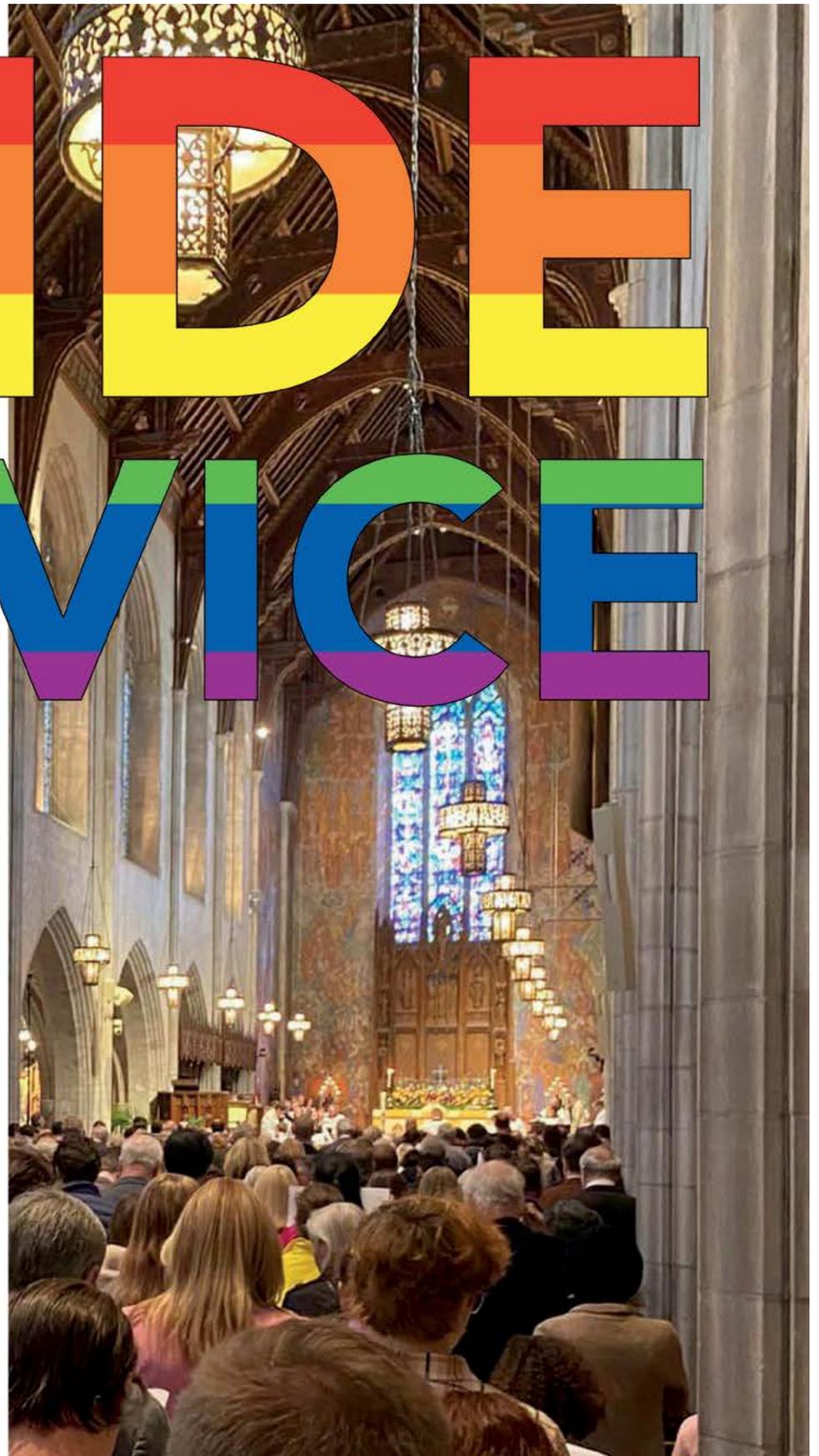


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◀ Passing the Torch

Continued from page 8

Theatre and Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit are housed at Affirmations' headquarters on 9 Mile and Ferndale.

Affirmations even thrived during the pandemic, which hit just under a year after Garcia returned. Already in the throes of his greatest challenge as ED, securing a reliable budget to right the ship, Covid shut Affirmations' doors. In addition to in-person programming, big-ticket fundraisers were no longer feasible.

"We were like, 'What are we going to do?'" Garcia said. "How do you run a community center when you can't open the front doors? So that's when we just tried to be creative." Programming was made possible via Zoom. Two telethons were organized. Donors stepped up. And the center actually made money during a very dark time.

Without a dedicated team of board and staff members, the transformation that Affirmations experienced under Garcia's leadership would not have been possible. Garcia said he's especially proud of the diversity of his staff and the board of directors, both of which include 40 percent persons of color. "So from a DEI [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion] perspective, we're getting better," Garcia said. "But we have a long way to go."

Not surprisingly, Czach and others give Garcia's performance as ED high marks. "I don't know that I could praise him enough," Czach said. "Dave often says, 'It's not me. It's the staff.' And of course, there's an element to that. But Dave is the person who put the staff together, who leads the staff, who offers them guidance and mentorship, who gives them the space to grow and to perform."

Board co-chair Brianna Yuille agreed. "I think Dave has done an incredible job as our executive director. Since coming back, he's grown Affirmations in every area: programs, services, staff and board of directors. I'm very proud of him and the positive changes he's made for our community. I don't think I've known a better person in my life who's done so much good for others."

Yuille is equally confident Czach can take the reins and move the organization forward. When Yuille joined the board in 2019, Czach was board president. Yuille said she was impressed with Czach and that she looks up to her.

"[Czach] is an extremely rare individual, and we're very lucky to have her. She has successful experiences of running large organizations and coaching others who do the same. Most importantly, Cheryl cares deeply about Affirmations and the community it serves."

Sherman pointed out that Czach knows the staff and the community and will transition smoothly into the ED role. "The entire [board] believes that she is the right person for this position and that there was no need to do a national search which would cost tens of thousands of donor dollars," he said.

Garcia, who brought Czach in earlier on a contract basis, said he was pleased with the HR work she did for Affirmations when they were

having staff issues. "And then we just became closer and developed a friendship. I trust her, and I think she's going to do a really good job," he said.

Czach not only brings extensive HR experience, she has also held roles responsible for finance, operations, IT and facilities management. "My executive leadership experience has touched a lot of the areas that are important for an ED," she said.

Despite Czach's solid record and a chorus of support, Garcia has a single but persistent concern. Czach is white and he feels the community expects the next ED of Affirmations to be a person of color. Yet he said Affirmations learned from experience that just because someone is a person of color does not guarantee they are going to understand the community or the organization or be the right person for the job.

It's something Garcia, a light-skinned Latino, feels acutely. "I've struggled with that my whole life because I am a person of color," Garcia said. "I was raised in a Mexican American Latino family. That is my culture. My grandparents are people of color. My father is a person of color. My siblings, my brother is very dark skinned. And I am a Garcia."

Czach addressed the issue head on, too. "It's been important for Affirmations for a long time, certainly when I was on the board, that our leadership, our staff, reflects our community. And stepping into this position as a white, cisgender, queer woman, I'm well aware that I'm not necessarily reflecting the diversity of our community, and it's top of mind for me." She stressed the organization's emphasis on DEI.

Garcia is excited to turn his attention to areas of interest at Affirmations like arts and culture. "Our partnerships with Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the opera and other theaters across the region, art openings — all of that excites me," he said. "New plays, comedy, open mic nights. We need to be doing more."

Theatergoers can expect to see Garcia star in "Candy Corn, Christ and the Convoluted Creation of Golf," a play he wrote in 2000, at the Ringwald Theatre in October. He has plans for another play, and is at work on a book based on 30 years of personal journals. To preserve the histories of LGBTQ+ leaders, Garcia wants to secure a grant to conduct interviews over the course of several years.

Garcia is also passionate about public policy and advocacy work, which he'd like to take on either locally or nationally as the 2024 election approaches. That could include contract work with other LGBTQ+ community centers.

Since returning to Michigan, where he has extended family and where he plans to keep as his home base for now, Garcia has undergone personal inflection points as well. For one, his 26-year-old daughter, whom he raised, came out as transgender two years ago.

"Not only did Navy transition while I was here," Garcia said of his daughter, "not only did we have Covid while I was here, but there was domestic violence in my life and my heart was broken in a way that I've never experienced before. And so, the personal toll of being an executive director, trying to navigate [your] own personal life — it's not easy. These jobs are not easy."

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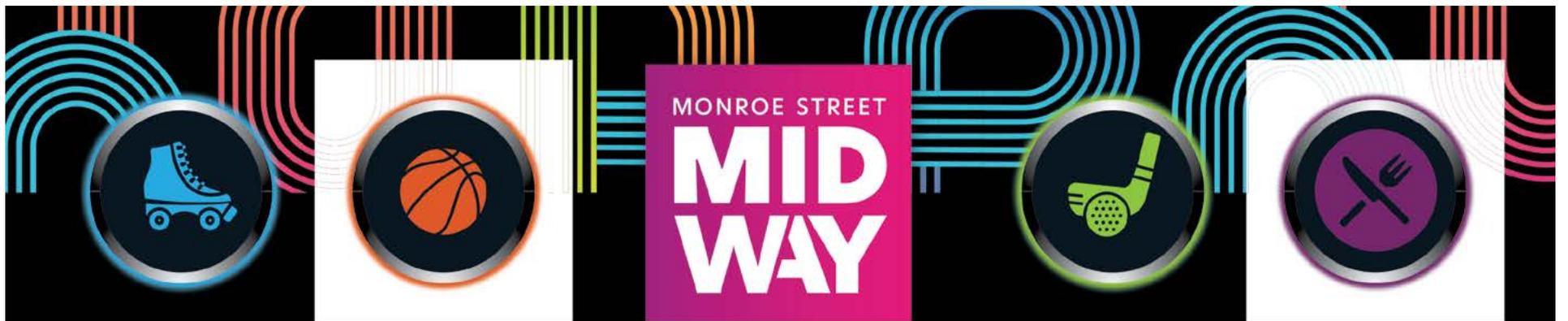
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◀ Hannah Gadsby

Continued from page 20

married people my whole life, I'm mostly surprised that it's not so miserable. Like, you hear comedians talk about it: 'My wife's this. My wife's that.' Why did you marry that horrible person you keep complaining about?" they joke.

Gadsby says that as they toured with the new material, audiences responded in a way that made it clear this was a show they wanted and, in many ways, needed. "It's going to be a feel-good show because I believe I owe you one," they say in the special. "I have dragged you through a bit of my shit over the years, and you've stuck with me. Much obliged! But it's time for some payoff!"

Still, Gadsby is happy to dig into the heavy stuff during our time together, acknowledging the deeply disturbing culture wars being fought in the U.S. with the LGBTQ+ community at the center — especially LGBTQ+ kids and young adults. "I was a young person during a very similar time, but without the internet — so it wasn't that similar," Gadsby says. "But the anti-gay rhetoric that I grew up with — the discourse surrounding me when I was growing up — was frighteningly similar to that which we're experiencing now."

Coming of age in tiny Tasmania, an Australian island state some 150 miles south of the mainland, Gadsby said they felt isolated, a struggle in and of itself. But today's younger generation is experiencing an anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment "everywhere all at once."

"So it's incredibly difficult, particularly, to be a young queer person in this moment," they add. "And I can't speak to that experience. I'm not queer... That is a joke. I'm not young. But, I wanted to lead with the fact that I've overcome the trauma of this kind of environment."

Gadsby is frustrated that the world is experiencing a new wave of anti-queer sentiment. "Part of the rage in 'Nanette' was the fact that we don't learn," they say. "Why aren't we learning? Why can't we learn? And I still have that rage. There's still a fight to be fought, but there'll be time for that. I just felt like we need a break also because we're fighting for our right to exist."

Gadsby notes that people trying to oppress the queer community don't actually have skin in the game. "They're not going home and wondering if they'll be safe. They're already safe. That's what we have to remember as a community. It's like we have to look after ourselves and each other, on a very personal level."

Looking after each other can be challenging for people experiencing trauma — the tendency can be to retreat into isolation. "Yeah, that's what trauma does," Gadsby says. "And what's going on at the moment is incredibly traumatic. We're in a

new place, and it's frightening, but I think it's horrible to think that I'm an 'elder' and I'm only 45, but we have to do our bit to help relieve the pressure."

In many ways, Gadsby's presence on stage is a billboard for intersectionality. They are frank about their identity as a genderqueer lesbian and their 2017 autism diagnosis, aspects of Gadsby's personhood that has made it challenging for the entertainment world to figure out where they belong.

"Before I even began my career, I was difficult to categorize my entire life, and not for a lack of trying," Gadsby says. "But I think that's where my comedy begins — it's me trying to be what people would prefer I be, and my persistent failure is what has gotten me here. I think I'm... close. I'm always close, but just always fall short. But I think that's where comedy lives, so it's not a problem."

Neurodiversity has been a central topic in all three Netflix specials. "And I'm really keen not to *tell* autism, and rather to show it. That's what this show really is. It's showing autism."

At one point in "Something Special," Gadsby recounts two separate stories involving awkward encounters with Jodie Foster. In one, Gadsby crumples up a bit of cardboard where Foster had written down her phone number, right in front of Foster (one of Gadsby's sensory issues relates to feeling "very irritated" when they have to hold small and irregular-shaped objects against their palms). In another, Gadsby responds to a birthday gift from Foster by saying "I've already got Bananagrams!" and then chucks the present to the side. The stories are universal on one hand — virtually everyone can conjure up social encounters they'd like to do over — but resonate strongly with the neurodiverse community.

Foster, Gadsby says, was gracious about the incidents. "She was there with a wife and they just kept on being amazing, kind, generous people," they remember.

"She's very competitive at charades, though. I will give her that," Gadsby adds.

Throughout the special, Gadsby stresses how important it has been to have Jenno by their side as both their romantic partner and producer of their shows, describing their relationship like the sport of curling. "I'm the giant puck," they say in the show. "And every morning, we have a little team meeting and go, 'This is where you need to go, this is how fast you're gonna go there, this is the line you're gonna take,' and then we send me out, and there's not a fucking thing I can do about it."

Perhaps neurodiversity is Gadsby's secret super power? "Maybe. Although we've just told everyone, so, rats!"

"But, no. You've always got to keep trying to make connections. That's what we are as humans, and it's a particularly difficult time to do that. All I can say is hang in there, and it's not your fault."



RAEDY LEX on stage. Courtesy photo

◀ RAEDY LEX

Continued from page 18

6. Elie and Torvi

I have two pitbull mixes, Elie and Torvi. We rescued them from a Humane Society in 2019. They're so smart and lovely. They like long walks, playing at the dog parks, pupsicles, and snuggling with their moms.

7. "Like That"

I just dropped my first track "Like That" that I produced with Tom Uncommon. For me, "Like That" means do and be whomever you

want. I even used my own voice in the track to make it even more of a statement from me to the whomever needs to hear it. So, so proud of myself and grateful for my partner Tom Uncommon's help with bringing this to life. As well as Guilty Records for picking up the track, which you can find at hypedit.com/jq6who.

8. Signing off

I always end my shows the same way every time, by telling the audience: "Remember to be kind. Remember to be necessary. Remember to be true. And remember to always be you — that is where your power lies."

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Diana Graham on stage. Courtesy photo

◀ Diana Graham

Continued from page 25

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before my 17th birthday. Before that I was always writing notes in my phone of little things that I thought were funny. And that's still how I do it today.

How do you address being genderqueer with your audiences — or do you?

I don't know that I necessarily explain it anymore. I used to have some jokes where I would say, "I'm genderfluid because being the hottest girl in the room wasn't enough for me." But now I've kind of shifted to talking about my life and my experiences more as a matter of fact. I leave it less up to whether or not you agree or whether or not you understand. It's just this is the way that I am, this is the way that I live, and here's the joke.

Have you faced any backlash or criticism for your honesty?

You go to some open mics and there's more people out there who just want to get up on a mic and talk. I was in Denver and this man spent his whole set talking about beating up a trans person. So, as a trans person, following him was not so fun.

Yikes. What about dating? You're single. What do dates say when they find out you're a comedian?

Well, it's something that I keep off my dating profiles. It's a little embarrassing. You say you work in comedy. What does that mean? My family members don't feel I make any money out of it, which is true and not true.

Do any of your dates end up in your act?

Sure. [If something fun happens] I am going to write a bit about you, I can't lie. It's going to happen.

I understand that you really blew up on TikTok during the pandemic.

I posted three videos all at once just to see what would happen. I just posted them and from those three, one immediately went viral. So there's not been a time on TikTok that I haven't had a following. It's kind of crazy. Especially for me being a young, queer comic. My first joke to ever go viral was about being genderfluid.

If you get big enough, will you leave your day job?

I like my day job. I like engineering. I say this in all my interviews — with the skills that I have and the passions I have, I think industrial engineering is how I can help the most people. And that's what I want to do with my work and my comedy. I want to make the most people happy. Plus, I don't know if I could ever give up the healthcare that I have.

Learn more about Diana Graham at linktr.ee/dianagraham.

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Images from the BTL Pride festival archives featuring Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (top left), Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II with drag performer Sabin (right) and throngs of Pridegoers (bottom left). Photos: Andrew Potter

Your 2023 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar

Pride Season is in full bloom for 2023, and you'll find all the important details right here. From small-town Prides in unexpected places to the big mainstay events happening in June and beyond, there's something for every Michigan Pridegoer.

JUNE

Thursday, June 1

Trenton Pride

5:30 p.m. Trenton City Hall (2800 3rd St., Trenton).

Saugatuck/Douglas Pride

Through June 5. Known as neighboring LGBTQ-affirming vacation spots for decades, Saugatuck and Douglas will each host festivities. On June 1, head to Alley's Classic American Diner (229 Center St., Douglas) for a drag bowling party at 6 p.m. The Saugatuck Douglas

District Library (174 Center St., Douglas) will host a free presentation, "Book Banning and its Impact on the LGBTQ Community" at 4 p.m. On June 3, the annual Pride parade begins in Saugatuck High School (401 Elizabeth St., Saugatuck) at 12 p.m., commencing at Beery Field (8 Center St., Douglas), where the Pride fest will be held. Featured entertainment includes music by NIAH band, Tom Sandoval & The Most Extras and a DJ. Food provided by Chris Steel. Stack BBQ. Soft drinks, beer and mixed drinks will be available. Learn

more at facebook.com/profile.php?id=100065008781044

Friday, June 2

OutFront Kalamazoo

Through June 3. The two-day festival features show-stopping drag performances, incredible music, exhibitors, food, dancing and more. June 2, 6 p.m.-midnight; June 3, 12-11 p.m. Arcadia Creek Festival Place (145 East Water St., Kalamazoo). outfrontkzoo.org/pride2023

Ypsi Pride

Featuring performances by DJ Myint, Amaretto and Baddie Brooks. 4-10 p.m., Depot Town, Ypsilanti. facebook.com/YpsiPride

Saturday, June 3

Ferndale Pride

Music, drag and more on two entertainment stages (including folk duo Nervous But Excited, J. Santino and the Ferndale Drag Extravaganza featuring Motor City Drag Kings), a large vendor marketplace and plenty of entertainment for the whole

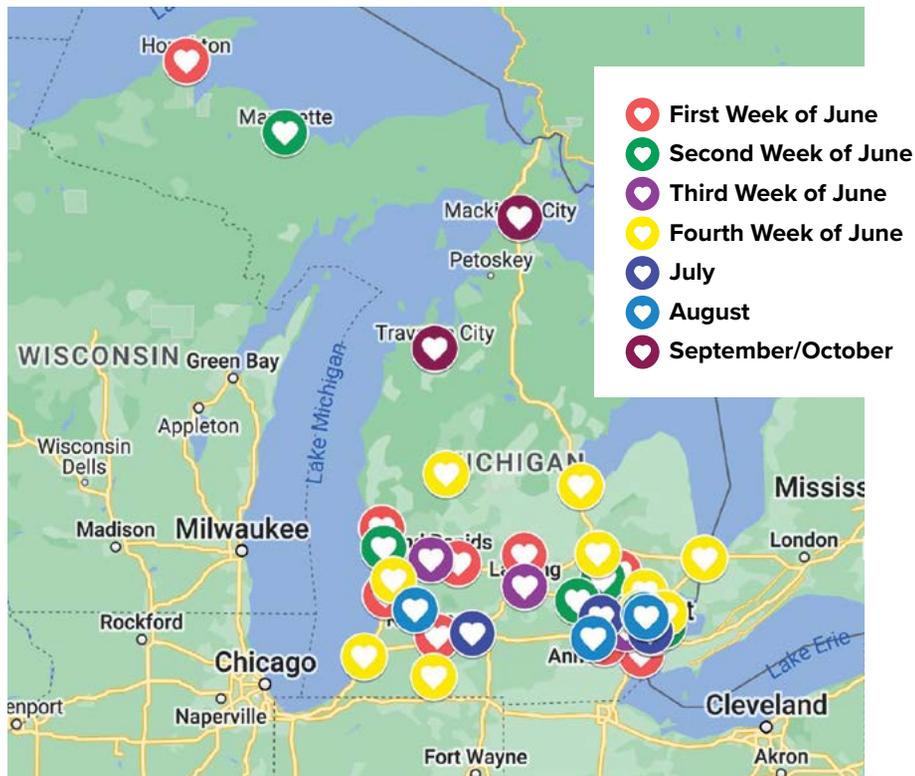
family, Ferndale Pride has grown into a not-to-be-missed Southeast Michigan Pride event. 12:30-10 p.m., downtown Ferndale. Ferndalepride.com

Keweenaw Pride

1-5 p.m., East Houghton Waterfront Park (1220-1298 E. Lakeshore Dr., Houghton). facebook.com/events/1195350074484550

Lowell Pride

10 a.m.-6 p.m., Lowell Riverwalk. lowellpride.org



Muskegon Pride

Muskegon's first ever Pride parade kicks off at 10:30 a.m. in downtown Muskegon, followed by an all-ages Pride fest (starting at 11:30 a.m.) at Unruly Brewing Company (360 W. Western Ave., Muskegon). muskegonpridecenter.wixsite.com/website

stages, plentiful food and drink options, and a wide variety of activities for all ages. This year, MCP welcomes pop singer-songwriter Jordy, whose new album "Boy" is out now; Detroit native and up-and-coming pop artist Siena Liggins; The

Ortonville ("Abigail's Pride")

11 a.m.-4 p.m., downtown Ortonville. abigailspride.godaddysites.com

St. John's Pride

12-4 p.m., downtown St. John's. allevents.in/mobile/amp-event.php?event_id=200024123144016

Saturday, June 10

Detroit (Motor City Pride)

Through June 11. Michigan's largest Pride festival draws more than 50,000 visitors each year to a two-day event featuring entertainment across three

See **Pride Calendar**, page 38

New this year, check out the interactive 2023 Pride Source/Between The Lines Michigan Pride Festival Map. Search by location or zoom in to find a Pride fest near home or while you're enjoying a Michigan road trip this summer. Find the map at bit.ly/3oDcral.



Motor City Pride 2023 performers (left to right) Hayley "Crusher" Cain (of Hayley and the Crushers), Siena Liggins and Anthony J. Fink. Photos courtesy of Motor City Pride

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Jake Shears. Photo: Damon Baker

Jake Shears Channeled Joy on His Second Solo Album, Even If He Wasn't Feeling It

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Listening to his new album, “Last Man Dancing,” you wouldn’t know Jake Shears went through a pandemic breakup. After all, he doesn’t process his personal hardships through his music, Shears admitted to me during our recent interview.

And so “Last Man Dancing,” his second solo release after his 2018 self-titled album, is a “party album through and through,” he says. This, then, is a Shears LP down to its deeply disco-heavy core, rooted in the glittery glam-pop sounds of the Scissor Sisters (which, by the way, haven’t totally disbanded, though they are on a very long indefinite hiatus — Shears spoke on that in our recent interview, too).

The Scissor Sisters made Shears, the band’s frontman, a gay icon almost 20 years ago

when the quartet’s self-titled 2004 debut embraced the kind of unabashed queerness we’ve now come to expect from LGBTQ+ artists.

Shears, whose look has gone from twink to daddy (is there a 44-year-old gay man who can’t relate?), tells me he watches up-and-coming queer artists with great admiration. But without Shears, it’s hard to imagine what their careers might look like — could they be as freely expressive if he wasn’t leading the way in feather-adorned leather pants or that bare-chested suspenders look he favored? Even for a generation of LGBTQ+ people who aren’t musicians (including yours truly), Shears made celebrating ourselves easier by always outwardly celebrating himself.

The publicity notes for his latest album call it a “reminder to keep moving through whatever life throws at you.” So while he may

not have created a breakup album or one that speaks directly to this current climate of Republican-charged anti-queer expression, Shears’ message of defiance through joy, dance and self-celebration profoundly resonates. It’s an exultant Pride proclamation to get us through the night.

When we last spoke in 2018, I felt like you were just getting settled into New Orleans. You had just maybe moved, is that right?

Yeah, I’d been there for a little while and I had my apartment. I bought my house after. I have a house there now; you’re like, what are you doing in London now?

That was my follow-up question, actually.

New Orleans is always my wind-down spot, you know what I mean? It was always a place for me to go be creative and feel free.

And I love it so much. I can’t be there year ’round. I started getting a little twitchy. So I wanted to come to London because I knew I could just get all my work done here; I could get loads of stuff done. It’s been super busy this last year, so it’s been good. It’s just kept me on my toes.

With “Last Man Dancing,” I always appreciate when you have a new album out because so much of my experience is rooted in your music.

Thank you. I get excited about it too.

And this is cool because it’s an all out party. I was like, where are the Jake ballads? And it kept playing and I’m like, OK, I guess I’m just supposed to dance the whole time.

Yeah, they don’t come. It was an idea that I had when I had half of the songs written

for this and the album was taking shape, and then I was like, “What if it just doesn’t stop?” And there’s a halfway point to the record, so I put it in two parts — but what if it just keeps going and literally the second half doesn’t stop; there’s no stops between the tracks. It’s definitely a party record with a lot of different influences going on.

I imagine you created it during the thick of Covid.

Some of it. There’s a few songs before, some during and some after. So not wholly. “I Used To Be In Love” and “Devil Came Down the Dance Floor” [featuring Amber Martin] were made totally remotely. Me and [producer Michael] Cheever made them a world apart and made a really cool ballet of studio monitors, iPads, iPhones, headphones, earbuds, all on top of each other to mute. If you’ve got your monitors going and you’ve got your mics going, and it’s echoing and reverbing... it was just a load of muting; we’d have to get each other’s attention on the screen and wave “turn things off.” Yeah, it was complicated.

I read that a lot of the vibe of the album was influenced by your parties, specifically ones you’ve had in New Orleans, which made me feel like I had missed out on a lot of good Jake Shears parties.

Oh god, they’re still going to go on and on. My house there is very special and it’s very central. It’s a couple blocks out of the [French] Quarter. It’s really nice. It’s not fancy, but it’s super cozy and vibe-y and there’s loads of books and there’s record players everywhere and great art and, yeah, there’s a place to dance.

Collaboration has been a significant aspect of your career. What do you value most about collaborative experiences and how do they influence your creative process?

I don’t make anything by myself. I get seeds of ideas. I’ll do some writing. I’ll get concepts, but the joy of making music is the joy of hanging out with somebody else that you like and doing something with them. Cheever, Boys Noize, Vaughn Oliver and Ryland Blackinton — we all are just great friends. We just love working together. So there’s fun happening while we’re making music and geeking out on stuff. It’s a great hang and it’s super fun. You build something together and there’s payoffs. Cheever and I wrote “Diamonds Don’t Burn.” I was literally doing vocals in his 3-year-old’s nursery when she was at school.

What was going on in your life when you wrote these songs?

It’s kind of all over the place. There was nothing too personal, although my boyfriend and I broke up in the summer of 2020. I was just absolutely devastated, and it took me two years to get over it. I’ve

never been so heartbroken, but I had no desire to put that into the music. I wanted to put the good times into it and the joy and the fun that I was having, especially when stuff started opening back up, when New Orleans sort of came alive again and we could all get together. That was what I wanted to infuse into it, the fun that I was having as well. But yeah, that was a super rough moment. A breakup in the middle of lockdown is just not fun.

So many artists write best when they’re heartbroken, and so the fact that you didn’t take advantage of that musically and went in the opposite direction is really interesting — maybe making a dance album was, for you, the catharsis?

It is, and also, I’m just the opposite. If I’m having a bad day and if I’m not feeling good and if I’m feeling depressed, I don’t want to write, I don’t make myself write, I don’t feel like working on creative stuff. I really only like to work creatively if I’m feeling good, if I’m feeling healthy, if my brain feels good. I’m not one of those people that makes lemons into lemonade, necessarily.

Even now, you’re still addressing themes of self-acceptance, love and empowerment. How do you think your work from Scissor Sisters and beyond has contributed to the broader conversation surrounding LGBTQ+ rights and representation?

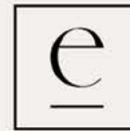
It was a funny, old world in 2003, and it is in 2023. I do think that we are in a better spot in so many ways. It’s such a big conversation. I feel like it was such a different world then; we didn’t have social media and we weren’t communicating the same way that we are now. I would never want to go through what I did then, now. Just having that spotlight, everybody can so easily just get amplified unwillingly in one moment, and I liked that world better.

I hope that I opened up some doors and pathways as I feel like people did for me who came before me, and it’s nice to see queerness being celebrated in mainstream culture and risks still being taken. I also find some of it to be... I’m really going to have a really hard time getting to my point. I think there’s been a lot of inauthentic allyship. Look at the Dodgers right now.

Do you see that same kind of inauthentic allyship in music?

Not necessarily. No. I see a wide breadth of artists being listened to and adored and these artists taking risks. Just seeing Anohni put out a record or announce an album was really exciting. But then there’s the new kids I’ve become friends with, like Jake Wesley Rogers, who I love so much. It’s just been really amazing watching him

See **Jake Shears**, page 40



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Orion Story performs at Lansing Pride, June 17

◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 35

Robyn Party, a tribute to Swedish dance-pop artist Robyn, and local drag favorite Sabin. You'll also find "RuPaul's Drag Race" stars like Robin Fierce and Jasmine Kennedie on the Pride Stage. The Riverfront Dance Stage is usually where the DJs like John Collins spin. The Festival Stage, where you can catch a performance by "poolside glitter punk" band Hayley and the Crushers, is predominantly punk, rock 'n' roll and folk. Finally, the Pyramid Stage is for up-and-coming talent — don't miss Robert Bannon on Saturday night. June 10, 1-9 p.m., June 11, 12:30-7 p.m., Hart Plaza (1 W. Jefferson St., Detroit). Pride parade June 11 at noon, downtown Detroit. motorcitypride.org

Grand Haven Pride

Grand Haven will hold its first Pride festival in 2023, featuring drag shows, a live DJ, drag bingo, food and drink, a kids zone and

an adult friendship connection area. The all-ages event is set for 12-9 p.m. at Waterfront Stadium (1 North Harbor Dr., Grand Haven). ghpride.org

Holly Pride

1-6 p.m., Holly Lakeside Park (Holly Bush Dr. and Park Ave.,

Holly). facebook.com/ACTHOLLY

Howell Pride

Tiny Howell in Michigan's Livingston County is a prime example of Pride persisting in an unlikely place. The Pride Alliance of Livingston will host the event, which includes swag, games, face painting, crafts, food trucks and a performance by a cappella group MaskEra on the lawn of the Howell Historic Courthouse from 12-4 p.m. qflivco.org/upcoming-events/howell-pride-parade

Marquette Pride

1-10:30 p.m., Ellwood Mattson Lower Harbor Park, (200 N. Lakeshore Blvd., Marquette). uprainbowpride.org/events

Saturday, June 17

Grand Rapids Pride

Grand Rapids will hold its 35th annual Pride celebration, themed "Unapologetically Me" in 2023. The bustling festival, one of the largest one-day events held in Grand Rapids each year, will offer 100+ vendors, a beer garden, entertainment on multiple stages, family and children's activities, food trucks, local artists, a sensory space and teen/youth activities. 12-10 p.m., Calder Plaza (320 Ottawa Ave. NW, Grand Rapids). grpride.org/festival

Grosse Pointe

WE GP will feature a short march, music, activities for kids, a selfie station and activism opportunities. Attendees are encouraged to bring signs, joy and Pride. 1-3 p.m., downtown Grosse Pointe at the corner of Kercheval Avenue and St. Clair Street. wegp.org/event-5267072

Lansing Pride

Michigan's capital city boasts a long, influential history as the

birthplace of several modern LGBTQ-influenced movements and organizations, including the long-running Women in the Arts Festival (held in neighboring East Lansing each November). The annual Pride event will include more than 100 vendors, live entertainment all day long and a beer tent. 1-11 p.m., Lansing's Old Town neighborhood (centered on the 1200 block of Turner Street). lansingpride.org

Livonia Pride

Livonia's very first Pride event runs from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at Livonia Civic Center Park (15218 Farmington Road). facebook.com/events/1223582008522184

Saturday, June 24

Bay City (Great Lakes

Bay Pride)

11 a.m.-6 p.m., Wenonah Park (801 N. Water St., Bay City). greatlakesbaypride.org/regional-pride-celebrations/#pride-festival

Benton Harbor

12-6 p.m. Dwight P. Mitchell City Center Plaza (127 Pipestone St., Benton Harbor). outcenter.org

Flint Pride

2-8 p.m., Riverbank Park (100 Saginaw St., Flint). facebook.com/FLINTGAYPRIDE

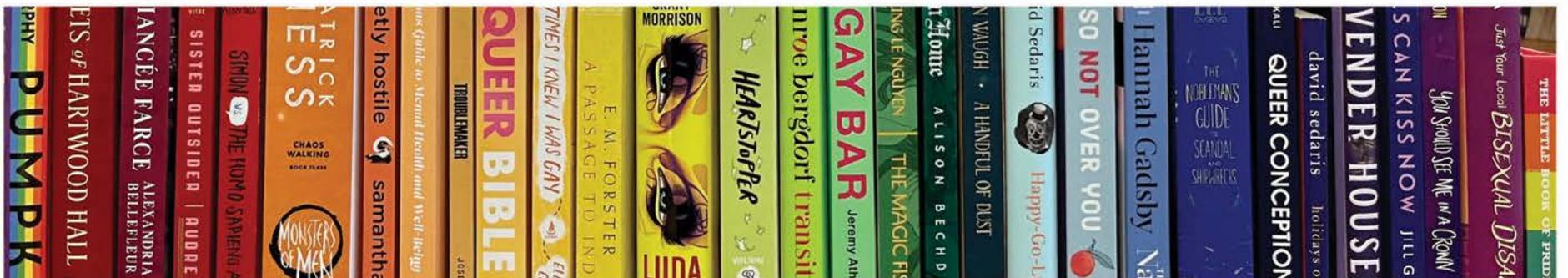
Holland Pride

Out on the Lakeshore, the host organization for Holland's annual Pride fest, faced an unfriendly local county government this year when it came time to plan the popular event. Ottawa County, which has made national headlines driven by the actions of a vocal anti-diversity county commission, withdrew funding, but the organization pushed ahead to create a family-friendly festival complete with food, entertainment and a renewed commitment to support and affirm the region's LGBTQ+ community. 12-5 p.m., Centennial Park (250 Central Ave., Holland). facebook.com/HollandPride

See **Pride Calendar**, page 42



Holland Pride 2022. Photo: Facebook



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Baddie Brooks. Courtesy photo

◀ Baddie Brooks

Continued from page 6

herself in a way she didn't have the chance to when she was younger. Now, she can show other members of the LGBTQ+ community that they can be comfortable being their true self too.

"Black trans women deserve to be loved and protected," Brooks says. "People need to take the time to actually get to know us as people. Violence or bias against us is unacceptable and disgusting."

The tragic fact is that transgender women of color disproportionately experience violence. In Michigan, the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act has recently been expanded to further protect LGBTQ+ residents from discrimination in employment, public services, housing and educational facilities.

In the U.S., though, trans rights are being targeted by anti-LGBTQ+ legislators, and according to the American Civil Liberties Union, there are currently 474 anti-LGBTQ+

bills pending in state legislatures across the country. Brooks expressed her feelings on the current political climate in the country.

"LGBTQIA rights need to be protected at all costs," Brooks says. "We deserve to be safe, and should not be targeted for just being who we are. I think that it's important to highlight the successes of transgender people."

Performing during Pride events is just one way Brooks' success will be highlighted, and she hopes her performances and upcoming album will inspire other young queer people in the community.

"My music is meant to tell a story," Brooks says. "I really want to continue empowering queer folks in general and letting them know that they deserve to be celebrated and to embrace who they are."

Brooks is set to perform at Ypsilanti Pride June 2 and Ferndale Pride June 3. The performer is raising funds to support the release of "Reclamation." Visit bit.ly/42Z3FCe to contribute.



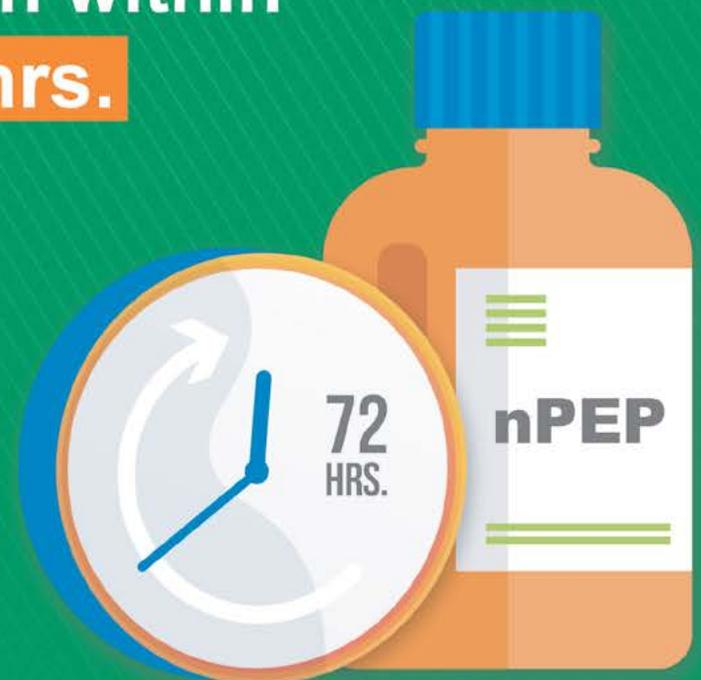
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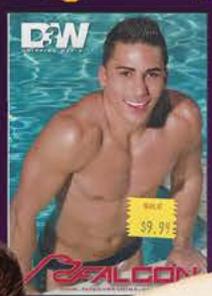
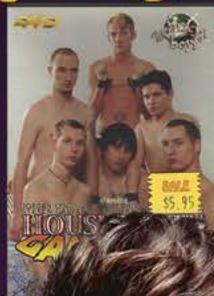
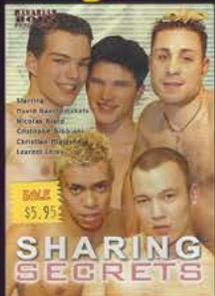
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Jake Shears. Photo: Damon Baker

◀ Jake Shears

Continued from page 37

blossom. It's also really interesting because he has a completely different experience in what he is doing. I mean, he's on TikTok all day long. It's so strange. To me, I just think it's weird. I think it's unnatural, and I don't ever really want to do that. But if the kids want to do it, then have at it.

So listen, I can feel like an absolute grumpy old man, but I also don't feel like an old man yet. So I don't know. I'm going to be 45 this year, which is just crazy. I don't know how I'm going to feel at 45. I'm so proud of everything I've done, and so I feel so lucky and fortunate with my career and I've been able to do all this stuff and then at the same time I'm like, "Am I going to have a family? Who's going to look after me when I start losing my marbles?"

Do you have any nieces or nephews who dote on you?

Kelly Ripa and Mark Consuelos are two of my best friends. I pull their kids aside all the time and I tell Lola, I'm just like, "You are going fucking to take care of me. I know you are going to take care of me."

I plan on living on a "Golden Girls"-style compound with all of my queer friends, and we will just all take care of each other. We're going to help each other keep our marbles.

It's what's happened in New Orleans. All my best friends have moved down there. When I'm down there now, it's just loads of family around. Although the other day I held a baby and burst into tears, so I'm just

like, "What?"

So maybe you were meant to be a real daddy.

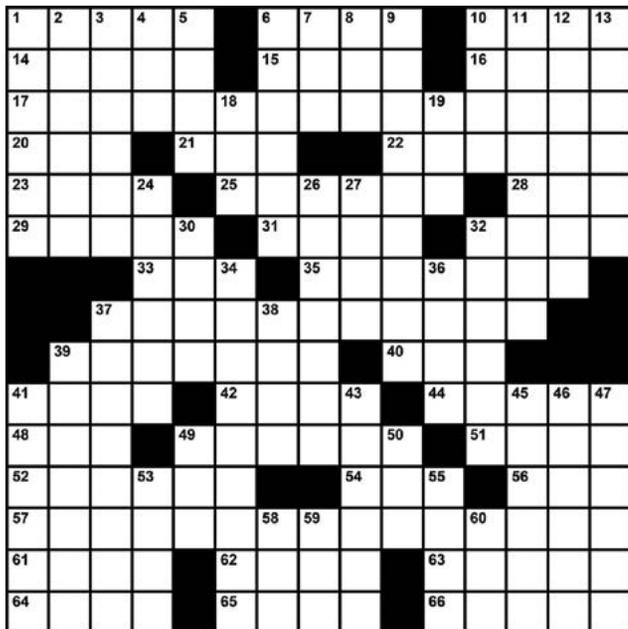
I don't know, though. I just feel like it's a new phase of life. I definitely want to just keep working. Now, another musician friend of mine who's putting out a record next month, we had about an hour on FaceTime last week, and he's going to be 50, and he was just like, "We can't do this forever." It's like, "We got to do it now," and I agree.

Next year is the 20th anniversary of Scissor Sisters' debut album. I know you get this question all the time about a reunion, and based on what I've read, you're very open to it. So if you're very open to it, why hasn't it happened yet?

I don't know. I think I want everybody to be down and ready and stoked if that was ever to happen. I definitely don't want to be twisting anybody's arm. Not that that's happening, but yeah, it would be nice. I think it would be really fun, and I think it would be great. So yeah, you never know. Stranger things have happened.

I think people want you to be the ringleader here and get the troop together, but I guess everyone has to be in on that too.

Everyone's got their own lives and stuff, you know what I mean? All I can do is just keep moving forward and doing what I love to do, and I'm so happy about just getting to put this album out. I feel like this record's got some Scissor spirit to it in a lot of ways. It's all one. I look at it as one body of work.



- 33 House seat holders, e.g.
 35 Cut out
 37 Montana state legislator and source of the answer
 39 Plowed land
 40 Long, slippery one
 41 South Korea's Syngman
 42 Alfred Douglas' title
 44 "___ sight!"
 48 Work unit
 49 Less likely to use the tongue
 51 Get dirty
 52 Gave a mighty blow
 54 Organ pleased by Bernstein
 56 Civil War monogram
 57 End of the answer
 61 Barneys event
 62 Like love, for some
 63 Mother-and-son piece
 64 London park name
 65 Jamie of "M*A*S*H"
 66 Flaming queen's activity?
- 10 Switch on a radio
 11 Troy Perry, for one
 12 Planned to kill Caesar, e.g.
 13 Erects
 18 Muscle problem
 19 Puts the finger on, in a lineup
 24 Diamond bird
 26 Karen Walker, and others
 27 "Woe ___!" (Hamlet)
 30 Carbon compound
 32 Engraver's tool
 34 Closed hermetically
 36 Logical prefix, for Rev. Jane Spahr?
 37 "Follies" producer
 38 Role for Bela
 39 Express road.
 41 Discuss to death
 43 Bottom's cry?
 45 Conservatives of Gielgud's land
 46 Relates with
 47 Cher's ex-husband Gregg
 49 Address book no.
 50 Sarah Schulman novel "___ Bohemia"
 53 Put your rear in gear
 55 Big name in TV talk
 58 Title for a man who avoids sex with women
 59 Above, to Byron
 60 To me, to Magnus Hirschfeld

Hope in Montana

Across

- 1 Talk like Gomer
 6 Anticrime acronym
 10 Dance club speakers
 14 Kind of queer
 15 Out and then some
 16 Denver elevation, roughly
 17 Start of the answer to "Do you ...feel that your one vote can make a difference?"

- 20 FICA funds it
 21 Title for Laurence Olivier
 22 Lets in
 23 Kind of list
 25 Atlantis cruise accommodations
 28 Pre-Eppie Beatle Sutcliffe
 29 Catch in a trap
 31 Where Dr. K. Weaver works
 32 From A to B, to Debussy

Q Puzzle

Down

- 1 Franklin and Jefferson, religiously
 2 "Because I said so," e.g.
 3 The Spanish one was huge
 4 Come out on top
 5 Signs of "The Lion King"?
 6 Gung-ho
 7 "___ Were a Rich Man"
 8 When repeated, a Cole Porter musical
 9 It may resonate with a Handel concerto

See p. 25 for answers

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Big Freedia. Courtesy photo

◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 38

Monroe County Pride

12-6 p.m., St. Mary's Park (111 W. Elm Ave., Monroe). bit.ly/43a65hV

Rochester Pride

1-4 p.m., Rochester Municipal Park (400 6th St., Rochester). linktr.ee/foreverpride?mibextid=Zxz2cZ

Three Rivers Pride

12-9 p.m., downtown Three Rivers. facebook.com/threeriverspride

Sunday, June 25

Berkley Pride (Block Party)

The second annual Berkley Pride Block Party is set for 12-4 p.m. at 12 Mile and Robina Avenue. downtownberkley.com/berkley-pride

Port Huron (Blue Water Pride)

10 a.m.-3 p.m., 701 McMorran Blvd., Port Huron. facebook.com/BlueWaterPride?mibextid=LQQJ4d

Big Rapids Pride

The second annual Pride Big Rapids Festival, themed "Live with Pride," will feature a beer tent, live music, a drag show, food vendors and more. 12-8:30 p.m., Northend Riverside Park (North 4th Ave., Big Rapids). pridebigrapids.org

Saint Clair Shores Pride March

Organized by the Saint Clair Shores Residents for Equality group, the second annual St. Clair Shores Pride March will feature speakers starting at 11 a.m. behind the Chapoton Pump Station (23001 E. Nine Mile Road, Saint Clair Shores). The march route follows Jefferson to Blossom Health Plaza to the end of the pier and

then back to the start. facebook.com/events/108974112207197

JULY

Saturday, July 8

South Lyon (Pride in the Park)
12-5 p.m., McHattie Park (S Lafayette St., South Lyon). facebook.com/SouthLyonPride

Friday, July 14

Hotter Than July

Through July 16. Hotter Than July, the world's second oldest Black LGBTQ+ Pride, is celebrating its 27th year in 2023. Hosted by LGBT Detroit, this three-day event focuses on entertainment, education and Black LGBTQ+ culture. Throughout the week, LGBT Detroit will host a candlelight vigil in remembrance of community members who have died, a book festival, a testing zone, an awards brunch, a worship service and a concert on July 15 at Motor City Casino featuring "Queen of Bounce" Big Freedia and Detroit's Amber Chene and Nuandré. lgbtdetroit.org/hotterthanjuly

Thursday, July 20

Battle Creek Pride

Through July 23. Battle Creek Pride's four-day event features an LGBT Q&A on July 20 (6:30 p.m. at Miller Stone Building), a Pride parade on July 21 (7 p.m. along Michigan Avenue, from Washington Avenue to Commerce Point), a festival on July 22 from 1-7 p.m. at Leila Arboretum (928 W. Michigan Ave., Battle Creek) and a candlelight vigil on July 23. battlecreekpride.org/pride-weekend

AUGUST

Friday, Aug. 4

Allegan Out Loud

Through Aug. 5. Allegan's second annual Pride festival, Allegan Out Loud, will feature an adults-only drag show on Aug. 4 at Griswold Auditorium (401 Hubbard St., Allegan) and a festival on Aug. 5 offering food, vendors, music, a drag queen story time and an all-ages drag show at Riverfront Plaza in downtown Allendale. facebook.com/alleganspeakup

Royal Oak Pride

Through Aug. 5. Details TBA. royaloakpride.com

Saturday, Aug. 5

Ann Arbor Pride

12 p.m., downtown Ann Arbor. facebook.com/AnnArborPride

Sunday, Aug. 13

Hazel Park Pride

Green Acres Park (620 W. Woodward Heights Blvd., Hazel Park). Details TBA. facebook.com/MotownDragBingo/

Saturday, Aug. 26

Transgender Michigan Pride in the Park (Ferndale)

Transgender Michigan is celebrating the 24th anniversary of Transgender Michigan Pride in the Park in 2023. The event, which features a vendor area and a bring-your-own picnic is a chance to socialize, learn about local organizations and businesses serving the Michigan transgender community and more. 12-6 p.m., Martin Road Park (1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale). transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride

SEPTEMBER

Thursday, Sept. 14

Mackinac Island Pride

Through Sept 17. Community Hall (7358 Market St., Mackinac Island). Details TBA. straitspride.org/

Wednesday, Sept. 27

Traverse City

(Up North Pride)
Through Oct. 1. Downtown Traverse City. Details TBA. upnorthpride.com



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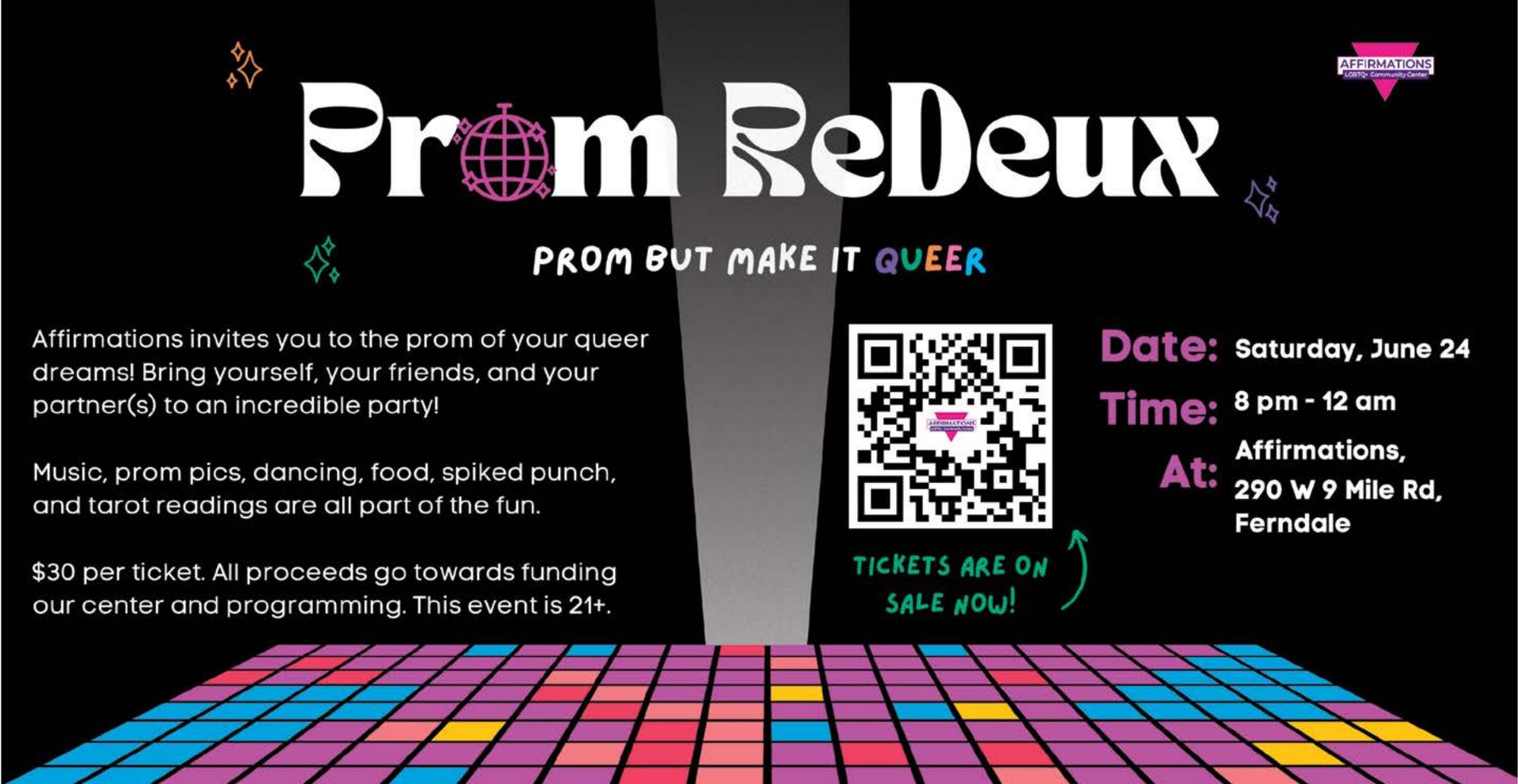
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◀ Protect Trans People

Continued from page 10

majority children might feel or the fact that such history could inspire white youth to feel positively by aligning themselves with collective freedom.

Dragging us back in time

These efforts to legislate global majority and queer people out of existence are part of a multi-pronged attack to deny historically marginalized people access to sexual health or basic care, are the literal manifestation of “Silence=Death,” and have disastrous implications for all people — because what affects one will eventually affect all.

Though there has been some racial and sexual progress over the last two decades, with this year’s introduction of over 400 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, it seems that conservative activists have returned to saying the quiet part out loud. To wit, the conservative commentator who — during the Conservative Political Action Conference, held earlier this month — stated, “Transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely.”

This brings us back to Helms who, during his arguments against funding HIV prevention, stated, “Some senators believe the AIDS epidemic is so bad that we should disseminate whatever materials anyone wants to produce

regardless of content. But I still flinch when I hear the word condom on television... We’ve got to call a spade a spade and a perverted human being a perverted human being, not in anger but in realism... I just want the American taxpayer’s dollars to be spent in a moral way.”

By 1993, Helms’ morals had contributed to HIV becoming the leading cause of death among people aged 25-44 years in the U.S. Though he was considered extreme in his day, he still held the ear of President Ronald Reagan and was able to push forward his amendment with a vote of 94-2. As Lori Behrman — then-spokesperson of Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) — foresaw, “This kind of amendment only sets a precedent that will come to haunt everyone at a later date.”

That date is now. And if we aren’t all in this together — if we don’t support transgender people who currently bear the brunt of these attacks, even as they fight for our collective right to thrive — we will be taken down piece by piece until no one is left.

Juan Michael Porter II is a senior editor at TheBody and TheBodyPro. He has been living with HIV since 2015. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service. Visit thebody.com, hivplusmag.com, positivelyaware.com and poz.com for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.



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9/22 ALL TIME LOW

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6/17 PALACE
6/25 ANEES
10/2 MATT AND KIM

THE SHELTER

7/23 LEANNA FIRESTONE
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9/2 THE NUDE PARTY

LITTLE CAESARS ARENA

6/14 BRYAN ADAMS W/ JOAN JETT AND THE BLACKHEARTS
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www.kingofkingslutheran.org

Trinity Lutheran Church
1400 Stadium Blvd.
www.trinityA2.org

Zion Lutheran Church
1501 W. Liberty St
<https://zlc-aa.org>

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www.tlcbattlecreek.org

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www.ourrisenlordelca.com

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St. John Lutheran Church
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www.stjohnsondundee.wordpress.com

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University Lutheran Church
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www.ulcel.org

St. Paul Lutheran Church
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www.stpaul-el.org

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Hope Lutheran Church
39200 West Twelve Mile Rd.
www.hope-lutheran-church.com

FERNDALE

Zion Lutheran Church
143 Albany St.
www.zionlutheranmi.org

FREELAND

Zion Lutheran Church
545 7th St.
www.zionfreeland.org

GRAND RAPIDS

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
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www.bethlehemchurchgr.org

KALAMAZOO

Lutheran Church of the Savior
3616 East G Avenue
www.lcoskzoo.com

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Ascension Lutheran Church
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www.twochurches.org

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Christ Lutheran Church
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www.christmonroe.weebly.com

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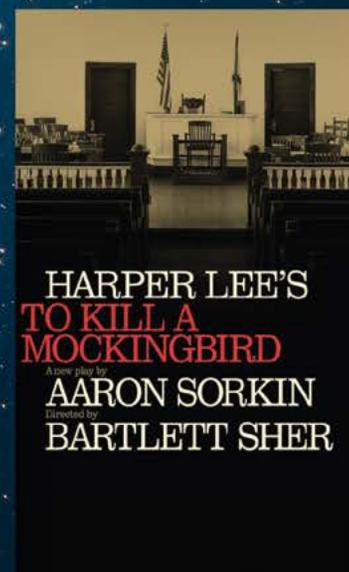
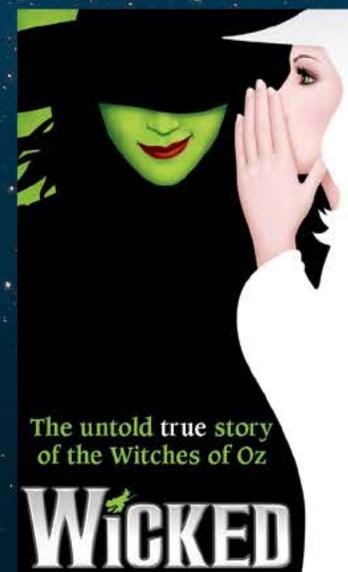
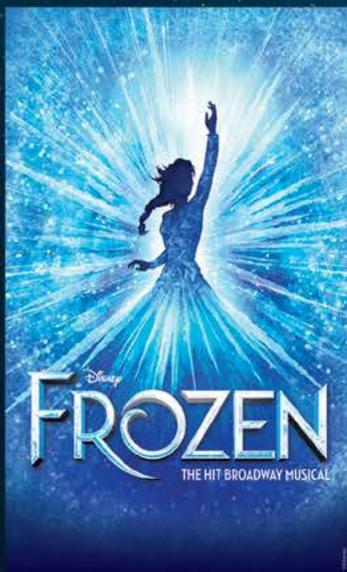
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