AG Nessel to Reconsider Predecessor’s Opinion on LGBTQ Protections

Mark LaChey Elected First Vice Chair of Michigan Democratic Party

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A Part-Time Burlesque Dancer Puts on the Shows of His Dreams

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PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP
20222 Farmington Rd., Livonia, Michigan 48152
Phone 734.293.7200
PUBLISHERS
Susan Horowitz & Jan Stevenson
MEMBER OF
Michigan Press Association
National LGBT Media Association
National Gay & Lesbian Chamber
Q Syndicate

EDITORIAL
Editor in Chief
Susan Horowitz, 734.293.7200 x 102
susanhorowitz@pridesource.com
Entertainment Editor
Chris Azzopardi, 734.293.7200 x 106
chrisazzopardi@pridesource.com
Feature News Editor
Kate Opalewski, 734.293.7200 x 108
kate@pridesource.com
Editorial Assistant
Eve Kucharski, 734.293.7200 x 105
ev@pridesource.com

News & Feature Writers
Emell Derra Adolphus, Michelle Brown, Ellen Knoppow, Jason Michael, Drew Howard, Jonathan Thurston

CREATIVE
Webmaster & MIS Director
Kevin Bryant, kevinbryant@pridesource.com
Columnists
Charles Alexander, Michelle E. Brown, Mikey Fox, D’Anne Witkowski, Gwendolyn Ann Smith
Cartoonists
Paul Berg, Dave Broussard

Contributing Photographers
Andrew Patter, Alexander Godin, Andrew Cohen

ADVERTISING & SALES
Director of Sales
Jan Stevenson, 734.293.7200 x 101
jan@pridesource.com
Sales Representatives
Ann Cox, 734.293.7200 x 103
anncox@pridesource.com
Donelle Kremke, 734.293.7200 x 104
donelle@pridesource.com
National Advertising Representative
Rivendell Media, 212.242.6863

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February 7, 2019 | BTL
AG Nessel to Reconsider Predecessor’s Opinion on LGBTQ Protections

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

While standing in front of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission at Cadillac Place in Detroit on Friday, Feb. 1, Attorney General Dana Nessel made it clear that discrimination against the LGBTQ community does occur on a daily basis in the state of Michigan.

Nessel detailed what she calls an “ugly reality” with several examples:

• Same-sex moms Krista Contreras and her wife Jami Contreras, were turned away by a pediatrician in Roseville.
• Aimee Stephens was fired from her job at R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes in Garden City when she came out as transgender.
• Same-sex couple Elizabeth Gardiner and Stephanie Citron of Royal Oak were denied health insurance benefits.

Transgender women – Jessica Storm, Gregory Daniels, Norman Williams, Amber Monroe and Kelly Stough - were murdered in Highland Park after being forced to work as prostitutes because, Nessel said, “it’s next to impossible for many trans women to find gainful employment so they have no other means to feed themselves or pay for shelter than work on the streets.”

After listing those instances of direct homophobia, Nessel said it’s because of LGBTQ discrimination like this that she “welcomes the opportunity” to reevaluate her predecessor’s formal opinion that could expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, housing and real estate as well as use of public accommodations and public service.

During the meeting, in a 6-0 vote, the commission approved a resolution directing the Michigan Department of Civil Rights to send a letter to Nessel asking her to reconsider AG Opinion 7305.

“My response without equivocation is that I believe it is incumbent upon me as attorney general of this great state to do just that,” she said. “Justice demands no less.”

History of the Opinion

In July 2017, Equality Michigan and 37 other LGBTQ organizations first petitioned the commission to clarify ELCRA and issue an interpretive statement that laws prohibiting sex discrimination also prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

During a September 2017 commission meeting, following more than two hours of public comment on both sides of the issue, the commission’s legal counsel, Assistant Attorney General Ron Robinson, under former Attorney General Bill Schuette, informed the commission that it does not have the legal right to issue an interpretive statement on the issue, and that it is the role of the legislature to address any changes in law.

“And should the commission issue a ruling contrary to the attorney general, the commission would give up its governmental immunity and would be subject to a lawsuit,” he said at the time.

Despite this intervention, the commission became the first of its kind in the nation in May 2018 to issue the interpretive statement.

But in July 2018, Schuette authored an opinion which said “Michigan’s Constitution entrusts the legislature, and not executive agencies or commissions, with the authority to change, extend or narrow statutes.”

Schuette said that state law “prohibits discrimination based on sex but does not cover distinctions based on sexual orientation or gender identity ... The commission’s ruling is invalid.”

The commission ignored Schuette’s opinion and directed the MDCR to accept, review and investigate complaints of discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“The Michigan Civil Rights Commission is an independent, constitutionally created and established body,” said Agustin Arbulo, director of the MDCR, in a previous statement.

“The commission is not bound by the opinion of the attorney general. The only recourse is for the courts to determine if issuing the interpretive statement was within the scope of the commission’s authority, and that is the appropriate venue for resolving this issue. Until that time, the department will continue to carry out the directive of the commission.”

MDCR is currently investigating 13 complaints. Of those under investigation, five are related to claims of discrimination based on gender identity, and eight are related to claims of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Nessel told the commission that Schuette’s opinion “runs in direct conflict with years of legal jurisprudence from federal circuit courts from around the nation, including ours, the sixth circuit court of appeals.”

Robinson, who was appointed in January 2019 as the civil rights and civil litigation practice manager in the new attorney general’s office, spoke to his previous position during Friday’s meeting.

“That was the opinion of the old administration,” he said. “There’s a new sheriff in town.”

In fact, Robinson said he has received “reassurance” from Nessel who “said she knows I was in a difficult position at the time ... I’m very excited about the new attorney general and the faith that she has in me.”

Nessel’s Personal Response

Nessel, a Democrat, said she felt it was important to personally address the commission after Republican House Speaker Lee Chatfield appeared for an interview on Off the Record on Friday, Jan. 25. He indicated that even if there were enough votes in the chamber for passage, he would not allow a vote to amend ELCRA to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

“Personally, I don’t believe people should be discriminated against. But at the same time, I’m never going to endorse a law or allow a bill to come for a vote that I believe infringes on someone’s ability to exercise their sincerely held religious beliefs,”

Advocates hope to expand ELCRA under Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who signed an executive directive on Jan. 7 to strengthen LGBTQ protections. But, according to a Detroit News report, GOP Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey said “that Democratic efforts to expand ELCRA to include LGBTQ protections would likely be ‘heavily contested’ in a GOP-led legislature.”

“Majority Leader Shirkey is out of touch with popular opinion, as the majority of Michiganders believe that LGBTQ people deserve to be treated with the same fairness and dignity as everyone else in Michigan,” said Erin Knott, interim executive director of EQMI. “Equality Michigan stands ready to build bipartisan support around pro-LGBTQ legislation, and is working in coalition with the business community, faith leaders, community member and allies to finally, at long last, expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to make it fully inclusive for all Michiganders.”

In response to Chatfield, Nessel said, “People who choose to demean others or deny them employment, housing, educational opportunities, medical treatment or goods and services simply because of that person’s sexual orientation or gender identity are not religious heroes, they are bigots.”

Chatfield said on the show, “If people today in Michigan were being discriminated against on a daily basis because of their sexual orientation, it would be statewide news, and we all know it.”

To that, Nessel responded, “I believe you are a kind man, a good man, a well-intentioned man, but Mr. Speaker, what you don’t know about discrimination against the LGBTQ community could fill not only the pages of a book, but that of an entire library.”

Nessel said it is her obligation to inform Chatfield that there are hundreds of thousands of people who identify as LGBTQ in this state, and many of them have experienced discrimination at some point in their life.

“Discrimination which would be greatly reduced or many times eliminated altogether were it just made illegal to engage in that practice in the first place,” she said, adding that states which enact policies have demonstrated to improve productivity rates, reduce turnover, enhance profitability and advance recruitment for businesses.


“These states also see additional benefits including a reduction in suicide attempts by LGBTQ youth, and as someone who spent more time in my youth than I care to remember thinking of ways to end my life instead of dreaming about what I would one day do with my life, I can tell you this, your words, your rhetoric matter and I would be remiss in my obligations both as this state’s attorney general as well as the first openly gay statewide elected official if I failed to advise you of such,” Nessel said.

The next Michigan Civil Rights Commission meeting is scheduled for March 25. For more information, visit michigan.gov/mdcr.
Newly elected leaders of the LGBTQ & Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party. Roland Leggett, Chair, and Vice Chairs, Susan Grettenberger, Grace Wojcik and Jacob Johnson.

Mark LaChey Elected First Vice Chair of Michigan Democratic Party, Roland Leggett Chair of LGBT & Allies Caucus

BY ELLEN KNOPOW

One day after the state emerged from a record-breaking cold snap, nearly 3,000 Democratic Michiganders gathered for the Michigan Democratic Party Spring Convention at Cobo Center in Detroit. There, credentialed delegates were tasked with electing MDP leadership as well as leadership for constituency caucuses and congressional districts.

The mood of the day-long event was largely celebratory in light of the gains made in the recent midterm elections; however, as 2020 looms, the crowd was advised to remain vigilant. As one elected official quipped, “put the champagne back in the refrigerator.”

The LGBT & Allies Caucus opened with words from Vice Chair Mark LaChey, who was not seeking re-election to that post. Later, he would be elected first vice chair of the Michigan Democratic Party and would become the first openly gay Michigander to serve on the Democratic National Committee.

“It’s gratifying that we are the force in Michigan Democratic politics, and that’s a thank-you to you for showing up, being queer, making sure people know we’re queer; that we vote, that we write checks, that we knock doors and that we are who we are,” LaChey said. “And we have candidates we’ve elected — people who are pro-equality, starting with Gretchen Whitmer, all the way down.”

LaChey said that the pro-LGBTQ executive order signed by Gov. Whitmer on her second day in office didn’t happen in a vacuum. In politics today, he said, one can’t count on people to do what’s right just because it’s right.

“It happens because we’re loud, we’re proud and we make sure people know that we’re in their faces,” he said.

LaChey went on to encourage more LGBTQ Democrats to run for office in 2020. In terms of LGBTQ representation in the state legislature, Michigan has gone from zero to three in just a few years — Tim Sneller and Jon Hoadley in the state House, Jeremy Moss in the state Senate — but the caucus needs to be cognizant of term limits.

“So if you are interested, talk to somebody, make yourself known. We have support,” he said.

Next on the agenda was the election of a new chair and three vice chairs of the caucus. Roland Leggett detailed his experience and, as LaChey had, the power of this group.

“One of the things that has really had the greatest impact for me in this role is the opportunity that we have had to make real change happen for LGBTQ Michiganders,” said Leggett, speaking of his tenure as vice chair.

Continued on next page

Newly elected first Vice Chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, Mark LaChey, with newly elected Chair of the LGBTQ and Allied Caucus Roland Leggit.
vice chair to first, Dillon called him “not only a tireless advocate for folks in the LGBT community, but for all people in Michigan,” further describing him as “proven, tested, respected at the state and the national level.”

In his new role, LaChey will serve on the Democratic National Committee. After winning his election, LaChey said he was “very excited and honored to be the first LGBT Michigander to serve” on the DNC.

“I will do my best to represent the LGBT community, members of the Michigan Democratic Party as well as Democrats across the state of Michigan,” he said. “I was gratified and honored to be asked to serve with Lavora Barnes … and excited to be working with Fay Beydoun, our new second vice chair. I think the three of us, along with the thousands of others who comprise the Michigan Democratic Party, will make a great team going forward as we head into 2020.”

Attending the convention was Steve Hanses, a transgender woman who is retired and lives in Royal Oak. Hanses worked as a field organizer during the 2018 coordinated campaign, and said she was hopeful about the work that the LGBT & Allies Caucus is doing and the future of the MDP in general.

“In a packed house, we came and voted for the future of the Democratic Party in Michigan,” Hanses said. “It gives me good hope to know that we’re putting good candidates out there and we’re gonna work hard for the next two years.”

Brandon Dillon called Mark LaChey “not only a tireless advocate for folks in the LGBT community, but for all people in Michigan,” further describing him as “proven, tested, respected at the state and the national level.”

Affirmations, Transcend the Binary Host Peer-Led Support, Education, Navigation Services

BY BTL STAFF

For many in the nonbinary and gender non-conforming community it can be difficult to navigate a binary-focused world. Transcend the Binary — an organization dedicated to “empowering our trans/gender non-conforming community with skill-building, tools, navigation services, planning and support” — has partnered with the Affirmations LGBTQ community center to help provide support to people who may be struggling to know their identity. Offered regularly throughout the month, the two Ferndale-based organizations are providing peer-led meetings that can help interested parties find:

- Peer Counseling
- Safe space for families to ask and have their questions answered
- Consults available with doctors, pharmacists
- Skill-building and peer support
- Name change
- Gender marker change
- Transition Planning
- Referral Navigation

“"All of our services are free for our community,” wrote event organizers on Facebook. “We blend the talents of social workers, therapists, pharmacists, physician, peer advocates, certified fitness instructors and many more to provide you the best peer-led services available.”

The next available event is on Wednesday, Feb. 13 at 11 a.m. hosted at W. 290 W. 9 Mile Road in Ferndale.

Find out more about scheduling appointments and finding resources by emailing consults@transcendthebinary.org to connect with Intake Coordinator Morgan. For more information visit transcendthebinary.org/our-team.


**Ferndale’s SheHive Hosts Release Meditation Feb. 9**

**BY BTL STAFF**

Meditation is a millennia-old practice that has been adopted by people from cultures around the world. Its longevity is likely due to the fact that it provides myriad health benefits to those who regularly practice it. In fact, Forbes even released an article citing studies that document its ability to provide benefits like reducing anxiety, its ability to prevent and treat depression and diminish age and racial bias among those who regularly meditate. On Saturday, Feb. 9, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Ferndale’s SheHive will host its own meditation event focused on releasing tensions.

“In this meditation, we will release old emotions and experiences which we have stored in our bodies through a process of meditation, toning and movement,” wrote organizers. “After creating safe and sacred space together, we will move through a guided meditation to locate blocked energy and, let healing energy flow through the blockage, releasing that which we no longer need.”

SheHive is located at 2505 Hilton Road, Unit 107 in Ferndale. Find more information about the event online at eventbrite.com.

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**Clerk: Williamston Campaign Crosses State Law**

**BY KYLE KAMINSKI, CITY PULSE**

Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared in City Pulse.

A board member at Williamston Community Schools could face fines from the Michigan Bureau of Elections after she was anonymously exposed for a string of alleged campaign finance violations.

Karen Potter, who defeated Board President Greg Talberg in November in Williamston’s recall election over transgender policy, appears to have repeatedly violated Michigan’s Campaign Finance Act in the months leading up to last year’s school board election, Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum said. Potter could face fines should the investigation continue.

According to a 14-page report filed by an anonymous “Williamston Resident,” various printed and online campaign materials that supported Potter failed to include proper disclaimers for who paid for them. Those advertisements, under law, legally require the name and address of their appropriate campaign committee.

“There were some violations,” said Byrum, to whom the anonymous report was sent. Byrum said she confirmed that the accusations were accurate.

“It’s absolutely a big deal,” said Byrum. “Voters and citizens of Ingham County have a right to know who is paying for election materials and who is paying for these candidates. This is about disclosure, and it’s more than just a technicality. There’s no reason this type of stuff should’ve been overlooked.”

In many cases, Potter’s materials didn’t include a name or address, according to the complaint. Some advertisements also supported her fellow challengers in the recent recall election. Byrum identified them both as violations; State law also bans individual candidate committees from supporting multiple campaigns.

Potter, who was only made aware of the allegations by City Pulse, chalked it up to a simple mistake.

“I am still reviewing everything,” Potter said via email. “I can assure you any clerical errors were not intentional, and if there is any error, I will certainly correct right away. I do appreciate it being brought to my attention.”

The complaint could result in a series of fines should it be forwarded to the Bureau of Elections. But Potter, who won by a margin of only 58 votes, won’t need to worry about her seat on the board. Regardless of the eventual findings, state officials don’t carry the legal authority to remove someone from office, Byrum said.

Byrum said anonymous complaints aren’t typically reviewed by state regulators, but she invited the anonymous resident to identify himself and file another complaint directly to the Bureau of Elections. An investigation cannot begin until that report is filed, but it would likely confirm the anonymous suspicions, Byrum added.

Potter was one of four challengers who tried to overthrow the board of education at Williamston last year. Three trustees, Nancy Deal, Sarah Belanger and Christopher Lewis, survived the effort to recall them for having supported pro-transgender policies. Talberg packed and sowed a deep divide within the community.

Byrum in September also reported alleged campaign finance violations against Julie Conley, Potter and other challengers — Walter Holm, Craig Hagelberger and Debbie Hutchison — under similar accusations. That complaint has yet to generate any state findings more than four months after Byrum forwarded the claims.

“It’s shocking, but I’ll trust the system is going to look and handle things,” added Board President Scott Gaffner.

Visit lansingcitypulse.com for previous and continued coverage at Williamston Community Schools.

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**Gay Man Found Dead After Lansing Fire**

**BY BTL STAFF**

Known as an incubator for small businesses, the lesbian-owned Lansing Eastside Gateway was ravaged by a fire last weekend that resulted in the death of 43-year-old openly gay employee John Bolan. He was discovered dead inside Sunday morning. In an article by reporter Kara Berg, The Lansing State Journal reported that Bolan had been sleeping inside the building when the fire broke out.

“It is not clear why Bolan was in the building when the fire began at about 5 a.m. Firefighters were told a person who had been sleeping in the back of the building was still inside. Lansing Fire Department spokesperson Steve Mazurek said Sunday,” the report said. “Due to structural issues, crews were not able to gain access, he added.”

The Gateway’s Facebook page shared a GoFundMe link to aid Bolan’s family in providing burial services after the tragedy.

“Not only was the business a complete loss but John lost his life in the battle. John prided himself in being a human first and everything else came later. He was always willing to give of his time and help those that needed it,” The post read. “John was not only my brother-in-law he was one of my best friends he will be greatly missed. His brother Patrick and I, along with other members of the family, are asking for your help. We do not have the funds for this unexpected loss and any little bit would be greatly appreciated.”

The Facebook page also shared pictures of the results of the blaze with a message of thanks for community members who have shown support.

“Thank you, all, for the outpouring of support after this morning’s fire,” The post read. “I can’t say much; it’s still being picked over by the fire crews, but the photos say it all.”

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Babs Siperstein, Pioneering N.J. Trans Activist, Dies at 76

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

Barbra "Babs" Siperstein, a transgender Democratic activist in New Jersey who's credited with taking a lead role in pushing a pro-trans state birth certificate law for her state, died over the weekend at age 76, according to local media reports.

Siperstein died days after the law went into effect on Feb. 1. The "Babs Siperstein Law" allows individuals in New Jersey to change the gender marker on their birth certificate without proof of surgery and offer a gender-neutral option. The law was signed by New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy.

The first openly transgender member of the Democratic National Committee, Siperstein was appointed in 2011 to the Democratic National Committee's executive committee and served there until 2017. Siperstein was a superdelegate for Hillary Clinton at the 2016 Democratic National Convention.

Speaking with the Washington Blade at the convention, Siperstein was dubious of Trump's pledge to support LGBT people during his speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention. (Her prediction later proved true.)

"There's nothing behind it," Siperstein said. "He said unequivocally that he was going to appoint the most conservative Supreme Court justices. He will say anything."

Although she was a Democrat, Siperstein wasn't afraid to take on members of her own party on the issue of transgender rights.

In 2015, Siperstein told the Blade she was "extremely disappointed" in Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), now a U.S. senator and a 2020 presidential candidate, for her actions as California attorney general appealing a court order granting a transgender prison inmate in California access to gender reassignment surgery.

"I would think that any political candidate, or any public servant, that would fight to prevent basic and necessary medical treatment for any person would be incompetent to serve," Siperstein said. "How can you trust any public servant, any elected official, who fights to prevent basic and necessary medical service for any person? Who's next?"

Sean Meloy, who served as the DNC’s Director of LGBTQ Engagement and is now political director for the LGBTQ Victory Fund, said Siperstein built a strong legacy.

"For so many in the Democratic Party, Babs was the first openly trans person they ever met and she undoubtedly changed the hearts and minds of many party leaders who were not yet committed to trans equality," Meloy said. "She was a constant advocate for the entire LGBTQ community and helped make the Democratic Party more accepting not just of trans people, but trans candidates as well. Her presence in the DNC helped prepare the party and pave the way for trailblazing trans Democratic candidates like Danica Roem and Christine Hallquist – and her impact will be felt for years to come."

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.
Black Gay Detroit Friends
(Pt. 1)

Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

As a teenager in the mid-1950s, I listened faithfully to country and western music radio — especially Patsy Cline — and later ‘Senator’ Bristo Bryant’s rhythm and blues after high school class broadcasts. (A favorite group was Billy Ward and His Dominos.)

At age 19, my first partner, ballet dancer and pianist Ernie Gilbert, 23, introduced me to classical music. He was writing for the Wayne University Collegian as entertainment by-liner, and took me with him — a gay “Mutt and Jeff” pairing, if ever — for his reviews of ballet companies, symphony orchestras, soloists, operas and Sol Hurok musical galas at Detroit’s Masonic Temple. And foreign films!

Basically a street kid before I met Ernie, my introduction and our partnership, stretching over four years, changed my life dramatically. He was the best catalyst that happened to my young, formative gay life.

In 1960, Ernie got me a sales job at Discount Records, in the Sheraton Cadillac on Washington Boulevard. It was there that my 20-year friendship with Detroit Free Press music critic Collins George began.

Mr. George was the first black journalist to be hired at the Freep. He was a regular customer at Discount Records. George, prior to his music critic tenure (1953 to 1980), had been a managing editor for the Pittsburg Courier, then and now one of the nation’s major African-American newspapers; and, as a Howard University graduate with a French Language minor, he taught French at Howard briefly.

“I was so nervous during my first class, I had to sit on my hands to keep them from shaking,” George once commented to friends gathered for drinks at his Lafayette Park condo. (A favorite side “dish”: chopped fruit, coconut and marijuana topping, drenched with Grand Marnier.)

When our friendship started, George was also hosting a weekly classical music program for WQRS-FM, playing selections from his extensive collection of hundreds of LPs. He was a close friend of sopranos Leontyne Price and Jessye Norman.

George had a small east-side Iroquois upstairs flat at the time; for him, a real plus — his meals were lovingly prepared by someone whom I never saw, never met, his “feeding lady.”

As I got to know George I introduced him to two close gay friends, Dan Stevens and Cecil Miller. Soon George began referring to us as “my daughters.”

Of course we enjoyed his celebrity company, but we were also content to drink his ample supply of available scotch, recount our adventures of recent and previous seductions, before hitting the bars — cost free thanks to George — on weekends.

George was a gifted storyteller. We learned of his tenure as a World War II news correspondent in Italy, and of a year spent as a conscientious objector in a CO camp with two close detainees: famed British author Christopher Isherwood and Denham Fouts, a handsome escort of much notoriety to gay detainees: famed British author Christopher Isherwood and Denham Fouts, a handsome escort of much notoriety to gay

royalty and final drug overdose demise.

(Denham Fouts, a handsome escort of much notoriety to gay detainee: famed British author Christopher Isherwood and Denham Fouts, a handsome escort of much notoriety to gay detainees: famed British author Christopher Isherwood and Denham Fouts, a handsome escort of much notoriety to gay

In February of 2009 I was 17 and working up the nerve to break off my abusive relationship with the adult man whom I’d been dating for two years, long before I was able to come out as queer. This Valentine’s Day will be the 10-year anniversary of that decision. I still have nightmares.

See Parting Glances, continued on next page

Viewpoint

Valentine’s Day Visibility: To Stay in or Go Out?

BY JEM ZERO

As a lesbian, I often feel the urge to be vocally happy in my engagement to a woman. It’s a spiteful parry to a book I keep on my shelf as a joke: “The Unhappy Gays,” a my impression of V-Day have been ... let’s say, soured.

In February of 2009 I was 17 and working up the nerve to break off my abusive relationship with the adult man whom I’d been dating for two years, long before I was able to come out as queer. This Valentine’s Day will be the 10-year anniversary of that decision. I still have nightmares.

As time passed, I looked forward to V-Day, hoping one year I would finally have a happy relationship. Some years, I dreamed of the mind-numbingly perfect date of rom-com legend; the kind so good you still remember it when you’re old and crusty.

But contrary to my hopes, though, I don’t remember anything but the disappointments.

This year, finances allowing, I’m getting married to a woman who makes me feel like the hurt and abuse and neglect I went through as a young adult is finally behind me. If there was a time to plan this magical Valentine’s date, it would be now.

Except ... I’m just not feeling it.

Is it giving up? Am I losing something by letting a romantic holiday be ruined by my trauma?

For some, the decision might be easy. Many feel that Valentine’s Day is a corporate scam that has nothing to do with St. Valentine — whose historical significance is convoluted and highly dubious anyway. It’s not hard to opt out of the celebration.

Say whatever you like, but that doesn’t bother me. If I want to have a nice time, I’m going to have a nice time. It’s not

See Viewpoint, continued on next page
like my individual abstinence will stop other people from participating in a holiday, and I'm not a big spender anyway. The value to me is the experience and atmosphere. Or, at least, it would be.

The question for me is: "Is it worth it?" I don't think it is anymore.

Is it worth dredging up traumatic memories in hopes of planting new and better ones? Unearthing trauma in therapy is one thing — digging through the dusty box in the back of your attic just to find societal approval borders on self-harm.

It leads me to question why I desire acknowledgment from straight, cisgender people in the first place. The assumption that a gay couple is just two "besties" is invalidating, but deliberately seeking out opportunities to challenge that might be going too far ... then again, I'm totally the kind of person who would kiss my fiancée in front of homophobic protesters. (Another act of defiance from the days when a girlfriend and I had bottles thrown at us while we were walking down the street holding hands.)

I don't think it's wrong to loudly challenge lesbophobic and homophbic attitudes about us, but doing it at the expense of my mental health is a rather poor idea, and even worse in practice.

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**Parting Glances**

Continued from p. 11

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critics who were gay or supposedly bi. The Times critic, Frank Gill, was married to the publisher's daughter. He was also the advisor for the Wayne University Collegian. (He advised a journalism to scratch his column headline, "Liberace gives gay concert!") Gill said he had once partied mid-1940s with Lord Alfred Douglas, Oscar Wilde's queeny companion. He also had one of his music compositions, "Fanfare and Fiesta for A State Occasion" performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

The News critic, Joe Mossman, something of a pompous twit, delighted to be the last to walk into a DSO concert at Ford Auditorium, to be seen by everyone, then sit behind George and whisper comments to get George, who had survived two minor strokes, to uncontrollably guffaw out loud.

(Mossman was fired for drinking on the right. "The Second 'Our Father' on the right."

At this point in my life, I'm okay with Valentine's just being another day on the calendar. I can make other meaningful anniversaries with my beloved; I don't need the validation of a dead white man who may or may not have actually existed to be a happy, visible lesbian. It helps that my fiancée doesn't celebrate V-day or care about the cultural performance involved.

Maybe I'll change my mind in the future. Maybe another decade will pass and the wounds will be healed, and I'll be able to take this silly Hallmark holiday out of the recycle bin, rinse it off and enjoy it again. I can't say that I won't.

This year, though, I resolve to let Valentine's Day be just another day. Boring, meticulous and intimate in its own special way; she and I sitting in the same room working or idling, speaking occasionally and enjoying the intimacy of the mundane. Seems like a much more positive way to heal from the ghosts of relationships past.

Jem Zero is a disabled queer content creator. Ze is currently pursuing an accounting certificate to compliment zir career as a writer, photographer and artist. Most days, ze can be found making fruitless attempts to preserve zir spinal integrity while bent over zir computer, pumping out everything from essays on equal media representation to science fiction and fantasy romance with hard-hitting political themes. Connect with zir at www.jemzero.com, at www.facebook.com/jemzero.art, or jemzero.art@gmail.com.

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 туристы, who were gay or supposedly bi. The Times critic, Frank Gill, was married to the publisher's daughter. He was also the advisor for the Wayne University Collegian. (He advised a journalism to scratch his column headline, "Liberace gives gay concert!") Gill said he had once partied mid-1940s with Lord Alfred Douglas, Oscar Wilde's queeny companion. He also had one of his music compositions, "Fanfare and Fiesta for A State Occasion" performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

The News critic, Joe Mossman, something of a pompous twit, delighted to be the last to walk into a DSO concert at Ford Auditorium, to be seen by everyone, then sit behind George and whisper comments to get George, who had survived two minor strokes, to uncontrollably guffaw out loud.

(Mossman was fired for drinking on the right. "The Second 'Our Father' on the right."

At this point in my life, I'm okay with Valentine's just being another day on the calendar. I can make other meaningful anniversaries with my beloved; I don't need the validation of a dead white man who may or may not have actually existed to be a happy, visible lesbian. It helps that my fiancée doesn't celebrate V-day or care about the cultural performance involved.

Maybe I'll change my mind in the future. Maybe another decade will pass and the wounds will be healed, and I'll be able to take this silly Hallmark holiday out of the recycle bin, rinse it off and enjoy it again. I can't say that I won't.

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**Creep Of The Week**

**James Greene Sr.**

The video is peak white privilege. Greene is surrounded by officers who repeatedly, and politely, ask him to leave and he refuses over and over again demanding to “see the law” he is breaking and asserting that he is “a tax payer.” Did I mention he has a gun? Granted it’s a concealed weapon (which is illegal to bring to a library in Texas), but if you don’t think Greene’s treatment wouldn’t be radically, and violently, different if he was black instead of white, I have a bridge to sell you. You just don’t realize you’re lying to you. You don’t realize they’re using you. We have a bunch of homosexuals who are molesting children. They are doing it with your help! wollen.

The police are astonishingly calm and polite as they escort him to his car, which he apparently refuses to get into and drive away, and so he ends up getting arrested and his gun confiscated. He complains of chest pains (sure, Jan) and they take him to the hospital.

News reports about the incident say that there was no evidence that Greene planned to use the gun.

But here’s the thing: people who bring guns to libraries are the ones most likely to use guns in libraries. Now add in the fact that Greene, who sure has a lot in common with other right-wingers who became mass shooters, believes children are being harmed by people he sees as inhuman.

Before Drag Queen Storytime, they did not hesitate to tell him to scram. Greene clearly thought this was unjust and so the library called the police.

In the background of Greene’s video, while the police officers have gotten him outside of the building but not off of the premises, the song “I Like to Move It” is playing. So as Greene argues with and disobeys the officers about leaving, the scene is punctuated by calls to “Move it!”

Greene asks, again, why he has to leave and an officer says something like, “You were filming in the library” and Greene responds, “You don’t realize they’re lying to you. You don’t realize they’re using you. We have a bunch of homosexuals that are molesting children. They are doing it with your help!”

The police are astonishingly calm and polite as they escort him to his car, which he apparently refuses to get into and drive away, and so he ends up getting arrested and his gun confiscated. He complains of chest pains (sure, Jan) and they take him to the hospital.

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But here’s the thing: people who bring guns to libraries are the ones most likely to use guns in libraries. Now add in the fact that Greene, who sure has a lot in common with other right-wingers who became mass shooters, believes children are being harmed by people he sees as inhuman. According to The Independent, Greene later claimed in a Facebook video that he was “arrested for being a white Christian” and referred to a librarian as a “Satanist.” How much evidence do we need to believe that everyone at that library was in danger so long as he was there with a gun?

And I know I said I wasn’t going to write about Trump this week, but it bears pointing out that Greene broadcasts his show in a MAGA hat in front of a cardboard cutout of Trump, a president who has more than any other in modern history emboldened right-wing radicals and encouraged violence. The State of the Union is deplorable.
Migrants Find Refuge at Lesbian-Run Shelter

BY MICHAEL K. LAVERS AND YARIEL VALDES GONZALEZ

MEXICALL, Mexico – Cindy Campos was washing clothes on a concrete washboard in the courtyard of Cobina Posada del Migrante, a migrant shelter in the Mexican border city of Mexicali, shortly after 4 p.m. on Jan. 27.

Campos and her two children – her 6-year-old daughter Alexia and her 4-year-old son Dylan – and her sister arrived at the shelter the day before. Campos, 22, told the Washington Blade they fled Mexico’s Michoacán state after her partner was shot to death outside her home.

“We fled mainly because of fear of what will happen to my children, to me,” she said.

Campos and her children are among the more than 200 migrants from Mexico and Central America who are currently living at the shelter, which is less than a mile south of the Calexico West Port of Entry between Mexicali and Calexico, Calif., in the Imperial Valley.

A group of local LGBTI residents founded the shelter in 1987.

Altargracia Tamayo, a lesbian activist in Mexicali, currently manages Cobina Posada del Migrante. Casandra, a native of Acapulco who identifies as a transsexual woman, lives at the shelter and oversees its day-to-day operations.

Cobina Posada del Migrante is one of seven migrant shelters in Mexicali, which is the capital of Mexico’s Baja California state. It currently receives financial support from the governments of Mexicali, Baja California and Mexico.

Casandra was quick to point out to the Blade the migrants who stay at the shelter don’t have to pay for anything.

“It’s free,” she said.

Tens of thousands of migrants who hope to seek asylum in the U.S. have traveled to the border over the last couple of years.

Many of these migrants were traveling in large caravans that arrived in Tijuana, a city that is roughly two hours west of Mexicali, last November and May respectively. Mexicali has not seen this influx of migrants, but many of those who are staying at Cobina Posada del Migrante hope they too can find refuge in the U.S.

José Javier Vázquez told the Blade he and his son left their home in Honduras’ Cortés department on Oct. 22, 2018, because of poverty and death threats they received from gang members.

Vázquez, his son and a group of five other people traveled through Mexico on freight trains that are known as “the beast” or “La Bestia” or walked. Vázquez, a farmer whose wife and two daughters remain in Honduras, told the Blade he hopes to cross the U.S. border and seek asylum.

“It’s the wish that I have,” he said.

Maira González Alvarado from Michoacán state is currently living at the shelter with her two young daughters, including one who was born six weeks ago. She told the Blade her mother is already in the U.S., and she wants to live with her.

“Each day there are seven people killed where I am,” said González.

Campos told the Blade that her children witnessed her partner’s murder.

“They were there,” she said. “All of this was very hard.”

The shelter’s residents spoke with the Blade against the backdrop of continued outrage over President Trump’s immigration policy that includes the separation of migrant children from their parents once they enter the U.S.

Trump continues to demand a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, even though a physical barrier already exists between Mexicali, Tijuana and other border cities that include Nogales, which borders Arizona.

The Trump administration last week began to implement a controversial pilot program that will force some migrants who ask for asylum at the San Ysidro Port of Entry south of San Diego to remain in Mexico as they await the outcome of their cases. The Transgender Law Center last fall released the results of an autopsy that shows Roxsana Hernández, a transgender woman with HIV who died while in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody on May 25, was beaten before she died.

“I am not as bad as they say,” González told the Blade.

Casandra acknowledged Trump’s immigration policy has sparked concern among migrants in Mexicali. She also pointed out closing the border could adversely impact the U.S. economy, in part, because migrants often take jobs on farms and elsewhere that Americans don’t want.

“The U.S. would die of hunger,” Casandra told the Blade. “It will lose millions of pesos if the port of entry closed for two days.”

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

Casandra, right, is a transsexual woman who oversees the day-to-day operations of Cobina Posada del Migrante, a lesbian-run migrant shelter in Mexicali, Mexico. She is talking to a group of women from central Mexico who are currently living at the shelter with their children on Jan. 27, 2019. Washington Blade photo: Michael K. Lavers.
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Transgender Troops Attend State of the Union as Trump Pursues Ban

Rep. Jackie Speier has invited transgender airman Staff Sgt. Logan Ireland to the State of the Union address.

Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.), a champion of transgender military service and now chair of the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee, announced Friday on Twitter she had invited Air Force Staff Sgt. Logan Ireland to attend the address.

Ireland, a security forces airman who served in Afghanistan, has been public about being transgender in the military. When the Defense Department sought to implement openly transgender service during the Obama administration, the Air Force consulted Ireland for guidance.

As the Trump administration pursues a transgender military ban, at least four lawmakers have invited transgender people with records of military service to attend to President Trump's State of the Union address in the House chamber in protest over his policy.

Although courts had initially blocked the Defense Department from implementing Trump's ban, the U.S. Supreme Court issued stays on those decisions, essentially greenlighting the policy. (One injunction issued by a federal court against Trump's policy remains in place for the time being, but the Justice Department is challenging that order.)

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After the Defense Department unveiled plans last year to implement Trump's plan to reverse that policy, Speier questioned former Defense Secretary James Mattis about the ban during a congressional hearing. Holding up a photo of Ireland, Speier asked Mattis to explain why Ireland shouldn't serve. Mattis declined to say, citing ongoing litigation against the transgender ban.

Also on Friday, Rep. A. Donald McEachin (D-Va.), a member of the House Armed Services Committee, announced he'd invite Navy Petty Officer Second Class Megan Winters to the State of the Union address.

"I have been fighting for LGBTQ equality since my time as a legislator in the Virginia General Assembly and have proudly continued that fight in Congress," McEachin said in a statement. "Given the recent Supreme Court decision to allow the Trump administration's transgender servicemembers ban to go into effect while challenges to the policy continue, I am honored to bring Megan, a dedicated patriot, to the State of the Union. Every member of our armed services deserves our utmost respect and gratitude for their service to our country."

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), a 2020 Democratic presidential contender who's set to introduce legislation in the U.S. Senate against Trump's transgender policy, announced Monday she has invited Lt. Cmdr. Blake Dremann, a decorated transgender sailor, to attend the State of the Union address.

"I am inspired by Lt. Cmdr. Blake Dremann's leadership and am honored that he will be attending the State of the Union as my guest," Gillibrand said. "Lt. Cmdr. Dremann is a proud member of the U.S. Navy, he is a loyal patriot who has devoted his career to serving and protecting our country, and he is also one of the thousands of transgender service members serving in our military with honor and distinction. Transgender service members like Lt. Cmdr. Dremann make extraordinary sacrifices every day to defend our freedom and our most sacred values, and President Trump's decision to ban them from military service is cruel and undermines our military readiness."

Dremann, who has been deployed 11 times and won the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Joint Service Achievement Medal and the Navy & Marine Corps Achievement Medal, is president of the LGBT military group SPARTA.

Gillibrand, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, last year questioned each of the military service chiefs during congressional hearings on whether having transgender people in the military harmed unit cohesion. Each of the service chiefs answered "no."

According to the statement from Gillibrand, the New York Democrat is set to introduce her legislation against Trump's policy later this week.

On Sunday, Rep. Chris Pappas (D-N.H.), one of the freshmen openly gay members of Congress, announced he has invited transgender veteran Tavion Dignard from Auburn, N.H. to attend the State of the Union address.

A transgender man, Dignard served in the U.S. Navy from 1998 to 2002 and was honorably discharged, but now is a student at University of New Hampshire, according to a statement from Pappas' office.

"President Trump's transgender service ban weakens and politicizes our military despite the ridiculous claims of improving military cohesion," Pappas said in a statement. "I'm so glad Tavion will be with me to tell his story, share his truth, and stand as a warmly welcomed guest of the United States House of Representatives. As lawmakers, it's our job to hold the Trump administration accountable for its discriminatory policies. Denying transgender Americans their right to serve this country is a disgrace. They deserve equal treatment by their government and the law."

"I thank Congressman Pappas for this unique opportunity to share my story and be a part of this incredible experience," Dignard said in a statement. "I came out as a transgender man because I wanted to live my authentic truth and because I wanted to be the person I needed when I was younger. Being denied that opportunity put up absurd discriminatory barriers and created serious trauma in my life. No transgender service member should have to suffer through uncertainty about the acceptability of their identity or feel pushed out of their job for expressing who they are."

According to a 2014 study from the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, there are more than 15,000 transgender Americans in active duty and 153,000 transgender veterans.

Technically, openly transgender people in the military would be able to continue to serve in the military under the Trump policy — on its face anyway — because it has a grandfather provision for openly transgender people currently in the armed forces. However, openly transgender people wouldn't be able to enlist in the military unless they’re willing to serve in their biological sex, and individuals who are diagnosed with gender dysphoria or seek transition-related care after enlisting would be kicked out.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.
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‘Miracles and Glory Abound’

at the Flint Institute of Arts

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Hanging at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, Emanuel Leutze’s 12-by-21-foot “Washington Crossing the Delaware” is a proud, imposing painting, framed in a brilliant gold. Famous for not only its size but its portrayal of the glory of the American revolution, it features a valiant George Washington on his way to achieve a great military victory against Hessian troops, a victory that would aid in the creation of a country dedicated to serving all of its citizens. Or, at least, that's the story it tells to some. When Pittsburgh-based artist Vanessa German sees the work, she doesn’t only see its intended narrative, she observes what that storyline is leaving out, too. Specifically, the full truth.

“If you ask the museum, they say that it’s the most famous painting in America. It’s this very heroic image of Washington crossing the Delaware in ice, this illuminated background; and there’s the figures in the boat, they’re supposed to represent all these cultures,” German said. “There’s a Native American person, a black person, a woman, and it’s this really heroic, romantic lie about that war, the man, the time.”

For German, the painting is one of many examples of a theme that is part of a much greater pattern that presents itself not only in the American art landscape but in the broader American culture as a whole: the prioritization of white stories and histories above others, false or not. And German says that, among other things, a primary consequence of perpetuating this racist pattern is the formation of inaccurate narratives in people’s minds surrounding history and about who holds value in today’s society. In fact, a re-evaluation of that more than century-old image became the focus of her latest exhibition, “Miracles and Glory Abound,” now featured at the Flint Institute of Arts through April 20.

German said that when creating the piece she re-examined how she was taught history as a young girl and how pieces like the original “Washington Crossing the Delaware” made her feel.

“I think about the stories that I was told as a little, black, strange, artistic child growing up in Los Angeles about America and about what made America and about who made America, and I would experience the sort of trajectory of that story and the people who looked like they were in that story and the world that I was in,” German said. “It looked like white people made America. [That] white people are safer, healthier, smarter, richer, more beautiful — they’re just everything. ... I’m a black, gay woman on this land and I was never actually supposed to have liberty.”

German added that one can trace that narrative back to “these early romantic, heroic, sometimes very specific works of art that affirm and uplift and sort of solidify this narrative of these heroic, visionary, hyper-masculine white men that made America,” and decided with her piece to visually, physically and spiritually flip that narrative.

Reimagining Washington

For one entering the gallery housing German’s sculptural installation at the FIA, German’s work brings with it the scale of Leutze’s original piece and then some. As if sucked into the painting itself, viewers enter a space where a three-dimensional painting leads a similarly positioned crew forward across what can be assumed is the Delaware. The Washington figure, in this case a standalone piece part of a greater whole titled “LaQuisha Washington Crosses the Day Awa,” along with everyone featured in the exhibit, is black and female.

“When I say female, I mean femme, I mean trans, I mean presenting intentionally as, that’s what I mean,” German said. “...So, thinking about not just blackwashing history, how history is often whitewashed, not just taking a thing that exists and making the figures in it black, but doing that and doing it with deep intention.”

That intention, German said, centers around thanks, because for her, the creation of the work was “an act of love.”

“So, it’s not just the Washington figure, it is a single mother figure and it is a single mother figure who is carrying her child with her,” German said. “Because I live in a world where everything around me would be different and healthier and ... would have the spirit of almost edgeless abundance if people had the capacity to know how remarkable they are, and what is within them, and the sort of reach of humanity that exists in them because they recognize it reflected all around them.”

But as loving as her intention is toward the groups of people highlighted within her installation, German’s reimagining is also a direct confrontation of the lie perpetuated in Leutze’s original work, too. That confrontation is well-summarized in a written piece by Holly Bass titled “The Evidence of Things Not Seen” that accompanies German’s work in an exhibit-specific booklet.

“She inserts and asserts her Blackness, her womanness, her multivalent queerness, into this ongoing American narrative and asks us to consider the birth of this nation, a mythology of chopped cherry trees and founding fathers lying through wooden teeth,” Bass writes. “‘The artist has said she wants to do violence to the lie. What she means in part is the lie that the violence in Black communities is somehow a result of Blackness itself, and not centuries of systemic terrorism meted out against Black people. Lies against Black beauty, the sanctity of Black life, Black joy.’

However, although German’s work is a confrontation of that lie, she said that it’s “not a direct answer.”

“There is a reincarnation of a boat, of the George Washington figure, but the boat is floating on a skirt of water that tumbles off of the back of a little black girl. And she’s carrying that whole boat forward and she looks like she’s marching on water in the figure, but it’s not just that,” German said. “Then there’s also the layers of the fact that you see it’s almost as though the
installation exists in a fictional city park and you see the monument, you see the little girl figure, but then you also experience the wonder of the lookers."

Surrounding the boat are sculptures of people each experiencing the monument in their own way, some are weeping, others point, while others still flip a literal bird at viewers. When asked how she came to call the work what she did, German said it's a play on a phrase made famous during the 2016 presidential election.

"... It's called 'Miracles and Glory Abound' on purpose. It's a tangle and twist and a reassertion of a phrase that is actually very violent to me which is 'Make America Great Again,'" German said. "And so, it is reaching more toward what Lincoln would call the better angels among us to say, 'No, miracles and glory abound.' Which is reaching toward the future, as opposed to 'Make America Great Again' which is asking you to cull through some sort of past of myth. A past of theater almost, the theater of America, to find something that was great, but there's no going back.

"There's no going back to that," German continued. "There's no going back to a time where as a black woman I was never supposed to have freedom, resources or liberty. So, it's playing on this, it's functioning on the spiritual plane, but also a political and cultural plane right now. And I think about [how] I just got back from Charlottesville a little while ago and went to Water Street where a young man felt like it was his sort of patriotic duty to run through a crowd of people who thought differently than him."

**Creation of a Power Figure**

To someone unfamiliar with German's larger body of work, the significance that each person depicted in her installations is something known as a power figure might not be immediately clear, but it's a piece of knowledge that adds another greater layer of depth to "Miracles and Glory Abound." Each presented figure within the greater installation is a standalone sculpture that carries its own meaning and is constructed from seemingly everyday objects. These objects have been carefully hand-chosen by German to not only achieve a desired aesthetic look, but to impart a deep emotional and spiritual significance. In an essay titled "Inherent Magic," author, poet and artist Daniel Simmons related German's sculptures to the West-Central African nkisi, plural minkisi, or "spirits, or objects that spirits inhabit."

"Like the traditional makers of nkisi, who used various materials available to them, such as bones, nails, pieces of mirrors, and herbal potions to infuse magic into the objects, German also uses things she finds readily available," Simmons said. "She incorporates objects that have various personal meanings from her life and experiences. Objects of real significance from childhood found abandoned in the community, as well as objects that have other personal and traditional cultural meaning for everyday women and people of color, all become products of spiritual, emotional and aesthetic infusion to be attached to or embedded in the sculptural housings made in the image of Black women."

Simmons also mentions in the written piece that though German didn't specifically reference minkisi in the creation of her pieces, it is something that occurs naturally, and the "revelation made her work all the more powerful to me."

"This seeming historical reference was her honest, innate magical 'juju' revealing itself..."
and not a homage to the traditional tribal works that are found in museums and private collections,” Simmons said. Beyond the items comprising the sculptures, meaning is imparted also through hand-made packets or beads that adorn the work and carry inside of them intentional messages.

“I call them different things: I say that there’s an incarnation of them. Depending on where I am and how averse people are to different spiritual language, I will name them different things — but they’re swaddle beads, prayer beads or power beads,” German said. “They have words inside of them. Sometimes, people will send me people’s names and send me language and I will write them out on a big roll of butcher block paper and just cover it and then cut them into pieces and it goes inside of them.”

German said, too, that this is a practice evidenced in a variety of cultures across the world.

“It’s like Native Americans [who] had medicine packets and so did Hawaiians and Africans. It’s a very old original human technology of sacredness, to wrap something up that’s sacred and to keep it close to your heart, to wear it on your body or to put it in the earth,” German said. “That’s a way that human beings have spoken a language of sacredness across the entire earth.”

**Vanessa German**

Continued from p. 17

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**Defining Beauty and Sacredness**

When examining the work, it’s clear that German has a specific focus in the creation of power figures that represent black women both straight and across the LGBTQ spectrum. That focus seems to stem from, at least in part, the attempt to partially fill the disproportionately huge vacuum that exists surrounding black female beauty in American society. German, who grew up in Los Angeles and attended school with now famous actors, said that the unrealistic Hollywood beauty standard was solidified in her mind very early on.

“I went to the Los Angeles Performing Arts Conservatory, and you knew who were aesthetically pleasing children. You knew who that was, you knew who they wanted to be on Saturday morning cartoon commercials, like which child sells you Wonder Bread. I started to notice as a child that I never saw happy black people on TV commercials or black families together,” German said. “... And so, I grew up not having incarnations of black joy, black happy families and a diverse black beauty because I grew up when there had been some black models, but the features of those models fell in line with this one percentile of human beings that look a certain way. That’s the world I grew up in, where you didn’t see your joy reflected back to you in your face.”

At the same time, as a child in the ’80s living across the street from a halfway house called Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services, German said that she was very early on introduced to a world not bound to heteronormativity. There, she formed a crush on a young black girl who was a skateboarder — a significant message present in the work, though German said, was exceedingly rare.

“She was so rare, and she was a good skateboarder,” German said. “And we would go to Santa Monica Beach and I would look for black surfers and you wouldn’t see that. Where would you see black people soaring and thriving in these ways that weren’t like males in sports? ... That’s why Debi Thomas was a huge deal.”

And when German’s family eventually moved to Loveland, Ohio, German said there were even fewer examples of identities like those present. In fact, she was one of two black families in her new town where she was not exempt from dealing with blatantly racist attitudes.

“It was rare to be addressed with a sense of the fact that my being as a human being, as an earthling, is honorable and beautiful the same way that maple trees and sycamore trees and redwood trees; their beauty just stands; it just is,” German said. “It took a long time to be able to have experiences outside of my own sacred time where I had a reflection of the is-ness that your beauty just is. That you are remarkable and you just are and you will not be repeated. Your life is now and it is beautiful and your body stands. I think all of those ways of knowing and seeing and honoring your is-ness are connected so deeply to your deep health, not disregarding your body because everybody else disregards your body and your organs. It’s not just the aesthetic beauty it’s the beauty of existing.”

Today, it’s clear when chatting with German that she has a much deeper appreciation for not only her own being but for others that’s far greater than was ever intended by America’s Founding Fathers. It’s unmistakable, too, that her exhibit highlights this narrative of black beauty and power. German emphasizes, too, that the many messages present in the work, though they definitely hold a specific meaning for her as its creator, can certainly change depending on the person attending and experiencing her work. And in fact, she hopes that’s the case.

“It’s an ingestion that isn’t merely aesthetic. It’s not just that you’re looking at the color blue, right? And then what is trying to diagram that experience for a human being who could have come from Vietnam to live in Flint, that’s not [possible],” German said. “[There’s] no singular message because I think that, for me, if there’s any hope, it is that people would come into the room, you know, to be honest. Be in the room so you move around it and be with it. There’s a bench in there, sit down. Be there.”


Photo: Heather Mull.
Michigan’s Definitive LGBTQ-Friendly Wedding and Anniversary Resource Guide

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This Year, Skip the Teddy Bear

3417 Rochester Rd.
Royal Oak, MI 48073
BY EMELL DERRA ADOLPHUS

A s soon as Jeremy Plante turned 18, he went to see his first burlesque show at the Majestic Theatre in Detroit. “I can remember marveling at the way the audience reacted to the performance,” he said recently in conversation. “I knew that, deep down, I wanted to be able to have that effect on people, too.”

Done up in a come-hither costume as his “boylesque” persona Dixon Derrière, (pronounced dicks-in-dare-e-air), Plante now draws from that early influence to make his own marvels on stage.

On Saturday, Feb. 9, and Saturday, Feb. 16, he’ll appear in the International Erotic Art Exhibition in Detroit. Known by some as The Dirty Show, the exhibition features erotic artists from across the globe.

“I am still very new,” Plante warned. But he is learning fast.

Plante’s performances sparkle with Old Hollywood, and it was his love for the era that first led him to the stage.

“Burlesque, at times, is very reminiscent of eras past, and that is what I found alluring about the craft initially,” he said.

Encouraged by friends, Plante said he had been wanting to try burlesque for years, but the timing was never right. Or rather, he explained, he didn’t have the confidence. Then some time studying at the Holly Hock’s Detroit School of Burlesque in Ferndale gave him the courage to finally “pull it off.”

“I knew that taking the courses offered there would allow me to get my toes wet enough to find out if this was something that was right for me,” Plante said, graduating from the program earlier this year. “I continue to take classes at the school because I believe in constant improvement and the instructors there are always offering more neat courses … makeup, dance, fitness, you name it.”

Learning the twists, turns and teases of the burlesque trade — like stocking pulls and tassel twirling — builds comfort when being the centerpiece of the room said Plante.

“Confidence in my opinion is probably one of the two most important things when it comes to burlesque,” he said.

The second is to have fun.

“An audience can sense if either of these things are missing, and it will make all the difference in how people remember you,” Plante said.

Absent the voluptuous form that is a hallmark of the burlesque business, Plante focuses on sensually maneuvering his slender frame, in heels to lengthen the legs, with moves that accentuate a butt over bust. His first performance — dancing to a mix of “Malambo No. 1” by Yma Sumac and “Hips Don’t Lie” by Shakira — “It had to be one of the most nerve-racking moments of my life,” he said. “Once I was on stage that feeling changed though. After the performance was over, while admittedly exhausted, I knew I wanted to do it again. I think if I had to pick one word to describe the feeling it would be ... exhilarated.”

Predictably, Plante names contemporary burlesque performer Dita Von Teese as a source of inspiration in performance; “honorable

“BOY-LESQUE”

A Part-Time Burlesque Dancer Puts on the Shows of His Dreams

“For now, Plante plans to moonlight only on occasion as a burlesque dancer.

“But never say never,” he said. “Who am I to say what prospects may present themselves down the line? Whatever comes, it’s bound to be entertaining.

I love playing with gender and this very much allows me to do that. Sometimes I think of what I do as somewhere in between drag and boylesque.”

“SAVE THE DATE”

International Erotic Art Exhibition Detroit
Saturday, Feb. 9 and Saturday, Feb. 16
Russell Exhibition Center
Russell Industrial Complex
1600 Clay St., Detroit
Tickets start at $40.
For more information, go online to dirtydetroit.com.
One would think that in the field of burlesque, sex and the discussion of it would be welcome, but this may not always be the case. In 2019 there is open discussion about all things LGBTQ as well as openly gay celebrities, but in the burlesque world, sex and sexual orientation are still considered dirty words by some. Why is this the case? Perhaps the answer to this and many other questions lies in pondering why humans readily embrace some things and people and not others. Normally, that which is deemed different is looked at with suspicion and approached with caution — as is the case with the LGBTQ or queer burlesque performers.

At the onset, those who decide to perform burlesque are told that burlesque is one big glittering family and that all body types and characteristics are welcome. But one only has to be in that world for a short time to see that this may not always be the case. While many well-known burlesque performers may carry the torch for campaigns like body positivity, self-hatred and body hate, they are markedly more quiet on issues of race and sexual orientation. When race and sexuality are approached and asked to be spoken about by those who vehemently rally against bodily discrimination, all talks may diminish or downright cease. The lack of discussion within the burly world about said topics has left a gaping hole within the community and left members of the sparkly tribe feeling alienated and misunderstood. And for those who happen to be both a racial minority and LGBTQ, that void is felt even more so.

It’s possible also that the topic of sexuality and talks of it may not be seeing many advances in the burlesque world due to an “it’s none of my business” mentality that’s popular with performers.

Sexual orientation and gender may not come onto the proverbial burlesque stage, is that some see it as too big of an issue to tackle. Let’s face it, burlesquers still haven’t even come to any type of agreement as to whether burlesque is stripping let alone whether it’s okay to come to a workshop deemed for females if you were not born genetically female.

While the reasoning behind why sexual orientation is not more openly learned about and undertaken may seem small it can be assured that the issue of it is not. The lack of acceptance of LGBTQ performers in the burlesque community creates an unnecessary divide when, in reality, we are all here to make beautiful art, no matter who is in our bed. With the Supreme Court ruling in support of same-sex marriage, perhaps it is time for burlesque to open its arms wider to its LGBTQ artists. After all, burlesque is about society, what makes it and shapes it, and performing about it. And LGBTQ artists are definitely a part of society, whether the burlesque world as a subset of the world wants to acknowledge and deal with it or not.

The Irresistible O is a burlesque and pinup historian, known as the Sepia Queen of Burlesque, the Black Prima Ballerina of Burlesque and the Pin Up Queen. She is the 2015 Burlypicks Michigan Master of Voice, 2015 Miss Pin Up Perfection, 2016 Miss Phobia Pin Up, the Inaugural Miss HotWheels Pinup, and the 2017 Burlypicks Master of Improv. She has been featured by Ohio Burlesque, the blog I Gave My Body, Moxie Dolls Pinups and Burlesque Magazine. She is also a writer for Burlesque Bitch and guest blog writer for Burlycon. Her literary work has also appeared in Burlesque Bible Magazine. O also instructs the world-renowned History of Performers of Color in Burlesque course, and actively teaches and discusses the absence and history of women of color in the pinup, rockabilly and burlesque genres. She also teaches all genres of dance, theater, and vocal arts.
BY MIKEY ROX

Show the love for your someone special with these affordable gifts that go straight for the feels.

Neon Love Sign
Flexible LED tubing that mimics the real glow of neon turns your romantic passion into illuminated wall art with Amped & Co’s white “love sign” mounted on clear acrylic backing for easy hanging. “Love” in purple and a red heart also are available. $60, ampedandco.com

Vibrating Couple Bracelets
Sensory technology in Bond Touch’s vibrating bracelets allow couples to ping each other – no matter the distance – to calm anxiety, create a sense of intimacy, and strengthen relationships. A quick tap on the bracelet relays to your partner that they’re on your mind, plus you can create custom codes like three taps for “I Love You.” $98/pair, bond-touch.com

‘This Date in Music’ Book
Your favorite music lover will appreciate author Mike Walter’s “On This Date in Music” book, which features stories of significant events in audio history for each day of the year – from Edison patenting the phonograph to Pharrell Williams’ 10-week “Happy” run in 2014. Bar trivia is in your future. $30, amazon.com

Starry Sky Map
Did the stars align the night you two met? They did, and you can take away a memento of that specific time and place with an exact depiction of how the cosmos looked overhead. My Sky Moment provides a personalized print of your celestial encounter that blends astronomy and art with a dash of sentiment. $50, mysksymoment.com

Same-Sex Cake Toppers
While finding a bakery to supply your Valentine’s wedding cake could be tricky in some parts of this country, head Down Under for exquisitely designed same-sex cake toppers. Australia’s Marri Tree Lane offers both sexes singly in light, medium, and dark skin tones to accurately represent the betrothed. $20, marritreelane.com.au

Beekman 1802 Sweet Treats
Indulge in straight-from-the-farm sweets from the Fabulous Beekman Boys with their Chewy Gooey Caramels, salty goat milk fudge cookies, or the Snuggle Bundle, which includes a pair of Beekman 1802 enamelware mugs and your choice of Heirloom Pantry Salted Caramel Hot Cocoa or double chocolate hot cocoa – which calls for a stay-in-bed snow day. $15-$30, shop.beekman1802.com

Love-Themed Beaded Pins
Handmade beaded pins from celeb-worn Jewels for Hope – in a Pride heart or bouquet of flowers – keeps Valentine’s gift giving sweet and simple. Upon checkout, select one of several charitable organizations that a portion of proceeds will benefit, including the Born This Way Foundation. $35-$55, etsy.com/shop/jewelsforhope

Fog of Love Game
Settlers of Catan meets RomCom in Fog of Love, a two-player strategy game where players role-play as couples to experience all the milestones, hurdles, compromises, and celebrations of a typical relationship to end up happily ever after or in heartache – because ya win some, ya lose some. $50, walmart.com

Customized Skin Care
Artificial intelligence uses your partner’s skin type, age, living environment, stress, and other factors to design a personalized YOUR Skin Care regimen that includes a cleanser, day cream, night cream, and serum for a smoother, more kissable complexion. $180, y-ourskin.com

Léon and George Plants
Keep a symbol of your love fresh and vibrant with help from Léon & George, purveyors of stunning, responsibly sourced statement-piece houseplants styled by interior design pros. Choose from 13 varieties of flora, including peperomia, silver evergreen, and bird’s nest fern, that each arrive with a wood-crafted dock. For every plant purchased, a donation is made to plant trees for humanity. $79-$109, leonandgeorge.com

Travel-Tracking Maps
Travel the country (or the world if you’re ambitious) while tracking your progress on push-pin maps from GeoJango. Framed versions as wall art provide a special way to look back on a lifetime of adventure. Sports maps also are available to chronicle tours of MLB, NHL, NFL, and NBA stadiums. $99, geojango.com

‘What I Love About You’ Book
If whispering sweet nothings isn’t your forte, pick up a copy of the fill-in-the-blank book “What I Love About You,” which prompts you to complete evocative checklists, deliver compliments, and otherwise tap into your sensitive side for a gift that your partner will cherish forever. $9, amazon.com

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. He spends his time writing from the beach with his dog Jaxon. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyrox
Invites You To
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FRIDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2019 – 7:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.
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You’re Invited
Join Ozone House for an evening of wine, chocolate and cheese while helping ensure that all LGBTQ+ youth in Washtenaw County receive the safety and support they deserve.
Presented by Liberty Dental
February 12th, 2019
6:30pm
Zingerman's Greyline
100 N. Ashley Street | Ann Arbor, MI
Register at www.ozonehouse.org
$75 per guest*

Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem
UMS Choral Union
Ann Arbor Youth Chorale
Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Scott Hanoian, conductor
Thursday, February 14 // 8 pm
Hill Auditorium

Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem was commissioned for the re-consecration of Britain’s Coventry Cathedral, which was destroyed by a Nazi bomb raid in 1940. The work requires huge forces, including a large orchestra and chorus, two organs, a chamber orchestra that accompanies the soloists, and a boys’ choir.

In Plain Air
International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE)
Phyllis Chen and Nathan Davis, composers
James Kibbie, organ
Tiffany Ng, carillon
Thursday, February 21 // 7:30 pm
Hill Auditorium

An interwoven history of mechanical instruments (organ, harmonium, music boxes, carillons, and more), In Plain Air is a composition in 13 short vignettes designed to bring the sonic properties of a large organ into a contemporary ensemble context.

734.764.2538 — UMS.ORG
Bowie & Prince at Windsor Symphony Orchestra

Combining two of music’s late greats, the Windsor Symphony Orchestra is hosting a night of classic hits from the two rock stars. The show is on Friday, Feb. 22. Doors open at 8 p.m. Find out more at windsorsymphony.com.

MUSIC & MORE

53rd Annual Detroit JV and Camping Show February 9, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. All types of recreation vehicles, nearly 400 RVs, will be displayed. Suburban Collection Showplace, 46000 Grand River Ave., Novi. 586-752-6381. novoshows.com.


The House on Poe Street at The Detroit Repertory Theatre February 9, 7 p.m. LGBT Fundraiser: A John Williams Celebration! For five decades, Leonard Slatkin has championed the diverse music of America. This three-week festival begins with a cross-country musical travelogue of sorts from Morton Gould, Joan Tower, Leonard Bernstein and Virgil Thompson, plus Ferde Orkhanoff, Hall and the House where Poe is reputed to have committed a murder. Portland Repertory Theatre, 1101 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-995-1930. detreptheatre.com.


The House on Poe Street at The Detroit Repertory Theatre February 9, 7 p.m. This is a fun bowling league and provides a great opportunity for anybody to become acquainted with bowling. The 2018-2019 season celebrates our 26th season. Lodge Lanes, 46255 5 1/4 Road, Belleville. 734-697-1978. info@jlbowling.com. jlbowlingleague.com.

Thursday, February 14

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Farmington Hills – Oakland County 7 p.m. Oakland United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road, Farmington. 248-826-3620. oaklandumc.org. standwithtrans.org.

Toastmasters International SpeakOUT! LGBT Meeting 7 p.m. Professional & personal communication skills development. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court,Ann Arbor. 734-595-9667. lawrencecemoeb@gmail.com. speakout.toastmastersclubs.org.


Friday, February 15


Spring 2019 – Family Style Dinner with a cross-country musical travelogue of sorts from Morton Gould, Joan Tower, Leonard Bernstein and Virgil Thompson, plus Ferde Orkhanoff, Hall and the House where Poe is reputed to have committed a murder. Portland Repertory Theatre, 1101 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-995-1930. detreptheatre.com.

Clyde Petersen is a Scottie-based artist working in film, animation, music, installation and spectacle. A proud member of the trans and queer communities in Seattle, Petersen’s work explores identity and narrative form. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397. stamps.umich.edu.

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In an amateur stage production it’s not unusual for there to be a few hiccups throughout the show. In fact, even Broadway-caliber performances don’t always make it through without a hitch. That is, after all, why “the show must go on” has become such a famous saying both in and out of show business. But in the comedy “The Play That Goes Wrong,” that concept is blown way out of proportion when the Cornley University Drama Society does its best to put on a 1920s murder mystery play. Cast members have to deal with stuck doors, forgotten lines, collapsing floors and, according to cast member Ned Noyes, “many things you’ll never see coming going wrong, too.”

Noyes, an openly gay Northwestern University-trained actor, has performed in nationally touring productions of “Cabaret” along with Broadway shows like “You Can’t Take It With You” and is a Broadway cast member for “The Play That Goes Wrong.” Additionally, Noyes has had a versatile career in TV and film, appearing in titles like “Boardwalk Empire” and “The Post.” Now set to perform at Detroit’s Fisher Theatre from Feb. 12 through 24, Between The Lines caught up with the “The Play That Goes Wrong” actor to get a feel for the show before its Detroit debut, why it’s important for LGBTQ visibility to exist in theater and why comedy is always funnier when it’s honest.

“The Play That Goes Wrong” follows a group of students who are trying to put on a murder mystery show. In your career I’m sure you’ve done many similar performances, but hopefully never ones that have resulted in mishaps as huge as these.

Never quite to this disastrous degree, but some of the moments of the show are achingly familiar (laughs). Yeah, there was a production of a show I did once where some props definitely had a mind of their own. Once, I had to enter, basically pretending to be a car with these two flashlights standing in for headlights, and, you know, there was a lot of spinning choreography involved. I spun, and the flashlights weren’t secured and the batteries, huge batteries, went flying out into the audience. I later found out that they hit a critic (laughs), but he wound up writing a rave review for the play anyway.

“The show must go on” is definitely a theme that’s present throughout the performance, but to a crazy degree here. Was that concept a huge mainstay in your education as an actor?

Certainly. I think everyone’s quite well aware, even before you begin a training program, what a difficult business this is. It does take quite a fair amount of resilience to even stay in the game as an actor, so as far as when things go wrong on stage, most actors are resilient in that matter.

Were you always drawn to being an actor?

Yeah, from a pretty early age [it was] something I was attracted to. I loved arts, I loved singing, I loved reading and writing, but there was something wonderful about telling a story collaboratively that really drew me to the art form pretty intensely pretty quickly. There was nothing like it for me.

Being an LGBTQ-identified actor doesn’t seem that drastic in 2019, and the theater world has a reputation for being welcoming, but you started acting in high school. Were you always confident in your identity around your peers?

Especially in high school it was very much a
Editor’s Pick

Affirmations Food Fundraiser at Troy’s Big Salad

Fans and regular attendees of the Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center’s programming can help raise money to maintain its programming schedule by making their way to The Big Salad in Troy on Monday, Feb. 25. That day, 25 percent of the restaurant’s sales will go directly to the Center. Those interested in participating should let their cashier know they’d like to donate a portion of their bill. The restaurant is located at 738 E. Big Beaver Road. For more information contact Kyle Taylor at ktaylor@gaaffirmations.org or call 248-398-7105.

**Happenings**

Continued from p. 24

- **The Village Theater at Cherry Hill**
  50400 Cherry Hill Road, Canton. 734-394-5300 ext. 3. cantonvillagetheater.org

- **Dispelling Myths about Smoking, Mental Health/Substance Use Disorders and Recovery** February 19, 7:30 p.m. People with mental health or substance use disorder can quit tobacco use. Health educator Rosemary Bik Lavery will shed light on the relationship between tobacco, mental health and substance abuse disorders. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725. dawnfarm.org.

- **Candy Chemistry** February 23, 11 a.m. Experiment with candy to learn science concepts. For ages 5 & up. Capital Area District Libraries – Dansville Branch, 1379 East Mason St., Dansville. 517-623-6511. smiley@cadl.org.

- **Cabaret 313 Presents Carole J. Bufford** Made famous by Janis Joplin, Dusty Springfield, Tina Turner, Carole King and more, Cabaret 313’s own Carole J. Bufford returns for her third performance with Cabaret 313. The Big Salad, 738 E. Big Beaver Road, Troy. 313-873-0513. cabaret313.com.

- **Experiment with Candy to Learn Science**
  Candy Chemistry February 23, 11 a.m. The Village Theater at Cherry Hill, 50400 Cherry Hill Road, Canton. 734-394-5300 ext. 3. cantonvillagetheater.org

- **90th Annual Spring Dance Concert**
  Join us as we highlight national and international works from top performing artists. Bonstelle Theatre, 3424 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-577-2960. stagecrafters.org.

- **Tangent Gallery**
  Come join us for an eclectic celebration of the erotic arts all in one evening! Featuring poetry, art, music, burlesque and more! Tangent Gallery, 775 East Milwaukee Ave., Detroit. 248-445-1277.

- **The Lightning Thief**

- **Gaelic League of Detroit**
  The 90th Annual Spring Dance Concert takes place this evening in celebration. Detroit. 313-868-1347 www.detroitreptheatre.com

- **Williamston Theatre Presents ‘To Quiet the Quiet’**
  February 9, 9 p.m. What if, at the heart of every choice we’ve ever made lies this question: What if we had chosen differently? How would our lives be changed? If/Then follows Elizabeth, a divorced urban lawyer, who moves to a small town and makes a life for herself. Will our lives be changed? If/Then follows Elizabeth, a divorced urban lawyer, who moves to a small town and makes a life for herself. Wharton Center Presents ‘Miss Saigon’ March 12, 7:30 p.m. Experience the emotional crescendo of the original production, with a somber and thoughtful new score that features new songs, including the memorable “Last Night of the World.” Wharton Center, 750 E. Shaw Lane, East Lansing. 517-353-1982 wharton@msu.edu

- **Mary’s Place**
  738 E. Big Beaver Road, Troy. 313-873-0513. cabaret313.com

- **Grand Rapids**
  February 23, 11 a.m. Experiment with candy to learn science concepts. For ages 5 & up. Capital Area District Libraries – Dansville Branch, 1379 East Mason St., Dansville. 517-623-6511. smiley@cadl.org.

- **Cable313 Presents Carole J. Bufford**
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AT LITTLE CAESARS ARENA

THU, MARCH 28 – 7:00PM
vs. ORLANDO MAGIC

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The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce have partnered with the Detroit Pistons to bring you Pistons Equality – Celebrating Pride Night on March 28th. Grab your friends and family to see the Pistons take on the Orlando Magic for an exciting night of Detroit Basketball. Each person that purchases a ticket will receive a limited edition Pistons Equality - Celebrating Pride Night t-shirt. Come early to watch PRISM Gay Men and Allies’ Chorus of Metro Detroit sing the National Anthem! In addition, there will be a specially choreographed halftime performance aimed around the LGBT community performed by the Pistons Dancers and an exclusive post-game experience. A $5 proceed from each ticket sold will benefit a local LGBT charity you choose when you checkout. Please place orders quickly because packages are limited!

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(248) 377-0172 / BGOEBEL@PISTONS.COM

DEADLINE: FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2019

All tickets are subject to availability and handled on a first-come, first-served basis. All prices on orders received after the indicated deadline are subject to change. Refunds or exchanges will not be issued. Please provide an accurate cell phone number and email address in order to access your tickets. All tickets purchased will be available on your Pistons Account. You will receive an email once they are available.
Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Sarah Paulson flies over the cuckoo’s nest

Ryan Murphy, the man who currently owns most of television, has another show coming. It’s called “Ratched,” and you’ll need to reach back to at least the 1970s to get the title’s reference, because that was when the film adaptation of Ken Kesey’s novel “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” won Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, and, for the purposes of this explanation, Best Actress for Louise Fletcher, who played the monstrous Nurse Ratched. For this upcoming project – already given a deal for two seasons and 18 episodes – newcomer Evan Romansky has created an origin story, one that will star Murphy regular Sarah Paulson as a younger version of the nurse who grew to be a demon of the mental health care system. And there’s an all-star cast rounding out the event: Judy Davis, Cynthia Nixon, Corey Stoll, Amanda Plummer, Sharon Stone and Finn Wittrock, among others. You’ll be hearing plenty about it as the airdate approaches. It’s Netflix, after all; they know where to find you.

Laverne Cox and Sara Gilbert move to ‘Weird City’

Jordan Peele is, how they say, on a roll. From “Get Out” to the upcoming “Us,” to the planned “Twilight Zone” reboot: if he touches it, people want to see it. And now he’s working on a new series for YouTube Premium called “Weird City,” alongside “Key and Peele”’s Emmy-nominated writer Charlie Sanders. The premise is comedic sci-fi, and it’ll be an anthology series, which means lots of one-off guest stars. Cast so far are people like Sara Gilbert, Ed O’Neill, Rosario Dawson, Michael Cera, LeVar Burton, Dylan O’Brien and Laverne Cox, all in as-yet-unknown combinations and storylines. Six episodes are coming later this year to YouTube Premium – in case you didn’t know that existed, you’re welcome – so you’ve got some time to learn how to throw it from your phone to your TV.

Call Michelle Williams ‘Miss Ross’

When Beyoncé starred in “Dreamgirls,” she wasn’t playing Diana Ross specifically, but OK she actually sort of was. And now, in brand new Destiny’s Child-member-playing-Diana Ross news, Michelle Williams will be portraying the real deal for a series coming soon to BET. It’s called “American Soul” and its plot is aligned with that of the legendary TV show “Soul Train” and its impact on American pop culture. Sinqua Walls (“Power”) will star as Don Cornelius, with Williams as Ross, Gabrielle Dennis (“Rosewood”) as Tina Turner, Bobby Brown as soul singer Rufus Thomas, singer K. Michelle (“Love & Hip Hop: Hollywood”) as Martha Reeves and, completing the triple play, Kelly Rowland as Gladys Knight. Now all DC members will have at least one musical legend role on their resumes (and in Beyoncé’s case, having also played Etta James, two). The show is coming up quickly, Feb. 5 on BET, so spend all your free moments until then dancing around to “I’m Coming Out.”

Jamie Lee Curtis RSVPs to your queer wedding

Unless she’s been to your wedding, you might not instantly know the name Sara Cunningham. But she’s the mother of a gay son, and she’s written a memoir about it titled “How We Sleep At Night.” And what makes her story unique is that wedding thing. Last summer Sara got national attention by posting on Facebook that she would be a stand-in mom at any LGBTQ wedding that found itself rejected by the biological parents. And now Jamie Lee Curtis has purchased the film rights to Cunningham’s 2014 book, presumably as a starring vehicle for herself. Curtis was quoted in the Washington Post as having been “moved by [Cunningham’s] journey,” and now we’re imagining a heartwarming dramedy where the “Halloween” heroine buys upwards of 27 dresses to wear at a variety of queer nuptials, dashing across town in a zany get-me-to-the-church-on-time speeding car chase to attend her third ceremony in one afternoon. These are free ideas we’re giving you, Hollywood.

Romeo San Vicente is usually Best DILF at weddings.
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Oakland County Swears in its First Openly Gay Circuit Court Judge

BY DREW HOWARD

Oakland County saw its first ever openly gay circuit court judge join the bench this week at the swearing-in ceremony of Jake Cunningham last month.

Cunningham, a graduate of Western Michigan University Law School, was joined by friends, family and colleagues who praised his work ethic and empathic nature. Cunningham will fill an empty seat on the Oakland County Circuit Court’s Family Division following his 3 1/2 year stint as a judicial staff attorney on the same docket.

Mary Ellen Brennan, presiding judge of the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court and mentor to Cunningham, said the judge’s victory is also a win for Oakland County residents, including transgender claimants.

“Transgender citizens seeking a legal name change as part of their transition want a judge who will be kind,” Brennan said. “I along with my family division colleagues will benefit from his generous work ethic, his insight, his humor and his friendship. The work he is set to do is important, and he will be really, really good at it.”

Cunningham’s new position in the Family Division will see him handling cases involving divorce, custody, child support, juvenile abuse, termination of parental rights and juvenile delinquency – among other things. In a July interview with Between The Lines, Cunningham described the new role as a “natural progression” for his career.

State Sen. Jeremy Moss praised Cunningham’s character while highlighting his role in the 2018 rainbow wave. Moss made history in November when he became the first openly gay person to be elected to the 11th state Senate district.

“Another thing Jake and I share in common is being part of this rainbow wave of 2018,” Moss said. “Jake and I were talking about it, and we think that Jake is the first openly gay official elected in Oakland County county-wide, and would be among the first openly gay judges to serve in the state of Michigan.”

Moss continued: “I think that is so critically important, especially in the Family Division, as Oakland County’s LGBT families are looking for credibility, for justice, for somebody who has sympathy with things our community is facing. We couldn’t put a better person that spot to represent us.”

Cunningham was also joined by his partner Mark of 11 years, who the judge described as the “campaign MVP.” Through law school, the bar exam and the 2018 campaign, Cunningham said his partner has supported him in all of his professional aspirations.

“I think everyone here tonight would agree if this campaign had an MVP, it’d be you,” Cunningham told his partner. “From the at-home treasury work, at-home emotional support, putting your life on hold for this, your incredible sign installations, extensive Snapchat documentary and the hours upon hours you spent into putting this video together today, you truly deserve the title MVP both in this campaign and my life. I love you.”

More information on Cunningham’s goals, objectives and experience can be found in our July candidate profile on pridesource.com.

Ned Noyes

Continued from p. 25

thing I wasn’t quite ready to deal with. Being part of the theater community eventually actually made that transition much easier for me in college, but it’s definitely come a long way since I was in high school. I love seeing these movies like “Love Simon” — it seems achingly familiar of course, but also it seems like the world has come quite a long way now in terms of being something that more people are proud of their friends for dealing with in high school when it’s the most difficult to.

Do you think when you came out it helped you as a performer? Or do you feel it didn’t make an impact?

I think anything that’s stopping you from being the most authentic version of who you actually are is going to hold you back in so many ways in life, but certainly artistically expressing yourself. Being very sure of who I am and taking that to the world enables me to understand people better. If you’re constantly trying to hide a part of who you are, that’s going to make you a terrible artist.

I heard a comedian once describe performing while in the closet as similar to having one hand tied behind his back. Oh, precisely, that’s a great metaphor for it. And I think the audience can tell, too, if something is being held back. Truth is always at the root of the best comedy.

Beyond LGBTQ performers, the LGBTQ community makes up a large number of theater fans, too. Was that audience base part of your consideration when you came out?

No, I can’t say that I ever actually thought about that. It’s a wonderful thing that it exists, I think, for people to have that kind of community if it’s not accessible to them within their immediate circle. I think it’s a wonderful thing, and it’s a plus side to the rise of social media that people can find people who share their passions online and share those passions together, but I can’t say I was ever aware of that.

Why do you think LGBTQ visibility is important, even if you’re not performing in an LGBTQ-specific role?

Visibility is everything. It enables people to be progressive in so many ways; the more people you know who are gay, the less you’re able to discriminate. It’s hugely important for everybody, I think, both within and out of the gay community.

Find out more information about ticketing and the play online at ticketmaster.com.
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