

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between the Lines

PEEK INSIDE ARCENCIAEL
Fun for all at Detroit's
newest queer venue

YEEHAW, DADDIES
Why farmers top
Michigan porn
searches

PUSHING BOUNDARIES
Eurovision winner
on nonbinary
representation

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By Jordyn Bradley

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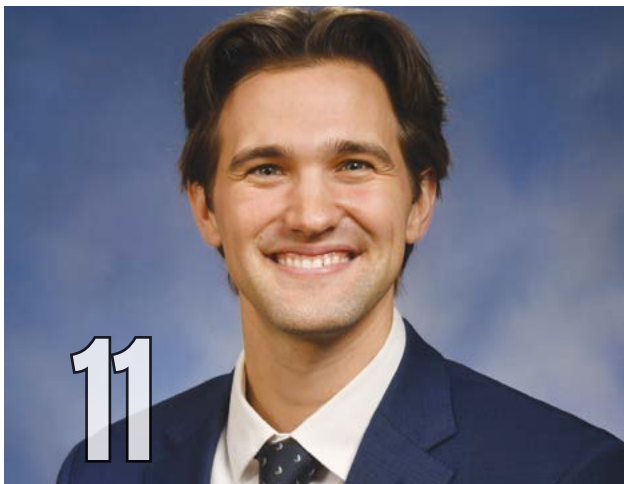


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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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Models showcase Perry Wayne's new all-lace clothing line.
Photo: Preppyman Photography

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

In the words of Mariah Carey, "It's tiiiiime!" The holiday season is upon us, folks, and your friends here at BTL have all the "gay happy meetings" and events you won't want to miss. After all, the new year isn't far off, so there's no better time to let loose and have fun before the inevitable pressure to improve ourselves with resolutions. Let the joy of this season unfold freely as you unwrap what we have in store for you — from fundraisers to concerts and drag shows, there's something for everyone, the naughty and the nice.



Captain Fantastic. Photo: captfantastic.com

Glam Out at an Elton Tribute

As Elton himself sings on his 1974 holiday classic, "Step into Christmas" with a musical tribute extravaganza featuring all the glamor and showmanship of the icon himself. During "Captain Fantastic — The Tribute To Elton John," marvel at the elaborate costuming (and glasses, of course!) and sit back and be taken on a musical journey by Captain Fantastic, an Elton John impersonator.

It's the musical gift that keeps on giving, too — in addition to Elton favorites, you'll also catch some of Billy Joel's best, performed by tribute band 52nd Street.

Dec. 21, 7 p.m., District 142 (142 Maple St., Wyandotte). Snag tickets at bit.ly/4inPija.



Astara Love. Photo: Instagram/@astaralove

Feel the Joy of Drag

The Flint Institute of Music's Make the Yuletide Gay won't be your average drag show. The 90-minute performance is bursting at the seams with energy and heart — featuring 11 drag queens from across the state, plus special guest Miss Gay America 1982 winner Astara Love. "It's all about having a good time, laughing together and even becoming part of the experience," said Amanda Sauvie, manager of community programs, in a news release.

Dec. 18, 7 p.m., FIM Capitol Theatre (140 E. 2nd St., Flint). More information at bit.ly/3ZDuBZi.



A previous Ferndale Pride euchre tournament. Courtesy photo

Play Games While Supporting a Good Cause

Pride Month may be far off, but the preparations for its celebrations are not. Kicking off the new year, Ferndale Pride is holding weekly events to fundraise for upcoming Pride experiences. The first of which, a euchre tourney, is in collaboration with Ferndale's Elks Club, an organization focused on community service and promotion of well-being. "As a longtime Elk, this event is a great way to combine two of the most recognizable groups in Ferndale," event director Julia Music told BTL.

Before you head off to the beer tent in May, you can help support Ferndale Pride in others ways too! Test your "Schitt's Creek" knowledge at their upcoming trivia event, take a moment to center yourself at the Psychic Self Care Fair or venture out to another upcoming event in support of this LGBTQ-supportive community organization.

Weekly euchre starting Jan. 10, 7 p.m., Ferndale Elks Lodge (22856 Woodward Ave., Ferndale). Visit ferndalepride.com/events for more information on upcoming events.



Ozone House youth. Photo: ozonehouse.org

Give Back to Queer Youth

In the winter months, those experiencing housing insecurity are at their most vulnerable. Ypsilanti's Ozone House provides shelter and resources to displaced youth, including young LGBTQ+ folks who have nowhere else to go.

In honor of the holiday season, the organization is asking the community for help in providing their youth with the products they need — and they're making it easy via an Amazon wishlist filled with commonly requested items. It's your chance to play Santa and help those in need have the holiday they deserve.

Ozone House Drop-In Center (102 N. Hamilton, Ypsilanti). The wish list can be found at bit.ly/3Vo5dV4. For more Ozone House services, check out ozonehouse.org.



Shop at an LGBTQ+ Holiday Market

Would it even be the holidays if you weren't putting off gift shopping until the last minute? Before you put it off any longer, Affirmations has just the event for supporting Michigan businesses: 30 local vendors, from candlemakers to apparel designers, will be showing off their wares at the Make the Yuletide Gay holiday market on Dec. 14. If you're in need of that something special, why not support local LGBTQ+ creatives in the process?

Dec. 14, 12-6 p.m., Affirmations Community Center (290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). A full participating vendor list and other info can be found at bit.ly/3ZD6au7.

A Peek Inside Arcenciel

A love letter to the queer community and a source of subtle resistance in a troubling era



A night out at Arcenciel. (Right) Entrance to the Magenta Lounge. Photos: Arcenciel Detroit

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In the vibrant landscape of Detroit's nightlife, a new beacon of hope and inclusivity has emerged. Arcenciel isn't just another venue — it's a carefully crafted sanctuary designed to welcome, celebrate and protect the LGBTQ+ community during increasingly challenging times.

Joey Ewick, the venue's general manager, understands the power of creating spaces that feel like home. With a background in high-end hospitality, working previously at theme parks like SeaWorld, Ewick brings a sophisticated approach to community gathering.

"We want all letters of the alphabet to feel represented and wanted here," Ewick explains to BTL. This commitment isn't just rhetoric — it's a mission woven into every aspect of the venue's design.

Owners David Grossman and Julie Adelson based Arcenciel on European nightclubs in their favorite cities, including Las Vegas, Miami and Paris. Located in a space with deep queer historical roots —

the site was the former home of LGBTQ+ nightclub Backstreet at Large Multiplex — Arcenciel, which means "rainbow" in French (arc-en-ciel), deliberately honors its predecessors.

"I love that this was previously a queer-owned space," Ewick notes. "It's really important to maintain these spaces so they don't get demolished or taken over by something less inclusive."

The venue offers a multi-dimensional experience that goes far beyond a traditional bar. Imagine an evening where you can seamlessly transition from an intimate dinner in the Versailles Dining Lounge to craft cocktails in the Magenta Lounge, and then dance the night away in front of a floor-to-ceiling video wall dance floor — a space that will soon offer events like "Drag Race" viewing parties.

Because Arcenciel offers multifaceted entertainment options, guests can make a whole night of it during a single visit. "Our goal is always to keep you in the building," Ewick



explains. "Park once, check your coat, and enjoy multiple experiences without ever leaving."

Each space inside Arcenciel offers a distinct atmosphere — from the quiet fine-dining dining environment to the energetic bar and dance areas. "Each area is going to have a different personality," ensuring there's something for everyone, Ewick says.

Arcenciel's mission goes beyond mere entertainment. Ewick says the venue stands as a deliberate statement of resistance and hope in a challenging political landscape, simply by existing as an expressly queer space. He is hopeful that Arcenciel will offer something important to a queer community that is, in large part, reeling from the reelection of Donald Trump. "I

See **Arcenciel**, page 24

Trans Lucent: Carta Monir's Life Is Her Art

BY ANNI ARBOUR

Anni Arbour is an award-winning, bestselling author and journalist. Based in Ann Arbor, Anni attended both Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan. She has recently been accepted as a member of the Trans Journalist Association. Anni's monthly Trans Lucent column will shine light on wide-ranging transgender topics and individuals.



Carta Monir. Courtesy photo

Keith Haring famously observed that "Art is life. Life is art." In Carta Monir's case, her life is her art.

Attempting to succinctly put into words the breadth of Monir's creative talents to someone who doesn't know her is as fruitless as trying to describe the colors of a sunset to a person without sight. It's a task best left to Monir herself, who offered BTL this self-description: "I'm a writer, performance artist, adult film performer and visual artist, most generally. And it's inescapable that you can engage with my work without knowing I'm transgender."

Born and raised in the Midwest, Monir came from a family dominated by her emotionally and sexually abusive father. As a young person, Monir clung to her nearly fanatical religious faith and kept her gender dysphoria private.

Throughout her childhood, Monir had created her own comics. While attending a small liberal arts college in Minnesota, she founded and published a student comic magazine. The comic pages she created delved into the most intimate of subjects. Monir was, in her words, "groping towards some unknowable problem in my life that turned out to be transness."

It was not until after graduation, four years after she moved to Ann Arbor, in the wake of a personal tragedy, that Monir finally embraced her true self.

"I finally came out after my mother's death and could express herself without self-censorship... Once I came out, my work got

much more interesting."

She began creating and publishing small-press comic books — mini-comics that were small in size and produced in small print runs. Uninhibited, unrestricted and uncensored by a publisher concerned about offending social norms.

Her big break came when she introduced her dysfunctional family dynamic in 2017, in the online publication, Zeal. It presented her autobiographical comic strip, "Lara Croft Is My Family," which spanned the early years of Monir's life. Its title came from her father's obsessive playing of the "Lara Croft" video games, while the rest of the family hovered around him, watching obediently.

Monir's "Lara Croft" is depicted in 40 comic strip panels. Each one occurs as memories actually do: in short snapshots of recalled emotion and trauma.

This subtly harrowing tale touches on her father's relentless criticism, Monir's gradual coming out, her mother's cancer diagnosis and death, and the beginning of her transition in its wake. These life-defining events are told in a series of quick withering jabs that accumulate viscerally and with devastating effectiveness.

The effort won her the 2018 Ignatz Award for Best Online Comic, the top award given out in the small-press industry. She soon became a sought-after guest and

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At Christ Church Cranbrook ‘Everybody Is Welcome’ — At the Holidays and Beyond

Inclusive events like annual Christmas Carols and Chocolate singalong offer a safe community space for all

BROUGHT TO YOU BY CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

For many queer people, it can be intimidating to consider entering a religious institution. While these spaces can be ornate and beautiful, they can also represent past trauma. In fact, a 2022 study found that LGBTQ+ people who experience certain forms of religious trauma are at increased risk of substance abuse, homelessness, anxiety, depression and suicide.

Bill Danaher, the rector of Christ Church Cranbrook (CCC) in Bloomfield Hills, understands the complexity of these feelings, which is why he tells BTL that his goal when coming to CCC in 2014 was to “make church more inclusive. To be a normal human being and a good Christian is being welcoming and inclusive of all people.”

He says he doesn’t think it’s a “heroic thing” that his congregation and clergy welcome the queer community (many of them are also part of the queer community); he says in his experience, LGBTQ+ people “add vitality and joy” to everything they are part of, including church.

Darin DeWeese, CCC singer and the artistic director of PRISM Gay Men and Allies Chorus, says members of CCC “represent every color of the queer rainbow,” which he says shows the “essence of healing” that comes from attending the church, even for those who once had traumatic religious experiences.

“For some of our singers, I can see their shoulders kind of tense a little bit the first time they are walking into such a huge cathedral space because they don’t know what to expect,” DeWeese says. “But then to be greeted by the clergy, hear affirming messages in sermons, and hear themselves represented in that kind of space, I think is a really healing experience

for a lot of these guys.”

This is why DeWeese says the partnership between the church and chorus is something that “just makes sense.” Danaher also says he is “so proud to be associated” with PRISM.

Their next partnership is for the church’s upcoming Christmas Carols & Chocolate event on Dec. 23. The event is set to bring together church members, PRISM performers, local actors and community members looking for a festive respite. The theme will be “A Charlie Brown Christmas” because, as Danaher says, “there’s no better thing” than the beloved cartoon. Attendees will enjoy Christmas carols and reenactments of “A Charlie Brown Christmas.” And of course, there will be hot chocolate.

“It’s geared to be a secular event to bring all different communities together, whether you celebrate Christmas or not, into the same space,” says DeWeese.

Danaher says he hopes the event is joyful for the local community, especially during these dark times. Following the presidential election, he says he could feel the hurt and fear throughout the church.

“Between the recent events that we’ve had to live through and the trauma that many LGBTQ+ people experience, holidays are a time when joy feels like it’s been robbed from them,” says Danaher. “So our goal with this event is that we’re bottling up joy in a way that’s going to be available for anybody. It doesn’t matter if they’re a person of faith or if they have a hard time keeping faith during difficult times,” says Danaher.

Following the election, Danaher stressed in a sermon that he and his congregation are committed to the queer community and “have their backs.”

“The egregious, horrible scapegoating that has happened is not reflective of how most people feel



PRISM performs at the 2023 Christmas Carols and Chocolate event at Christ Church Cranbrook. Courtesy photo

and believe,” says Danaher. He says this is especially true of God.

“God made them exactly as they are. The greatest gift He gave them is the fullness of themselves,” he says.

DeWeese says it’s refreshing to see faith and queerness exist in the same space, as they aren’t mutually exclusive.

“To see local organizations going out of their way to extend a sort of olive branch to our [queer] community, it means a lot,” says DeWeese.

CCC’s commitment to the community doesn’t stop there. The church is providing holiday meals for over 115 families in Pontiac in partnership with The Baldwin Center. It is also gathering about 4,000 toys with help from its 17

community partners. Its outreach isn’t exclusive to the holiday season, though. The church partners with the Ruth Ellis Center monthly to serve meals, donate money and educate the community on the organization’s role in supporting local LGBTQ+ youth. And Danaher says much of the leadership around these projects is queer.

“We could not do church without them,” he says. “Our leadership and our congregation is a visible demonstration to the community that we mean what we say when we say that everybody is welcome at Christ Church Cranbrook.”

PRISM is excited to spread holiday cheer with music this season, and DeWeese says they will be “all over the place” doing so. To stay up-to-

date about their appearances, check out their Facebook page.

“I hope we just get the chance to brighten everyone’s holiday and see people out and about in the community together,” he says.

Danaher agrees, and says his “greatest prayer” is that everyone experiences joy this holiday season.

“I want to assure the LGBTQ+ community that joy is a birthright given by God,” says Danaher, “and no one can take that away from them.”

This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Christ Cranbrook Church. Pride Source’s journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like CCC.

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Teacher to School District: ‘Not Today, Bigots,’ Sues Over Book Banning Policy



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

When I was in my 20s, I did not see a future where marriage equality would be legal. I did not think I would ever have legal recognition of my relationship with my wife.

When we had a child together in 2009, I was not especially hopeful that I would ever be his legal parent.

But both of those things happened when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality in 2015.

Granted, today's Court is openly hostile to LGBTQ+ rights and that's scary. There's no reason to believe that they won't overturn *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which made marriage equality the law of the land. It's not like the radical conservatives who have been fighting against LGBTQ+ rights suddenly stopped in 2015. In fact, they've actually gained more power in the government and in our courts. Also scary!

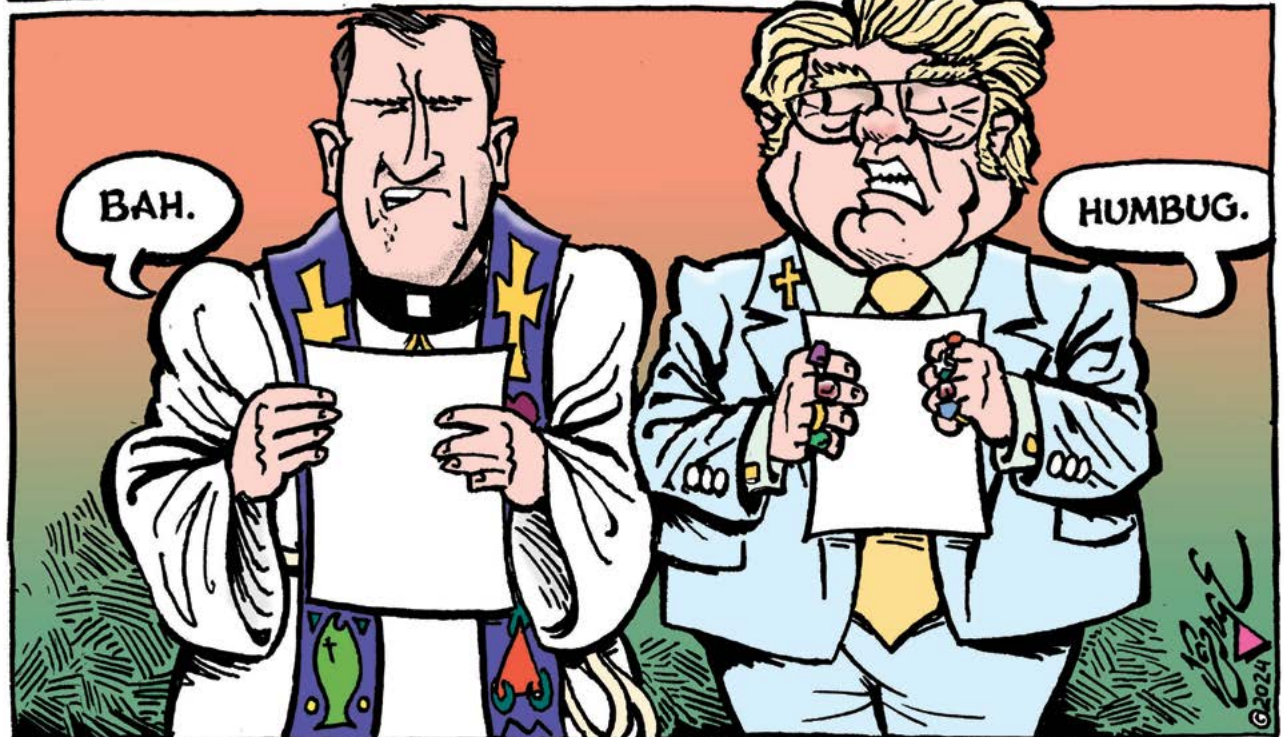
I am reminded of that oft-quoted piece of wisdom from Mr. Fred Rogers: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

I am reminded of the many people over the course of history who have fought in one way or another against oppression and for progress. A lot of people had to sacrifice a hell of a lot to advance LGBTQ+ rights.

Granted, that advice is intended for children who cannot be helpers themselves in such situations. But I am reminded of the many people over the course of history who have fought in one way or another against oppression and for progress. A lot of people had to sacrifice a hell of a lot to advance LGBTQ+ rights.

I get it. Being told to “keep fighting” is exhausting. But

News item: After a federal judge ordered Prattville, Alabama to allow “Prattville Pride” to participate in its Christmas parade, a local Catholic church and a fundamentalist drive-in ministry pulled out of the parade, issuing the following statement:



I think it's still important to look for the people who are helping. Who are looking at discriminatory laws and hateful rhetoric and saying, “Nope.”

One such person is Ohio elementary school teacher Karen Cahall, who has a 30-year career in the New Richmond Exempted Village School District.

Cahall, like many elementary school teachers, has a lot of books in her classroom. And four of those books contain “LGBTQ+ characters in the plot line.”

A parent complained and her district suspended her for three days without pay. So Cahall is suing.

The four books, reports *The Advocate*, are “Ana On The Edge” by A.J. Sass, “The Fabulous Zed Watson” by Basil Sylvester, “Hazel Bly and the Deep Blue Sea” by Ashley Herring Blake and “Too Bright to See” by Kyle Lukoff.

The books “have LGBTQ+ characters in them but do not otherwise advocate for or against any particular lifestyle or endorse an LGBTQ+ lifestyle,” reads the lawsuit, which was filed Dec. 2.

I should note that I take issue with the term “lifestyle” here as it has long been used to reduce LGBTQ+ people to a way of living that one adopts, rather than an inherent identity, e.g. vegetarianism.

“None of these books can fairly be considered ‘obscene,’ ‘offensive’ or appealing to prurient interests,” the suit continues. “None of these books describe sexual conduct or sexual activity. Each of these books has serious literary,

artistic, political and scientific value. These books each deal with characters who are LGBTQ+ and are coming to terms with feeling different and excluded simply because they are LGBTQ+ and serve to reinforce plaintiff Karen Cahall’s sincerely held moral and religious beliefs that all children, including children who are LGBTQ+ or the children of parents who are LGBTQ+, deserve to be respected, accepted, and loved for who they are.”

Wait, what? A “sincerely held moral and religious belief” that doesn’t include hating LGBTQ+ people? Can you imagine?

Well, you don’t have to. Because Cahall is hardly the only person who feels this way.

Her lawsuit is challenging the school district’s “controversial issues” policy which, according to the lawsuit, “vaguely and ambiguously defines a ‘controversial issue’ as ‘a topic on which opposing points of view have been promulgated by responsible opinion or likely to arouse both support and opposition by the community’ – a definition that is so vague and all-encompassing that it could extend to virtually any topic upon which any two random individuals or groups of individuals might find something to disagree about.”

These kinds of policies, which exist to block topics related to LGBTQ+ people and the history/existence of racism, are reactionary and do not actually protect children. If anything, they put children who are in minority groups in greater danger by positioning them as an “other” whose lives aren’t worth learning about and thus not worth considering.

Cahall is taking a risk here. But doing the right thing in the face of opposition is rarely easy. So the next time you are feeling hopeless, look for the helpers like Karen Cahall and remember that there are good people in this world. Even good Karens.

AG Dana Nessel Calls Out Michigan GOP Lawmaker Who Wants to Ban Same-Sex Marriage

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel strongly defended LGBTQ+ rights after state representative Josh Schriver (R-Oxford) claimed gay marriage should be “illegal again” in a recent social media post.

Nessel, who has been married to a woman since 2015, directly challenged Schriver’s stance. “Please explain how dissolving my marriage, or that of hundreds of thousands of other same-sex couples, provides any benefit,” she wrote. She accused Schriver of wanting to “hurt those you hate” rather than helping Michiganders.

When questioned by the Detroit News,

Schriver cited Bible passages and shared a 2004 video of Barack Obama discussing marriage as being between a man and a woman. Schriver claimed America only accepted gay marriage through a “perverted Supreme Court ruling.”

Nessel later expanded her criticism, warning that Republicans are targeting LGBTQ+ marriages and rights. Her concern is not unfounded, given the current Supreme Court’s conservative 6-3 majority and Justice Clarence Thomas’s comments on reconsidering same-sex marriage protections.

While Schriver lacks the power to immediately change gay marriage laws, his comments are significant. They reflect views within the newly Republican-majority Michigan state house and highlight potential vulnerabilities in existing protections. Outspoken advocates like Nessel will play a pivotal role in the upcoming legislative session.



(Left to right) Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel and Michigan Rep. Josh Schriver. Photos: michigan.gov

Good News for Daddy Lovers as Grindr Unwraps Year-End Review

Grindr Unwrapped, the dating app’s yearly review, offers a cheeky, global glimpse into LGBTQ+ community trends for 2024. Notably, “trans” was the second-most searched tag worldwide, and missionary was the top sex position. Other fun results:

- Italy is the country most into feet, while the U.S. is most into sending nudes (and South Africa the most averse)
- South Koreans were most likely to seek n o n m o n o g a m o u s profiles
- Singapore has the most sides, Jordan has the most tops, South Africa the most bottoms and Finland the most vers
- Italy offers the most bears, while the Netherlands boasts the most twinks — the U.S. is home to the most daddies



Equality Michigan at the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing. Photo: Instagram/@equality_michigan

Trans Advocates Flood Michigan State House, U.S. Capitol

Ahead of the new year, trans advocates locally and nationally are speaking out. In Lansing, more than 120 activists joined up with Equality Michigan, Outfront Kalamazoo and other advocacy groups on Dec. 4 to urge the passage of House Bills 5300-5303,

which would ease and add safety measures to the legal name and gender marker change process. The Michigan Senate must vote on the bills before Dec. 18, when the legislative session ends.

At the U.S. Capitol, Chelsea Manning, Raquel Willis and other trans activists and allies were arrested on Dec. 5 at a staged sit-in in the bathroom across from Speaker Mike Johnson’s office, in response to Rep. Nancy Mace’s congressional bathroom ban last month targeting Sarah McBride, the first trans member of the House of Representatives. Fifteen advocates and allies were arrested.

Stand with Trans Launches Mental Health Services

Stand with Trans has announced a new mental health therapy focus. “Our mission has always been to provide the resources and support trans youth and their loved ones need to thrive,” said Daily Andrews, director of clinical services. The services will address a broad spectrum of issues including ADHD, anxiety, depression, autism spectrum, eating disorders, gender identity and LGBTQ+ issues, parenting challenges, PTSD, trauma and more. Learn more at standwithtrans.org.

In Our Pink Pilates Princess Catwalk Pop Era

If your Spotify Wrapped synopsis identified your 2024 listening habits as part of the Pink Pilates Princess Catwalk Pop Era, don’t feel too special. Apparently, every queer listener under the neon rainbow wound up in this camp, if Instagram is any indication. “spotify calling everyone gay in the most niche way this year wdyam ‘pink pilates princess catwalk pop’ just call me a slur at this point,” posted one user. “Are you straight or did Spotify call you a Pink Pilates Princess this morning,” pondered another.

Trans Icon Alex Consani Snatches Model of the Year Award

California-based Alex Consani was named Model of the Year at the British Fashion Council’s 2024 Fashion Awards, earning her the distinction of being the first trans woman to ever win the prestigious honor. “I can’t accept this award without thanking those who came before me, specifically the Blank trans women who really fought for the space I’m in today,” she said in her acceptance speech.



Alex Consani. Photo: Instagram/@alexconsani

The playful year-end summary provides insights into dating, sex and cultural preferences across Grindr’s global user base. Read more at grindr.com/unwrapped.

All About That Lace



Perry Wayne (center) poses with models showcasing his fashion designs. Photo: Preppyman Photography

How Perry Wayne is redefining the emotional power of underwear

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

Detroit's own Perry Wayne, the visionary behind Wayne Underwear, is bringing a shimmer of boldness to the season — and your wardrobe. Wayne's mission shines bright: to help everyone feel unapologetically sexy and confident, long after the last gift has been unwrapped.

One look at Wayne Underwear's website could tell you this — the photos are playful, unapologetically risqué and leave nothing (or maybe everything) to the imagination. Oiled-up models flood the site. You might even forget what you came there to find. Ahem, it's underwear — not a boyfriend.

Whether it's a jockstrap, thong, crop top, swimwear or activewear, Wayne says his clothing is meant to make people feel bold, like his prints, colors and, yes, the marketing.

"Sex sells, right? So some shoots are hyper-sexual, but we just have fun, put on some music, and Jason [Bush] does the directing," Wayne tells BTL about working with his friend and photographer, who runs Preppyman Photography. But Bush gives credit to Wayne; he says he just makes the designs and visions come to life.

"Perry has really honed in on what makes the brand stand out and created a unique space in the market," Bush notes.

"Plus, it's undies, ya know?" Wayne says.

It is, at least, until it's much more than that: Perry Wayne wants his underwear brand to be a household name like Calvin Klein and Victoria's Secret. By his 40s, he hopes to be the largest male lace retailer in the world.

"And if we move to the goddamn moon, I'd sell panties up there, too," Wayne says.

That level of success isn't out of reach. At 30, Wayne is already on his way. Wayne Underwear is shipped and sold in 48 countries, and he says he is "humbled, proud and motivated" that his dreams are becoming a reality.

"I hoped and dreamed of 100 sales, and here we are," he says.

Wayne didn't originally plan to be a fashion designer. He grew up doing musical theater in high school and planned to be a performing arts major at The Art Institute of Michigan in Novi. Through his time being around all the costumes, he grew more interested in the design element than the performance itself, so he switched gears to fashion. For about five years, he designed and created womenswear lines and couture under the name Perry Wayne Couture. And while he says his previous lines haven't all

been great, he hasn't looked back. "My first collection was awful," he says, laughing. But people liked it.

Wayne got into designing undergarments after noticing that the lace pieces he had purchased from other companies felt awkward and unflattering. He noticed a need for men's underwear that was sexy, while not "cheaping out" on the quality. While at a photo shoot for his couture line with Bush about six years ago, he started planning his next move.

“You’re going to have some haters, girl, but I say if you can make it in Detroit, then you can make it anywhere.”

— Perry Wayne

"He blurted out [during the shoot], 'I want to start an underwear line.' I turned to him without hesitation and said, 'Do it!'" says Bush. He says he went back to shooting, thinking little of the comment.

"After a few moments, he showed me a random sketch he had done of an underwear design, and the rest is history," says Bush.

Wayne's bold vision — and biggest gamble — was to

develop the lace that became the foundation of it all. He knew from his own experience that there was a desire for sexy men's underwear that could bring confidence, while also not breaking the bank. Or just breaking, period.

"In a lot of lace garments, the fabric either does not stretch at all so it's uncomfortable, or it's falling apart when you put it on because there's too much stretch," Wayne says. When he set out to create lace garments, he knew he wasn't going to sacrifice one for the other.

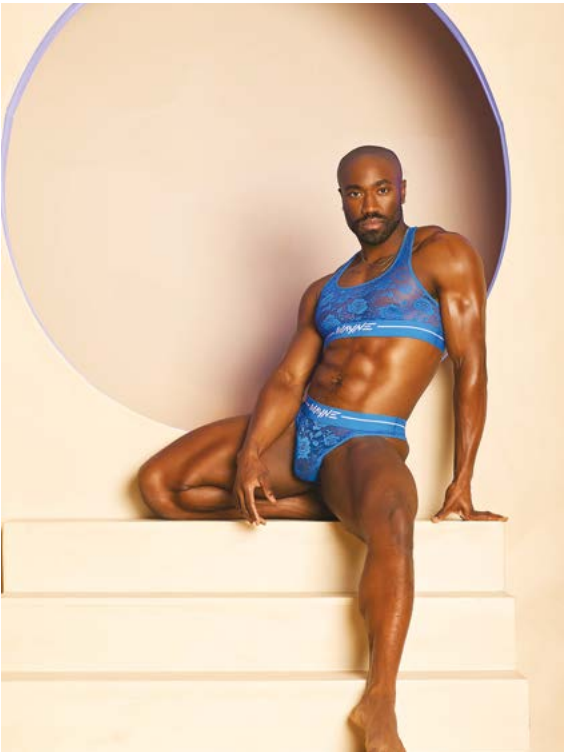
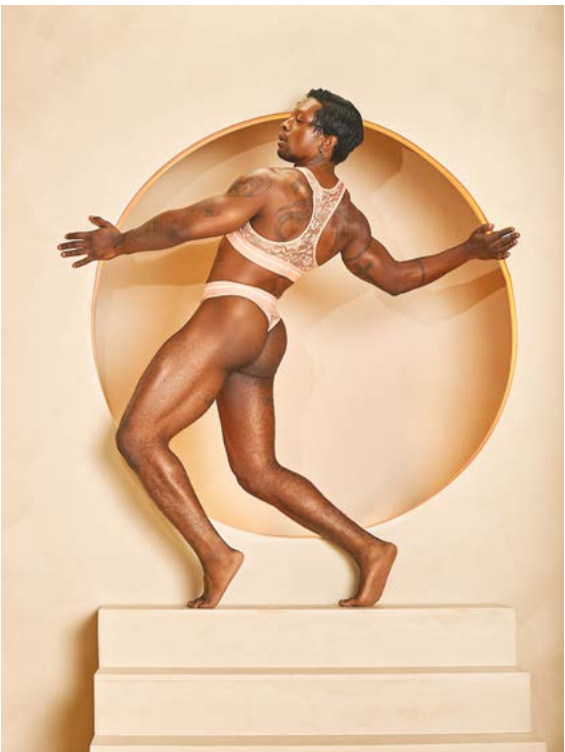
Wayne also knew it was a gamble to create men's lace underwear in the first place. He says he sees more retailers carrying it now than in 2019 when Wayne Underwear was founded, but at the time, he didn't know if his risk was going to pay off to support his dream.

In late 2019, Wayne quit his job at Nordstrom, took out his 401K and put the money toward what has become an ever-growing business. Recently, he launched an all-lace line that includes items such as the Espresso Lace Set and the Champagne Dream Lace Set.

"I bought 500 units [of lace], so a small quantity, to see if or what would sell," Wayne recalls, looking back at 2019. "I woke up the next day after releasing the collection and Wayne went viral."

For Wayne, though, it wasn't a quick rise. Throughout his career, he used checks from shifts at Macy's, PacSun and DoorDash to put toward photoshoots or new

See **Perry Wayne**, page 22



Perry Wayne recently launched his new all-lace line. Photo: Preppyman Photography

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Catching Up with Ronni Sanlo, LGBTQ+ Education Trailblazer and Storyteller

BY LIAM CLYMER

Ronni Sanlo is a shining example of how one can turn hate into hope. After losing custody of her children due to her orientation, Sanlo built a career around making queer voices heard and LGBTQ+ youth feel supported.

Sanlo fought hard for decades to create safe spaces and for

LGBTQ+ colleagues and students to have a seat at the table in the academic world. She's the creator of the nationally recognized Lavender Graduation, which recognizes the achievements of LGBTQ+ college graduates and acknowledges the unique experience of getting a degree while queer.

Even after her retirement, Sanlo has refused to slow down, instead picking up pen and paper to share stories, while reflecting on the discrimination she's experienced and how she overcame it.

How would you describe your connection to LGBTQ+ advancements in education?

I do believe that my work in LGBTQ+ issues both as an early HIV epidemiologist and as a lesbian activist helped create and advance LGBTQ+ issues in education, particularly within higher education. My work has been foundational in shaping policies, creating inclusive spaces and empowering LGBTQ+ students and educators.

I helped establish and advance some of the earliest university LGBTQ+ resource centers in the United States, starting with the University of Michigan (UM) and later at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). These centers provided essential support, counseling and resources to LGBTQ+ students, creating safe spaces for students, faculty and staff to connect, receive guidance and be part of a community. I helped shape university policies related to LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and I've been an advocate for anti-discrimination policies, LGBTQ+ student rights and inclusive administrative practices. My policy work has influenced institutions to adopt measures that support LGBTQ+ students, such as gender-inclusive housing,

LGBTQ+ scholarship funds and expanded healthcare access.

I was the co-founder and founding chair of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, which connects LGBTQ+ resource center professionals across universities, providing a network for best practices, mentorship and resources for supporting LGBTQ+ students on campuses across North America.

I've contributed significantly to LGBTQ+ literature and research, including developing the "LGBT College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators," a foundational resource for educators and administrators seeking to understand and support LGBTQ+ students. My publications offer insights into LGBTQ+ student experiences and guide institutions in creating affirming spaces.

I believe my work has had a lasting impact on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in education, inspiring other leaders, fostering safe and affirming spaces, and advancing policies that continue to shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and educators today.

What has your path looked like since moving on from serving as director of

LGBT Programs at the University of Michigan?

In 1997, I was recruited by UCLA to grow their LGBT office. I was able to design a center in the middle of campus that included a 400-square-foot library. I became a Faculty in Residence, living in an apartment in the residence halls and supporting students academically. In addition to my LGBTQ+ Center duties, I was appointed Senior Associate Dean of Students and I founded the Masters of Education in Student Affairs in the UCLA Higher Education and Organizational Change (HEOC) Graduate School of Education, the number one public education grad school in the country. I was awarded full professorship for that work.

Why was the creation of Lavender Graduation important to you and how do you feel about its impact almost 30 years later?

The creation of Lavender Graduation was deeply personal and significant for me and the academic environment, stemming from a painful personal history. After coming out as a lesbian in 1979, I lost custody of my children due to anti-LGBTQ+ bias in my

home state of Florida, which fueled my passion to support LGBTQ+ students in ways I hadn't experienced myself. When I began my work at UM, I noticed that LGBTQ+ students often felt invisible and under-celebrated in their achievements compared to their peers. Traditional commencement ceremonies didn't necessarily create safe or affirming environments for LGBTQ+ graduates, leaving some students feeling alienated on a day meant to celebrate their hard work and success.

Lavender Graduation, first held in 1995 at Michigan, became a way to honor these students, affirm their identities, to celebrate their resilience and to acknowledge their gifts to the academy. For me, it wasn't just about the ceremony itself but about creating a lasting tradition that showed LGBTQ+ students they were seen, valued and celebrated. This event became a model for other universities, growing into a nationwide celebration that has helped countless students feel recognized and empowered at a pivotal time in their lives.

Lavender Graduation has evolved into a cherished tradition on campuses nationwide. *Read more at pridesource.com, including Sanlo's proudest LGBTQ+ storytelling moment and why she became a playwright.*



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THE FARMERS ARE WATCHING

Michigan's Farm Porn Fascination

After PornHub ranked ‘farmer’ as a popular search term for horny Michiganders in 2024, BTL plowed into the new trend

BY DANI LAMORTE

We're a species of voyeurs. Whatever's done in private — medical treatments, sacred rites, marital spats — is also done in public, for thousands or even millions of viewers on screens big and small. This is particularly true of sex.

Dante catches Elliot watching him. Mark watches both Elliot and Dante, then — not so unexpectedly — makes his presence known. This is the somewhat predictable plot of “Going Down on the Farm,” a 2021 film by Next Door Studios. All around the watching men are bits of straw and hay, a detail which — depending on the kind of viewer you are — is either incidental or crucial. According to PornHub's 2024 Pride Insights, the word “farmer” is at the center of many gay Michiganders' porn searches.

“Going Down” might appeal to you, or maybe videos by Leviwranglerxxx, self-described as “just your average country boy top,” would be more to your liking. The word “farmer” shows up in the title of one 2023 video by Levi, along with some words describing what will happen to the farmer, but there are no bales of hay in sight. Levi, who grew up in Montana, Idaho and Colorado, says he makes videos about country guys because it's true to who he is, and others enjoy that.

“I feel someone like me is a fantasy



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because we enjoy our boots and being outdoors.”

Erin Moor is of the same mind. “[Viewers] can find a mindless creator anywhere,” she tells BTL, “but a creator who is a real person, who has and shows emotions, shows everyday life — as long as there’s good sexual content — those are the ones [viewers] want to follow.”

Moor says her country-tinged videos have a mixed following — some urban, some rural; mostly men, but some women, too. Filming in barns, next to farm equipment and in the fields, Moor gives viewers the fantasy of sex, her sex, out where things are wild.

Wild to some of us, that is. As Moor and Levi know, what’s “wild” is actually controlled: pastures are mowed, crops are managed, waterways are rerouted. There’s a great deal of seemingly un-erotic work on the farm and, ironically, that may be part of what makes the place hot.

“Gender researchers have studied how the traditional farmer identity has been solidified as the rugged, tough individual who has control of nature and uses large equipment,” says Dr. Michaela Hoffelmeyer, assistant professor of public engagement in agriculture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Dr. Hoffelmeyer says that this rugged ideal may explain “eroticization of [masculine] bodies that do physical labor.”

“I would say most [viewers] are city slickers or that’s what we call them. They have this innate fantasy of what is exotic to them. That is what psychology is all about: what is exotic becomes erotic.”

The farm is a place of fascination, even when a buff beau in the field



Leviwanglerxxx, self-described as “just your average country boy top.” Courtesy photo

doesn’t charm. BigGoat Farm is a new-ish operation in Houghton, Michigan, founded by two queer women: Danielle and Grace Perkowitz. Prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic to reconsider how they spend their time, the couple moved to the Upper Peninsula from Chicago.

“It started as a joke: what if we moved

up here and started a dairy farm? But with some courage and hundreds of hours of research, we decided to turn our dream into a reality. We are so happy we did!”

The Perkowitzes aren’t alone in

See **Farm Porn**, page 18

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Lesbian Out of Carolina
Puzzle can be found on page 25

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making this move.

“It’s so interesting to me how many lawyers, engineers, data scientists are moving to the area to start farms. Most work remotely, including my wife who is still an engineer,” Danielle explains.

City queers moving to the country isn’t new. Throughout the 1970s, separatist lesbian collectives formed subsistence farms as part of the “lesbian-back-to-the-land” movement. Radical Fairies, who were primarily gay men, created rural communes of their own.

This urban exodus is the reverse of an urban legend, which says that rural queers must quit the farm to be their true selves. However, in his 1996 book, “Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest,” Will Fellows writes of a “balancing influence” that some queer people find in the country. On the farm, the diversity and complexity of animal and plant life becomes an analogy for human difference. What these ruralites find in the city is a lack of meditative space,

a disconnect from the environment and cultural norms which are almost foreign.

Fellows cites Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin who wrote this in 1948: “The city boy’s failure to understand what life can mean to a boy who is raised on a farm, and the farm boy’s idea that there is something glamorous about the way in which the city boy lives, apply to every avenue of human activity, including the sexual.”

Farm queers moving to the city for a more “open” life might be a fantasy created by and for city queers. Leviwranglerxxx knows that, to many of his viewers, farm life is a mystery.

“I would say most [viewers] are city slickers or that’s what we call



Erin Moor. Photo: Instagram/@erin_moor26

them. They have this innate fantasy of what is exotic to them. That is what psychology is all about: what is exotic becomes erotic.”

This might explain, at least in part, why gay Michiganders

But farmer porn doesn’t do it for everyone, and some styles don’t work for those who know the life.

“The farmer thing doesn’t turn me on, really for no apparent

seek out farmer porn. Michigan ranks no. 30 among American states for total farm land, per USDA data. The farmer fascination might be less about “rugged masculinity” and more about the unfamiliar.

Maybe this is why Danielle’s city friends are so interested in country life, too.

“For my queer friends back in Chicago, the idea of being a farmer and seeing queer farmers is exciting. If there were more representation of female farmers in erotic spaces, I know my friends would eat that right up.”

reason,” Erin Moor notes.

While doing his own online searches, Levi says he doesn’t find “a ton of actual good country content.” He questions its authenticity.

“We wear boots going through rough terrain and buy what’s comfy. Then you see these [people] just really trying hard to look country, which distracts from the real focus at hand: blue-collar work.”

In “Going Down on the Farm,” Dante rakes a pile of hay that never seems to go anywhere, and Mark draws a hoe across dry soil for no apparent reason. It’s like they’ve never been on a farm before, and maybe that’s the point. We ‘city slickers’ fantasize about a version of farm life we understand: city life copy and pasted onto rolling fields. The farm men from Next Door Studios look like they work out at Equinox and tweet Fire Island Speedo pics with a caption that includes the hot tea emoji. It’s familiar, but just different enough to be exotic and erotic to some of us. We’re watching farmers who look like Midtown go-go boys, and the farmers are off watching something else entirely.

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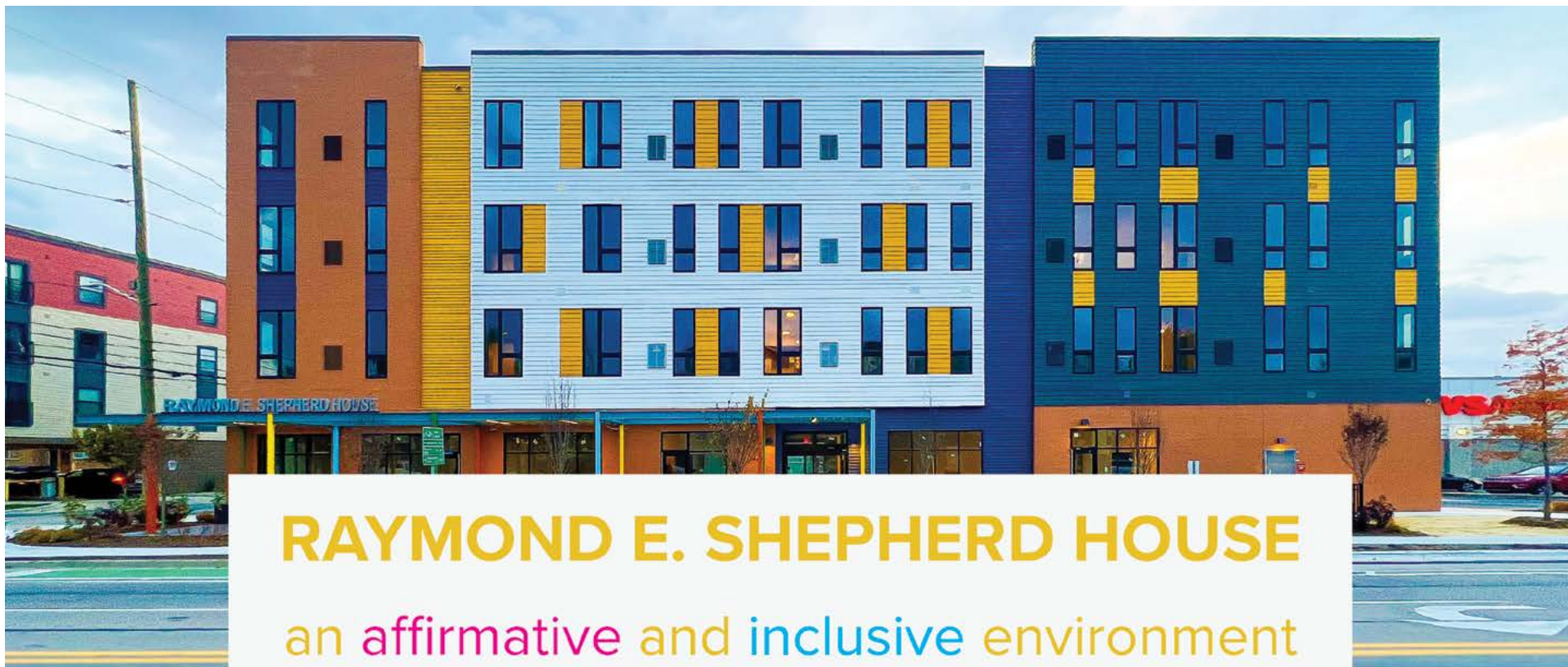
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Nemo's Big Year

How Eurovision winner Nemo is championing visibility for the gender-nonconforming community

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

When Eurovision Song Contest 2024, the high-camp international singing competition, crowned Nemo as its winner earlier this year, it signified more than a musical triumph — it was a groundbreaking moment for representation. The nonbinary artist, celebrated for their theatrical performances and unapologetic authenticity, has become a powerful symbol of LGBTQ+ visibility.

Switzerland's winning entry, "The Code," co-written by Nemo, marked the country's first victory since "Ne partez pas sans moi" by Celine Dion in 1988. It also made history as the first winning song by a nonbinary artist in the contest's history. Imagine an opera-rave fusion, as Nemo's voice reaches beyond the ceiling and tips over into rap. On the chorus, they sing, "I went to hell and back to find myself on track; I broke the code. Like ammonites, I just gave it some time; now I found paradise." In October, the artist followed up with "Eurostar," a high-energy club banger.

But Nemo's impact goes beyond music; they've boldly and directly challenged Swiss leadership to recognize a third gender option, advocating for change not just for themselves but for countless others seeking acknowledgment and equality. As we look ahead to 2025, these critical conversations about identity and representation are sure to resonate far beyond Switzerland, sparking dialogue across the globe, including here in the U.S.

On stage and during our video interview, Nemo radiates warmth and a perky spirit — even at 9 a.m., a time they confess is "usually my wake-up time, not my interview time." From L.A., where they recently attended a dreamy Malibu wedding and were partaking in songwriting sessions, Nemo opened up about what their Eurovision win means — not just for their career, but for so many who find inspiration in their story.

I owe you congratulations, Nemo! How cool is it that you get to represent not just the LGBTQ+ community, but specifically the nonbinary community?

I feel like this is what I really fed off of. During the whole competition, I think my number-one drive was knowing how much visibility



Nemo. Photo: Ella Mettler

matters: getting messages from all over the world — or all over Europe mainly, but also a few from the U.S. — during the process and how it started a conversation in [someone's] family, or how they finally had the courage to come out or they realized something about themselves during Eurovision. Not just because of me, but because of queer representation this year in general. And it continues to be a huge honor to just get to be myself in public and know that people are watching, and young

people are watching — people that need to have representation to look up to, because when I grew up, I didn't have any nonbinary people in media or wherever to look up to and feel represented by.

It just is such a wonderful time and a special year, and not just with Eurovision. I feel like there's all these artists that are openly queer and are making amazing music or amazing art and people really feel that, and I feel like it really matters. So knowing that I can be a

little part of that has been one of the biggest honors of my life.

People like David Bowie, Annie Lennox and Mika may not be nonbinary, but obviously they all challenged gender norms in some ways. Were you drawn to artists like them, and who are some of the artists you're proud to stand alongside now?

For me growing up, it was definitely Mika. I think I felt very at home in his music, but also just in his personality in this world he's built. I've always felt drawn to people like that. Also, Freddie Mercury from Queen. I used to listen to a lot of Queen and I never really knew or understood why, but I think I always felt drawn to these types of personalities in music and art.

You can't really pin it down, but it makes sense in retrospect. And nowadays, people I really look up to right now... I mean, one of the biggest inspirations for me personally is Chappell Roan. She has such a wonderful universe, but also personality and music; she's such a great connector in the queer music scene, but also just connecting worlds and opening up the field to so many more people. I think there are always super important people in the course of history, people that can really build bridges in a way. I feel really inspired by her a lot at the moment.

You mention both Mika and Chappell Roan creating artistic universes. Take me back to when you were young and musical and doing that for yourself.

I think in a lot of ways I was always drawn to worlds that weren't the world I was living in. I was always drawn to theater and opera, and I was in youth opera when I was from nine to 13 or so, and we prepared one opera a year. I love to just dive into certain worlds. As a kid, I felt very drawn to that. One of the biggest fascinations was actually "The Magic Flute" by Mozart, and I was obsessed with the "Queen of the Night" [aria].

And now you are the queen of the night.

Literally. That's the coolest part about "The

Code” — a part of the “Queen of the Night” made it into “The Code.” And I feel like it’s the realest thing, because I used to annoy everyone around me singing this song the whole day. I can hit the high notes. I never thought about it that way, but I was always fascinated and drawn into alternate universes. That’s also why I ended up making music, because I think that was when I realized this is the place I can literally create whatever I want to. And I think that’s still what drives me with making music. Nowadays it’s building worlds and building universes.

I love that. I think your victory sends a powerful message, especially considering Switzerland’s rejection of a third gender option. How do you feel your win impacts this perspective on representation in your country?

I think there’s been a few things that have happened. The first thing that happened was it just took this conversation to a much broader level in my country. The story was suddenly so big that people that didn’t want to talk about it couldn’t ignore it anymore. That was certainly something that it did and continues to do now that Eurovision is going to be in Switzerland again. I think when it happens, there’s going to definitely be the question of, so how much has actually changed in this year? How have things progressed? Did they progress at all? It happened a few months before the Eurovision finale, when I was already announced as the artist to go to Eurovision. I was getting ready for an interview and I was in this makeup chair at the television [station], and then suddenly I see the Swiss president, one of the Swiss presidents coming in, and he’s getting ready for his interview, as well, and getting his makeup done. We get our makeup done in very different ways. On me, there’s a little bit of powder.

No nails?

No nails. But we started talking and it was really cute. And then, he left. He asked for a picture and left. That night I was like, oh, wait, maybe I should talk to him about the third gender entry option on Swiss passports and IDs. And I just sent him an Instagram message like, “Hey, would you want to maybe get some coffee and talk about this?” And then I get an Instagram message back: “The Swiss president doesn’t answer Instagram, but we can certainly make a meeting happen.” It was one of his assistants, but then things got really crazy with Eurovision and fast-forward, I’m at the press conference. They asked me, “What’s the first thing you’re going to do when you get back to Switzerland?” I was like, “Well, I’m probably going to meet the Swiss president for coffee to talk to him about the third gender option on passports.” And obviously I wasn’t exactly aware of how much impact just that one sentence would have, because I wasn’t aware that this moment had become so huge. But that became a national headline. Actually, I met him a month later

with the lovely people of the Transgender Network Switzerland, and we talked about various options and things, but not just the third gender entry on passports, but also just safety and visibility for nonbinary people in general, trans people in Switzerland, and it was a really good conversation.

And we just actually texted again for an update in the next couple of months because I really want to know what actually has changed. Switzerland is obviously like a slow democratic country in the way that everything is direct. We have direct democracy, so things tend to take time because every decision can be challenged in a way. People can propose their own laws. If you get 100,000 signatures, you can propose a law and then the nation decides if this law is worth putting in place or not, but also you can challenge it. Overall, as I said, how can we increase security and visibility and build bridges? And I think that’s equally as important for nonbinary and trans people in Switzerland. So I’m excited to meet Mr. [Beat] Jans again and talk to him.

You’re touring Europe next year. Can we expect to see you in the U.S.?

I would love to. I would love to come to the U.S. I think a good way to start for me in the U.S. would be to do a support tour somewhere with someone. I think that’d be a great way to get to know the country musically and get to know what touring feels like here, but definitely next year I’ll play in the U.S. in some way.

Your shows must just be like an operatic rave.

Actually, I think that’s a great image. It’s just me singing “Queen of the Night,” 90 minutes straight.

What’s the timeline for your full debut album?

It’s in the works. I booked a lot of studio time in January and February, so that’s when I want to finish the album and round it all off. But at the same time, I don’t want to have the pressure of saying it has to be absolutely done. But then I really want to make something that I’m super happy and excited about. And I think just good music takes time and I’m working on making my album the best thing I can possibly create. And so I want to be very gentle with that part of myself and just make sure I’m really happy with the result before committing to a release schedule. But definitely sometime next year.

I imagine it’s a lot of pressure. The debut is a defining moment. It initially defines your sound and who you are.

Definitely. I feel like an album is such a nice way to capture a moment in time of your life and it feels like this very extensive journal entry.

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collections. When he took out his 401K, Wayne says his bank account was “literally at zero.”

“Maybe it was risky, but it takes someone truly incredible to take that leap and then follow through to make it a success,” says Kendall Smith, one of Wayne’s closer friends who met him while modeling for one of his collections nearly 10 years ago.

“His drive to build something truly monolithic has propelled Wayne Underwear to where it is now.”

Underwear is a necessity, but not something everyone can afford to buy or replace. Wayne, a lifelong Detroit, knows how hard his city rides for him and supports him, so he does what he can to give back to the place that has molded him. He regularly hosts parties to celebrate new collections, bring the community together and give away underwear to those who need it.

“And I’ll get text messages or emails from customers or people who attend the parties who say, ‘This is the most confident I’ve ever felt.’ And that’s the reason why I do all of this,” he says.

Those around Wayne say that while his success is impressive, his ability to give back and uplift others is more impactful than any sale or collection.

“He’s not just building a brand, but helping build a legacy in Detroit,” says Smith. “It’s been great to see so many in Detroit embrace him, especially within the LGBTQ+ community. People in Detroit are proud to have him represent our city, and that pride is felt in the way they rally around his brand.”

Wayne says the backing from local businesses, like Soho, Pronto! and “a bunch of others” has motivated him throughout his journey, and it’s why he doesn’t think he could ever move.

“You’re going to have some haters, girl, but I say if you can make it in Detroit, then you can make it anywhere,” says Wayne.

Wayne Underwear can be found online (wayneunderwear.com) and at C&J Hammer Hard Accessories in Ferndale and Intimate Ideas throughout Michigan.



Models showing off their Perry Wayne underwear. Photo: Preppyman Photography



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Arcenciel

Continued from page 6

think a lot of people feel fatigue when it comes to the abilities we have to protest or resist or fight back," he notes. "But sometimes, being a quiet, gentle, loving flame is more than enough to illuminate the darkness. We don't have to be kicking and screaming. We can just exist. We can be ourselves. We can express love."

Peaceful coexistence is key, Ewick says. "Life is just little kids on the playground," he muses. "You may not want to play games with me, but that's OK. I'm going to go to the swing, and you're going to go to the slide. And we can exist peacefully and we can exist comfortably. I'll do me. But just our existence is protest enough."

Central to Ewick's many general manager duties is his commitment to safety. "Us opening a bar like this in this time and this era that we're heading into means I'm doing everything I can to promise safety, welcoming and love inside these doors," he stresses. "I want everyone to feel that this is a place they can go and breathe and relax and get away from negativity and political drama or the news. This should be a place to celebrate who we are and our community."

The venue has ambitious plans to create even

more inclusive experiences. Upcoming events include ladies' nights, drag brunches and Detroit Deaf Jam, a unique event for the deaf community featuring sign language interpreters and bass so powerful "you can feel it in your chest." The venue is planning for a spectacular New Year's Eve party featuring a champagne toast, special dining options, go-go dancers,



Arcenciel offers fine dining in the Versailles Dining Lounge. Photo: Arcenciel Detroit

drag performances and local DJ sets. Ewick recommends making New Year's Eve dinner soon at arcencieltetroit.com/reservations.

For Ewick, this isn't just a job — it's a calling. After growing up in Indiana, working in Florida, and returning to Michigan, he speaks passionately about Detroit's unique spirit. "Whether you're LGBTQ, whether you're straight, whether you're a Lions fan or a 'Drag Race' fan, we do come together in this city. It is a city of love."

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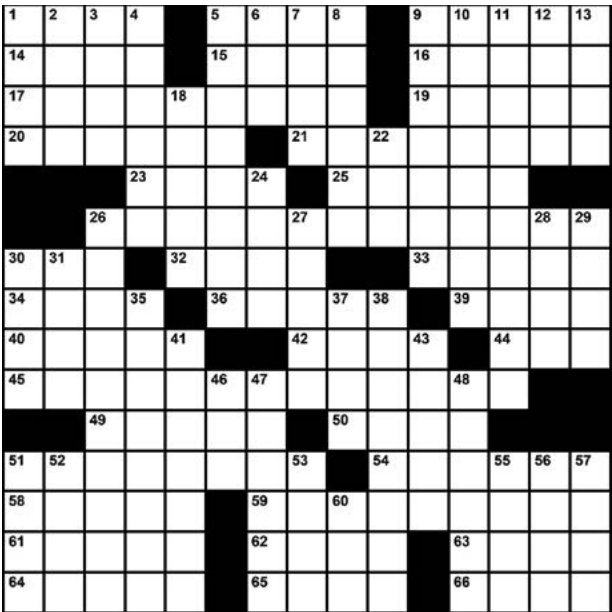
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Across

- 1 Caesar's city
- 5 Like a Marc Jacobs ensemble
- 9 Jack, who licked it clean
- 14 "Lawrence of Arabia," e.g.
- 15 Sixty minutes, for Marga Gomez
- 16 Being an active breeder, in slang

- 17 Start of a Quote from Dorothy Allison (1949-2024)
- 19 Woody secretion
- 20 Is responsible for
- 21 Making uniforms for "Jail-house Rock"
- 23 Bear of the night
- 25 Tried to tackle tight ends
- 26 More of the quote
- 30 Autumn mo.
- 32 Fast feline
- 33 In bad shape
- 34 "Show Boat" rank
- 36 Pears of a gay pair

- 39 From A to B, to Debussy
- 40 Eva Gabor's "Green ____"
- 42 Lickety-split (abbr.)
- 44 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 45 More of the quote
- 49 Michael Landon's "____ Teen-age Werewolf"
- 50 K-6 sch. designation
- 51 Mouthing off
- 54 Response to "That's not true!"
- 58 Black, to Rimbaud
- 59 End of the quote
- 61 Hits on the head
- 62 Arab head
- 63 It serves Tel Aviv
- 64 Drama queen's emotion, perhaps
- 65 Lairs of bears
- 66 Have the blahs

Down

- 1 Caitlin Clark's sometime nemeses
- 2 Photographer Catherine
- 3 Steinbeck title vermin
- 4 Misbehaves like Larry Kramer?
- 5 Select, as sides for a game
- 6 Title for Baldwin (abbr.)
- 7 "The Unicorn" author Murdoch
- 8 Street where Milk was "mayor"
- 9 Events where you can succeed in the short run
- 10 Obeys the Scout Motto
- 11 Gets on top, maybe

- 12 Opposed to, to Gomer
- 13 Half of a pair for grabbing
- 18 Car gadget for iPods
- 22 WWII fighter pilots of Eng.
- 24 Top
- 26 Assessing penile lengths, e.g.
- 27 "____ apple every day..."
- 28 Some Feds
- 29 Promo overkill
- 30 "Beat it!"
- 31 "Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of ____ Other"
- 35 ABC and more
- 37 To be, to Caesar
- 38 Those making a comeback
- 41 Least fresh
- 43 Mother-and-son piece
- 46 Milk, in a way
- 47 Foamed at the mouth
- 48 Rapper of "8 Mile"
- 51 Pre-Columbian Peruvian
- 52 Time for cowboys to shoot off
- 53 DiFranco's "Talk ____ Now"
- 55 Hole entered by a Minute-man
- 56 Move the ball between your legs
- 57 Watch porno, perhaps
- 60 Maj. opposite, for Rorem

See p. 17 for answers

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panelist at comic book conventions around the country. Her art became the subject of academic study. She became a revered creator in a burgeoning medium.

If she had produced nothing more, Monir would have already fixed her place as a rising comics star. But she did not stop there.

She acquired an old Risograph from a local print shop. In times past, this digital duplicator was popular with churches as a cost-effective way of reproducing their weekly bulletins. Monir saw it as an art tool and embraced the freedom it provided. So was born Diskette Press. “I started Diskette Press because I wanted to be able to print and experiment with my own projects without having to rely on a print shop,” she said. “I got my hands on an old Risograph printer and once I got it working it only made sense to offer printing to my friends as well.”

Monir’s entry into the realm of small press publishing allowed her to produce her increasingly intimate work uncensored. Both small in dimensions as well as in print run, Monir’s raw, sexually explicit and sometimes shocking visuals and text developed a strong following among adult comics fans and rave reviews by critics.

Even as she was enjoying the first flush of notoriety for her work, Monir confronted a devastating new reality.

“I threw out my back in a serious way. I knew



Panel from Monir’s “Lara Croft Is My Family” comic. Photo: Diskette Press

that I most likely had EDS because my brother had been diagnosed somewhere in 2011 or 2012, and I had been extremely ‘double-jointed’ all my life.”

Only 24 years old at the time, Monir’s diagnosis of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS) was life-altering. EDS is a genetic condition that affects the connective tissue in a person, whose first indication of it is double-jointedness (hyper-mobility).

Over time, Monir experienced a painful progression of her condition, from continually sprained wrists, severe back and neck pain, down into her legs. Incurable, her EDS is currently managed with painkillers and physical therapy. At present, Monir wears leg braces that allow her to stand and often needs a wheelchair to get around.

“I had to step away from [Diskette] press as my disability got worse, but it’s now in the hands of a very capable team who are continuing its mission of spotlighting up-and-coming queer — and especially trans — creators.”

Undaunted, Monir persevered. Circa 2020, Monir started “exploring and deconstructing taboos and fears instilled in her around sex and identity.” She pushed back on societal restrictions as she began producing and appearing in transgressively adult films involving graphic masochism. A niche pursuit, but as with her comics and writings, she developed a dedicated following.

In 2022, her interest in sexuality and erotica led her to apply for the Artist-in-Residence position at the Tom of Finland Foundation in Los Angeles.

“Tom of Finland” was the pen name used by legendary artist Touko Valio Laaksonen, whose renowned homoerotic artwork influenced gay culture in mid-20th-century America. Late in life he established his foundation, which serves to both preserve his artwork and to provide a venue to showcase the cultural merits of erotic art.

“It’s a place where artists are never told to reel themselves in or censor their work. It was an amazing incubator for my own work, and a place where I could do a ton of research and networking with other artists,” she said. “I am not for everyone. I am an acquired taste. I don’t have any interest in mass appeal, and I love my fans who specifically want what I offer.”

The constant pain and mobility issues have understandably limited Monir’s filmmaking recently, a challenge she is working around through a podcasting venture. Under the title of “Huge Pages,” Monir reads vintage erotic magazines cover-to-cover to her listeners. It’s a unique and typically creative effort, describing the graphic imagery through words alone.

And Monir continues to explore boldly creative outlets. Rather than hide her disability, she incorporates it into her art. She journals her battle with EDS on Patreon, providing intimate details of its effect on aspects of her life.

Physical photographic prints and print comics are still available via Diskette Press (diskettepress.com).

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