MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE Lines™

RUDY SERRA'S 25-YEAR BATTLE
Michigan's first gay judge on anti-gay police stings

HALLOWEEN, BUT MAKE IT QUEER
10 clever costumes that celebrate joy and resistance

JOHN WATERS IN TOWN
Filmmaker talks rebellion and fighting bigotry

IN FURSUIT OF DEMOCRACY

Michigan furry Elyon Badger brings honey badger energy — and Medicare for all — to his bid for U.S. Congress

By Hank Kennedy

Dr. Paul Benson's

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Dr. Andrew Roberts with a Be Well Medical Center patient.

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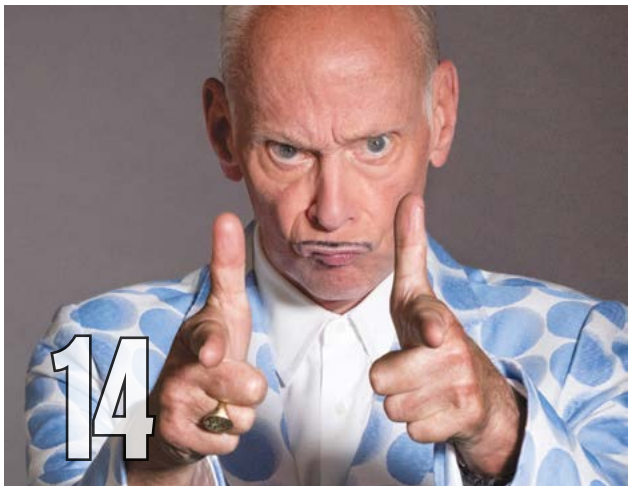

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Elyon Badger. Photo: Brian Wells

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

October brings cooler nights, a chance to wear that cozier sweater (or maybe that hoodie you "borrowed" from your ex three years ago) and queer events so good you'll abandon your pumpkin spice latte mid-sip. This month, you can root for Pride on ice, explore a little botanical witchcraft, dance with a drag legend and score tickets to a choral concert that promises to sleigh. Consider this your official permission slip to celebrate LGBTQ+ History Month with equal parts style, substance and sparkle.

PRISM Chorus. Courtesy photo

1 Get Tickets for PRISM's Holiday Show

Move over Hallmark — PRISM Men's Chorus has your feel-good holiday fix covered with Holiday Movie Magic, a cinematic celebration blending harmonies, heart and sparkle from golden-age classics to modern favorites. The event will mark PRISM's first performance in Detroit at the group's new state-of-the-art rehearsal space inside MotorCity Casino. Grab tickets before Oct. 31 to skip the fees. Whether your heart swells at every crescendo or hums from the back row, this concert proves the holidays are meant to be heard.

Dec. 18, 8 p.m., Sound Board Detroit at MotorCity Casino Hotel (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit). Visit prism-chorus.org for tickets.

Photo: Facebook/@hortulusgardens

2 Learn to Brew Botanicals

Looking for a spellbinding way to mark the season? Experience the fabulous garden historian and National Garden Club Blue Ribbon Winner Ed Blondin of Hortulus Gardens digging into the mystical and medicinal history of plants. From mandrake myths to modern herbal uses, this LGBTQ-inclusive evening will be perfect for anyone who's ever whispered affirmations to their succulents. Expect laughs, lore and maybe a few magical gardening tips.

Oct. 23, 7 p.m., Community Room, Lathrup Village City Hall (27400 Southfield Road, Lathrup Village). Sign up at bit.ly/magikplants.

Yvie Oddly. Photo: OddlyYvie.com

3 Catch Yvie Oddly at Necto

Every Friday, Ann Arbor's Necto Nightclub transforms into a haven of queer joy for its beloved Pride Night. But on Oct. 17, the stakes — and let's be real, the wigs — are higher. "RuPaul's Drag Race" Season 11 winner and "All Stars" Season 7 standout Yvie Oddly brings her signature blend of chaos, camp and couture to the main stage, joined by resident queens Perry Dox and Chanel Hunter with special guest Seasin. Look forward to a night to remember and possibly rehydrate from.

Oct. 17, 8 p.m., Necto Nightclub (516 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor). Learn more at bit.ly/oddlyatnecto.

Saginaw Spirit 2024 Pride Night. Photo: Facebook/@DowGLBR

4

Pride Hits The Ice

The Saginaw Spirit's annual Pride Night turns the rink into a rainbow that will melt even the iciest of hearts. The team, joined by Dow GLAD+ (Dow's employee resource group) and Great Lakes Bay Pride, is throwing a glitterific celebration featuring giveaways, music, photo ops and a sea of affirming fans. Even better: using the Pride25 group code sends $5 per ticket to Great Lakes Bay Pride. So grab your jersey, layers (you still have that hoodie, right?), loudest cheer voice and your friend who thinks hockey isn't their thing. They'll leave converted.

Oct. 19, 5:30 p.m., Dow Event Center (303 Johnson St., Saginaw). Get tickets at bit.ly/saginawspiritpride.

Ruth Ellis Mural at Ruth Ellis Clairmount Center. Courtesy photo

5

Explore LGBTQ+ History

LGBTQ+ History Month isn't just about remembering history — it's also about making history happen. Visit OutHistory.org or your local LGBTQ+ archive and take one small step to preserve queer stories: scan an old Pride photo, dig through BTL's archives online at pridesource.com or record an elder's memories. Feeling social? Host a history hangout by streaming an episode of the podcast "Making Gay History" with friends and talking about what you never learned in school. However you participate, you're honoring your own legacy and keeping our stories alive and visible for the next generation.

October (all month), statewide and online at OutHistory.org, makinggayhistory.com and LGBTHistoryMonth.com.

Elyon Badger on the steps of the Michigan State Capitol building in Lansing. Photo: Brian Wells

Elyon Badger brings costumed activism to a serious campaign for U.S. Congress

BY HANK KENNEDY

Elyon Badger doesn't look anything like how one expects a candidate for office to look. Often clad in marijuana-themed attire or a honey badger fursuit, Badger — alias Samuel Smeltzer — is running for the Democratic primary for Michigan's 7th Congressional District, which encompasses both the state capital of Lansing and arch-conservative Livingston County. His campaign may rely heavily on humor, but he takes the issues very seriously.

Badger isn't a candidate who has been dreaming of running for office since childhood — he explains he was motivated to run for office after spending "too much" time "yapping" on social media about ways to improve the country. A 14-year Lansing area resident and former Michigan Army National Guard who runs an IT security company, Badger says he had grown tired of "voting for people that aren't making things better." If he wanted something done right, he figured he'd have to do it himself.

After the incumbent Republican for the 7th U.S. District Tom Barrett voted for Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill," including support for healthcare program cuts, Badger protested outside his office. Inspired by what he sees as a growing grassroots movement in favor of universal healthcare, he decided to run for Barrett's seat on a platform of Medicare for All, to ensure no one goes bankrupt from medical bills. "I'm in the fight for healthcare," he says.

Badger also advocates for comprehensive progressive policies including criminal justice reform, climate action and workers' rights. He describes himself as a democratic socialist, inspired by Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed and Vermont's Sen. Bernie Sanders, whose message "resonated with so many voters." When asked to define democratic socialism, he says, "It's about us collectively voting on what's best for everyone — not just for a couple people who own everything."

Yes, Badger is a furry, a connection inseparable from his politics and one that adds urgency to his campaign. He describes the furry subculture dedicated to anthropomorphic animals as "a wide group of people that basically create their own mascots. My mascot is the honey badger. I kind of feel that honey badger energy within me." The honey badger is a carnivorous mammal living in Africa, the Middle East and India. Due to its combative disposition, it has few predators. He contrasts his animal mascot with that of the Republicans ("old, never gonna die, and never forgetting their racism") and leading Democrats ("Jackasses").

"The reason I'm leaning into the furry side of things is the Heritage Foundation has targeted the furry community," Badger explains. "They're going after the queer spaces and organizations where we are allowed to express creative freedom." Indeed, a 2011 study found that the vast majority of furries are somewhere within the queer community.

Various sectors of the American right spread falsehoods about schools providing litter boxes to furry students, a claim Equality Michigan derided as "delusional transphobic antics." In both 2023 and 2024, Motor City Furry Con, held annually in metro Detroit, was forced to temporarily evacuate after bomb threats. In 2025, Republican legislators in Texas introduced the FURRIES (Forbidding Unlawful Representation of Roleplaying in Education) Act, banning "any non-human behavior" or roleplaying in public schools. Lawyers have argued the proposed law would unnecessarily infringe on students' free speech rights, while school Dungeons and Dragons clubs in Texas fear the overly broad statute could ban their hobby.

Badger is also a strong and vocal proponent of marijuana legalization and an opponent of the so-called war on drugs. "I was personally driving my friends to the polls the whole day," he says, referring to efforts to pass Proposal 1 in 2018, which legalized marijuana in Michigan. What does he think of President Trump's recent musings about rescheduling marijuana to a lesser drug category at the federal level? "Anything to distract from the Epstein files."

When it comes to LGBTQ+ issues, for Badger, it's personal — he is

See **Elyon Badger**, page 17

State Rep. Josh Schriver Called Queers Perverts. Guess Who Had The Fling Account?

Michigan Republican's call to ban online porn comes as data breach links him to explicit dating website

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Rep. Josh Schriver. Photo: Michigan Advance/Kyle Davidson. Design: BTL

According to records obtained by Metro Times, State Rep. Josh Schriver (R-Oxford) — the same lawmaker who introduced legislation in September to ban all online pornography statewide and who has compared porn to heroin — appears to have maintained an account on Fling.com, a pornographic dating site that promised users they could "find sex" and "get laid tonight."

It's disappointing how predictable this whole delicious new development has turned out to be, as we drag out the same tired tape we've been playing for decades. You know this one: Angry right-wing bigot lashes out at the queer community — or as Schriver says "gays, queers, transsexuals, polygamists and other perverts" — who are advancing "attacks on our children." Only to find out this principled, pearl-clutching conservative is actually into some kinky stuff.

Allegedly.

The data breach records, verified by multiple cybersecurity databases, show an account linked to Schriver's personal AOL email address. The profile indicated sexual interests including "fetish" and "groupsex," with the account last accessed on Sept. 11, 2010. Metro Times reports that it independently reviewed the leaked data using multiple publicly available cybersecurity databases. The Fling.com breach was confirmed by Vice News in 2016 when millions of user accounts were hacked and sold on the dark web.

For years, Fling.com described itself as the "world's best casual personals for adult dating, sex, and swingers," providing access to explicit photos, videos and live sex webcams. Schriver told Metro Times the records were "forged" and claimed he'd never heard of the website.

If true, the revelation is particularly ironic given Schriver's lengthy record of moralizing about sexual behavior. In December 2024, he called oral sex "a crime against God and the natural order."

That same month, Schriver wrote on X, "Make gay marriage illegal again." In January, he introduced a resolution urging the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the landmark Obergefell v. Hodges ruling that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

Undeterred, Schriver introduced House Bill 4751 in July, which would strip sexual orientation and gender identity protections from Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act — a direct assault on protections that were hard-won just two years ago.

Schriver's "Anticorruption of Public Morals Act" would ban all online pornography for Michigan residents of any age while specifically targeting transgender representation.

The bill would criminalize any material "that includes a disconnection between biology and gender" — essentially making it illegal to depict or represent transgender people online.

"Don't make it, don't share it, don't view it," Schriver posted on social media, calling for pornography distributors to be added to the sex offender registry. He's also compared pornography to heroin.

Schriver has also voted against bills banning child marriage and closing Michigan's marital rape loophole.

The pattern is exhaustingly familiar: conservative lawmakers who build their brands on moral outrage against marginalized communities are revealed to be practicing the behaviors they claim to abhor. Yet Schriver's case stands out for its sheer audacity — a lawmaker who has made targeting LGBTQ+ people and sexual content his entire political identity, allegedly participating in an explicit hook-up site complete with preferences for fetishes and group sex.

While Schriver's discriminatory legislation is virtually dead on arrival thanks to the Democratic-controlled state Senate and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, these bills serve as reminders to stay vigilant. At least he's consistent in his commitment to being consistently awful. And now, consistently hypocritical.

Allegedly.

Rudy Serra. Photo: Andrew Potter

After 25 Years, Rudy Serra, Michigan's First Gay Judge, Is Still Fighting the Same Battle

The gay sex stings he documented in 1999 have evolved to Grindr, but targeting continues

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When Gov. Jennifer Granholm appointed Rudy Serra to Michigan's 36th District Court in 2007, she made history by naming him the state's first openly gay judge. But for Serra, the appointment represented just one milestone in a decades-long career defending LGBTQ+ people from what he calls systematic police targeting.

Nearly two decades later, at 70, an age when many would be retired, Serra continues practicing law from his Ferndale home office, still taking cases and still sounding the alarm about police stings that he says violate the constitutional rights of gay men. The work that consumed him in 1999 remains urgent in 2025, even as the tactics have evolved from public restrooms to dating apps like Grindr.

"These types of undercover operations where the police pretend to be consenting adult gay men in order to entice someone into accepting an invitation seem to increase at times when, for example, the prosecutor's running for reelection or the sheriff is running for reelection," Serra said in a recent interview with BTL.

He's seen the pattern repeat across four decades of practice. Police conduct sweeps, prosecutors hold press conferences touting arrests of "predators" and gay men's lives are destroyed — often for behavior that, Serra argues, isn't actually criminal.

Serra's 1999 "Bag a Fag" report, compiled for the Triangle Foundation, now Equality Michigan, documented what he termed a "relentless, determined and persistent choice to target gay men, their bars and public cruising areas, for special harassment and expensive undercover decoy operations." The report detailed cases from Detroit to Troy, from adult theaters to rest areas, where police arrested men for words alone or for consensual activity that would never result in charges for heterosexual couples.

"Rudy, working together with the Triangle Foundation and [founding executive director] Jeff Montgomery, really was the singular voice speaking out against this," ACLU of Michigan staff attorney Jay Kaplan said.

In one case Serra documented, a man was arrested after meeting two undercover officers at the Detroit Eagle, a gay leather bar; they spent two nights socializing before arresting him for disorderly conduct. His offense? Telling one of the officers, "You're really nice looking. I wouldn't mind chomping on your crotch for a while." The charges were eventually dismissed when police refused to provide evidence, but only after he was held for 17 hours and spent thousands on legal fees.

"Reliable sources inform the Triangle Foundation that officers have an 'inside' slang for these decoy projects," Serra wrote in the report. "They call them 'bag a fag' operations."

Serra submitted his findings to the Department of Justice. While the DOJ acknowledged receipt, he recalls little substantive change in police behavior. The

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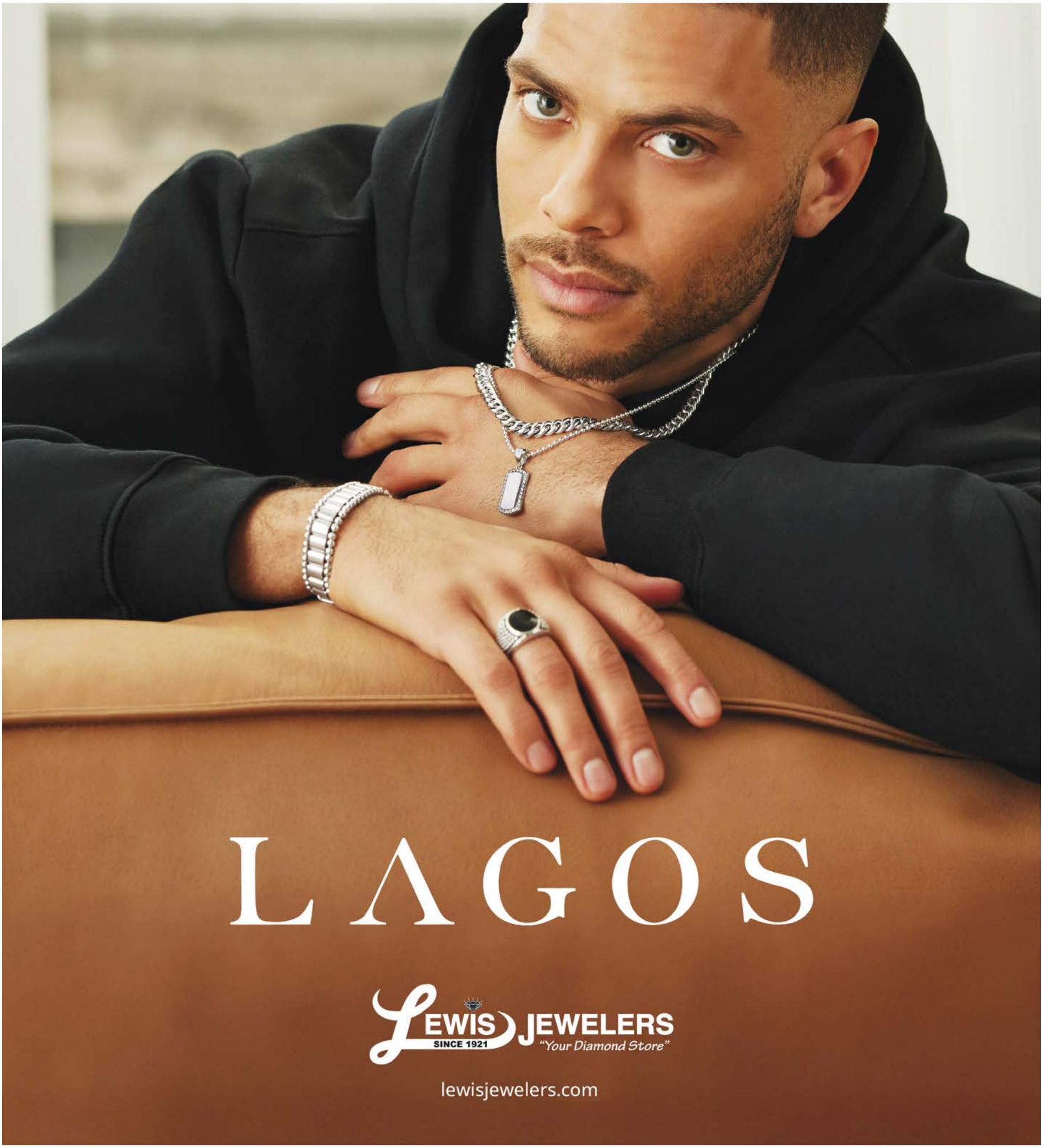
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Conservative Christian Lesbians Coming Out Late

When raised in compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy, how do lesbians unravel who they are?

BY SAM DONNDELINGER

This article was originally published by Uncloseted Media.

Angela Thompson in her home in Columbia, South Carolina. Photo: Ian Curcio for Uncloseted Media and The 19th

Angela Thompson soaked in the garden tub of her new apartment in Columbia, South Carolina. With a freshly cut bob and a lease penned in her name, she reflected on the 30-year marriage she had just left behind. "I put down a deposit, I got the utilities and I furnished the [apartment] off Facebook Marketplace," she told Uncloseted Media and The 19th.

At just 17 years old, Thompson married a youth pastor six years her senior due to pressure from a non-denominational evangelical church she described as "close to a cult."

"The message from my church was: 'You find a man, you marry a man, you have his babies, you stay married forever, whether you're happy or not,'" she says. "Look around and pick a man," they would tell her.

During Thompson's marriage, however, something felt terribly wrong, and she turned into a shell of herself. She says she shut down, stopped trying to communicate her needs, put her head down and kept going.

For the next 30 years, she'd raise four kids and continue to be involved in her church. But at age 48, Thompson realized something earth-shattering: She was a lesbian.

"I started researching the [LGBTQ+] community for my child who came out to me," she says. "That's when I found my people. I found people like me. And I didn't know what that meant."

After questioning for a few years, Thompson slowly started to come out. "When I told my [ex-]sister-in-law I was gay, she said, 'That makes sense. I've noticed on social media over the last couple of weeks that you look happy. You look like a full person,'" she says.

"And she was right."

While Thompson, now 55 and married to a woman, felt isolated in her feelings of shame and confusion for decades, she's far from alone.

Across the U.S., a growing number of women raised in conservative Christian environments are coming out as lesbians later in life — often after decades of heterosexual marriage, child-rearing and religious devotion. Experts say this late realization is rooted in what's known as compulsory heterosexuality: a cultural and religious pressure that makes straightness feel not just normal, but mandatory. For women shaped by strict gender roles and purity culture, recognizing attraction to other women can be delayed by years.

A study from 2013 found that lesbians are more likely than gay men to discover their identity later in life, with 14% of lesbians first thinking they might not be straight when they were age 20 or above, compared to only 3% of gay men. And a 2019 report found that the average age for women entering a same-sex marriage is significantly higher than for women entering different-sex marriages.

"Women are born into a world built on compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy," says Anne-Marie Zanzal, a coach for later-in-life lesbians and queer women divorcing men. "So we bury any longing for women so deeply that we forget it was ever ours to claim."

But Zanzal says that now more than ever, the world is seeing stories of conservative Christian women coming out in midlife.

"There is greater visibility, more expansive language and safer community spaces — both online and in real life," she says. "This loosens the grip of old scripts like compulsory heterosexuality and the good daughter, wife and mom."

She says that as stigma lowers and support rises, women in their 30s all the way to their 60s can reexamine long-held assumptions and choose truth over performance. "It's less a trend of new lesbians and more a cultural shift that makes long-quiet truths speakable, livable and worth honoring."

Gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality

Therapists and researchers say many women — especially those raised in conservative Christian environments — have long felt pressure to pursue heterosexual relationships because anything else seemed unthinkable. The concept of compulsory heterosexuality, coined by the late feminist Adrienne Rich, argues that heterosexuality is not a natural state but an institution, like the patriarchy, that organizes and controls. It sets the norm, making other sexualities seem like deviations.

"It's like a checklist," says Emily Bettdur, a coach for later-in-life lesbians. "Find a man, get married, have kids — that's what's supposed to make you happy. But many women do all that and still feel something is off."

Zanzal says that what is particularly toxic for conservative Christian women is the fear linked with making decisions for themselves, because independence is often associated with wrongdoing.

"When you're deconstructing faith, you first have to deconstruct what it means to be a woman and what these conservative traditions have taught you," says Zanzal. "They're told that they're second. They are told that they are less than. They're told that their needs come last."

For many women, the pressure to conform buries their sense of self.

"Christianity is often taught as a form of control," says Traci West, a Christian ethics scholar at Drew University Theological School. "It's so important to recognize that shame is a tool of repression used by the church. And it works to the advantage of those who are considered the superior ones, often heterosexual men. Shame seeps into your identity and your sense of worthlessness. And the only way to regain that worth when you feel shamed often is to be obedient."

The same is true for Brook, a 48-year-old woman from rural Arkansas who came out two years ago. When she hears the word "lesbian," she still feels a tightness in her chest.

"There's this anxious feeling. Like, 'Stay away from that,'" she told Uncloseted Media and The 19th.

Brook's earliest memory of the word lesbian came when she was in sixth grade. Kids at school called her a lesbian, and she didn't know what it meant, so she asked her mom.

"She didn't tell me what it meant, just that it was bad, like a curse word."

Brook, who asked to use only her first name because she isn't out to her immediate family, was raised in a Southern Baptist church. She was married to a man for 10 years before she began questioning her sexuality.

"I thought I was doing something wrong the whole time I was married," she says. "I was so unhappy. The messaging was all about purity, being sinless, untouched, a gift to your husband. That's what we were taught a proper woman should be. How to sit, act, move, dress."

Brook says that her marriage was sexless and lacked intimacy. "But I couldn't leave. … I made that vow in the sight of God in my community that I would be married [until] death do us part," she says. "The church infused in me that divorce is not an option. You dig your heels in and you push through. There were a lot of really unhappy married people that I was around that just dealt with it."

According to online resources for late-blooming lesbians, many women who aren't experiencing intimacy with men wonder if they are asexual because they are not attracted to their husbands.

Thompson thought she was asexual for years. "I [thought I didn't] like sex at all, because literally the only form of sex that's acceptable in that evangelical church movement is male and female, when you are married to each other," she says.

She remembers a friend bringing up to her that she might be gay. "I was like, 'What do you mean? No, I think I'm asexual. I honestly don't care if I ever have sex again. That man can leave me alone. I'm tired.'"

It wasn't until early 2018 — six months after that first conversation — that her friend gently raised the question again: "Have you considered that you might be gay?" This time, Thompson didn't dismiss it outright.

One 2016 study found that internalized heterosexism — when a queer person believes that their identity is a bad thing for going against the heterosexual norm — is directly associated with chronic physical health conditions and depression. According to a 2014 article, later-in-life lesbians face the triple threat of shame from sexism, homophobia and ageism.

That shame and fear is what kept Addy Sakler, who realized she was a lesbian when she was a teenager, in the closet until she was 36. Sakler grew up in a conservative Protestant community in Ohio and spent decades internalizing the belief that "God hated gay people" and that she was broken and in need of healing.

"I was walking around like a zombie, dead inside and depressed and having suicidal ideation," she told Uncloseted Media and The 19th. "I was cutting myself, hitting myself and desperate."

Sakler says she was "white knuckling it" trying to avoid her attraction to women.

"I would sit at night and just read the Bible and pray to Jesus. And then I put myself in conversion therapy."

Sakler was in and out of conversion therapy for 30 years trying to cure herself, denying she was a lesbian to her religious community and living "a double life."

Zanzal says that for lesbians from a religious setting, the stakes of leaving are terrifying. "They lose so much community … and they get a lot of shaming for not staying married and for being queer."

While Sakler eventually found acceptance at a progressive church that allowed her to explore her lesbian identity without shame and has been married to her wife for three years now, she still gets triggered by her conservative upbringing.

"I drive by an evangelical church, and it's a trauma response. I get a pit in my stomach," she says.

Moving forward

While experts say that there is an increase in acceptance and visibility, some fear the current social climate will quell that.

"We are currently seeing an extremely dangerous regression rooted in misogyny, homophobia and transphobia that will have severely negative implications for future generations," says Mallory Hanfling, a psychotherapist and researcher studying the experience of later-in-life lesbians coming out. "We're seeing anti-abortion campaigns … book banning and censorship of LGBTQ education, and normalization of sexual assault and abuse specifically towards girls and women."

She says that she can no longer clearly see the light at the end of that tunnel as the world feels less safe for queer folks day by day.

"I expect that if we, as a country, continue in the direction we are headed, folks will understandably choose safety and self-preservation over living authentically."

With that in mind, she emphasizes that finding community is crucial for overcoming these hurdles.

Sakler, Thompson and Brook have all left the church entirely. It wasn't until they found acceptance in a new environment that they felt they had the space to come out.

"Once I felt safe in my new community, I came out and it was like this weight just lifted immediately off my shoulders," Sakler says. "I have healthy self-attachment with [my wife]. As I've grown older, I've gotten more wisdom and a lot of therapy and more self-acceptance and self-love. That's been a revolutionary, life-changing experience."

Brook is still in the process of understanding her identity and said acceptance from her family would have helped. "I really wish my mom hadn't made it seem like [lesbians] were something shameful. If she'd just said, 'That's a human being who's worthy of love, no matter who they love,' that kind of acceptance would've meant everything."

For Thompson, it was when she started working at a new job where she had other queer women as colleagues that she realized there was a life beyond heterosexuality.

"As I came out to the inner circle of moms in our homeschool co-op, I was pleasantly surprised," she says. "So many of them said, 'Well, I'm bisexual, I just happen to be married to a man.' I had no idea. But as I opened up to them one-on-one, they felt safe to share that too."

The intimacy and safety felt radical in contrast to the culture she came from. On her first date with her wife, she felt "safe enough to fall asleep with her head on her shoulder," something she had never done in her 30-year marriage with her ex-husband.

"There's so much talking. I feel treated with such respect and equality. So much listening. We are always validating each other's feelings and ideas. That was amazing to me," she says. "Because in the world I came from, children were mostly seen and not heard and women were in the same category. I didn't know that kind of intimacy was even possible. I didn't know what real love and real safety felt like before I met my wife."

Additional reporting by Sophie Holland. This story was reported in partnership with The 19th, a nonprofit newsroom reporting on gender, politics and policy. Read the full story at pridesource.com.

SPONSORED EDITORIAL

How We Can Reclaim Intimacy, Consent and Connection Together

Mark McMillan, founder of McMillan Behavioral Health and Addiction Services, offers a trauma-informed retreat for queer men in recovery

BY MARK MCMILLAN

What does it mean to feel safe in your own skin? For many queer men in recovery, this question is layered with history — of trauma, shame and longing. Before I began my own healing journey, I didn't realize how deeply out-of-control alcohol use had disconnected me from my body, my boundaries and my desires.

As an addiction therapist, I've witnessed how recovery can open the door to intimacy — but only if we're given spaces to explore it with care. That's why I created Feelings, Flesh and Consent, a trauma-informed mini retreat for male-identifying individuals in the LGBTQ+ community navigating recovery and reconnection. (A female-focused Feelings, Flesh and Consent is in the works and coming soon!)

This three-hour gathering is not about fixing ourselves — it's about relearning who we truly are. Relearning how to trust ourselves. Relearning how to feel pleasure without fear. Relearning how to show up in our bodies with honesty and care.

At McMillan Behavioral Health and Addiction Services (MBHS), which I founded in 2020, I specialize in working with queer clients around addiction, trauma and intimacy. I'm a licensed master social worker (LMSW), a certified advanced alcohol and drug counselor (CAADC), and a trauma-informed care provider. These credentials matter — but what matters more is the lived experience of our community. We know what it means to survive. Now, we deserve to thrive.

Feelings, Flesh and Consent Mini-Retreat

Mark McMillan invites male-identifying individuals in the LGBTQ+ community to a mini-retreat focused on navigating recovery, reconnection and reclaiming intimacy after trauma.

Saturday, Nov. 9, 8:30 a.m.

McMillan Behavioral Health and Addiction Services

800 Hilton Road, Ferndale

Feelings, Flesh and Consent is rooted in the belief that healing is not just personal — it's communal. In a world where queer bodies are politicized and policed, reclaiming sex positivity and self-trust becomes an act of resistance. One client recently told me, "I've been sober for years, but I still flinch when someone touches me intimately." That's the kind of wound we'll gently tend to together.

Ready to join us? Here's what you should know:

On Saturday, Nov. 9, doors will open at 8:30 a.m. at my Ferndale office (800 Hilton Road). We'll begin at 9 a.m. with light refreshments and grounding practices. From there, we'll move through guided discussion, creative reflection and embodied exercises designed to explore:

- Relearning intimacy after trauma and substance use
- Reclaiming sex positivity through consent and self-trust
- Rebuilding authentic connection — physically, emotionally and spiritually

This retreat is a brave space where vulnerability is honored, autonomy is celebrated and healing is community-led. Whether you're early in recovery or years in, you're welcome here.

Space is limited, and we expect it to fill quickly. If this speaks to you, I'd be honored to have you join us.

Come as you are. Leave with deeper breath, clearer boundaries and a renewed sense of connection.

To register or ask questions, visit Mark-McMillan.com or email Mark@Mark-McMillan.com.

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CREEP OF THE WEEK

Antifa Stands For Anti-Fascist. Because Fascism Is Bad. So It's Good To Be Anti-Fascist.

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

And let me be clear: We are living under fascism right now. The Trump administration is a fascist administration. And the vast majority of Republicans are either avowed fascist themselves or are happy to support fascism because it benefits them (which, of course, makes them fascist).

> *Fascism thrives in a culture of fear. They want people to be too scared to stand up, to protest, to declare themselves anti-fascist.*

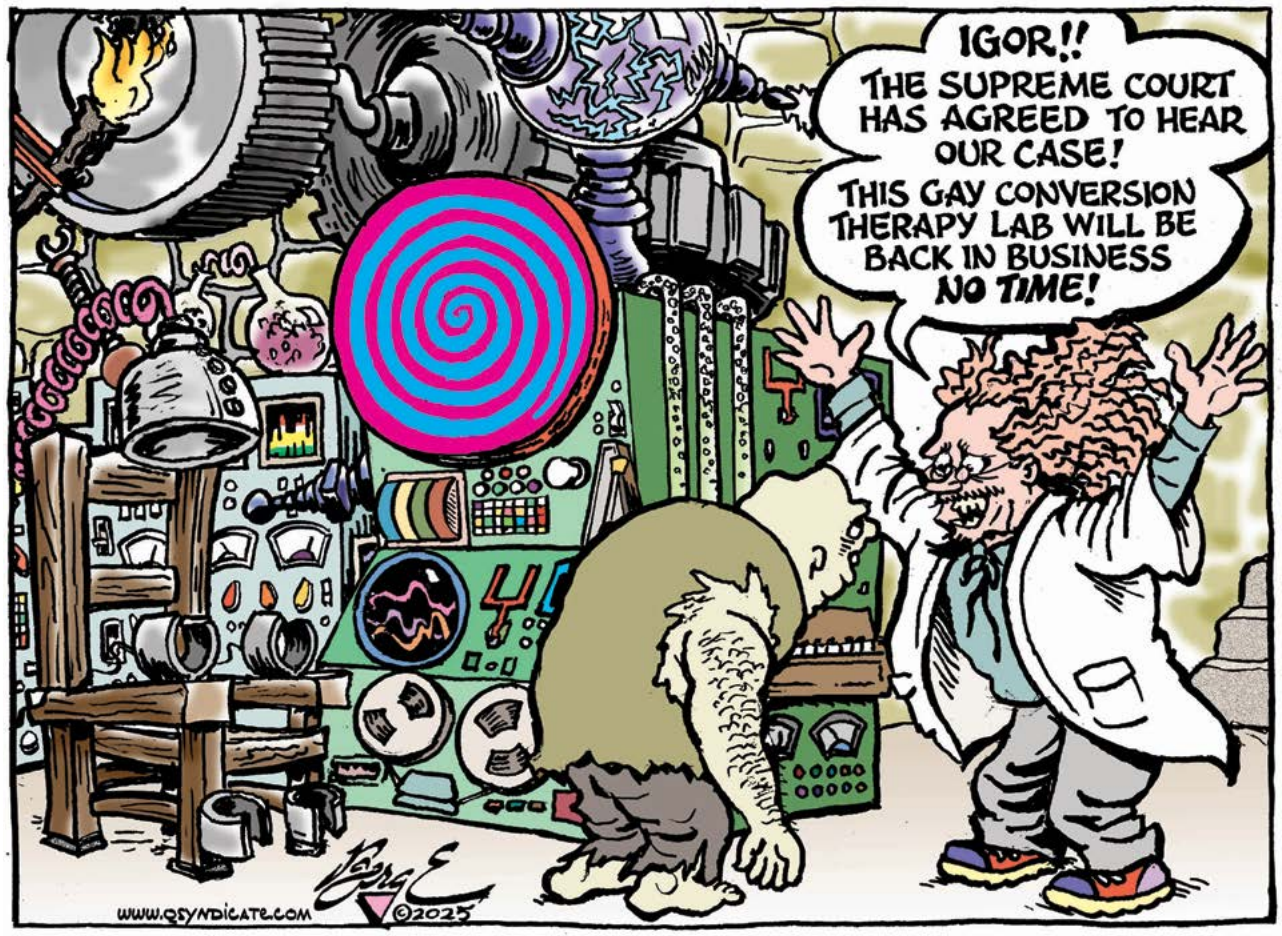
But what is fascism? Wikipedia, the purest place on the internet, defines it as "a far-right, authoritarian, and ultranationalist political ideology and movement... characterized by a dictatorial leader, centralized autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy, subordination of individual interests for the perceived interest of the nation or race, and strong regimentation of society and the economy."

I mean, come on. That's exactly what's happening right now.

But that doesn't sit well with, you know, fascists. Fascism works best when people don't oppose it, especially the people who are not yet directly hurt by fascist policies.

For example, if you aren't transgender, don't know anyone who is transgender and don't really understand that whole thing anyway, you are unlikely to protest the fascist targeting of transgender people in the U.S.

The same goes for immigrants. Whether your response to seeing immigrants kidnapped off of the street by masked ICE agents is to applaud, shrug or say, "I don't like this but they shouldn't have come here illegally," you are supporting fascism.



And like I said, fascism is very bad. But Trump and the far-right are trying to rewrite history where the Nazis are the good guys. Most people look at Hitler and see a monster. Trump looks at Hitler and sees a role model.

Trump recently issued an executive order designating antifa a "terrorist organization." In other words, according to Trump, if you are anti-fascist, you are a terrorist.

"Antifa is a militarist, anarchist enterprise that calls for the overthrow of the U.S. government, law enforcement authorities, and our system of law — using illegal means, including violence and terrorism, to accomplish these goals," the White House declared. "The Order directs the Federal government to investigate, disrupt and dismantle all illegal operations conducted by Antifa or any person claiming to act on behalf of Antifa."

Granted, antifa isn't an organization with membership cards. It's just a bunch of people who think that fascism sucks and are willing to protest against it. This order is clearly intended to stifle free speech and pit Americans against one another. It's also deliberately broad. Anyone could be declared antifa or acting on behalf of antifa. Remember McCarthyism? U.S. senator Joseph McCarthy went on a persecution spree of people he declared communists, ruining a lot of lives in the process. People eventually realized he was full of shit. Anyway, this is like McCarthyism if McCarthy had an army of armed agents ready to do his bidding.

Trump said of antifa, "They have been very threatening to people, but we're going to be very threatening to them, far more threatening to them than they ever were with us, and that includes the people that fund them."

"We're going to be…far more threatening to them than they ever were with us," says the President of the United States. A chilling claim since Trump has the weight of the military, law enforcement, the Department of Justice and Republican lawmakers across the country. Oh, and the Supreme Court.

"We're deploying the full might of the federal law enforcement to crack down on antifa and other domestic terrorist organizations," Attorney General Pam Bondi told Reuters.

That's a lot of might, all right. If that sounds scary, it's supposed to. Fascism thrives in a culture of fear. They want people to be too scared to stand up, to protest, to declare themselves anti-fascist.

Meanwhile, antifa has frog costumes.

Seriously, though, the people Trump is declaring terrorists are civilians who strongly oppose the Republican agenda (see Project 2025. Like, they're literally flying through it). A big focus of anti-fascists is ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and how it is operating as a violent extrajudicial secret police force. It turns out, a lot of people in the U.S. do not like this at all. They do not want to see protesters shot, journalists brutalized, pastors hit with pepper balls and children detained.

But Trump and the Republicans want you to believe that the people being victimized are the people doing the kidnapping and brutalizing. ICE agents are so unfairly maligned, Republicans complain.

Boo fuckin' hoo.

No one is free and no one is safe under fascism. Not even the people benefiting from it. And that's why we all have to be anti-fascist. We're on the right side of history.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Michigan Removes All Anti-Trans Provisions From State Budget

Michigan lawmakers' final state budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026, signed into law by Gov. Whitmer on Oct. 7, didn't include any of the 18 anti-trans items that House Republicans had embedded in their initial proposal. The removal of these provisions marks a significant victory for LGBTQ+ advocates who had been closely monitoring the budget negotiations as the Oct. 1 deadline approached.

"This is a big win for our community," said Emme Zanotti, director of advocacy and civic engagement at Equality Michigan Action Network, in a statement following the budget's passage.

The Republican-controlled House had passed a budget containing more than 15 anti-transgender restrictions, setting up a clash with the Democratic-controlled Senate. All of these provisions were removed during conference negotiations between the chambers.

Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks acknowledged the compromises inherent in divided government during her concluding speech, noting that no one got everything they wanted in the bipartisan budget. However, "There are no direct attacks on the trans community here," Zanotti noted. "They were all removed in conference negotiations."

While Zanotti acknowledged "some ugliness" and gaps in the final budget that will impact the broader state and LGBTQ+ community, she emphasized that Democrats and their allies worked to protect trans families from what she called "Republican nonsense."

Review the full budget at michigan.gov.

Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber Endorses Sheffield For Mayor

The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce has endorsed City Council President Mary Sheffield in her campaign for mayor of Detroit.

Kevin Heard, the chamber's founder and executive director, praised Sheffield in the Chamber's endorsement as "an unwavering advocate for the LGBTQ+ community and a champion for inclusive policies that uplift the most marginalized Detroiters."

Sheffield's record includes passing the CROWN Act, which bans discrimination based on hair texture and style, and leading efforts to establish Detroit's Reparations Task Force, which includes LGBTQ+ voices. Her platform emphasizes community justice, housing equity and economic empowerment through programs like the Housing Trust Fund and Home Repair Grants.

"Her commitment to inclusive policy isn't performative; it's principled and persistent," added Christina "Chris" Ware, the chamber's vice chair.

PBS Detroit Special Highlights Michigan's LGBTQ+ History

PBS Detroit's "One Detroit" marked LGBTQ+ History Month with a special segment exploring Michigan's pivotal role in the national movement for LGBTQ+ rights, available to watch at video.detroitpbs.org.

The program traces Michigan's LGBTQ+ history from Detroit's first Pride march in 1972 through today's elected officials. Historian Tim Retzloff discusses his comic book "Come Out! In Detroit," which documents Christopher Street Detroit '72, with an exhibit currently on display at the Detroit Historical Museum.

The segment profiles pioneers including Jim Toy, the first person to publicly come out as gay in Michigan in 1970, and Kathy Kozachenko, who became the first openly LGBTQ+ person elected to public office in the U.S. when she won an Ann Arbor City Council seat in 1974.

State Rep. Jason Morgan notes that Michigan's current LGBTQ+ caucus includes seven legislators, calling it "massive progress for our state."

Make It a (Lesbian) Night at Pronto!

Don't sleep on Pronto! Lounge & Showbar's monthly Lesbian Night, happening every third Friday of the month at the Royal Oak queer mainstay, including Oct. 17. DJ Nouveau brings the beats from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., so grab your crew, throw on your fiercest look and get ready to own the night at this queer celebration. Find more info at prontolounge.com.

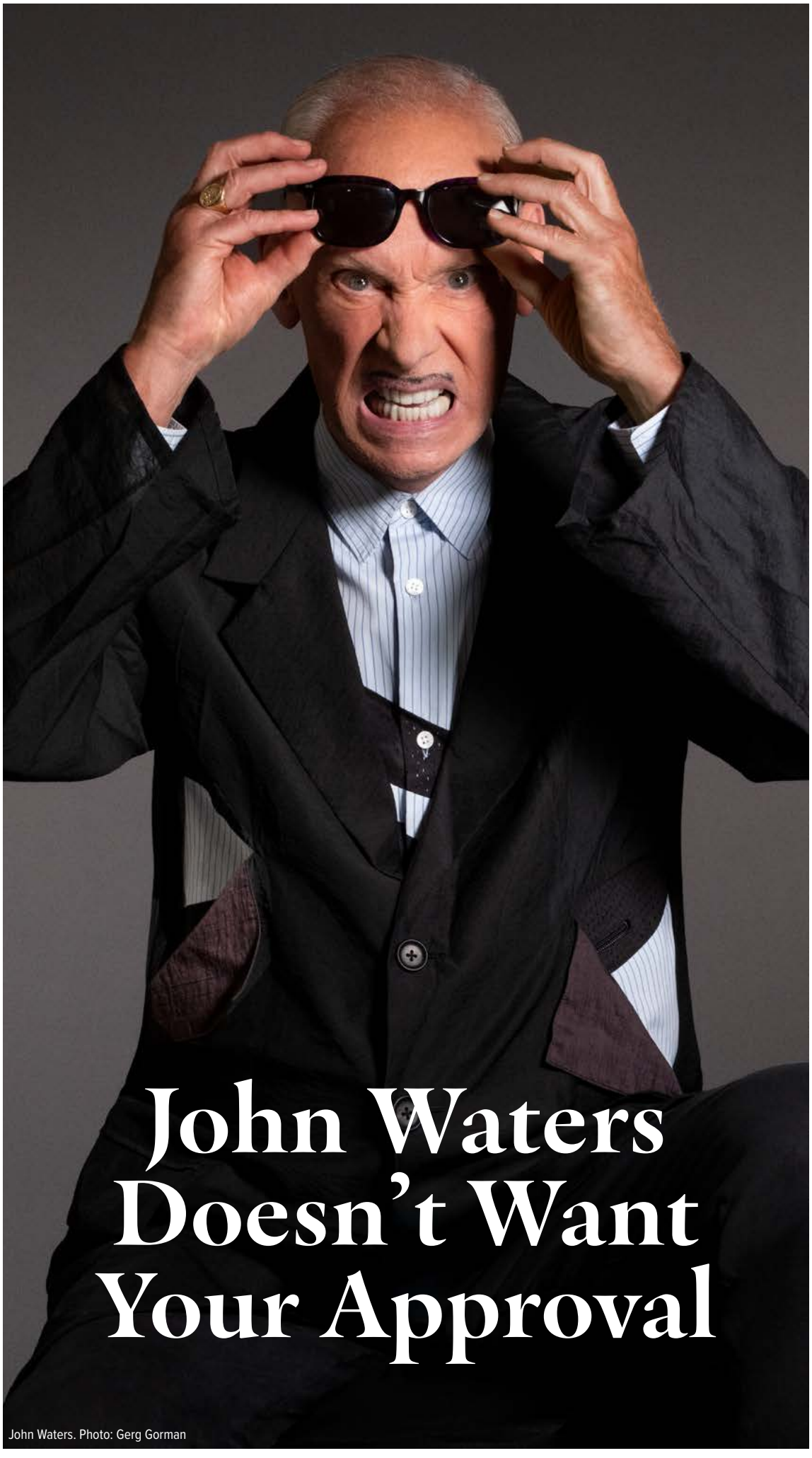
Gear Up to Vote!

While many eyes are on the 2026 election — when Michigan will elect a new governor and attorney general — don't overlook the Nov. 4, 2025 election. Detroit voters will choose a new mayor, several cities have local elections and there are two statewide ballot proposals: one on high-income taxes and another on voter ID. Find your ballot at vote411.org. Early voting begins Oct. 25.

RIP Diane Keaton

Diane Keaton died on Oct. 11 in California at age 79, after a period of sharply declining health. In BTL's 2019 interview with her, Keaton discussed her openness to playing lesbian roles and why gay men love her. "Maybe because they love their mother," she said. "I don't know, but I appreciate it!"

Diane Keaton. Photo: Starfrenzy



John Waters Doesn't Want Your Approval

John Waters. Photo: Gerg Gorman

The legendary filmmaker on how 'humor is terrorism' and making up fake titles to drive book banners crazy

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

John Waters doesn't just embrace contradiction — he lives in it. A filmmaker, writer, visual artist and cultural icon, Waters has spent over half a century gleefully blurring the lines between art and filth, good taste and bad, high camp and low culture. Dubbed the "Pope of Trash" by influential Beat Generation author William S. Burroughs, he's an unapologetic visionary who now aligns himself with what he calls "the extreme middle," a provocateur who mocks liberals as often as conservatives, and a queer icon who tells me he never quite felt at home in gay bars.

Raised Catholic in 1950s Baltimore — the city that became his cinematic muse — Waters began making 8mm films in his teens, later forming a troupe of outsider collaborators known as the Dreamlanders, including the legendary Divine, whose filthy glamour helped reshape drag forever. His early transgressive films like "Pink Flamingos" and "Female Trouble" scandalized audiences and were banned in multiple countries, but over time his work gained cult status — eventually breaking into the mainstream with "Hairspray," which went from midnight movie to Broadway hit.

Waters, now 79, has built a career on going too far — on purpose — and somehow always landing with his audience exactly where he wants them: laughing, uncomfortable, maybe even reconsidering what they believe.

When I spoke with Waters ahead of his new spoken-word show "Going to Extremes" — which comes to Ann Arbor's Michigan Theater on Nov. 22 — we covered everything from "bonus holes" to fake banned books and the politics of humor. He also reflects on what rebellion looks like now, what it meant then and why humor might be our last defense.

I'm excited for you to bring your show to Michigan.

Yeah, that would be one of the first times I'm doing my new show. It's right before my Christmas tour, so I'll be memorizing two at once.

You've been touring for most of this year, right? You don't stop.

My tour never ends. I think the whole year I have 51 shows, including all the Christmas shows that are coming up.

That's wild.

I'm a carny.

Let's start with the obvious: What does the name of this tour, "Going to Extremes," mean for you in 2025?

I rewrite my show that I do once a year. It's a 70-minute stand-up show about everything. This is the newer version of that, and so it's all new material. It's a brand-new spoken-word show where I talk about everything: politics, fashion, crime, the new sexual revolution, everything. But it's going to extremes. I think I've always done that, but it seems like we're in such an extreme time now that I'm going to go even further with humor, hopefully.

When I hear "extreme" now, it's almost impossible not to think "extremists."

Well, I've always been an extremist, but I'm more of a joyous one than the kind of extremists we have on either side of the political chart these days.

I've heard you even call yourself part of a "joyous rebellion," which seems true when I think back to your catalog of films. There's certainly a rebellious nature to those films, but there's also lots of silly joy in them. Why "joyous rebellion"?

Well, because I make fun of the rules that rebels live by, not our parents that we rebelled from. And so I basically make fun of things I like, and I always said: That's why I've been able to do it for half a century and get away with it. And I make fun of gay rules just as much. My audience is even straight people that can't get along with other straight people, and gay people that don't always fit within the gay world. I'm sometimes one of them. I was one of the first ones in a gay bar when I was young thinking, "I might be

queer, but I'm not this."

Have you always felt like a misfit in a misfit community?

Yes, in all communities, but that did not bring me sadness. It gave me a new sense of humor and it gave me a different perspective to look at things through. It wasn't a bad thing, but I recognized it.

I spoke with comedian and drag legend Murray Hill recently. We talked about the disarming nature of humor and how it can be a tool to reach across the aisle.

Definitely. Humor is terrorism — which I think is important, when you embarrass the enemy. The hardest thing? The enemy of many of us is not embarrassed easily. [Laughs.]

Looking back at your career, can you think of a moment when you felt like everything changed for you — either because your work reached a new audience, crossed boundaries or just landed in a way that shifted things professionally?

The night that "Pink Flamingos" finally opened at midnight in New York after it'd been playing other places for two years, and after it opened, the next week I went back and there was a line around the block. My life also changed the night that "Hairspray" opened on Broadway, and when one of my books got a great review in The New York Times. It was on the bestseller list. Those are the three times my life changed the most professionally. Personally, none of your business. [Laughs.]

When do you feel like your comedy reached across the aisle?

It always did. With "Multiple Maniacs," we made fun of hippies, even though my audience was hippies. I make fun of political correctness; my audience is politically correct sometimes. I make fun of the liberals. I'm a complete liberal, but I make fun of liberals. I make fun of the genres of every movie I've ever made. I mean, "Multiple Maniacs" was a gore movie. "Pink Flamingos" was kind of an underground movie. "Female Trouble" was a biopic. "Desperate Living" was a medical movie. "Polyester" was a gimmick movie. "Hairspray" was a dance movie. "Cry-Baby" was a musical. "Serial Mom" was true crime. "Pecker" was a family movie and "A Dirty Shame" was sexploitation and "Cecil B. Demented" was political.

Do you know of any radical Republicans who love "Pink Flamingos"?

Yes.

Tell me more.

No, because definitely I do know Republicans who like my work. I just don't talk about politics with them. I'm friendly with some. But I don't think being Republican makes you… Trump said two funny things in his life when he was in the debate. And no one ever mentioned this when he said to Harris, "Biden hates you." That, to me, was funny.

We're living in a world where extremes are everywhere — on the left, on the right, online, offline.

> *"I say we resist with a limp wrist fist. That's what I made them chant in my last show: 'Resist with a limp wrist fist.'"*

For the first time ever, I'm in the extreme middle. That is what I am right now. That's how I identify.

What extremes do you think we're not paying enough attention to right now?

Well, the extremes of humor are always important, and I think both extreme sides never have a sense of humor about themselves, because they're on a pedestal preaching to people, which is the way to make people vote for the opposite of what you're saying. And I think, in a way, that's what happened in the last election. We made the audience feel stupid. We don't know how to pick our battles, and picking our battles is something that's very, very important. You do the extreme things after you win, not before.

You've been making queer political art for so long.

Queer was a very hurtful word when I was growing up.

Have you come around to the word?

I don't use it much. I'm not against it, but I don't use it much. I have it in "Hairspray," when Penny says, "He's such a queer." That just meant a nerd too. It wasn't a gay thing. But being called a queer was very hurtful, yeah. And it's the same like all bad words: You take it back. I like "ribbon clerk" — an anti-gay term that I find quite endearing. "There's that little ribbon clerk." It's British. It means a snotty little queen that works in the gift wrap department at Harrods. There are some horrible things to say about people, but I don't think anybody's been convicted of a hate crime by calling somebody a ribbon clerk.

We have a new generation of LGBTQ+ artists pushing back right now on everything from transphobia to censorship, and for decades, of course, you've done this in your own way artistically. How does what's happening right now feel familiar to you? Or does this generation's version of queer rebellion look totally different from what you were doing in the '70s in Baltimore?

"We're here, we're not queer, and nobody's used to it." That's really what it is now, because the young kids, they aren't just queer. They're open to everything. You don't know what you're going to get, and they call it a "bonus hole," whatever you get when you take somebody's clothes off. That was a new one to me. It startled me. Then the next year at the camp [Camp John Waters is an adults-only summer camp hosted by Waters in Kent, Connecticut], we sold "bonus hole" badges and it was the first thing we sold out of.

These new extremes do surprise me even, but I think that's very healthy. I am a survivor of the first sexual revolution, but there's definitely a new one that is going on and the trans thing was, except recently, accepted by young people really quickly. "Gay" took centuries. But right now, every trans person's a murderer. That's what they're trying to say now. Gays Against Guns, that organization, I love. Then I saw somebody that had on a T-shirt that said Give Queers Guns, which did make me laugh. I thought, "Well, that's a new one. I haven't seen that one before."

What's your advice to young weirdos and LGBTQ+ artists today who want to push boundaries but maybe are afraid of getting dragged — or worse, doxed?

See **John Waters**, page 19

Russell Tovey, Plainly Speaking

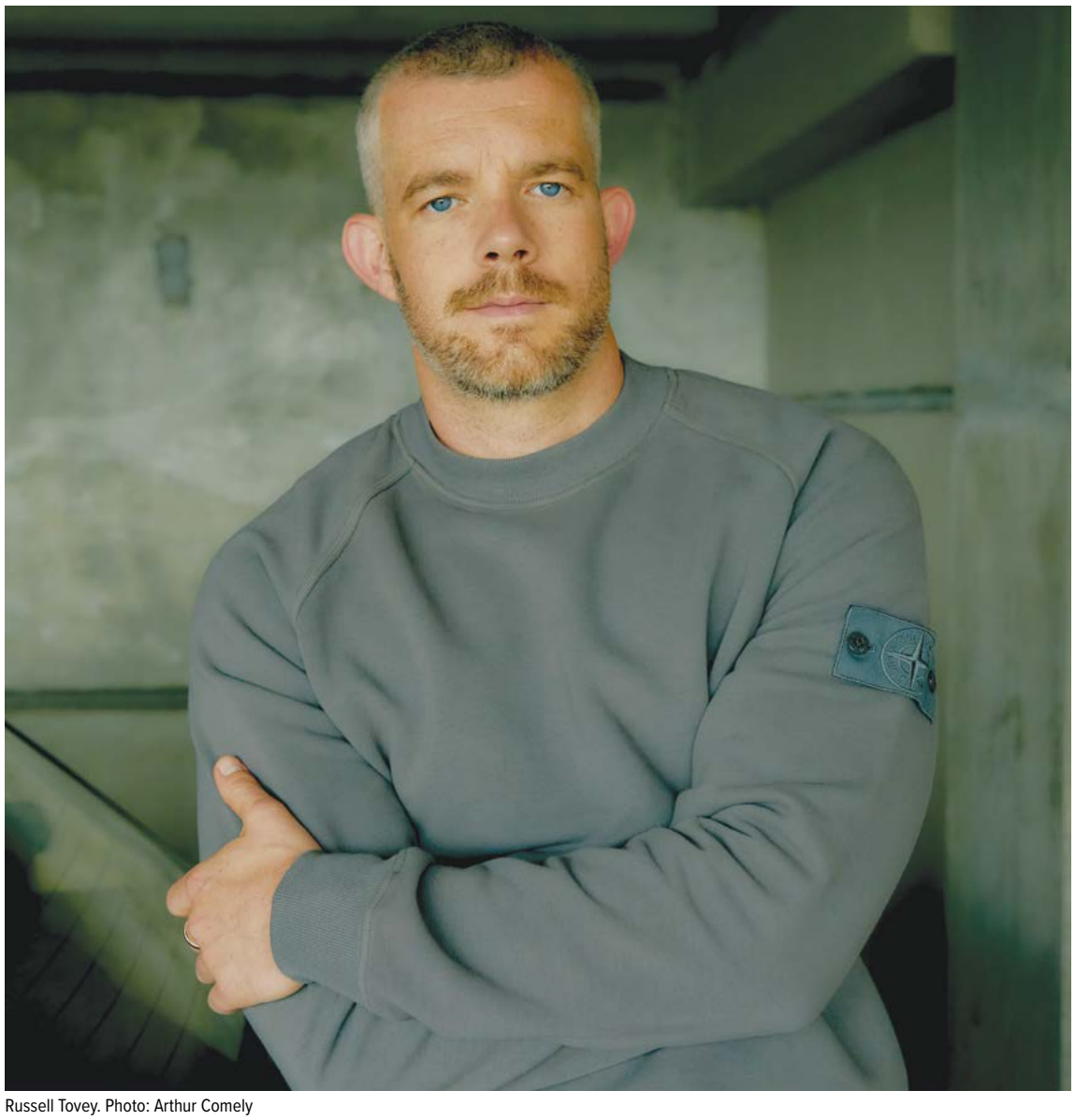
The actor talks candidly about discomfort as a creative force and his most haunting role to date

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Russell Tovey has always possessed a low-key magnetism in his work — one that goes beyond his appearance — whether starring in the queer HBO series "Looking" or the dystopian drama "Years and Years." But in "Plainclothes," his performance as Andrew, an out gay man navigating the dangerous terrain of cruising culture in the late '90s, feels especially lived-in. The film, which premiered at Sundance early this year, is set in 1997 and draws on real accounts of police stings targeting queer men in public spaces. In one such location, a shopping mall bathroom, Andrew locks eyes with Lucas (Tom Blyth), and what begins as a tense, flirtatious encounter spirals into something far riskier — and far more intimate — than either expects.

Andrew is spared. Lucas is a cop, but he's gay too. And in a moment of unexpected solidarity, he lets Andrew go. From there, the two circle each other in a slow-burning, erotically charged connection that walks the line between desire and danger. What unfolds is more than a romance — it's a reckoning.

I caught up with Tovey in late August, just as "Plainclothes" prepared for its wider release. We spoke about the emotional weight of the film, the power of discomfort in storytelling and what it means to tell queer stories in an era where queer lives are increasingly under threat.



Russell Tovey. Photo: Arthur Comely

I had the privilege of seeing "Plainclothes" during Sundance. What was it like to experience the film with a festival audience for the first time?

Well, you used the word privilege, and it was a total privilege to take on this role, to be part of this production, to work with [writer-director] Carmen Emmi on his first feature. I think he's a genius to go to Sundance. The big thing I learned from Sundance is that everybody knew everything that everybody was doing; there's a real film community full of storytellers, and everybody is kind and open and you realize it's because there's no money. It's actually because people are there wanting to tell stories and they want to get it out there as much as possible.

So the atmosphere was electric. And to do something like this, which is very experimental as a filmmaker, just by the lenses he was using, just by the texture of what you're actually looking at, it was so exciting. And to tell a queer story like this in any climate, but in today's climate especially, feels fundamental. So I feel really privileged to be part of this adventure.

I was really drawn to the overall nostalgic aesthetic of the film. That's not something that, as an actor, you can truly experience until you've seen the film.

When we were filming it, when [Emmi] whipped out the camcorder and started doing closeup lens shots and making you walk through the forest and he was following your feet, I was like, I don't know what this guy's doing. And I said, "Is this behind the scenes? What is this?" And he's going, "No, no; it's going to get in there somewhere, just stick with me." And then you watch it and you're like, "Wow."

The vision and the way he works is something that I've taken from filming on "Plainclothes," which I never did before and it seems so simple and obvious: He plays music into every scene. So when we are rehearsing, we have the music in there, and we all know that feeling when you hear soundtrack music — it's a fast hack to emotion. And he was doing that. And now every job I do, I'm always like, "Can we have speakers and play music so that we can all collectively be on the same energy level?" On the next job I did, I did it. And I thought the crew was going to be like, "Oh, please, can you tell Russell not to play music?" But then you see the focus with the music, and it's just so exciting and intoxicating. And Carmen introduced me to that, and that's changed everything.

Given how America has become a more hostile place for LGBTQ+ people since the film premiered at Sundance in January — we're experiencing the actual policing of queer voices — how has this reality changed the way you see this film?

I think proving the existence of queer people is incredibly important and making movies that can universally help people see similarities and not differences. Even though these characters are gay men, I hope that people can see feelings that they've experienced in their lives or are going through — of policing your own emotions, of unrequited love, of the forbidden fruit, of having an affair, of secrets and lies. And it's universal, and this is told through the lens of two gay men struggling at a time when safe spaces are non-existent.

As queer people we're pushed into the margins into dangerous situations because society has not created safety for our existence. This film is set in 1997, and you feel like it should be a historical piece. And then you just look at the world now and if you wait long enough, it moves in circles, and here we are, and this film suddenly feels contemporary. And it's a real message; these characters are real people, they exist. And I hope that people can see the universality in their struggles within themselves, whatever their desires are.

What kind of research went into understanding the history of police entrapping gay men?

I remember George Michael, that was the ultimate entrapment, and that was definitely an inspiration for this film. Carmen's brother is a police officer and he discovered this story about this bathroom that was being targeted and these men were being filmed and then they were having their lives destroyed or threatened. So it's based on a real experience.

I was born in '81. I was sort of coming of age at the time of AIDS and conversations around the legalities of what it is and age of

See **Russell Tovey**, page 20

Elyon Badger on the steps of the Michigan State Capitol building in Lansing. Photo: Brian Wells

Elyon Badger
Continued from page 6

part of the queer community and wrote a Pride Month article in June for the Lansing City Pulse on what that means to him. He wrote, “There’s such a loving acceptance for being different in the LGBTQ+ community, which reminds me that nobody can take my whimsy or my hope, and the world just might need our silly now more than ever.” He feels the Democratic party needs to do more to defend LGBTQ+ rights. He is unafraid to say “Trans rights are human rights,” while many Democrats seem to be running away from the issue.

The candidate has special animus for the Heritage Foundation and its Project 2025. He emphasizes the role of Michigan’s conservative Hillsdale College in planning the initiative, noting that Larry P. Arnn serves as both president of the college and as a trustee of the Heritage Foundation. Badger describes Arnn as a “shadow person” who is “fucking up our America.”

An activist candidate, Badger has appeared at Michigan protests such as No Kings Day and Hands Off Protests both to show his opposition to government policy and to plug his campaign. He attended a Medicaid Town Hall that Tom Barrett declined to attend. He describes the reactions he’s gotten at protests and county Democratic party meetings as “wildly positive.”

To win the Democratic primary, Badger will have to defeat five other candidates in the competitive race. His opponents include Bridget Brink, former ambassador to Ukraine and Slovakia; Michigan State University Professor Dave Cowen; Muhammad Salman Rais, a physician; tenants rights activist and co-founder of the Sunrise Movement William Lawrence; and Matt Maasdam, a former U.S. Navy SEAL and aide to President Obama.

Although lagging far behind his opponents’ fundraising in the primary, Badger feels his social media presence helps him better connect with voters. His Instagram has 13,500 followers. One of his TikToks from last April explaining why “billionaires shouldn’t exist” has nearly three million views.

The National Republican Congressional Committee is taking Badger’s candidacy as seriously as that of his primary opponents. They have included him in attacks on the Democrats’ supposed “war on ICE” and their alleged “Open Borders Agenda.” Potential voters have been much more positive. When campaigning at Pride, protests and other events, he says people see his outfits and run up to ask for a photo. They often ask, “You’re running for Congress like this?”

To a friend and supporter who asked to use the pseudonym “Saguaro,” Badger represents a new kind of political candidate. “A future with Tom Barrett, or any candidate satisfied with the status quo, is one not needed to fix this country. We need someone like Elyon who truly has the heart required to change things for the better.”

Saguaro is particularly impressed by Badger’s support for a Medicare for All-style single payer healthcare program. “He believes strongly in the need for all people to have free access to the healthcare that they so desperately need.”

Another supporter, Nicholas Adams, echoes Saguaro’s sentiments. “I strongly believe Elyon is the seed of change we need in the moldy political world. The country needs a new face and somebody willing to be progressive.” Adams is also strongly in favor of the candidate’s plan for healthcare. “How are we expected to work when we are constantly in fear of going bankrupt from getting sick, injured or even getting our teeth cleaned?”

The Financial Times recently reported that Americans are seeing the highest cost increases for healthcare in 15 years, making the issue likely important to voters in 2026.

Elyon Badger’s candidacy is certainly a long shot. He will not only have to defeat his well-funded primary opponents, but also an incumbent in a district that spans diverse political territory. Yet, in politics strange things happen and anything is possible.

It might be time for a candidate who literally “has some real teeth” to sit on Capitol Hill. “People want to see something different in Congress, and as silly as I may be, I’m deadly serious when it comes to the policies I want to enact,” he concludes. “I think that we need to mix a little bit of the absurdism with the seriousness, because these are deeply serious yet unserious times.”

10 Queerly Perfect Halloween Costumes for 2025

This year, try finding creative inspiration in pop culture icons and political satire

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Halloween 2025 is here, and whether you're handing out treats (or tricks) or hitting the "Queer Christmas" party circuit, we're offering costume inspiration that blends queer culture, pop culture and a healthy dose of political awareness.

1. Chappell Roan (Any Era)

For the Midwest Princess in all of us

Is there anyone more perfect for a Michigan queer Halloween costume than our very own Midwest Princess? Go full "Pink Pony Club" with a cowgirl lewk, channel "Hot to Go!" vibes with a cheerleader outfit and spelling hands at the ready, or embrace the full drag-inspired glamour of her festival looks. After her Grammy win for new artist, she's cemented her place as our queer icon. Bonus points if you can nail that signature eye makeup.

2. Doechii's Alligator Era

For bisexual hip-hop heads with theater kid energy

Doechii. Photo: Instagram/ @doechii

After making history as only the third Black woman to win best rap album at the 2025 Grammys, bisexual rapper Doechii is the moment. Channel her "Alligator Bites Never Heal" aesthetic with bold styling that mixes jazz, R&B and theatrical flair. Think dramatic makeup, confident swagger and raw unfiltered energy that celebrates her queerness without apology — and don't forget to cart around a plush alligator for max effect!

3. Billie Eilish's Latest Era

For the queer artists redefining pop music

Billie continues to push boundaries and be unapologetically herself in 2025. Channel her latest aesthetic with oversized fits, bold colors and that signature "I don't care what you think" energy. As one of the most visible young queer women in pop music, she's shown a generation that you don't have to fit into anyone's box.

4. Nancy Mace, Bathroom Monitor

For those who appreciate absurdist political theater

South Carolina Rep. Nancy Mace spent significant energy in late 2024 and into 2025 obsessing over bathroom access at the Capitol, specifically targeting Rep. Sarah McBride, the first openly transgender member of Congress. Go as the self-appointed bathroom monitor with business attire, a clipboard, maybe a hall pass on a lanyard and a sign reading "Biological Sex Inspector." Bonus points for carrying a bullhorn — she actually used one during protests.

5. Josh Schriver's 'Make Gay Marriage Illegal Again' Campaign

For Michigan queers with a dark sense of humor

Michigan's own Josh Schriver has spent 2024 and 2025 introducing resolutions to overturn marriage equality, calling for bans on birth control and gender-affirming care, and generally trying to drag us back to the dark ages. Go as his failed resolution tour with business attire and a poster board reading "HR 28: Resolution to Mind My Own Business (FAILED)." Turn this into a couple's costume — your friend or partner can go as Sen. Jeremy Moss. All that person has to do is take the questions Schriver wouldn't at his own press conference and laugh at his buffoonish attempts to strip away our rights.

6. Lesbian Period Drama Protagonist

For the cottage-core romantics and history buffs

Pick your era and your inspiration: Anne Lister from "Gentleman Jack" in her dapper 1800s menswear? A player from "A League of Their Own" in 1940s baseball glory? Emily Dickinson and Sue Gilbert in their real-life forbidden Victorian romance? The lesbian period drama continues its renaissance,, reminding us that queer people have always existed throughout history. Channel your inner repressed-but-smoldering energy, carry around a letter you're "not supposed to send" and gaze longingly at your also-costumed friend across the room. This works whether you're referencing a specific film or just the general vibe of "what if corsets but make it gay."

7. Troye Sivan on Tour

For the queers who aren't afraid to show some skin

The shortest shorts you can find, a crop top and the energy of an Australian pop star who said gym bodies are for sharing. Troye's unapologetically queer and sexual performances have been a celebration of gay desire and joy. Add some body glitter, perfect your choreography and prepare for a night of dancing. This costume requires minimal clothing but maximum commitment.

8. Lady Gaga's Grammy Speech Energy

For activists who believe pop music can change the world

Channel Gaga's powerful 2025 Grammy moment when she declared, "Trans people deserve love," in front of millions of viewers. In a year when trans rights have been under constant attack, Gaga used her platform to remind the world that we see you, we love you and pop music is for everyone. Dress in one of her iconic looks, carry a sign with her quote and embody that fierce advocacy energy.

9. Pick Your 'Drag Race' Fave

For the queens who know their herstory

Go as your favorite queen from any season of "RuPaul's Drag Race." Your choice probably says something about your personality or life choices, but we aren't here to judge — that's up to RuPaul. Whether you're serving glamazon realness, camp excellence or comedy gold, commit to the bit. Michigan's Orion Story is excellent inspo, but whoever you channel, perfect your death drop, practice your reading skills and remember: If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else? Shantay, you stay.

10. Whatever Makes Your Inner Child Happy

For those of us who need some gentle joy right now

Look, 2025 has been a lot. Between political battles and daily stress, sometimes the most radical act is letting yourself be purely, sweetly happy. Go as your favorite childhood Halloween costume or a character from the video game you've been using to decompress. Personally, I'm torn between making my 4-year-old niece happy by going as Gabby from toddler-TV's "Gabby's Dollhouse" or as my purple-haired Stardew Valley wife, Abigail. There's something surprisingly healing about choosing joy over irony.

Chappell Roan. Photo: Pooneh Ghana for Lollapalooza 2024

‹ John Waters
Continued from page 15

Well, I think they're going to drop a net on all of us. That's what I say in the press release. They're coming to take us away. I say we resist with a limp wrist fist. That's what I made them chant in my last show: "Resist with a limp wrist fist."

What do you remember from the early days of your own rebellion on anti-gay rhetoric?

First thing I wanted to be was a beatnik. Beatniks were gay probably because of Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky. Then I wanted to be a hippie and there were gay hippies, and I went to the first gay marches and everything, and so there was always the punks. I love gay punks still. They were downlow a lot, but so there were always gays. In whatever the rebellion movement was, there were gay hippies, like The Cockettes. I mean, bohemia is what I liked. I don't care what you do in bed.

Does the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric now feel different than it did when you were experiencing it for the first time?

Well, people aren't questioning it. To me, Trump's never going to get rid of drag. And I hear Republicans saying to their trans children, "Can't you just be gay?"

So it's a whole new thing. But Trump, I don't know. He'll never get rid of gay marriage. I don't believe that. Too many people have done it. It's not going to go back. I could be wrong. And drag… RuPaul deserves great credit for making drag completely mainstream. I mean that as a compliment. When I was young, Milton Berle was in drag; that was the first drag queen I ever saw. So I think you're not going to get rid of drag or gay marriage. But we got to resist with a limp wrist fist if we do. Also, I never understood why gay people want to get married. Haven't they heard of gay alimony?

You've never been interested in getting married then?

I'm not, but other people certainly should be allowed to. I hated all weddings I've ever been to no matter who's getting married. I don't like the ritual of it.

What do you think Divine, who you worked with in many of your films, would think of these TikTok drag queens and the fact that drag is now such a political battleground?

I think Divine would be thrilled [by them]. Divine changed drag. You can see his influence on every drag queen that's popular today. When I was young, drag queens were square. They wanted to be Miss America. Now every drag queen has an edge, and I think Divine has a lot to do with that.

Do you see any kind of connection between today's drag and book bans and the way that your work used to be treated as "filthy"?

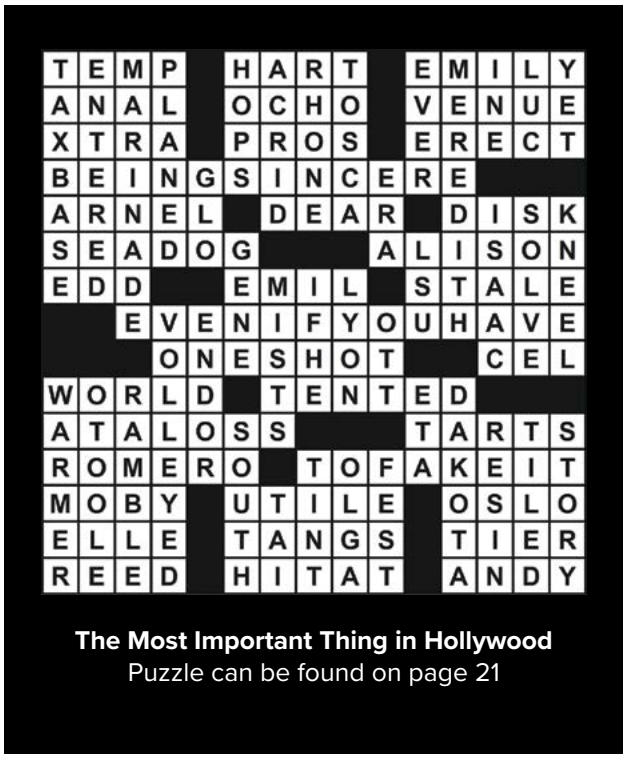
Well, I don't want to give away a lot, but basically I want to make up fake books and sneak them in the library with titles that'll really make them go crazy.

What's one thing you'll never stop defending no matter how unpopular it gets?

The "Final Destination" movies. I love every one of them.

Do you ever stop and look back and think, "I can't believe that I got away with all of this"?

Well, I do when "Pink Flamingos" is playing on Turner Classics. How could that possibly happen?



The Most Important Thing in Hollywood
Puzzle can be found on page 21

Tom Blyth and Russell Tovey in "Plainclothes." Courtesy photo

Russell Tovey

Continued from page 16

consent. And you feel like now all the work's been done, but all the work has just been undone. It's been reversed and it's at risk. And as a community, we're under threat and there are people within the community that are the most marginalized people on the planet, and we have responsibilities as a community. And because of inherited trauma and the work that people have done to allow us to be who we are today, to be a beacon of hope and support our community members and tell these stories and prove our existence and not go quiet and not disappear, which is what people want. And that's not going to happen.

Is this all making you feel even more emboldened to tell queer stories?

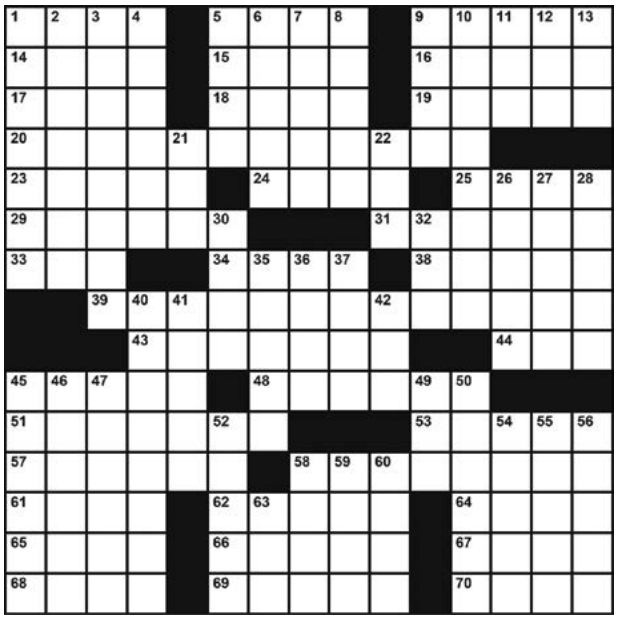
Even more so to be more visible than ever and to be more queer than ever, and to champion and get behind those stories and whatever medium it is, because if it appears in art, then you can't deny its existence. And if you dramatize something, it is the quickest way for people to connect emotionally and understand. And we've seen it time and time again. If you look at "Adolescence," which has had this massive kind of snowball effect of understanding, that is a family that is fictionalized, but that is the reality of incel culture, and that is the reality of the manosphere, that we're all sort of in denial that is there. And this TV show does it, and suddenly millions and millions and millions people have watched it, and parents and teachers and kids can now see something that goes, "This is the dangers of what is happening, and this is how you can quickly understand it, because you're not going to get it from reading an article." You have to penetrate people's minds and hearts and souls, and the way you do that is art. And the way you do that is film. And I hope that "Plainclothes" will have this universal connection for people to understand and see the existence and the plight of these characters and this community.

In "Plainclothes," Andrew initially comes across as a confident, more dominant figure — he has this cruising persona that feels very controlled and perfected. But as the story unfolds, especially with the reveal that Lucas is a cop, there's a clear and sudden power shift. How did you approach playing those shifts in power and vulnerability within Andrew?

I talked about this earlier with Tom — that there is a power dynamic. Andrew's an older man; he's more experienced. It's Lucas' first time. Then, as soon as Lucas reveals he's a cop, the power shift has gone completely upside down. That changes everything. But prior to that moment, my character has no idea what he does, that he's a cop. And I love the fact that as characters, the dance shifts and we're into different choreography at that point. And that's wonderful. I feel like Andrew has his cruising persona. It's safety. He's perfected it. This is something that he does. But Lucas connects with him on a level which he hasn't connected with anyone for many, many years, and it's terrifying for him and intoxicating, and that's so wonderful to play.

I'd like to shift to "Years and Years," since we are, in many ways, living that show in the U.S. It's very eerily prescient. But thinking about it alongside "Plainclothes," I was struck by how both might leave viewers feeling unsettled in a way that challenges their politics. What do you think of discomfort as a storytelling tool?

Life is uncomfortable right now. We are all paralyzed and fatigued and scared and traumatized, and at a loss for words. Art is the voice, the catalyst, the conduit to discovery, to understanding, to connectivity. That's what art does. And I feel like we need it more than ever. Being uncomfortable pushes you to activate and make change. And having the opportunity to understand how you can be better or help or amplify or encourage is so important because of so many topics. But the community needs amplification and needs allies so much more than ever. So being uncomfortable is a positive thing if you make the decision to help.



The Most Important Thing in Hollywood

Across

1 Office part-timer
5 "The Bridge' poet Crane
9 Poet Dickinson
14 Of a rear entrance
15 Eight for Lorca
16 Gateway Center Arena for the Atlanta Dream
17 Pink Triangle Press publication
18 Brittney Griner and Caitlin Clark
19 With blood rushing to the head
20 Start of the most important thing in Hollywood, per 57-Across
23 Synthetic fiber brand
24 What you may call Abby
25 Common UFO shape
29 Pirate
31 "Dykes to Watch Out For" cartoonist Bechdel
33 Teaching deg.
34 "Casablanca" croupier
38 Cliche-ridden
39 More of the quote
43 Like some fouls in the WNBA
44 "Beauty and the Beast" film frame
45 Florida's Disney ___
48 Like the big top
51 How sale goods may be sold
53 Fruit desserts
57 Cesar, source of this puzzle's quote
58 End of the quote
61 Melville's Dick
62 Scrabble companion of Q
64 City where Dick Button won gold
65 Woods of "Legally Blonde"
66 Sharp tastes
67 Stadium level
68 Robert of "The Brady Bunch"
69 Billy Bean did this to balls
70 "Blowjob" filmer Warhol

Down

1 Government funders
2 Penetrated
3 Flavor developer for Melissa King
4 Made smooth with a tool.
5 Commuter plane trips
6 Bitterly pungent
7 River of Cocteau's country
8 Puccini opera
9 "If ___ I Would Leave You"
10 "The Music Man" composer Willson
11 Suffix with Paul
12 Second name in sci-fi
13 Nevertheless
21 Shine, in ad-speak
22 It didn't get ratified
26 Hayes of "South Park"
27 Get to the bottom of
28 Get on your knees
30 Cause of homosexuality, some say
32 Tigers of the NCAA
35 Producers of rainbows
36 "Mame" song "___ Walked Into My Life"
37 Daughters of Bilitis co-founder Phyllis
40 Warmed up like Mauresmo
41 Forest moon in "Return of the Jedi"
42 Baseball great Mel
45 Place to keep your buns
46 Peter who played Lawrence
47 Don't go straight
49 Sked info
50 Ram alternative
52 "___ Park"
54 Woody secretion
55 Like some baths
56 The West Side has one
58 Windshield feature
59 Saint or Nuryev's land
60 Ending with Pride
63 Randy's skating partner

See p. 19 for answers

Rudy Serra
Continued from page 8

stings continued, the arrests mounted and gay men kept pleading guilty to avoid publicity — exactly what made the operations so effective at terrorizing a community.

Born into an era when homosexuality was both criminalized and pathologized, Serra built his career on the principle that the state has no business regulating consensual adult sexuality. He attended law school and became a social worker, served on Detroit's Department of Human Rights and joined the State Bar of Michigan's Open Justice Commission. His appointment to the bench came during a period when LGBTQ+ legal victories — particularly around marriage equality — made some community members complacent about ongoing discrimination.

"Now that we have marriage equality, I think that a lot of members of the community are under the mistaken impression that we can do whatever we want to in the privacy of our bedroom," Serra said. "And unfortunately, that's not true."

"I remember years ago that a lot of people weren't necessarily comfortable talking publicly about the sexual proclivities or behavior of gay people," Kaplan recalled. "But Rudy was courageous to call it out for what it is and to say, 'This is not a bad thing.' A lot of people have whatever their sexual likes or dislikes, but it's two consenting adults in the privacy of their home."

Outdated laws remain on Michigan's books, statutes prohibiting "gross indecency" and the "abominable and detestable crime against nature," which includes anal sex. Though courts have narrowed their application and Wayne County Circuit Court ruled them unconstitutional for private consensual acts in the 1988 case MOHR v. Kelley, prosecutors continue wielding them as threats. When faced with felony charges, defendants often accept misdemeanor pleas — building records that can lead to sex offender registration after multiple convictions.

The digital age has provided new hunting grounds. In August 2021, Michigan State Police arrested Evan Lakatos after an undercover officer posing as a 15-year-old boy on Grindr engaged him in conversation. The profile used photos of an adult man who Lakatos said appeared to be in his 20s or 30s. Lakatos, who had no prior record and didn't meet the supposed minor, was convicted and served 71 days in jail, was placed on Michigan's sex offender registry and lost his longtime management position. His case is now under appeal with the State Appellate Defender Office, with attorneys arguing the operation constituted entrapment and that his trial counsel was ineffective for failing to raise that defense.

"They had a big press conference and said, 'Oh, you know, we got this guy off the streets,'" Serra noted about the Lakatos case. "But then when you really read the facts of the case, this clearly was not a predator."

Since June, New York police have arrested more than 200 men in what they called a crackdown on "lewd behavior" at Penn Station. According to PinkNews, the operation has specifically targeted areas known for gay cruising, with officers conducting surveillance and making arrests for consensual activity between adults.

Selective enforcement remains blatant. Police don't conduct similar operations targeting heterosexual hookup spots or use undercover officers in straight bars. Comments that a woman could make freely in a singles bar will get a gay man hauled to jail, Serra noted.

"Even straight married couples could be victimized by these statutes," Serra said, referring to Michigan's gross indecency laws that technically apply to private consensual sex regardless of sexual orientation. But in practice, only gay men face arrest.

The human cost extends beyond individual defendants. Serra has watched clients lose jobs, marriages and hope. Some have died by suicide. Others plead guilty simply to end the publicity, forfeiting their chance to challenge unconstitutional practices in court.

"Usually they're very afraid of what's going to happen," Serra said. "They don't want to have anything public occur. And so they will plead guilty to something just so the media doesn't get wind of it."

At an age when he'd hoped to be "home in my recliner," Serra continues taking court appointments and family law cases because Social Security doesn't cover the bills. He'd like to update his 1999 report but lacks organizational support. Advocacy organizations don't seem to be exploring these police stings with the same focus as groups did in earlier decades.

Still, Serra remains available to anyone caught in a police sting. "If someone came to me with a criminal charge that involved an undercover police operation, I certainly would not tell them I'm not interested and hang up the phone," he said. "I would want to know more about what had happened and see if taking action would be helpful."

For Serra, the work isn't abstract. It's about human dignity and the right to exist without state harassment. Hooking up isn't illegal. Consensual sex between adults isn't illegal. But as long as police can pose as interested partners and prosecutors can threaten felony charges, gay men remain vulnerable in ways their heterosexual counterparts never experience.

"The desire to effectuate one's animus against homosexuals can never be a legitimate governmental purpose," Serra said, quoting the 1997 federal case Stemler v. City of Florence. "A state action based upon that animus alone violates the equal protection clause."

Twenty-five years after documenting Michigan's "Bag a Fag" operations, Rudy Serra is still waiting for that principle to be fully enforced.

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