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Between the Lines™

NEXT GEN DRAG TALENT ARRIVES

Meet the rising performers taking center stage at Ferndale Pride

YOUR PRIDE CALENDAR
With fests all over the Mitten, there's something for everyone

BIG EVENT ENERGY

How James Staycation is creating inclusive vibes across Metro Detroit

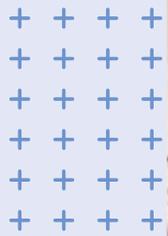
The Godmother's Groove

Decades later, Ferndale Pride headliner Stacey Hotwaxx Hale is still setting the beat for Detroit's music future

By Layla McMurtrie

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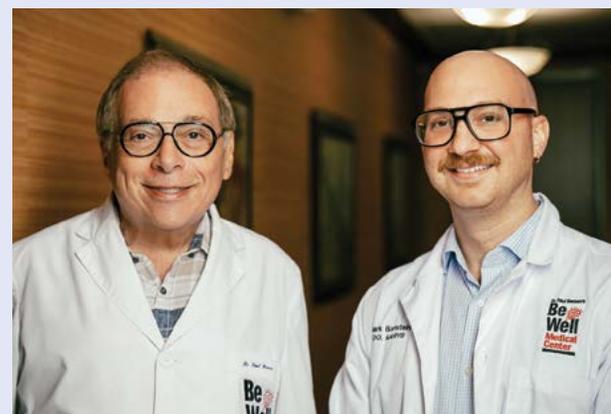
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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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Photo: James Taehyun Kim/TRIB3 EXP

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Is it just me or are things getting a little gay in here? Pride season is officially in full swing, friends, so get ready to experience a multimedia, cross-platform sensory explosion. With glitter, of course. From crafting Sally Ride in clay to sneaking books like a queer Nancy Drew (or is that redundant?), you have a wide range of options. Whether you want to party with Ferndale's finest, cheer on queer entrepreneurs or just stick googly eyes on something rainbow-colored, we've got you covered.



Flamy Grant. Photo: Ash Perlberg

Catch Flamy Grant's Drag Gospel Show

Don't miss Flamy Grant, the Billboard-charting drag artist who made history as the first drag queen to top iTunes' Christian music charts. Blending country, gospel, folk and roots music, Flamy, set to perform at The Ark on May 29, creates an inclusive spiritual space for LGBTQ+ audiences recovering from religious trauma.

"My music, what I do in drag, first and foremost, it's always for queer folks, and particularly it's for queer folks who grew up in the church," she told BTL's Chris Azzopardi in 2023. Named after Christian music icon Amy Grant, this powerhouse vocalist and 2025 International Folk Music Awards finalist transforms stages into sanctuaries of acceptance with bold lips, dramatic lashes and soul-stirring vocals.

May 29, 8 p.m., The Ark (316 S. Main St., Ann Arbor). Reserve tickets at theark.org/event/flamy-grant-250529.



Be Quietly Queer With the Library

One of the less fun characteristics of large Pride events is that they often aren't fun for everyone! In the last decade or so, Pride organizers have become more aware of how noise, flashing lights and other stimulation issues can create access barriers — not to mention Covid risk. But sometimes we don't want to spend a Saturday running into all our exes. And ex therapists. And exes' therapists. And therapists' exes. Even if there is a quiet area to recuperate.

Enter Ann Arbor District Library stage right! They've created a calendar of 30 days of mostly quiet, mostly at-home Pride-related activities — many of them kid-friendly. Some of my favorites include making a rainbow pop-up card, mulling over the radical, brilliant poetry of J Mase III and creating a tiny clay version of astronaut Sally Ride.

Do you think they'd add a queer speed dating option so all us booknerds could meet our next partner at the library? Well, a nonbinary bibliophile can dream.

Various days, times: aadl.org/30daysofpride.



Defy, Display, Delight

If you've ever been given a walkie talkie and a clipboard and tried to get queers to follow directions at a large event, you've learned: We do not like to follow silly rules.

So while the federal government's current obsession with aggressively defunding queer art is both dangerous and mean-spirited, it's not very, well, strategic. The quickest way to get queers to make a ton of really queer art is to tell us we're not allowed.

So, of course, Benjamin Bertrand's community art show "The Exhibition[ist]" is not going anywhere; in fact, it's bigger and better than ever in its third year.

"The Exhibition[ist] is a playfully provocative showcase highlighting queer artists," creator Benjamin Bertrand told BTL. "It is a bold and creative celebration of intimacy, sexuality and body positivity."

They go low, we lube up a papier-mâché leather daddy and hang him in a gallery next to a neon vulva sculpture.

May 30, 8 p.m.-12 p.m., 215 West, (215 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). bit.ly/ExhibitionistMI.



Kevin Heard, Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber board president.



Celebrate Queer-prenuers

Yes, the dress code is Opulence in Orange. No, you don't have to wear head-to-toe citrus couture but you'll definitely earn extra sparkle points if you do. The Pride Awards Gala, hosted by the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, is back with its \$10,000 pitch competition, honoring LGBTQ+ businesses and employee resource groups while raising funds for queer entrepreneurs. "We are also excited about still celebrating this year, given the increased political attacks on many communities," Chamber Board President Kevin Heard told BTL. "Orange is my favorite color — it's the color of friendship. We hope people attend our gala as we have impacted hundreds of businesses this year with our connections and programming."

So grab your brightest bestie and get ready to toast a room full of bold ideas and even bolder outfits.

June 13, 6–10 p.m., Motor City Casino Grand Ballroom (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit).
Learn more at detroitlgbtchamber.com/coloursawards.



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Plant a Book, Grow a Queer

Turn your local Little Free Library into a surprise coming-out starter kit. Buy your favorite LGBTQ+ book from your favorite LGBTQ+ bookstore (Sidetrack Bookshop in Royal Oak is always a great choice) and deposit it in your local Little Free Library Box. Maybe add an encouraging note? You never know whose life might change thanks to a surprise dose of representation.

Need some inspiration? Check out bit.ly/PrideSourceBooks, where you'll find book lists and feature stories on queer writers and books sure to delight Little Free Library visitors.

Little Free Libraries are everywhere. If the library owner has registered, you can find them on the location list at littlefreelibrary.org/map or on their mobile app.

THE GODMOTHER'S

GROOVE



Stacey Hotwaxx Hale. Photo: James Taehyun Kim/
TRIB3 EXP

How Stacey Hotwaxx Hale revolutionized Detroit's music scene as a Black lesbian

BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE

Stacey Hotwaxx Hale is the embodiment of Detroit talent and grit.

When I meet her at Spot Lite Detroit on a hot spring afternoon, she's finishing up a business meeting, dressed to the nines in a cozy Detroit Lions sweatshirt. Her blue-detailed nails, silver Detroit D earrings and blue-tinted shades say it all — she's a true fan of her city.

And for nearly a half century the city has loved her right back.

Dubbed “The Godmother of House Music,” Hale, who began her career in the '80s, was the first woman to spin house music on Detroit radio. Her first radio gig was at WGPR 107.5, and after beating out 600 DJs and rappers in the 1985 Motor City Mix contest, she landed a spot at WJLB 97.9 the following year. By the 1990s, her signature sound was broadcasting on mainstream stations like 95.5 and 96.3. In other words, if you listened to the radio any time during those two decades, you knew the name “Hotwaxx.”

Breaking into Detroit's male-dominated DJ scene as a queer Black woman in the '80s wasn't just rare — it was revolutionary. This milestone wasn't just about spinning tracks. It was about shattering glass ceilings and creating pathways for generations of women DJs who would follow in her formidable footsteps. It's no wonder, then, that Hale was inducted into Nashville's National Museum of African American Music in 2019.

“I realized that nobody can do what I've done because I already did it,” she says. “Being able to live and embrace the way sound and times have changed, I'm very excited about that.”

Today, Hale holds DJ residencies in both Detroit (at Spot Lite) and Berlin, captivating crowds with her genre-bending sets filled with unmistakable Detroit soul. Her sound blurs lines — house, funk, hip-hop, Motown and more — but is always rooted in her own tastes.

“I don't play nothing I don't like,” she says. “I worked in

radio... I'd find a mix that I liked so we'd satisfy both things — you liking the pop, and me liking that deep, underground house groove.”

That commitment to authenticity has always set her apart — especially in a scene where few women, particularly queer Black women, had a seat at the table. Whether spinning in a warehouse or for a crowd of 2,000 at a picnic, Hale has always played with intention, bridging divides of race, genre and gender.

“I wanted to play for the Black men the most. That was my favorite, favorite thing to do,” she says. “It was just a lot of love and very progressive and just... the freedom of that is unique. It's just cool.”

She continues: “I can't be out there playing all music for the white boys. I can't be out there playing music all for the Black boys. So how do you get the mix? What do you do? Pay attention. You gotta think. You gotta listen. So I found a way.”

In the early '90s, Hale co-founded the Detroit Regional Music Conference with fellow DJ John Collins — a pioneering effort to break down genre silos. The event brought together hip-hop artists, gospel singers, rock bands and techno DJs under one roof, laying groundwork for a more collaborative, cross-genre music scene in the city.

Even now, Hale is laser-focused on uplifting the next generation. She's building a studio near the Detroit River to teach youth how to DJ. She mentors with Girls Rock Detroit and other local groups, and previously founded the Lesbians of Color Support Network (LOCS), a vital resource for queer women of color in the city.

“You have to pay it forward,” she says. “If everything I know stays with me, it won't live.”

This summer, Hale is doing just that, taking center stage as one of three headliners — all women — at Ferndale Pride, appearing at 6 p.m. May 31 on the Woodward

See **Stacey Hotwaxx Hale**, page 20

Why I Wear My Miss Trans Michigan Crown for Every Black Trans Girl Still Seeking Safety

Ferndale Pride
headliner on what
trans people need
from allies in this era

BY BADDIE BROOKS

“I used to be so scared to even walk down the stairs.” This line is from my original song “Trans.” Unfortunately, this was my reality, as I was raised in an environment that was not inclusive of LGBTQIA+ identities. Since then, I walked away and never turned back.

It’s one of the many reasons why I work so hard and why words can’t fully express how much it means to be crowned Miss Trans Michigan 2025. There was a time when I thought I’d carry my secret to the grave. Now, I’m determined to fight for marginalized identities. There’s a Black trans girl out there who needs a role model, and it’s my mission to be the change I wish to see in the world.

As Miss Trans Michigan 2025, I’ll continue advocating for transgender people and will use this platform to bring positivity to how the trans community is perceived. Many media outlets use the trans community as a scapegoat for discrimination. I want to uplift the trans community and serve as a positive role model. I’ve chosen to support Affirmations, Black Pride Ypsi, PRISM Detroit and the Ruth Ellis Center.

As a young, Black, transgender woman who came out at 21, celebrating Pride means the world to me. The opportunities I’ve received from the LGBTQIA+ community have been life-changing. Despite the current political climate, I refuse to hide. Trans representation and visibility are important now more than ever. We will not be erased.

I’ll never forget being harassed in a public restroom in Detroit. As I was being threatened by a stranger, another LGBTQIA+ community member stood by and did nothing. The trans community shouldn’t have to fight alone. We shouldn’t be victims of inaction, especially from other queer community members.

I’m eager to connect with community members who experience adversity. I know there are other young queer and transgender individuals experiencing oppression in their environments. We must continue fighting the erasure of queer and transgender people. The trans community can’t win this fight alone, however.

No matter how we identify, discriminatory people will come after all of us. There is no “LGB” without the “T.” We shouldn’t be fighting for basic human rights by ourselves. Speak up when you witness injustice. By correcting misgendering, attacking harmful rhetoric and stepping in when a trans person is being harassed, you can make a difference.

I’m calling on allies to step up. We cannot combat discrimination alone. Using your voice against bigotry

makes a difference. It’s unfair to expect LGBTQIA+ community members to be visible while we’re constantly targeted.

Visibility without protection is a trap. Allyship needs to be direct and visible, not performative.

Being visible isn’t easy. I’ve dealt with *c o n d e s c e n d i n g* comments and behaviors. In just a few years, I’ve faced more controversies surrounding my gender identity than most people can imagine — from family judgment to public harassment. I’ve been threatened walking to a job interview. People don’t understand the cognitive dissonance when those who claim to love you treat you poorly for embracing who you truly are. It’s disheartening when family members intentionally disrespect your name and pronouns.

Although many perceptions of me changed after I came out, I found community. I found sisters to laugh and cry with. I found community in those who also faced adversity. My chosen family keeps me going. When I was at my lowest, fellow artists uplifted me. I’m driven to do the same for others in need.

Regarding how transgender people are treated, we need to stop accepting the bare minimum. Everyone grows up differently,



Baddie Brooks. Photo: Brigid Yates

but that’s no excuse to repeat your family’s bigotry without critical thinking. Many don’t realize the hardships of being “out” and proud. I’ve known who I was since I was 8, but had to hide because it wasn’t safe to live openly.

Transgender people deserve the right to thrive. The life expectancy for Black transgender women like myself isn’t high. At 25, I’ve lost many friends from the community.

Queer and trans people deserve to grow old. We deserve to start families like everyone else. How can we do that if we’re constantly fighting for our lives? We must fight against ideals and laws that harm the LGBTQIA+ community.

Treating trans humans with basic respect is the bare minimum. In

reality, transgender people aren’t abnormal. We’re teachers, lawyers, doctors, activists, sisters, brothers and more.

To me, thriving means achieving my dreams. I deserve to grow old and start a family. I deserve to chase my dream of being a musical superstar touring internationally. Transgender people should flourish in any career we pursue. We are someone, and trans people deserve the chance to thrive — forever and always.

Eastern Michigan University graduate Baddie Brooks is a classically trained musician blending R&B, pop and dance music. Brooks’ new single “Game Over” is out now.

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How This Michigan Community Events Organizer Is Rewriting What It Means to Belong

From pool parties to art workshops, James Staycation is bringing Big Event Energy to Metro Detroit

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

One hundred people — mostly gay, mostly men — walk into a bar.

It might sound like a punchline to a joke, but it's how Detroit Staycation Club started.

James Staycation, 36, and his friends grew bored of their routines going to the same few places in the early 2010s. They loved frequenting local LGBTQ+ establishments like Pronto, Gigi's, Gold Coast, Soho and Inn Place, but they were looking to find a larger community outside of their regular spots.

Staycation and his friend Steve Lovett came up with the idea to create Detroit Staycation Club (DSC) — in a booth at the now-closed bar Inn Place in Royal Oak, no less — after they realized they would travel to other cities and experience those places' hotspots and cultural touchstones, but they weren't really doing the same right here in Detroit.

"There are things in your community that, because they are in your backyard, you don't do them. But yet, if you're visiting another city, you would do those things. So we wanted to highlight them," Staycation tells BTL.

Their first trial event was in 2015 at Twin Peaks in Madison Heights, a sports bar with a very different vibe from their normal hangout spots. The bar was brand new and Staycation thought it could be fun to bring his friends, Steve's friends, and friends of friends together to meet and celebrate the opening. They let loose while flooding the lodge-like bar with line dancing queers wearing cropped flannels.

"That sticks out to me still, because at

what time are you going to have 100 queer people come together at the same time and go to a Twin Peaks of all places?" says Staycation. It was then that he realized this idea of bringing people together to explore their own city and find community while doing so was something that had real potential.

Growing up in Troy, Staycation recalls hearing people label Detroit as "unsafe." He says suburbanites typically only ventured downtown for two things: shows and sports. As he got older, he would visit on weeknights and remember "everything was closed."

But things changed for both Detroit and the queer community in the 2010s, during what Staycation calls the city's "resurgence and revitalization." The downtown area came alive, and the queer community began to form connections right at the heart of the action. Staycation wanted to be a part of that transformation, so he set out to show that Detroit was more than the city he'd known growing up. The result? "By diving into the city's culture and seeing its representation, it made us love and appreciate it even more."

But it always bothered him that Detroit, despite having so much to offer, wasn't considered a "destination city."

"Detroit has essentially every offering possible, so my hope with Detroit Staycation Club is that people realize what is here, what is available, and love their city," says Staycation.

DSC has hosted hundreds of events over the past 10 years. One of its most popular recurring gatherings is the Parasol Pool Parties, the pool parties of your summer bucket-list dreams. Attendees bask in the sun, dodge beach balls and sip tropical drinks while enjoying drag performances, DJ sets and go-go dancers — all without the stress of worrying about acceptance.

"If you go to a lot of 'gay' pool parties, you generally see one type of person that's there, at least that's what I see through social media. But when you come to Parasol, it's a very eclectic mix of everyone from across the queer and allied communities," says Staycation.

Diversity in identities and body types is essential to Staycation. This commitment to inclusivity inspired one of his favorite ongoing events, the Detroit Queer Sketch Series (DQSS).

James Staycation. Photo: Preppyman Photography



André Mason performing at Parasol. Photo: Preppyman Photography

Staycation has always had a deep passion for art, which he describes as his “pandemic therapy.” Along with Chris Gorski from Detroit GT, Staycation co-created DQSS to provide a welcoming space where individuals can create and immerse themselves in art alongside other community members. The event is barrier-free, operating on a pay-what-you-want basis and welcoming both seasoned artists and newcomers.

Just as the artists represent various backgrounds and parts of the queer community, the same goes for the models. Joni Genovesi, who modeled for the first time ever in February at a DQSS event, says it was an experience unlike anything she’d ever been part of before.

“Being a trans woman, I have some pretty high discomfort with my physical presence. I wanted to do this to hopefully help shed some of my own insecurities,” Genovesi tells BTL.

Despite her initial nerves, she says, “the minute my robe came off, everything just felt right. Seeing the artist’s drawings at the end brought me to tears. I saw my masculine features beautifully complimented with my feminine self. It was incredibly empowering, and I took so much more out of it than I could have possibly expected.”

Although Genovesi only met Staycation that day, she quickly understood why people are drawn to DSC events and why they keep coming back to be around him.

“He has a very calm and comforting presence. You can tell he is just a good soul that cares about his community and wants to uplift us all,” says Genovesi.

For Staycation, it was crucial that DSC felt like a welcoming, accepting place. For him, it’s personal. His interest in community organizing stemmed from time spent as a

camp director in his early 20s. Staycation was a member of the camp’s community from the time he was 8, and it was a place he considered home. But those feelings quickly changed after he came out at 23.

“At first, I managed to keep my private life quiet, but over time, the weight of living a double life became exhausting,” Staycation says. He was still working at the camp in 2015 when DSC held its first event, and word got around the camp that he was gay. Staycation was told by the executive director, a priest, to “silence my social media.” He was also excluded from board meetings.

“I felt ashamed and alienated, much like someone whose family doesn’t accept them after coming out,” he says. “The writing was on the wall — I was being pushed out.”

In 2016, after being with the camp for 20 years, Staycation left. He says he hasn’t spoken to anyone at the organization since.

“As painful as that chapter was, it ultimately pushed me toward building something where queer people could always feel seen, welcome and celebrated,” he says.

And for so many people, that is what DSC has become. Even his last name is a nod to Staycation’s journey.

“Early on, we made cheesy promo videos for our events, always ending with the tagline: ‘Live Every Day Like You’re on Vacation,’” he says. “It was a more intentional version of YOLO — about making the most of life, being present and having fun.”

What started as an event tagline became so much more than that for him during the pandemic. “Staycation,” he adds, “became

See **James Staycation**, page 34

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‘We’re Not Hiding’: Small-Town Michigan Salon Takes a Stand for LGBTQ+ Clients

Iron River salon owner pledges LGBTQ+ allyship even as she faces harassment for supporting queer community

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Being inclusive and affirming can come with a price, but Aimee Schimanski is willing to pay that cost. In fact, she’s become more determined as her small-town salon has been targeted for choosing love and acceptance.

Schimanski owns My Friend’s Salon in Iron River, a rural Upper Peninsula Michigan town where Confederate flags still fly and the past four presidential elections have gone Republican.

Despite that, Schimanski has made her salon a place that welcomes young trans clients and others in the LGBTQ+ community — a decision that has brought both community and hardship.

“We had our whole front porch filled with religious pamphlets,” Schimanski said. “There’s the stupidest things. Somebody took out an ad on the salon offering free haircuts on Mondays. We’re closed on Mondays — the ad was so we would get a lot of people angry with us. We’ve gotten bad reviews saying we’re politically unhinged or queer lovers.”

Her salon has even been vandalized.

“I’m very close to the chief of police,” Schimanski said. “We got cameras up now and he’s constantly surveying the area, but we haven’t been able to prove anything.”

Schimanski said she sometimes struggles with doubt.

“Do I want to call more attention to myself or do I want to hide?” Schimanski ponders. “It changes daily. Sometimes I’m ashamed of myself for feeling that way, but sometimes you just want to work and go about your day without something happening.”

Ultimately, though, she chooses not to hide because she refuses to abandon her clients.

Since taking a public stance that “all are welcome,” she estimates she lost more than half her clientele. Today, nearly 80 percent of her clients are either LGBTQ+ or openly affirming.

“I’m not upset about losing [those clients],” Schimanski said. “The comments and conversations that came into the salon while I had either clients that were of a more sensitive nature — it was just awful. I’ve had to kick people out — physically remove people from the salon because of how they spoke. So I’m not complaining about losing that clientele. It hurts [financially] — it hurts a lot — but it makes for a safer spot.”



My Friend’s Salon in Iron River. Courtesy photo

Her apprentice, Niketa Gines, said they refer to it as “firing a client.”

“I asked her, ‘Have you noticed that since you fired people like that your life has been better?’” Gines said.

For those who do come and find comfort in her chair, there’s often a deep vulnerability they carry with them — and for Schimanski, being a stylist also means shouldering that emotional responsibility.

“People come into my chair and within minutes, they start crying,” Schimanski said. “I had a woman who is 70 years old and for 40 years in this town, she has been hiding her relationship.”

A young man comes to the salon almost every day to hang out — he’s regularly beaten up in the school locker room.

“This is a place where people feel heard, cared for and loved,” Schimanski said.

She noted that some clients use the back door out of fear of being seen. One client didn’t wish to go on the record to talk about the salon for fear of her family facing backlash.

Some days, Schimanski said, she’s comforting a client who just shared a heartbreaking story, only to have someone walk in and loudly accuse her of being anti-Trump.

“All of a sudden, my clients feel like they have to scurry,” Schimanski said. “I’ve eliminated most of the red that comes in here. People don’t like me and that’s totally fine because my clients are so important to me.”

While she emphasizes welcoming everyone, there’s a limit. She describes herself as nice, cordial and welcoming — until someone proves unworthy of it.

“The minute you show me that you have some sort of hang-up or ill will towards any of my clients, you’re out the door,” Schimanski said.

For Gines, who has been working at My Friend’s Salon for the past year and a half, working there meant finding a rare safe spot. Moving to Iron River was somewhat of a culture shock.

“I’ve talked to a couple of my trans [clients] who are transitioning and they talk about their dads — it’s insane up here,” Gines said. “So for her to have this place that is open to everybody — I belong here. I found my people.”

One of Gines’ clients traveled more than an hour-and-a-half from Marquette after seeing a social media post about the salon. This kind of dedication demonstrates the scarcity of affirming spaces in the region, despite some locals’ denial about the real hatred LGBTQ+ people face. Gines said a recent client complained during an eyebrow treatment that a gay couple was “shoving it down her throat” by walking and holding hands in front of her home, and that it made her sick.

“Yes, it is happening here,” Schimanski said. “I am afraid to put my flag up because I don’t know if I’ll be burnt down.”

Schimanski said she has a trans client who comes in when she knows it will be private and no one else will see her there. This client grew up in Iron River and Schimanski has

See **UP Salon**, page 15

How Tech Can Empower Trans Communities: This Michigan Author Explores the Possibilities

U-M professor Oliver Haimson says he thinks trans visibility is a ‘double-edged sword’

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

Trans visibility is a complex topic for Oliver Haimson. On one hand, he says he loves finding and leaning on community, especially through tumultuous times.

“But visibility is a double-edged sword,” he tells BTL.

Haimson, a University of Michigan assistant professor and writer of the new book “Trans Technologies,” says being visibly queer — and, more specifically, trans — can put a target on your back.

“When we’re more visible, we’ve seen that trans violence and discrimination have increased along with the visibility,” says Haimson. “I think this can be scary in a lot of ways, and I’m a very privileged trans person because I’m not typically targeted for violence and hate when I just walk down the street,” he says.

Living as a cis-passing man, Haimson says he has struggled with how and when he should be visible and reveal one of the biggest parts of himself. When Haimson first started transitioning, he was bartending at a gay bar patroned by mostly cis gay men, who believed he was just like them. If he divulged that he was trans, he says he was often met with invasive, uncomfortable personal questions.

“So I just let people assume that I was a cis gay man, and that was a lot easier. And I just stuck with that for a long time,” he says of a time that included his early career in academia, where he studied trans experiences, human-computer interaction, social computing and the intersection between them. Even while studying trans experiences, people still assumed he was cis.

“It seemed like people didn’t expect that trans people would be academics, which was surprising to me. Nowadays, it seems much more obvious that people realize that trans people exist. But for a long period of time it was very confusing for me.”

This personal experience with visibility directly informed Haimson’s academic work. In 2021, he decided he wanted to write a book to uncover how technology creates new possibilities for transgender people, and



Oliver Haimson. Courtesy photo

how trans experiences, in turn, create new possibilities for technology. With this project, he says he wanted to go into it being fully and authentically himself.

With a February 2025 release date marked on a calendar years ago, Haimson says he had no way of knowing what the political and social climate would be like for queer people when “Trans Technologies” finally released this past February. He says the book’s launch during scary unknowns feels like fate.

“I’m not immune to all the anti-trans legislation that is being proposed in the U.S., because even if I don’t look trans, I am. And though speaking publicly raises more chances of being a target, I made this conscious choice that I was going to be more public and more visible when the book came out, and I am sticking to my decision. I just hope that it positively impacts people,” he says.

Haimson’s inspiration for this project is rooted in the complexity of working in and loving a field that he says often doesn’t cater to or consider marginalized communities. His book examines what happens when trans people take technology design into their own hands, especially given that mainstream technologies often exclude or marginalize transgender users.

In “Trans Technologies,” Haimson defines

See **Trans Tech**, page 24



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Pete Hegseth and President Donald Trump's Modern-Day Lavender Scare



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Something that pops into my head a lot (besides the Mentos jingle) is the phrase, "It was a kinder, gentler time." It's what my grandparents said when I interviewed them for an undergrad history class project. They were talking about the 1950s.

My grandparents, both of whom are no longer living, were white and upper-middle class. They were the kind of people for whom the 1950s were ideal. As much as I loved them, to think of the '50s as kind and gentle takes a lot of willful ignorance when it comes to the suffering of people not like you.

It makes sense, then, that so many straight, cisgender white people yearn for a return to the 1950s while the idea scares the hell out of just about everyone else.

That racial discrimination was rampant in the '50s is widely known, but the discrimination against queer people is not. But what's happening now — a crackdown on LGBTQ+ people from the highest reaches of power — is history repeating itself.

"Under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 [in 1953], the investigation, interrogation and



Administration is making to justify kicking transgender servicemembers out of the military. In 2025.

On Jan. 27, Trump issued an executive order titled "Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness."

"[A]doption of a gender identity inconsistent with an individual's sex conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful and disciplined lifestyle," it reads. "A man's assertion that he is a woman, and his requirement that others honor this falsehood, is not consistent with the humility and selflessness required of a service member."

These words were deeply hurtful and offensive to transgender service members, as they were intended to be.

On May 6, the Supreme Court ruled that the trans military ban could go into effect. No one seems to have thought this through.

"The most immediate impact is that transgender people serve in every theater of the world," Commander Emily Shilling, a transgender woman, told Erin in

the Morning. "If it were a fairly fast-moving ban, you would be pulling these individuals out of their units, leaving critical gaps in skill sets, experience and leadership positions that you're just not going to be able to fill with equivalent people anytime soon, especially given the shortfalls in recruiting."

I'm not a military scholar, but that seems bad, especially since the whole world is basically an on-fire hellscape right now.

"Transgender troops who do not voluntarily come forward could be outed by commanders or others aware of their medical status," reports the Associated Press. "Military commanders will be told to identify troops in their units who are transgender or have gender dysphoria, then send them to get medical checks in order to force them out of the service."

This is worse than "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Remember that? President Bill Clinton's so-called compromise on the issue of LGBTQ+ service members in 1993? It mandated that troops had to stay in the closet. It was repealed in 2011, and in 2016, transgender service members were allowed to serve openly for the first time under President Obama.

Anyway, I mention Don't Ask, Don't Tell to point out that what is happening now can be traced right back to the centrist bullshit that created DADT in the first place. Clinton did not fight for LGBTQ+ people even though he'd said he would. He even signed the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, FFS. Centrist is an awful strategy because it isn't based on doing what is right; it's based on doing what is expedient. With all due respect, fuck that.

To every Democrat who is saying, "We must treat transgender people as inhuman if we want to win elections," instead of "The attack on transgender people is abhorrent and must stop," I hope you are primaried and I hope that you lose.

We are in the middle of a trans scare where a trans person serving this country is the worst thing losers like Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth can imagine. "No more dudes in dresses," Hegseth had the audacity to say. "We're done with that shit."

Hegseth is an unqualified clown and Trump dodged the draft repeatedly. They might hate trans service members, but at least trans service members actually give a shit about protecting the country.

We are in the middle of a trans scare where a trans person serving this country is the worst thing losers like Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth can imagine.

systematic removal of gay men and lesbians from the federal government became policy," reports Time. This was known as the "Lavender Scare."

The belief was that queer people "posed a threat to national security because they were vulnerable to blackmail and were considered to have weak moral characters," historian David K. Johnson told Time.

This is essentially the same argument the Trump

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Michigan Republicans Target Trans Youth with Sports Ban

Republican Michigan lawmakers are pushing legislation aimed at banning transgender girls from participating in female school sports teams. House Bills 4469 and 4066 would force athletes to compete based on the sex listed on their birth certificate, regardless of their gender identity.

Rep. Rylee Linting (R-Wyandotte) framed the legislation as protecting cisgender girls: "This is not about putting anyone down. This is about lifting up our young girls who have dreams, making sure that they have a level playing field, that they are not robbed of scholarship opportunities, a

spot on the team, or worse, seriously injured."

Supporters include Payton McNabb, a paid spokesperson for the anti-trans Independent Women's Forum, according to GLAAD, and Riley Gaines, a known anti-trans activist. Neither of these supporters is from Michigan.

LGBTQ+ advocates fiercely condemned the measures. Emme Zanotti of Equality Michigan told Michigan Advance, "We should want more young people to play sports in our state, not put up more barriers for all girls, like invasive inspections and ridicule about what gender they are because their hair is too short, they're too tall, their shoulders are too broad, or because they have a good serve."

The bills passed through an all-male committee with zero Democratic support, highlighting the partisan nature of the proposed legislation.



New Report: Social Media Platforms Allow Hate, Suppress Queer Content

GLAAD's 2025 Social Media Safety Index reveals all major platforms are failing LGBTQ+ users. TikTok scored highest with just 56 out of 100, followed by Instagram (54), Facebook (48), YouTube (38), Threads (35) and X ranking lowest at 30.

The report identifies a disturbing pattern: Platforms simultaneously fail to moderate anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech while over-moderating legitimate queer content through shadowbanning, demonetization and wrongful takedowns.

Meta and YouTube recently rolled back protections for transgender and nonbinary users, which GLAAD calls "grave threats to safety."

"Anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and disinformation on social media has been shown to lead to offline harms," the report states, urging platforms to strengthen policies, improve moderator training, increase transparency and respect user privacy.

Read the full report at [glaad.org](https://www.glaad.org).

Detroit LGBTQ+ DJs Set to Shine at Movement Festival

LGBTQ+ representation will shine at Movement Festival, held May 24-26.

Day 1 performer Stacey Hotwaxx Hale broke barriers as the first woman to spin house music on Detroit radio, shattering glass ceilings in the male-dominated DJ scene as a

queer Black woman in the '80s and creating a distinctive cross-genre sound that has earned her the title "Godmother of House Music." (Read more about Hale on page 6!)

DJ Minx (Jennifer Witcher), who came out as lesbian during Pride Month 2021, will perform on the Pyramid Stage on Day 3. Minx has become an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ+ visibility in Detroit's electronic music scene, with her image featured in a mural at the Ruth Ellis Center.

DJ Holographic (Ariel Corley), part of a new generation of queer Black femme artists, will perform on the Movement Stage on Days 1 and 3. Holographic built her early career in predominantly queer venues before emerging as one of Detroit's most exciting techno voices.

Visit movementfestival.com for tickets and complete details.

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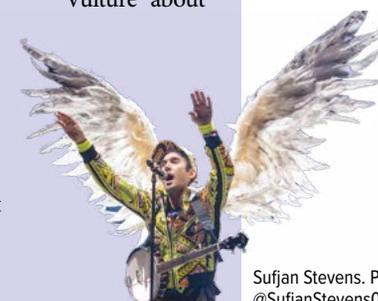
Award-winning choreographer Jeanine Durning brings her groundbreaking "The Invitation Situation" to Andy Arts Detroit (3000 Fenkell Ave., Detroit) at 7:30 p.m. June 6-7. Witness four exceptional dancers navigate the thrilling tension between individual expression and collective movement through Durning's revolutionary "nonstopping" technique. Born from pandemic isolation, this performance transforms the limitations of distance into an exploration of human connection. Find more information at bit.ly/3GZ6XQ0.

Let the Bears Wash Your Filthy Ride

Don't miss the beloved "Bears in Speedos" Car Wash from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. June 7 at First Merchants Bank (210 W. Saratoga Ave., Ferndale)! The Motor City Bears will scrub vehicles of all sizes to benefit Ruth Ellis Center and Affirmations — vital organizations supporting the LGBTQ+ community. This popular community tradition raised over \$1,000 last year, and the bears are aiming even higher for 2025. Join the fun, get your ride sparkling clean and support life-changing local charities. Visit facebook.com/motorcitybears/events for more info.

Sufjan Stevens: Bible is 'Very Gay'

In his first interview since revealing his Guillain-Barré diagnosis and partner's death, Michigan-born musician Sufjan Stevens didn't hold back, declaring "The Bible's very gay. Just all men." The beloved queer artist also spoke candidly with Vulture about his health struggles, upcoming "Carrie & Lowell" reissue and emerging from a two-year "shitshow." Read our full coverage at pridesource.com.



Sufjan Stevens. Photo: Facebook/@SufjanStevens001

America's Prettiest Girl: The Remarkable Story of Gender-Bending Trailblazer Lionel 'Iron Mike' Ames

When gender performance captivated America long before drag became political



BY ANNI ARBOUR

In an era decades before “RuPaul’s Drag Race” or political battles over drag performers, a University of Michigan student named Lionel “Iron Mike” Ames became a national sensation for his stunning performances in women’s roles. His story reveals how gender performance in early 1920s America existed in a complex social space — celebrated as entertainment while performers carefully navigated rigid boundaries of sexuality and identity.

College performances launch a star

Born on May 15, 1902, in Bay City, Michigan, Lionel was destined for the stage. His father Adelbert “Dell” Ames was a professional actor, while his mother Blanche performed in amateur productions. After Dell passed away, Blanche remarried George M. McBride, who managed the Majestic Theater and owned the town’s pioneering radio station.

At Michigan, slim, red-haired Lionel joined the all-male Mimes club production of “Make It For Two” in 1921, initially assigned to the girl’s chorus. The Michigan Daily noted that Ames was “so effective in his makeup that he would have no trouble in gaining admittance to the Junior Girls’ play.”

With the 1922 production of “In And Out,” Ames was promoted to lead women’s role. The Daily singled out his acting for its “finished perfection that shows long training and natural talent.”

Photos showcasing Ames’ startling feminine transformation were distributed to newspapers nationwide. A famous opera singer who saw Ames perform commented in the Detroit Free Press, “You don’t tell me that lovely, that adorable girl is a man... Such a figure; such grace; such beauty; surely no man ever could be that little girl.”

One syndicated photograph boldly claimed: “A new beauty may be a contender for the honor of being America’s Prettiest Girl.”

The delicate dance of dual identities

By the mid ’20s, Ames had adopted the more masculine name of “Mike” to affirm his manhood. Following the example of Julian Eltinge (a female impersonator more highly paid than Charlie Chaplin), Ames’ public image carefully balanced masculine and feminine qualities.

An interviewer in the Port Huron Times Herald revealed how Ames “daintily touched a perfumed cigarette to her lips,” while explaining that he “drove a huge motor truck all last summer” to achieve his feminine figure.

The attention brought unexpected consequences. Male admirers became so taken with his stage persona they “would have been glad to take him out to supper,” according to the Indianapolis Star. One wrote that Ames combined “all the attributes and charms of enchanting, alluring, fascinating womanhood,” calling him “truly a ‘modern Venus.’”

Like Eltinge, Ames maintained he was heterosexual. His marriage to Beulah S. Brown in early 1924 certainly helped. “Michigan’s Female Impersonator Weds,” announced the Associated Press wire story, noting the couple had “attempted to keep the marriage a secret.”

In University of Michigan senior superlatives, Ames came in second for “prettiest girl” in his class, losing by only one vote.

Vaudeville success and manufactured masculinity

After graduating in June 1924, Ames immediately began his professional career. By early 1925, he was touring vaudeville theaters



(Left) University of Michigan yearbook photo, 1923. (Right) Publicity photo, March 16, 1927. Public domain images



nationwide with his show, “Fascinating Feminine Fancies,” consisting of jokes and songs performed as he changed into stylish fashions behind a screen.

A feature in the Battle Creek Enquirer detailed the whiplash of seeing Ames in both personas: “[Ames portrayed] a ravishingly pretty young girl in a dazzling gown which was — blushing admits — cut rather low in the back,” the article noted. “When next seen this beautiful young girl had been suddenly transformed into a conservative appearing young man with a collegiate cut in his clothes. And on close scrutiny it was easily seen that a razor was necessary almost every day to halt the uprising of a very uneffeminate beard.”

The F.N. Arbaugh Co. department store of Lansing featured Ames in its “Learning to Dress” program, with ads that invited women to “Let Lionel Ames Teach You How To Dress!”

To maintain his public masculinity, a syndicated biography was distributed in 1925. This feature was almost entirely fictional, concocting a story about Ames’ reluctant entry into vaudeville and claiming he “never really liked dressing up like a girl”

and devoted “every spare minute to studying electrical engineering.” In reality, Ames had announced his intention to pursue acting while still in college and was enrolled in the Literary Department, not engineering.

The likely truth in this fabricated narrative was its claim that Ames was making \$500 a week as a female impersonator. When the Keith vaudeville circuit merged with the Orpheum, Ames began appearing in West Coast venues, expanding his fame.

Julian Eltinge himself recognized Ames’ talent, telling the Wisconsin State Journal in 1924 that he would “sponsor Lionel Ames” after he finished at Michigan, calling him “the best female impersonator I have seen in college dramatics.”

Brief fame during the ‘Pansy Craze’

In 1926, Ames and Beulah moved to Long

See **Trans Lucent**, page 38

UP Salon

Continued from page 10

been doing her hair since she was 12 years old and just starting to transition. She went away to college where she found an accepting environment, but comes back to the salon because of their history.

"I've been making her welcome in her own hometown because you want to be able to come home, but you want to be able to be you, right? And they have not been able to be them. They can't be them here."

Schimanski said she has also worked with many adolescents who are struggling and who are bullied in the schools, often because of their sexual and gender identity.

Sometimes things get tricky. Schimanski talked about a young customer who wants to transition, but their parent won't allow it. Since they are under 18, the salon is limited in the support it can offer, but they can do small things that are comfortable for the parent and the child.

"Let's say they want a shorter, more masculine haircut, but dad isn't comfortable with a full transformation yet," Schimanski said. "We compromise. We're very open about discussing this. Let's get them to where they want to go, but let's do it in a form that's not going to cause them any harm, not going to raise any flags and not cause them any pain. We can be subtle."

Haircuts, she said, can be a form of affirmation.

"It doesn't have to be a major change," Schimanski said. "They're not wearing the rainbow on their head, but if they want

something that makes them feel like they're doing something, then let's 100 percent do it."

Gines described another client in their 20s whose father insisted short hair would turn them into a boy.

"They don't identify as a boy or a girl — they just wanted their hair cut short and the dad threw a big fit," Gines said. "Somebody knew about the salon and brought them in



My Friend's Salon owner Aimee Schimanski with a client. Courtesy photo

and they were super happy."

The Pride flag flying out front serves a dual purpose: It signals safety, and it warns away those who might cause harm. "If you're feeling uncomfortable because I'm the only one that has a Pride flag, maybe it's a good idea you don't come here," Schimanski said. "If you don't approve of what I'm doing, then you best stay away. I'm not going to stop, not even if I get vandalized, because [my clients] mean too much to me."

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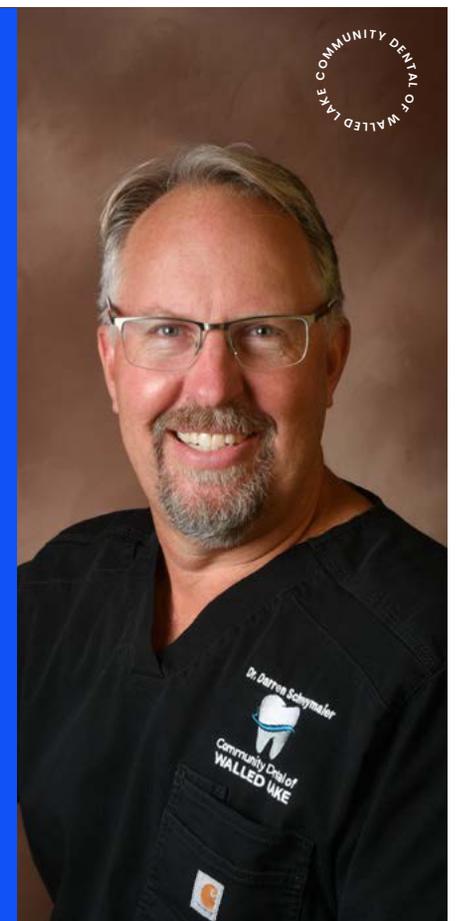
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MEET THE FIERCE AND FRESH DRAG NEWCOMERS SET TO SLAY THE FERNDALE PRIDE STAGE

The May 31 showcase will elevate emerging Michigan drag performers



Ferndale Pride performers Ariana Love Hunter, Belladonna Marz, Natty Apple, Virgil Ciel, Sir Guy, Luscious L. Minj and Luna Banx. Courtesy photos

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Get ready to gag on the eleganza, darlings — Ferndale Pride is serving up fresh faces and fierce performances with its 2025 Newcomer Drag Show, putting baby queens and kings center stage to help kick off the signature annual fest. The showcase starts on the Planovan Stage at noon May 31, right after the opening ceremony in downtown Ferndale, giving emerging performers the spotlight they deserve.

“The newcomers show is super special this year,” said Michael

Christian, founder of Motor City Drag Kings. “My co-producer and MCDK co-founder, Teddy, and I worked really hard to find entertainers who are up-and-coming hosts and title holders. We wanted to give them this bigger platform and audience. The hope is their love for their art will be inspired to continue in this competitive space of our community.”

Christian emphasized the importance of arriving early. “These folks are fired up and ready,” he said. “We want that crowd full from the start.”

The showcase features seven emerging performers from across Michigan’s drag community, each bringing their unique style and message to the Pride stage.

Belladonna Marz

Drag name: Belladonna Marz
Out-of-drag name: Bella McGee

How long have you been performing? I have been performing in drag for four years and have loved every minute of it.

Why did you decide to start

doing drag? I decided to get into drag on a whim during lockdown and then realized I really loved it and just stuck with it.

What do you love most about it? The one thing I love most about being in drag and performing is feeling my femme. For the longest time I never felt comfortable being viewed as a man, and drag let me be the woman I felt more comfortable as and allowed me to start my journey with transitioning.

What else should we know? Drag is so important to the queer community and I feel like here in

Michigan we need to represent it anywhere we can so that we can keep the show going.

Ariana Love Hunter

Drag name: Ariana Love Hunter
Out-of-drag name: Mike Beasley

How long have you been performing? Three years.

See **Drag Newcomers**, page 24



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2025 Pride Calendar

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Buckle up, babes of all genders — Michigan Pride is back for 2025 and it's queerer, louder and sparklier than ever. Whether you're into big-city parades, small-town park picnics or drag shows by a lake, we've got your whole Pride season mapped out.

From the tippy top of the U.P. to the mitt's pinky finger, there's a celebration near you (and yes, a few bonus bashes outside the Mitten, because we're generous like that). Get your glitter, your sunscreen and your snack stash — we're going on a gay road trip. You know we need this.

Help us keep our calendar up to date! Email sarah@pridesource.com with details about fests we're missing.

Single day events are in chronological order, alphabetized by date. Multiple day events are placed in the calendar in the order of the earliest event.



Ferndale Pride 2016. Photo: Andrew Potter

MAY

Saturday, May 31

Ferndale Pride

Downtown Ferndale, 12:30-10 p.m.

FerndalePride.com

Wooohooo! Or is it yeehaw?

The calendar goddesses must have known we needed Pride to stretch across as many months as possible, because Michigan's very first Pride of the season sashays in before June even starts.

If you've ever been to one of Ferndale Pride's year-round events — from their beloved SobriTea gatherings to queer community fundraisers — you already know FP doesn't play when it comes to planning joyful, inclusive celebrations. And their Gay in May event is no exception.

This year's Ferndale Pride features two full stages of entertainment: the Planavon Performance Stage,

hosted by emcee Bentley James and featuring the fabulous Baddie Brooks, and the Woodward Dance Stage, which kicks off at 1 p.m. and invites you to live out your queer fantasy of going directly from brunch to the dance floor.

There's something for everyone: Readings With Royalty in the children's area, water bottle fill-up stations to keep you cool, plus sensory-sensitive and quiet spaces where you can rest and recharge.

And don't forget the largest collection of vendors you'll see in Ferndale all year; you know your rainbow unicorn socks need to be replaced! Finally, don't forget to use [#iamferndalepride](https://twitter.com/iamferndalepride) to be featured on FP's social media.

Meridian Pride

Marketplace on the Green (1995 Central Park Dr., Okemos), 5-10 p.m.

meridian.mi.us/about-us/calendar/meridian-pride-event

JUNE

FRIDAY, JUNE 6

Kalamazoo Pride

Arcadia Creek Festival Place (145 E. Water St., Kalamazoo), 6-11 p.m., and Saturday, June 7, 2-11 p.m.

outfrontkzoo.org/pride2025

Kalamazoo Pride 2025 is bringing the sparkle back to Arcadia Creek Festival Place. Friday night entertainment features theater and dance performances, culminating in the Mx/Ms/Mr Kalamazoo Drag Pageant. Saturday, you can peruse vendors and check out local community resources tables, dance your afternoon away with DJ Tribewalker. Headliner Baddie Brooks brings the night to a close.

All proceeds from Kalamazoo Pride support Out Front Kalamazoo's amazing programs for youth, adults and families — including a fiber arts hangout delightfully called Knit Happens. If

that name doesn't melt your heart just a little, don't worry — spend the whole weekend at the festival and let the glitter do its work.

Ypsi Pride (Ypsilanti)

Depot Town, 5-10 p.m.

facebook.com/YpsiPride

Ypsi Pride's theme this year is "Celebrating Our Stories," with Headliner Baddie Brooks, aka The Queen of Brass, will deliver a high-energy show Friday night. Don't miss local vendors, plenty of food and drink and fun events like "Pied for Pride," where you can throw a pie in the face of Ypsi Pride board members! In the meantime, follow their social media for details on upcoming Yappy Hours — your chance to grab a coffee and chat with Ypsi Pride board members at some of the city's queer-friendly spots.

SATURDAY, JUNE 7

Abigail's Pride (Ortonville)

Brandon Township Community Park (1414 N. Hadley Road, Ortonville), 4-8 p.m.

abigailspide.godaddysites.com

This is the fourth year that Abigail's Pride will bring rainbow-kissed care to the Ortonville area. And even though festival founder Abigail Rowe has been accepted into the prestigious Disney College Program (go Abigail!) and Abigail will continue to help organize remotely — Abigail's Pride shows no signs of slowing down! Come out to Pride In The Park for music, food, fun and, most of all, community!

Keweenaw Pridefest

Calumet Colosseum (110 Red Jacket Road, Calumet)

See **2025 Pride Calendar**, page 21

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The First Homosexuals: The Birth of a New Identity, 1869-1939 is presented at Wrightwood 659 by Alphawood Exhibitions.

IMAGE CREDIT: Saturnino Herrán, *Nuestros dioses antiguos*, 1916, Oil on canvas, 101 x 112 cm, Colección André; Blaisten, Mexico. (Detail).



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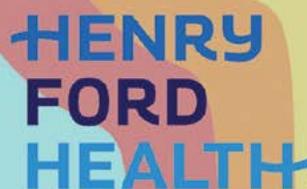


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◀ Stacey Hotwaxx Hale

Continued from page 6

Dance Stage. Sharing the bill with trans multi-instrumentalist Baddie Brooks and fellow DJ Rimarkable, Hale's inclusion reflects her status as a legend and mentor.

Ferndale Pride Executive Director Julia Music says Hale was a natural choice.

"A triple headliner situation is something we've never done," Music says. "I really, really love that Stacey is like the senior leader of the group, because what a godmother to have at a queer event."

Music, who grew up listening to Hale on Detroit radio, says her ability to blend old and new defines what a "Detroit sound" means today.

"She's just such a great fit for our event," Music says. "We want to show off how

much amazing talent lives right here. She's a changemaker."

"When you have talent like Stacey Hotwaxx Hale and like Rimarkable and Baddie Brooks, it's like, let's just shine a light on these incredible women, because they're gonna shine their light back onto this audience. And we're gonna have a great, great time."

That influence is clear even during our interview, when a young local DJ known as Lost Boy encounters Hale and excitedly updates her on his recent break and return to the scene. It's clear by the look on his face that he looks up to her, and Hale calls him one of her favorite rising artists in Detroit.

In 2023, Hale's legacy was immortalized in a literal way: with a mural along Woodward Avenue, located between Baltimore Street and Endicott Avenue by the bridge overpass. Painted during the BLKOUT

Walls Street Art Festival, the rainbow-hued artwork includes her portrait, her name and the title "Godmother of House."

"Having that mural saying 'godmother of house,' to me it says that we acknowledge house music, so that will live on," she says.

For Hale, house music is more than just a sound — it's a lived history. Long before the genre had a name, she was spinning its early forms simply because she liked the way it made people feel.

Some dismissed it back then as "gay music." But for Hale, it was always just good music.

Though Chicago is credited as house music's birthplace, Hale offers a more complex origin story. She recalls her connection to two key figures: Colonel Abrams, a Detroit-born singer, and Jesse Saunders, the Chicago DJ credited with producing the first house record, "On & On," in 1984.

"They were friends, and they fell out, or whatever, and so Colonel went to New York, and he put out a track called 'Music Is the Answer.' It's the exact same music," she says. "I don't have no clue of the story, but I know it's the same repetitious track — except he's singing on his."

"So if they collabed to make house music or to make a track, and then they fell out... this is what one put out, and this is what the other put out. And one happened to be from Detroit. It don't take rocket science."

In other words, according to Hale: Detroit's fingerprints on house run deeper than the history books suggest.

"Nobody told me. I didn't read it, I heard it, I lived it, and I managed to speak to both men," she adds. "I didn't know that. Colonel

came here, he told me."

She also points to Dimitri, who packaged genre distinctions — house for Chicago, techno for Detroit — into slick triple vinyl packs that helped define global perceptions.

But for Hale, labels don't mean much. "When it really gets down to it, who cares," she says with a shrug.

She feels the same way about labels around her identity. "What are you gonna say? 'She's a lesbian'? Everybody knows. I don't need the title... it don't change nothing," she says. "I'm always into the people, because we are the people."

When it comes to her Ferndale Pride set, she's less concerned with identity politics and more tuned in to the energy of the crowd. "I'm happy. I'm very happy, happy to do it. I'm always reading and feeling and looking and seeing the crowd. That's the best way to do it... My same theory just always holds, and that's what separates the good DJs from just OK."

That attentiveness shows in her prep, too: custom folders for every gig and a commitment to staying fresh, especially when playing for 3,000-strong Berlin audiences.

Locally, Hale is proud to share the stage with Rimarkable and Baddie Brooks, two artists she admires deeply. She first met Brooks at a Girls Rock Detroit event and made a point to connect her with more opportunities.

"I don't do that for credit," she says. "I do that because that person is... well deserved."

"I'm here because I love the music. Always have. That's the reason. That's the legacy."



Stacey Hotwaxx Hale. Photo: James Tae Hyun Kim/ TRIB3 EXP



Stacey Hotwaxx Hale in the early years of her career as a DJ. Courtesy photo

“

*You have to pay it forward.
If everything I know stays with
me, it won't live.*

— Stacey Hotwaxx Hale

◀ 2025 Pride Calendar

Continued from page 18

keweenawpridefest.org

Hosted for the third fabulous year by Keweenaw Queers, Pridefest 2025 is serving up small-town charm with big queer heart. Come out for lawn games, live music and community resources.

Lowell Pride

Lowell Riverwalk, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
lowellpride.org

Lowell Pride's theme, Defy and Amplify, is salve for our battered queer hearts and delight and hope for our collective queer futures. Entertainment, community tables and, of course, Gary, the Emotional Support Pug!

Motor City Pride (Detroit)

Festival: Saturday, June 7, Hart Plaza, 1-9 p.m., and Sunday June 8, 12:30-7 p.m.

Parade: Sunday, June 8, 12 p.m.. Kick-off at Fort & Griswold, ends at Hart Plaza.

motorcitypride.org

Motor City Pride isn't just Michigan's biggest Pride festival (although, yes, it is that) — it's also been making Hart Plaza sparkle since 1972. That's over 50 years of fabulous. Expect four stages of live music, more than a dozen food vendors serving everything from vegan fare to juicy burgers, and a crowd full of love, laughter and excellent outfits.

This year's event promises an enriched festival experience with an expanded history area, where attendees can connect with the powerful legacy of LGBTQ+ movement pioneers. The celebration boasts more exhibitors than ever before, from artisans offering Pride merchandise to organizations showcasing their community services. Health-conscious attendees will appreciate the return of the Health Village, providing resources and connections to LGBTQ-affirming healthcare providers.

The annual Pride Parade remains a central highlight, with over 100 organizations and companies marching in solidarity and celebration. As visitors gather along the Detroit riverfront, they'll enjoy this unofficial start to summer with diverse food and beverage options while standing together against anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and actions happening nationwide — demonstrating that community support and advocacy for full rights and inclusion remain at the heart of Pride.

Mount Pleasant

Broadway Park (2451 Nish Na Be Anong Road), 2-5 p.m.

greatlakesbaypride.org/events/cal/mount-pleasant-pride-festival

Muskegon Pride

Hackley Park (350 W Webster Ave., Muskegon)

Parade kick-off: 10:30 a.m.

Muskpride.org

The Muskegon Pride Festival organizers can't wait to greet us on rainbow-studded streets, so plan your calendars around the festival at Hackley Park, with tables, vendors and entertainment, including headliner Thea Austin. If you can't wait until June to get your Pride on, check out their ongoing programming including Coffee With Friends, Golden Years Lunches and a weekly all-ages transgender, genderqueer and gender nonconforming social group.

Community Pride Michigan (Saugatuck-Douglas)

Parade kick-off: Saugatuck High School (401 Elizabeth St, Saugatuck), 10:30 a.m.

Pride in the Park: Beery Field (8 Center St., Douglas), 12- 8 pm

communitypridemi.org

Community Pride Michigan does not just tip their collective toes into Pride — they do a full cannonball:

June 1: Kickoff Tea Dance (The Dunes Resort, 333 Blue Star Highway, Douglas), 4 p.m.

June 2: Putt-Putt Tournament (Saugatuck Mini Golf, 3460 Blue Star Highway, Saugatuck), 5:30 p.m.

June 3: Bowling Party (Alley's Pizza Lakeview Lanes, 229 Center St., Douglas), 6 p.m.

June 4: Speaker Series and garden party featuring author/historian Bonnie Morris (Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, 130 Center St., Douglas), 4 p.m.

Presentation — Archiving Lesbian History: From Sports to Music (Saugatuck-Douglas Public Library, 174 Center St., Douglas), 5:30 p.m.

June 7: Pride in the Park

Festival entertainment on June 7 includes the Lakeshore Community Chorus and the award-winning Chicago tribute band 16 Candles. Will this be the year you fulfill your lifelong goal of enthusiastically singing along to "Saturday In the Park" on a Saturday in the park?

SATURDAY, JUNE 14

Cass County Pridefest

Library Pavilion (206 Main St., Dowagiac) 4-8 p.m.

outcenter.org/pridefest

Cass County Pridefest is one sparkling stop on the Pridefest On Tour trifecta, dreamed up by the fine folks at OutCenter

See 2025 Pride Calendar, page 26

Sunday • 6.22.25 • 4-8pm

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Sunday

JUNE 8TH

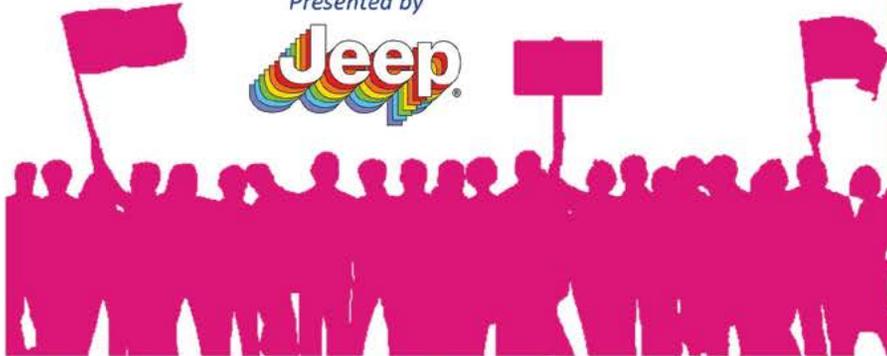
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◀ Drag Newcomers

Continued from page 16

Why did you decide to get into drag? My partner is a male entertainer and so is all my family, so I did it to become closer to them, originally. Once I got into it more I realized I can use my platform to be a voice for others. Right now in this crazy thing we call life, it's most important to remember who you are and why you do what you do!

What do you love about performing in character? Being able to spread love through a performance but also being able to connect with the people in the audience. I do this for them and that's what I love the most about it!

What else should we know? Remember to go out and support local drag!

Virgil Ciel

Drag name: Virgil Ciel

Out-of-drag name: Michelle Blumenau (she/her)

How long have you been performing? A little over a year now. I started in March 2024.

Why did you decide to get into drag? I've been wanting to do drag for years. I was deeply inspired by different artists. It looked like so much fun, and I had this alter ego inside of me that I always longed to express. I finally told myself that it's now or never and to stop telling myself "someday."

What do you love about performing in character? It's so much fun to get creative with each concept and watching that concept grow into a reality through all of the preparation and collaboration. I really love telling a story, providing messages that include self-love and being your most authentic self, and being able to entertain and connect with the audience.

What else should we know? I am so honored and excited to perform at Ferndale Pride this year.

Sir Guy

Drag name: Sir Guy

Out-of-drag name: Morgan (Mo) Hoeffel

How long have you been performing? Just about three years!

Why did you decide to get into drag? I have an extensive history in theater and grew up watching the early seasons of "RuPaul's Drag Race," so it seemed like a natural progression once I found out I could be a drag king!

What do you love about performing in character? I love the theatrics of it — the unfettered flamboyance I'm allowed to express. There's also something about Sir Guy that gives me a sense of gender euphoria in a way that feels right to me.

What else should we know? Support local drag! Support drag kings! And I can't wait to see everyone at Ferndale Pride! I've got quite the performance planned for y'all.

Luna Banx

Drag name: Luna Banx

Out-of-drag name: Daniel McLean

How long have you been performing? First time in drag was February 2017, but my first performance was March 2019, so six to eight years.

Why did you decide to get into drag? I have always been a theater kid and loved performing and making people smile. I was really inspired by similar stories from drag performers who found their strength and confidence, as well as that strong family bond from a drag family.

What do you love about performing in character? The freedom and confidence that flows when I get in drag and hit the stage. The creativity that flows when I'm styling my wigs or making a new outfit keeps me going every day and proves to myself, that this is what I was born to do.

What else should we know? I like to think Luna is a jack-of-all-trades who represents both the alternative side of drag as well as the classic polished pageant drag. I am a big advocate for mental health. We need the happiness and fun drag brings to the world now more than ever!

Natty Apple

Drag name: Natty Apple (@natty_apple)

Out-of-drag name: Gabe Steffey

How long have you been performing? I have been performing in drag for almost three years.

Why did you decide to get into drag? I got into drag because I have a background in dance and a passion for performing. I went to a performing arts high school and then continued my dance education throughout college. When the pandemic happened and everything shut down, I didn't have an avenue or performance outlet, which led me to the art of drag. I quickly became enthralled by the queens and knew it was what I wanted to do.

What do you love about performing in character? What I love about performing as Natty Apple is that it's my true, authentic self — a dramatic, more eccentric version, but nonetheless an extension of who I am. I love getting to show my authentic self to the public and receiving love in return, as well as hopefully helping someone along the way who may not have the confidence or support to live their truth.

Luscious L. Minj

Drag name: Luscious L. Minj

Out-of-drag name: Richard Jay

How long have you been performing? Four years this July.

Why did you decide to get into drag? My love for entertainment, activism and community outreach.

What do you love about performing in character? It's a chance to escape reality while helping others escape their reality at the same time. Plus, I get to pay homage to the strong powerful women who have raised me to be who I am today!

What else should we know? Remember if they can hate for no reason, we can love for no reason!

◀ Trans Tech

Continued from page 11

trans technology as technology that addresses unique needs or challenges faced by trans people and communities. He uses Solace — a gender-transitioning resource app where users can create a transition to-do list and are provided resources to accomplish those goals — to introduce the book. Solace is a technology made for trans users, and it was also created by a trans woman, albeit a white, college-educated one. Haimson takes time to detail that this technology might not be a one-size-fits-all model for trans people, but the beauty of trans technology is that there are many perspectives and approaches out there to help people find the right fit for them, which mirrors the transitioning experience.

Through his background in transgender studies, his own lived experience and in-depth interviews with over 100 creators in trans technology, Haimson surveys the landscape of trans technologies to reveal the design processes that brought these technologies to life. His research highlights what needs are being met in this industry and what work still needs to be done to include necessary voices and perspectives.

"When you're designing technology for marginalized folks, it's really important to include a diverse group of community members in the process of ideation and design," he says. "It's not enough just for a creator of technology to be trans themselves, because often, they end up creating tech in isolation, and that means that they can reinforce any privileged identities that they have."

Haimson's work examines how privilege, race and access to resources impact which trans technologies are built and who may be left out. He says there are often gaps between what the community needs and what tech is being designed, so including multiple perspectives was crucial for him to get his point across: listening to and leaning on community is important, even in the tech space.

"If we can understand the needs and start with that, then decide what to design and what technology to build, I think that is the approach

we should be taking," he says.

The book not only identifies the role of trans technology in caring for individuals within the trans community but also shows how trans technology creation empowers some trans people to create their own tools for navigating the world. In the book, Haimson writes that having a book like "Trans Technologies" when he decided he wanted top surgery in 2010 could've saved him a lot of confusion and time. He searched far and wide for



top surgeon recommendations and post-op photos, but mostly came up empty-handed. "I knew that the resource — that trans technology — was there, but I could not access it," he writes. Now that the book does exist, he's made something people can access and see themselves in — a work that articulates which trans needs and challenges are currently being addressed by technology and which still need to be addressed.

Despite the challenging political landscape surrounding the book's release, Haimson says he is excited to see his work, and the work of his many collaborators, come to life. And he couldn't think of a better way to celebrate than getting out in the queer community.

Haimson says it was "so special" to have a book launch event held at Literati Bookstore in Ann Arbor in April. "It's great to be able to have an event to celebrate something that you've been working on for so long because there are so many milestones, like finishing the first draft or getting to hold the first physical copy," he says.



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◀ 2025 Pride Calendar

Continued from page 21

of Southwest Michigan. Details for all three tour dates are still in the works, but go ahead and mark your calendar — and maybe pre-glitter your shoes while you're at it. Also: this one's happening at a library pavilion, which means it's automatically iconic. Because if I can't read, I don't want to be part of your revolution.

East Lansing Pride

Albert El Fresco (Albert Ave. between Grove Street and M.A.C. Ave.), 4-9 p.m.

[instagram.com/p/DImOKEBR0eI](https://www.instagram.com/p/DImOKEBR0eI)

This year, East Lansing Pride is bringing back their legendary open floor drag show — so get ready to cheer, twirl and maybe even join in (we won't stop you, although the queens might). The evening will also feature live music, local vendors and inclusive art activities.

Grand Haven Pride

Downtown Grand Haven

[ghPride.org/events](https://www.ghPride.org/events)

Grand Haven Pride details are on the way, but in the meantime, if you find yourself bopping around town, don't miss their year-round lineup of events — including a monthly Community Connections meetup. One month it's hiking, the next it's coffee, so whether you're an indoor queer or an outdoor queer, there's something to love.

Upper Peninsula Rainbow Pride (Marquette)

Mattson Lower Harbor Park (200 N Lakeshore Blvd.), 12-10:30 p.m.

[uprainbowPride.org/events](https://www.uprainbowPride.org/events)

UP Pride is turning 10 this year — double digits, baby! And they're celebrating in style with a brand-new poster featuring a pansy, the flower that once was used as a slur but has since been gloriously reclaimed as a symbol of queer resilience. This year's poster art came from a community contest (yes, they're that wholesome and fabulous), and the winning design is both beautiful and meaningful — just like UP Pride itself. If you've been looking for an excuse to plan a road trip to the Upper Peninsula, this is it. Ten years of Pride power, queer joy and, yes, drag performers ready to strut their stuff in the land of lakes and pasties.

Warren City Pride

Warren Civic Center, (1 City Square, Warren) **Festival**, 12-8 p.m.

Parade: location TBA, 11:15 a.m.

[warrencitypride.com](https://www.warrencitypride.com)

Free, family-friendly pride event in downtown

Warren; entertainment on not one but two stages, tasty food, tons o' vendors, water bottle refill stations and low noise/stimulus areas.

SATURDAY, JUNE 21

Fenton Pride

Rackham Park (150 S. Leroy Street), 2-7 p.m.

[fentonpride.org](https://www.fentonpride.org)

The heart of the fest lives in Rackham Park with the Fenton Pride Collective, vendors and community orgs, but the fun doesn't stop there. Local downtown businesses are also getting in on the action, offering sweet discounts and special Pride-themed food and drinks. Lesbian lemonade? Bear biscuits? Lavendar love lattes? Bi-burgers? Rainbow ravioli?

Additionally, organizers note that Fenton PrideFest has another notable tradition: it's typically hot. Like, summer-sizzle, glitter-melting hot. So dress cute and comfy — think breathable fabrics and maybe a fan you can wave dramatically.

Grand Rapids Pride (through June 22)

Calder Plaza (320 Ottawa Ave. NW, Grand Rapids)

[grPride.org/pride-festival](https://www.grPride.org/pride-festival)

Grand Rapids Pride Festival is back for its 37th year — which means it's officially older than most TikTok influencers and just as fabulous. Join the party, as West Michigan comes out (again!) to celebrate radical joy, community, and the beautiful messiness of queer interconnectedness. GR Pride packs Calder Plaza with over 150 vendors, food trucks galore, a beer garden with NA options (because hydration is sexy), all-ages activities, a sensory space and performers TBA.

Livonia Pride

Schoolcraft College (18600 Haggerty Road, Livonia), 11 a.m.- 2 p.m.

[livoniapride.org](https://www.livoniapride.org)

Livonia Pride is back and ready to party in a brand-new spot — Schoolcraft College! While the entertainment lineup is still under wraps (ooh, mysterious!), you can still show this big-hearted little Pride some love. Add them as your charitable contribution partner on the Kroger app and let your grocery runs turn into tiny acts of queer joy.

Michiana PrideFest (Niles)

Riverfront Park, Niles, 4-8 p.m.

[outcenter.org/pridefest](https://www.outcenter.org/pridefest)

This is the third installment of the Michiana Pridefest, part of the three-event Pridefest on Tour series. And we bet you'll have three times the fun as anything the straight folks at your job will be doing that same weekend!



(Top) Motor City Pride 2013. Photo: Andrew Potter. (Bottom) Lansing Pride 2024. Courtesy photo

More details to come about this fabulous event on the banks of St. Joseph River at, well, Riverfront Park.

Three Rivers (Downriver Pride)

Downtown Three Rivers (103 Portage Ave.), 12-11 p.m.

www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61568270740208

Wyandotte (Downriver Pride) (through June 22)

Downtown Wyandotte, 12.-11 p.m.

[downriverpride.com](https://www.downriverpride.com)

Downriver Pride has already released a tentative list of 2025 Pride vendors, and it looks like they'll have our mouths watering and our fanny packs open, reaching for our collective rainbow wallets! Roasted nuts? Tattoos? Candles? Spa treatments? They're all queering it up. Entertainment listings to come.

SUNDAY, JUNE 22

Berkley Pride Block Party

Downtown Berkley, 1-5 p.m.

www.instagram.com/berkeleypride

Berkley Pride returns for the fourth year, hosting another block party with activities for all ages; a kids' tent (crafts, facepainting, maybe occasional adorable mayhem), a teen lounge and DJ Laura from L Sharp Productions. Plus, you can secure your very own Berkley Pride T-shirt so you can wear your heart (and your city) on your sleeve!

THURSDAY, JUNE 26

Canton Pride OUTside

Heritage Park (1150 S. Canton Center), 6:30-8:30 p.m.

[cantonmi.gov/calendar.aspx?EID=4376](https://www.cantonmi.gov/calendar.aspx?EID=4376)

SATURDAY, JUNE 28

Holland Pride

Centennial Park (250 Central Ave.), 1-6 p.m.

[outonthelakeshore.org/holland-pride](https://www.outonthelakeshore.org/holland-pride)

Out On The Lakeshore seems tickled pink (tickled rainbow?) to be bringing back Holland Pride to Centennial Park. You can spend the afternoon soaking up fabulous entertainment, tasty bites from food trucks, awesome merch, helpful resources and fun for every age — from toddlers to chosen aunts.

Lansing Pride

Old Town (216 E. Cesar E. Chavez Ave.), 1-10 p.m.

Lansingpride.org

Get ready to turn up on Turner Street — Lansing Pride 2025 is coming in hot! It's a full day of queer joy, local love and rainbow-fueled fun. You won't want to miss the all-day entertainment including the People's Party Princess Singer, Adore Delano, of "American Idol," "Drag Race," TikTok and all the other fames.

Monroe County Pride

St Mary's Park (111 W Elm Avenue, Monroe), 1-7 pm.

monroecountypride.org

Monroe County Pride is bringing together local drag, resources, food trucks, an art market and every single of your exes, all together under the banner Love Is Everything.

Owosso Pride

Curwood Castle Park (224 Curwood Castle Drive, Owosso), 1-5 p.m.

facebook.com/OwossoPride

Owosso Pride Festival 2025 is gearing up — and while the entertainment lineup is still under wraps you can certainly still sign up to be a volunteer. Wrangling folding tables in a glitter strewn park will undoubtedly build queer character and it's a great way to meet Mx Right (or Mx Right Now, if that's more your style).

Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival (Saginaw)

Jolt Credit Union Event Park (300 Johnson St, Saginaw), 11 a.m.- 7 p.m.

greatlakesbaypride.org

The Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival is not a newcomer to the Pride scene, but they are at a brand new location this year with more room, more sparkle and more ways to keep everyone safe and smiling. This free, family-friendly outdoor fest brings together LGBTQ+ folks, allies, chosen family and supportive humans from all over the region. You'll find retail vendors, community resources, live entertainment, health screenings and a full-on kids' activity zone (because little queers and future allies deserve fun too). And don't forget the afterparty at the Dow Center, the largest drag event in the region!

South Haven Pride

Stanley Johnston Park (202 Dyckman Ave.), 12-10 p.m.

www.facebook.com/southhavenmichiganpride

South Haven Pride is now in its sophomore Pride, and they're primed to outdo their first year's spectacularity! Expect vendors,

entertainment, live DJ and dancing and — of course — cornhole. Because queers love a lawn game!

Twin Cities PrideFest (St. Joseph)

Shadowland Pavilion (101 Broad St., Silver Beach County Park), 4-8 p.m.

outcenter.org/pridefest

Now in its fabulous fourth year, Twin Cities PrideFest is the seasoned trailblazer of the Pridefest On Tour crew — the granddaddy, grandslappy or maybe just the glamparent of the bunch? Whatever you call it, this joyful beachside bash at Silver Beach County Park is bringing the sunshine, the sparkle and the queer cheer. Come for the vibes, stay for the beautiful water views!

JUNE 29

Pride Big Rapids

Downtown Big Rapids, 12-8 p.m.

pridebigrapids.org

Big Rapids Pride wants us to "Turn Up the Pride: Love Louder" and they're going to give us just the opportunity to practice with a queer joy, community cheer and maybe a little dancing like no one's watching (but they totally are and they love your moves). Be prepared for 70+ vendors ready to delight, dazzle and maybe tempt you into buying another pronoun pin, family and kids' activities to keep little hands busy and little hearts full, a quiet area to recharge and live entertainment that'll have you clapping, cheering and possibly shedding some tears (the good kind).

Bluewater Pridefest (Port Huron)

Downtown Port Huron (McMorran Plaza) 1-7 p.m.

bluewaterallies.com/team-1

Bluewater Pridedfest takes over downtown Port Huron for this family-friendly event that will include a special kids' zone (rumors of a cute clown abound), entertainment, amazing food and big queer smiles!

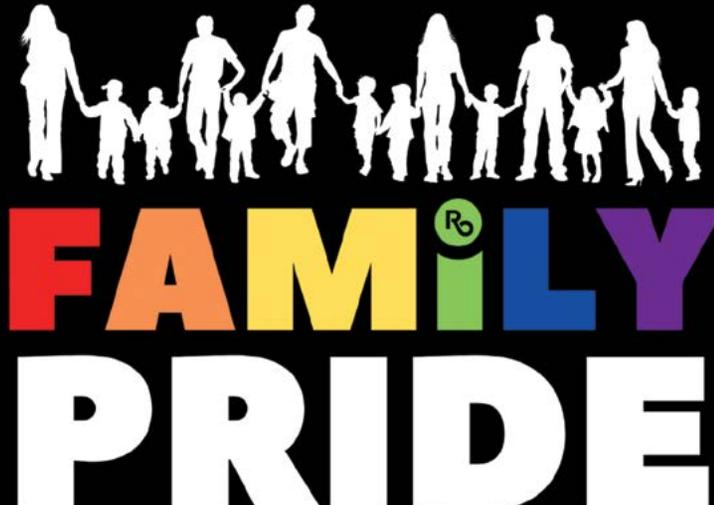
Buchanan Pride On The Common

The Common (122 Days Ave., Buchanan), 1-8 p.m.

buchananpride.com

Buchanan Pride on The Common has a little something for everyone and a full day of joy starting with a vibrant vendor market, lively samba performances and dance lessons from Cultural Arts Everywhere. Plus, DJ Chuck Fry will be spinning tunes before and after a high-powered set from the UltraFab Band.

See **2025 Pride Calendar**, page 30



Wednesday, June 11th | 4-9 PM
Royal Oak Farmers Market

A celebration of Royal Oak's diverse LGBTQIA+ community, focusing on our city's many queer families and their children.



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In Glam and Gospel, Jake Wesley Rogers Finds God in the Margins

Faith, glitter and the fight: why the glam-pop artist is singing for the queer kids Texas forgot

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Jake Wesley Rogers is a poet in glitter and leather, a kind of spiritual guide for queer kids growing up in a world that still hasn't fully figured out how to hold them.

With a voice that feels like it was carved out of gospel and glam rock in equal measure, Rogers is part of a new generation of artists who are reshaping what it means to be both queer and seen. Look no further than his anthem "God Bless," its refrain as much a balm as it is a battle cry as LGBTQ+ communities face increasingly hostile rhetoric and policy: "God bless the straight man in a dress. God bless threesomes when I'm celibate... God bless the trans kid in Texas. God bless the gods that don't exist. Sometimes I wish it all would end, but God bless, it's a beautiful fucking mess."

With his debut album, "In the Key of Love," finally arriving and ahead of a dream tour with Cyndi Lauper this summer, including a stop at Pine Knob Music Theatre on Aug. 1, the spiritual glam-rock artist recently spoke with me from Los Angeles during a video call about how the songs on his long-awaited album are "definitely part of the resistance."

He says the release is arriving at what feels like precisely the right cultural moment. After health challenges delayed its release (last year, Wesley revealed he has Crohn's disease), the timing now seems divinely orchestrated — giving his messages of radical love and acceptance an even more urgent platform. His music doesn't shy away from the intersections of queerness and religion, instead transforming these complex relationships into powerful meditations on unconditional love. During Pride, these messages are especially poignant.

Between discussing his Midwest upbringing (where he found his voice singing in church while dating the preacher's son), his

spiritual journey and his upcoming tour with one of his idols, Rogers reveals himself to be both a student of queer history and someone actively writing its next chapter.

During our conversation ahead of the release of "In the Key of Love," Rogers spoke about reconciling faith with identity, and why — even in the face of increasingly hostile legislation — he remains stubbornly, gloriously hopeful. He's honest, thoughtful and deeply rooted in something rare: a belief that love — radical, loud and unconditional — is still the most subversive thing we have.

Young queer people who are feeling condemned by this administration for who they are have been at the top of my mind. I am heartened knowing there are musicians like you who are allowing them that space to be themselves.

Thank you for saying that. When I was younger, I craved having an artist that looked like me and sounded like me and I found them, but they're kind of few and far between. I remember when I found Oscar Wilde, I was like, "Whoa, this homosexual is doing this way back then." Then I found Socrates too.

We didn't formally get to study our queer heroes in school. My high school history class did not cover Oscar Wilde.

I would love to teach that class, though. Right now, it's this extremely peculiar time. The news is just so absolutely horrific. It feels different than it ever has, and I guess it's different than it has ever been. Really the only thing in my life that's ever made sense is art. So that's where I put my faith and



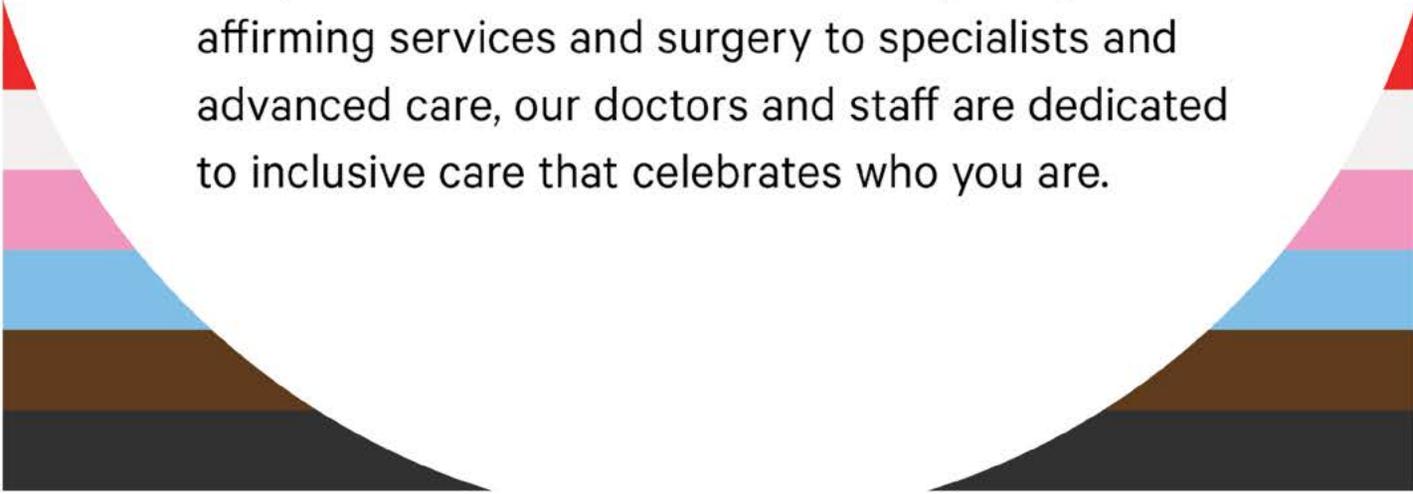
Jake Wesley Rogers. Courtesy photo

See [Jake Wesley Rogers](#), page 32



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◀ **2025 Pride Calendar**
Continued from page 27

JULY

JULY 12

South Lyon Pride

McHattie Park (300 Dorothy St.), 12-4 p.m.

facebook.com/SouthLyonPride

The 5th annual South Lyon Pride is once again gracing McHattie Park with a glitter-infused presence.

Information about entertainment coming soon!

JULY 18

Battle Creek Pride (through July 20)

Parade kick-off: Michigan Ave. at Washington St., July 18, 7 p.m.

Festival: Leila Aboretum (928 W. Michigan Ave.), July 19, 12-8 p.m.

Candlelight Vigil: Battle Creek Pride Resource Center (104

Calhoun St, Battle Creek), July 20th, 8 p.m.

battlecreekpride.org

Battle Creek Pride makes a weekend of it! The festivities kick off Friday with an evening parade — promptly at 7 p.m., so save your emotional ex-texts for later and snag a good view of that softball league float you've been waiting for all year. Saturday brings the main event: drag, music, dancing and a plethora of vendors. And on Sunday, the celebration slows down with a candlelight vigil, honoring lives lost to violence and the brave folks who made the weekend's joy possible.

JULY 19

Flint Pride

Saturday, July 19, downtown Flint (multiple venues), 2-8 p.m.

facebook.com/flintgaypride

Flint Pride is turning 15 — just old enough to be full of feelings and fabulousness! The usual venue, Riverbank Park may be getting a glow-up, but Flint Pride isn't missing a beat. Instead, Pride takes over multiple downtown venues,

with music, performances, food vendors and vibrant community energy. Think of it as a little Pride adventure — same sparkle, new stomping grounds.

JULY 22-26

Hotter Than July (Detroit)

Detroit (multiple venues and dates)

2025 marks the 30th anniversary of LGBT Detroit's annual summer Pride event, Hotter Than July. Michigan's longest-running Black LGBTQ+ Pride event, the celebration features several key events:

Tuesday, July 22 — Candlelight vigil, Palmer Park

Wednesday, July 23 — Reception — Detroit Historical Museum, mixer

Thursday, July 24 — Film festival

Friday, July 25 — Annual gathering for LGBTQ+ issues; mayoral candidate forum; official opening party, Pandora's Boxx

Saturday, July 26 — Palmer Park picnic

Sunday, July 27 — Worship Service at One Church Detroit; Sunday brunch with Billionaires

Boys Club
hotterthanjuly.org

JULY 26

Royal Oak Pride

Downtown Royal Oak, 1-11 p.m.

prideroyaloak.com

AUGUST

AUG. 1

Downtown Ann Arbor, Schedule TBA

annarborpride.com

AUG. 16

Jackson Pride

Horace Blackman Park (W. Michigan Ave. and S. Jackson St.), 2-9 p.m.

mijacksonprideorg/events

Jackson Pride is gearing up for a day of fun, flavor and fierce celebration under the banner "Equality Now! No Turning Back!" With food trucks, live music and dancing and the iconic Walk of Pride.

AUG. 23

Transgender Pride in the Park

Martin Road Park (1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale), 12-6 p.m.

Transgender Michigan's annual event features a BYO picnic, entertainment, speakers and more. This year, the organization will mark the 54th anniversary of the Compton Cafeteria Riots, when trans women in San Francisco's Tenderloin district fought back against police harassment in August 1966 (before Stonewall), sparking transgender activism in the city and nationwide.

transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 11

Straits Pride (Mackinac Island)

Mackinac Island, Details TBA

straitspride.org

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Oscar Reward Puzzle Solution
Puzzle can be found on page 39

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FERNDALE

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143 Albany St.

FREELAND

Zion Lutheran Church
545 7th St.

GRAND RAPIDS

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250 Commerce Ave. SW

JACKSON

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KALAMAZOO

Lutheran Church of the Savior
3616 East G Avenue

KENTWOOD

Ascension Lutheran Church
4252 Breton Rd. SE

LIVONIA

Emmanuel Lutheran Church
30650 Six Mile Road

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
34567 Seven Mile Road

MONROE

Christ Lutheran Church
225 E. Elm Ave.

MOUNT PLEASANT

Immanuel Lutheran Church
320 South Bradley St.

MUSKEGON

Harbor of Grace Lutheran Church
1132 W. Southern

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Faith Lutheran Church
4515 Dobie Rd.

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2525 Hemmeter Rd.

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Holy Faith Church
6299 Saline-Ann Arbor Rd.

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St. Philip Lutheran Church
1790 Fort St.

WATERFORD

Christ Lutheran Church
5987 Williams Lake Rd.

Further information, addresses, and website on all RIC faith communities may be found at:
<https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ric/findric/>.

◀ Jake Wesley Rogers

Continued from page 28

energy. And especially with this album. It's definitely part of the resistance.

What was on your mind when you first started creating it?

Well, I formally began it about three years ago when I moved to L.A. I guess I wasn't really thinking about the world. I was thinking about my life and where I was and feeling this overwhelming call just to go deeper in my art.

I think it's interesting listening to a lot of these songs now because in the context of today, for me, there's even a deeper level that I didn't anticipate. Obviously there's a song I put out already called "God Bless" that is incredibly inherently political.

You could have written that song yesterday.

It was building toward that. So I was feeling that in the summer of 2022, right when Roe got overturned. I had just performed at the GLAAD Awards and there was this mom talking about her trans kid in Texas, and so many of us were becoming acutely aware of what was to come and feeling sort of premonitions. So yeah, that's the funny thing too: The album was supposed to come out last fall and I had a lot of health stuff, so I had to postpone it and, honestly, thank God, because I think art in general is more necessary now than it was even five months ago. So I'm really grateful that the universe did what it had to do.

How are you doing now, health-wise?

I'm very good, thank you for asking. It threw me through a whole loop and took me out for about five months and [I had] four surgeries. Stuff like that just kind of seasons the soul. I am more healthy than I think I've been in years, which is another gift that I don't take for granted.

"God Bless" has been on repeat. Why is it important to you to explore the relationship between your queer identity and religion in your music?



Jake Wesley Rogers. Courtesy photo

"Hot Gospel," another single, is literally what that song is about: how disparate things can exist together very beautifully. And in fact, they often do, but in our binary world, it's either "good or bad" or "man or woman."

I grew up in Missouri, but we weren't a fundamental family. I was baptized Methodist, but Methodist is pretty chill. There's always one lesbian in the church. So what's interesting, if I'm being really honest, is I don't have direct religious trauma. I have trauma from being in a religious environment in an area that was the Bible belt, that collectively was telling you it was going to help. But I wasn't in a church every week getting it. When I came out very young, when I was in high school, I was dating the son of a preacher. That's when I started singing at their church. I love the feeling of being on stage and singing to something beyond me and the audience. That's carried over for me a hundred percent.

That was an aha moment. But I'm not here to sing, to be applauded. I'm trying to connect to something bigger than myself.

I could talk to you for probably four hours about how interesting I find Christianity and the story of Christianity — what I think it was in the beginning versus what it became. All I'll say right now is it is our sort of collective story in a way. In our world, we don't even realize how many times during the day it's what we reference. So for me, creating this album, it's like, those are the touchstones. Religion is always for the oppressed. It always belongs to people that don't have power. What's really ironic is that power always corrupts it and takes it and uses it to have power over people.

"I think art in general is more necessary now than it was even five months ago."

But, inherently, it is this really powerful tool to be subversive. But I don't do it in a subversive way. I'm not trying to offend any believer. I'm trying to expand what it could mean for other people.

So, in your view, you think that the queer community is just expanding the story of Christianity?

I think they are. I hope so. And also, Chris, I'm still figuring it out. Every day I'm like, am I converting? Like, no, I'm not. Why would I ever convert? What the hell? That's crazy. So it's kind of my inner dilemma. But I feel like

50% a monk and 50% a rockstar, and that's my cross to bear.

I am also so moved by the song "Mother, Mary, and Me." What's the story behind that one?

So I told you I began writing the album three years ago. It's kind of a lie. Every single song except for "Mother, Mary, and Me" I wrote in L.A. in the last few years, but that one I wrote in 2019. I wrote it when I was still living in Nashville. And I've never really experienced writing a song like that before, or since. You always hear the stories of, "I just sat down at the piano and it just came out," and whenever I hear that, I'm like, "OK, whatever." However, that was that one for me.

And I knew when I wrote it to reserve it for the first album because it just felt like I needed to catch up to it. But that is kind of the foundation of the whole album. The album is devoted to this idea of unconditional love, the love that is innate to all of us, and it's kind of our promise by being here and going back to that place of unconditional love toward self

and toward others, and how freaky unconditional love is. It just kind of freaks me out. My college boyfriend had moved to Berlin. Long story, but I was really sad. So I started reading "Harry Potter" again. I was just trying to comfort myself.

The part where Harry Potter's mom saved him with her love, but she died — she defeated pure evil with love — that's when I was like, whoa, love is stronger than death, which I do think is a hundred percent true. So that's kind of what that song is about.

I feel like there's a throughline between the way that Mary loved Jesus and the way that your mother loves you.

Totally. I mean, it still confounds me. Sadly, I'm never going to know what it's like to give birth

See Jake Wesley Rogers, page 40

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Artists at a Detroit Queer Sketch Series session. Courtesy photo



A Detroit Staycation Club pool party. Photo: Preppyman Photography

James Staycation

Continued from page 9

a guiding principle for how I needed to reclaim my happiness and purpose. It became a healing mantra — a reminder that life isn't meant to be miserable, that I deserve happiness, and that I needed to make changes to create that for myself. At some point, I changed my social media handles to James Staycation, and eventually, it just became my name."

Staycation's experiences have given him a unique perspective on the importance of community, and it's this understanding that fuels the work he does now.

"We are taking the safe space with us," Lovett tells BTL about DSC. "That's a key part of the Detroit Staycation idea." This traveling "safe space" has a lot to offer, whether it's a Parasol Pool Party, a DQSS event, an outing to the Motown Museum, a tour of the Ford Rouge Factory or an Auto Show brunch.

DSC has allowed Staycation, Lovett and dozens of others to take part in new ventures, like curling or watching horse racing, and through these offerings, Staycation has been able to show more people the quirks of Detroit.

"Just having this space to automatically be yourself in, without having to worry, that

was the goal. Plus having fun doing new things, of course," says Staycation.

"The reality is that everyone wears different hats in different settings," he continues. "But we also need spaces where we can let our hair down and just be. Staycation is about creating those spaces year-round where queer people can come together, feel safe, feel celebrated and build meaningful connections."

One such upcoming space is the Ferndale Pride PA•tea•O Party, a DSC-partnered event happening 3-10 p.m. Saturday, May 31 on Orchid's newly renovated patio. With DJs, drag, go-go dancers, drink specials, private bathrooms, and in-and-out access all day, the event promises a festive, stress-free way to dance, chill and recharge during Pride.

Staycation is the first to admit that planning DSC events takes a village, and that he is grateful for his.

"While I organize and lead Staycation, the success of our events is truly a collective effort. Every performer, venue owner, manager, volunteer and community member who has helped set up, spread the word or simply shown up — we couldn't do this without them."

"I look forward to the future of Detroit Staycation Club. There is definitely a demand for more enriching events, and



James Staycation and Detroit GT's Chris Gorski pose during a Detroit Queer Sketch Series event. Courtesy photo

James' innovation keeps things interesting in the Motor City," says Lovett.

Looking ahead, Staycation is excited for what is to come in 2025. He is in the process of planning more casual events in conjunction with "traditional Detroit Staycation programming," including more Parasol Pool Parties, art workshops and other ways to get out and explore the community.

"Being able to be together with our community and knowing other people are in your shoes can help us through tough times. Maybe even through these next four years," he says, in reference to Trump's presidency. "With today's political climate, it's more important than ever that we are seen and have safe spaces to be ourselves."

Despite the uncertainty

surrounding the queer community under the current administration, he remains hopeful that people will continue to support one another and embrace queer joy.

"When you look at the landscape, you see that so many people are making Detroit a little bit happier of a city, and also a little bit gayer of a city," says Staycation. "Who knows, maybe someday we'll even have a gayborhood."



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Why This Queer Writer Collected Stories From the ‘Edge of the World’

Alden Jones releases first queer-written travel anthology

BY SOPHIA VALCHINE

“Where are all the queer travel writers?” Alden Jones asked herself at a colleague’s retirement party. The Boston-based queer author and travel educator’s answer came in creating “Edge of the World,” the first anthology to capture LGBTQ+ experiences across borders and cultures. The groundbreaking collection brings together diverse voices exploring the unique challenges, joys and revelations of navigating foreign spaces while queer — filling a critical gap in a genre historically dominated by straight, cisgender perspectives.

Jones found her inspiration at a party honoring an editor at the University of Washington Press, the only queer travelist she had known of. “When we were at his retirement party, I was kind of thinking about, you know, how’s this going to evolve now that he was passing the torch,” Jones said.

Jones brought significant experience to “Edge of the World,” having already established herself in travel writing with her memoir “The Blind Masseuse: A Traveler’s Memoir from Costa Rica to Cambodia.” Her entry into the genre began during a year teaching English in Costa Rica — an experience that sparked her passion for documenting cross-cultural encounters.

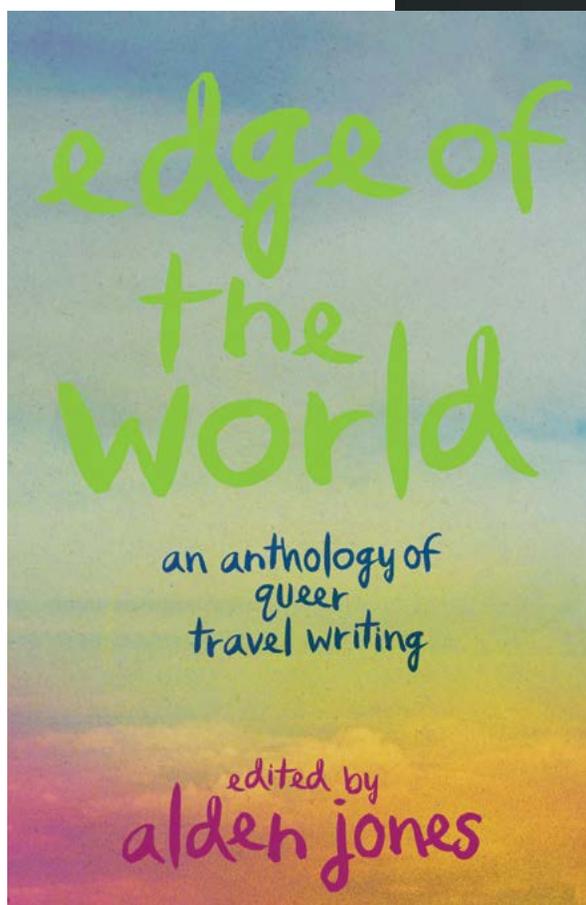
She currently lives in Boston, and attributes this move from New Jersey to the engaged lesbian community there. “[In Boston,] it was like, ‘The lesbians go here on Thursday, they go here Friday, they go here Saturday.’ So, it was such a nice environment to move into,” Jones noted.

The move reminded Jones that it can feel easier to find queer spaces away from home, and this is one point she wanted to emphasize in her anthology. She had experience with how things have been in the past and was motivated to create something new and unique to broaden the way queer voices are expressed in travel writing.

Jones found the anthology format

ideal for exploring queer travel experiences. “It’s not one person’s exploration of being queer,” she explained. “It’s a look at what it means to be queer outside of your own environment.” This approach allowed her to showcase multiple perspectives, reflecting the diversity of LGBTQ+ experiences across different cultures and locations.

To start, she had already found the majority of her contributors at the event of the anthology’s imagining. “That was the one really wild card piece about this — it’s like you don’t



Alden Jones. Courtesy photo

know what’s going to come in. Even if you know the work of the writer you’re soliciting, you don’t know if it’s going to be funny or dark or what it’s going to be like,” Jones said.

Jones wanted to steer away from the formulaic, one-dimensional quality she’s noticed in other travel writing, works that often include

“hotel” vibe with a “perky, positive tone,” she explained. “Sometimes travel is negative, and you need to be able to say that too.” This commitment to authenticity invites “Edge of the World” readers to explore both the joys and challenges of queer travel experiences.

more of a “where to go and where to stay in a

As for the stories themselves, they cover topics such as traveling with partners, finding queer communities in spaces you wouldn’t expect and coming out to family, all set against a wide variety of locations like Spain, Phnom Penh and Senegal. The writers explore what it is to be queer in these vastly different spaces, whether they are free to express their sexuality or forced to hide it away for their own safety.

“I think a really important thing that I wanted to include was what it was like to travel during the high homophobia era, like the ’80s. So, I was really happy to get the essay from Sara Orozco about being arrested after a raid on a gay bar in 1985,” Jones said.

Other stories include Daisy Hernández’s “La Cubana,” which

See **Edge of the World**, page 42



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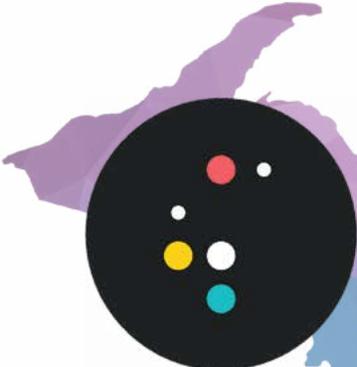
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◀ Trans Lucent

Continued from page 14

Island. He began appearing on the Loew's film theater circuit, headlining vaudeville acts that appeared on-stage before movie showings.

The Tulsa World quoted him on his beauty regimen: "It takes a lot of exercise to keep the old waist line at 27 inches and no more." The interviewer sarcastically added, "Mike's just like all the rest of us girls, he paints a new face on the one nature gave him, gets a Ponjola bob and wears shoes a size too small."

Ames' career peaked during the short-lived "Pansy Craze" of the early 1930s. As mainstream nightclubs shuttered during the early Depression, drag clubs saw business boom. Mae West had scandalized America with her 1927 show, "The Drag," a play with an entirely gay cast, bringing the subject of same-sexuality to mainstream attention.

Warner Bros. released a short film starring Ames in 1930 called "Varsity Vamp," a six-minute talkie featuring him singing two songs from his act.

From cultural icon to private citizen

Tolerance of gay culture soon waned. Morality overseers pushed for movie censorship and laws against same-sex

activity. Female impersonation shows became illegal in parts of the country.

By early 1934, Ames stopped performing in drag. Later that year, the Loew's Theatre chain barred all such acts from its stages. Public sentiment had turned against crossdressing performers, as noted in a 1935 syndicated column: "Deservedly or not, audiences began to look on female impersonators as pathetically psychopathic. They either jeered or walked."

Ames' personal life suffered too. In January 1935, he and Beulah separated. Ten days after their divorce was granted, she married Ames' former piano accompanist.

After briefly trying theatrical producing, Ames returned to Detroit as sales manager at the Book-Cadillac Hotel. He remarried a woman named Marie Morris, but they divorced within a few years. During World War II, he served in the Navy and rose to the rank of Lt. Commander.

Upon returning to civilian life, he married a woman named Kathryn, and they had two children. In 1955, the family moved to Palm Beach, Florida, where he spent his remaining years in anonymity. Most of his later friends and acquaintances were unaware of his early fame as a female impersonator.

Lionel Eugene Ames, "America's Prettiest Girl," died on May 5, 1986.

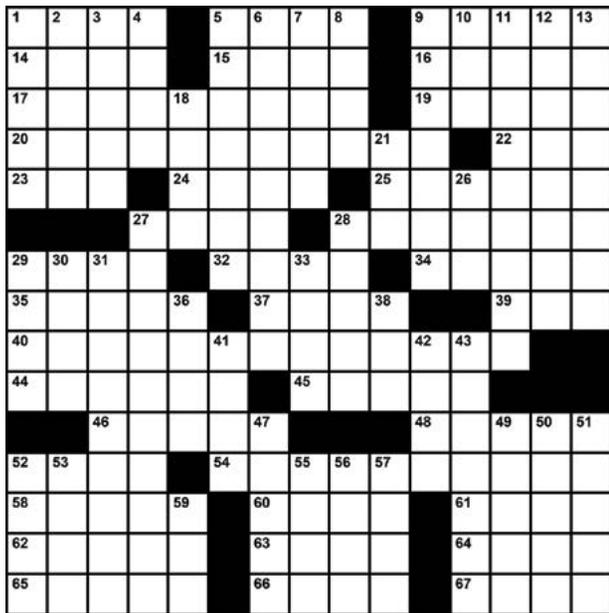
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- 14 Anal alternative
- 15 To be "lesbienne"
- 16 Layers beneath a groom and groom
- 17 Liquor, in the old west
- 19 Ethiopia's capital, ___ Ababa.

- 20 Start of a quote
- 22 Verb suffix for Rupert Everett
- 23 In-case connector
- 24 Wrestling wins
- 25 Stones' companions
- 27 "___ It Like Beckham"
- 28 More of the quote
- 29 Top draft level
- 32 Angelina Jolie's "___ Interrupted"
- 34 "Divine Comedy" poet
- 35 Does some darning
- 37 Straight, to mixologists
- 39 Logo for a Dean Cain role

- 40 More of the quote
- 44 Prepare to blow
- 45 Cutter of heaven, in a Leguin title
- 46 Removal of the foreskin and more
- 48 Hayes of "South Park"
- 52 Sailor's pole
- 54 End of the quote
- 58 Oscar, the source of the quote
- 60 Go off, on Broadway
- 61 Chick's suffix
- 62 Big splash
- 63 Timothy or his sister Tyne
- 64 Feels poorly
- 65 Emma Stone's beard movie
- 66 Nemesis of Tinkerbell
- 67 Nitty-gritty

Down

- 1 Nicholson title role
- 2 Hunter that comes out at night
- 3 "Mandy" singer Manilow
- 4 Jackie's designer
- 5 Shot-putter's activity
- 6 Present
- 7 Parker of "South Park," and others
- 8 Mark Bingham of 9/11
- 9 Set in motion
- 10 Help out
- 11 AZT and others
- 12 Fine meats
- 13 Determines value
- 18 Use a trick towel
- 21 Org. for your first mate

- 26 Cole Porter's "___ Gigolo"
- 27 When your pubes are disheveled?
- 28 Writer Dykewomon
- 29 Potent leader
- 30 Brightly-colored
- 31 Spellbinds, like a Streisand song
- 33 Not made up
- 36 Russian River deposit
- 38 Alternative to HBO
- 41 RuPaul's application
- 42 John Goodman's "Normal, ___"
- 43 Affirmation to a dominatrix
- 47 Places for tools
- 49 Award for books on tape
- 50 Speedy train
- 51 Where to find bulging pecs
- 52 Part of a cartoon baby's name
- 53 Not elite
- 55 Digital-rectal, for example
- 56 "8 ___" (Eminem film)
- 57 Lid problem
- 59 Sappho's long E

See p. 30 for answers

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◀ Jake Wesley Rogers

Continued from page 32

from my body. That idea just blows my mind. It makes me sad that I'll never know that feeling, but it must be that kind of love that's next level. It does take an insane amount of love to keep us alive.

You seem like someone who, even right now, is still filled with so much hope.

It's my gift and my curse, I think.

As a musician, what do you think is your role as far as visibility and representation for helping to shape the future for LGBTQ+ people?

That's a great question. I think about it, but I also try not to think about it and just focus on the work and whatever it does or doesn't do for people. Especially when I just signed a record deal and I was making my first music video, I was very intentional about being in bed with a guy. That was

a choice for sure, because my closest representation growing up was Gaga, and obviously she's an incredible ally, and also she doesn't have my experience. So I think it's really important to show my experience.

What advice do you have for LGBTQ+ young people who are trying to find their way right now, or who might want to be a musician like you?

I love this question, and it's a hard one for me. I always want to say something like follow your heart, which is so oversimplified, but I guess I can only talk about my experience, and I had this affliction from a very early age that I just wanted to be on stage singing. My earliest memory is at 3, and so nothing was really going to ever stop me from doing that. I had a few experiences early on that really shaped me.

When I was 14, I auditioned for "America's Got Talent," and that was not a negative experience, but not positive either. It's where I learned that to be an artist,

you have to say something. I got home from that and I was 15, and everybody in my little town was like, "You made it." And I felt like absolute garbage because I wanted to actually stand for something. That would be my advice. Figure out what you want to stand for. Maybe you want to stand for queer joy and just show and just write about relationships, and maybe that's it. Maybe whatever it is, find that little itch that can be scratched. And keep going. There will be a lot of people that come in and try to alter and change that message, guaranteed. Especially when you start to get really good at telling the message. It's like all the movies — when the hero gets closer, the challenges get bigger.

How are you feeling about getting this album out into the world?

I finally feel ready. I really didn't feel ready until recently. Probably mid-January. I was still having kind of an existential crisis about it all. And then it was actually the day David Lynch died, and I loved David Lynch a lot, and I kept thinking that I didn't know he was

sick, and I just thought there'd be another movie. I was like, I bet Lynch will have another movie. It was something I even was thinking while rewatching "Twin Peaks." And then when he died, I was like, oh, there's no more. It's a weird thing to think about when it comes to the artists that we admire. That was my wake-up call. I was like, "Oh my God, I'm alive. I get to do this right now and I need to do this." And time is of the essence. So I feel very ready in that way. I mean, I still definitely feel scared, but I'm just ready to give this album away.

You'll be touring as Cyndi Lauper's opening act this summer. What's your history with her and her music?

My real history is that I was obsessed from a pretty young age. "True Colors" is one of the first songs I learned on guitar. I wish I could say it was because of her, but it was kind of because of "Glee" first. In high school — and I haven't told her this but I'm excited to — I went to my local record store. I was collecting a bunch of vinyl, and I just got a

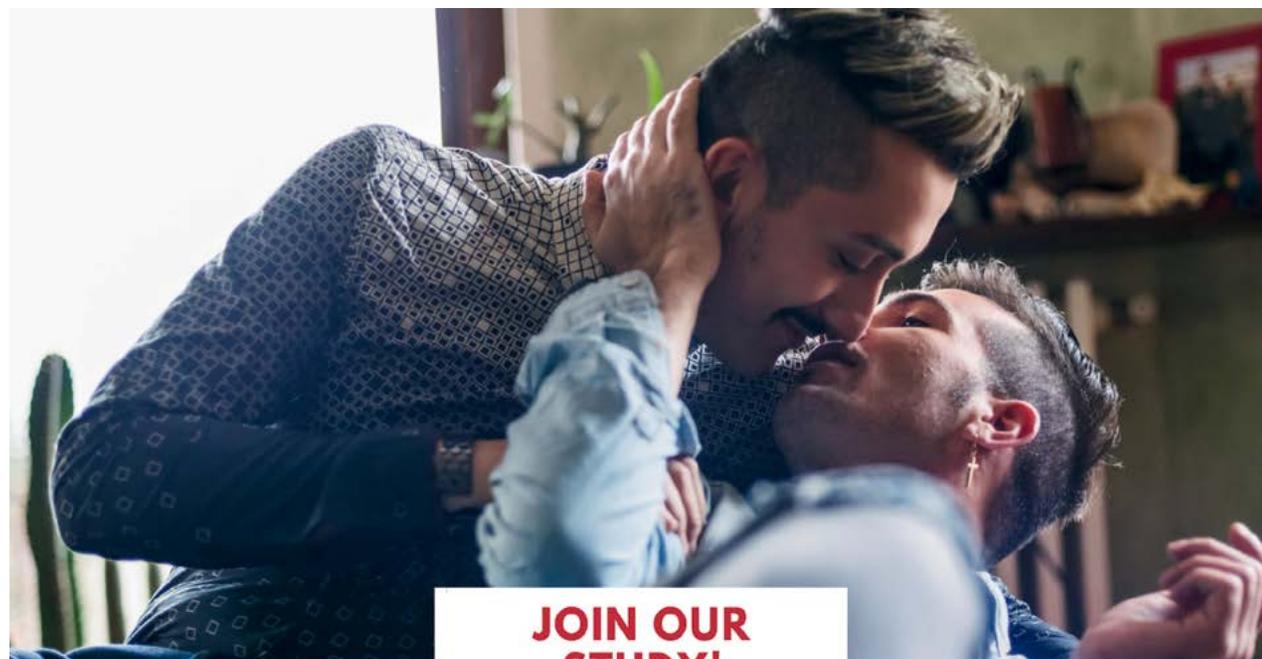
record player, and I wanted to get "She's So Unusual," of course. I went to buy it, and the guy was like, "I'll give you this for free if you sing one of the songs to me." I was 15 or 16. So I sang "Time After Time" to him and he gave it to me.

On this tour, she's been inviting the opener to duet with her on "Time After Time." What if that happens to you?

I can't talk about that. That freaks me out. I'm going to start crying already. I better start practicing that harmony. Actually, I think I know it deep down. I don't think I even have to practice.

Lastly, Jake, what's something that's bringing you hope right now?

Honestly, my small community. Really focusing on that and on the deep relationships in my life and starting there. That's really giving me hope. And seeing people begin to organize is giving me hope that we are not asleep and we're doing what is called for.



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◀ Edge of the World

Continued from page 36

details Hernández's experience bringing her nonbinary partner to visit her parents in Cuba who don't understand their gender; Putsata

“Travel itself is inherently queer. I think we can really experiment more than we have with what traveling means and what it means to explore an uncentered perspective in the form of travel writing.”

— Alden Jones

Reang's "The Return," detailing her complex emotions toward coming out to her family in Cambodia who have strong expectations about the way she should be; and Genevieve Hudson's "Myth Maker," which takes the reader through their experience finding queer spaces in Amsterdam.

While all of these experiences are extremely

different, they all find their common ground in queer themes, whether it be in forms of gender or sexuality. Jones found similarities across the anecdotes and quotes found in the essays, despite the broad range of topics. "You start to see how these unexpected patterns emerge," she noted.

Jones purposefully saved her own introduction for last, prioritizing the diverse voices she had gathered. "[I wanted to] offer a little bit of my own perspective being queer as a traveler while [explaining how] these themes speak to each other," she said.

In her introduction, Jones shares a revealing moment from Croatia, where a woman questioned whether her pregnancy was intentional. "I am 40 years old and married to a woman," Jones responded. "I don't think it gets more 'on purpose' than this." That brief exchange captures the distinct perspective through which queer travelers navigate the world — an experience that lies at the heart of her book.

For Jones, "Edge of the World" represents an invitation to reimagine an entire genre. "Travel itself is inherently queer," she suggests. "I think we can really experiment more than we have with what traveling means and what it means to explore an uncentered perspective in the form of travel writing." Through these diverse queer voices, readers gain not just new destinations to explore, but entirely new ways of experiencing the journey.

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