

WINDY CITY TIMES

THE VOICE OF CHICAGO'S GAY, LESBIAN, BI, TRANS AND QUEER COMMUNITY SINCE 1985

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Mary Otts-Rubinstein.
Photo by Matt Simonette

PAGE 10

FAMILY AFFAIR

Queer couple fights for justice for foster daughter



KEN MEJIA-BEAL

Gay man running for state rep.

Photo courtesy of Mejia-Beal

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THE BITCH IS BACK

Lesbian musician talks Pride, politics.

Photo by Shervin Lainez

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Michael Herman (left) and Ryan Garrison.
Photo by Matt Simonette

HOUSE HEADS

New Chicago House CEO, board chair talk about future

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online exclusives at
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'DEAD' RECKONING

Queer author Kristen Arnett talked about her latest book, *Mostly Dead Things*.

Photo (left) of Arnett and moderator Lindsay Hunter by Julia Hale

TAPPED OUT



WCT reviews the Fulton Market Kitchen spot City Tap.
Photo courtesy of City Tap

WITH PRIDE

Despite the heat, the Disability Pride Parade took place in the Loop.

THAT'S SHOW BIZ

Find out the latest about Ruby Rose, Janet Jackson and Max Minghella.

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Justice John Paul Stevens: An early supporter of LGBTQs

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, who will be buried in Arlington National Cemetery this week, was one of the first members of the nation's highest court to express support for LGBT people. He did so years before Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote the first of several decisions that championed equal rights for LGBT people. He did so years before Kennedy even joined the court and at a time when most of the court and most Americans harbored fear and hostility toward LGBT people. It was a time before even the acronym "LGBT" existed.

Stanford Law Professor Jeffrey Fisher, who clerked for Stevens during the 1998-99 session, said Stevens was "absolutely" one of the first justices of the Supreme Court to stand up for LGBT people.

"I remember the term I clerked that the Justice was quite distressed when the Court denied review in a case from Cincinnati ... where the Sixth Circuit had let an anti-LGBT right ordinance stand," said Fisher. "It was clear this was something he cared deeply about and that he was committed to the project of eventually revisiting Bowers."

But even before that case, *Equality Foundation v. Cincinnati*, Stevens made clear he cared about the rights of LGBT people. As early as 1976, he and Justices William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall voted to hear the appeal of a man challenging Virginia's ban on sodomy for male couples.

"Our three votes to hear the case expressed our view that the issue presented was sufficiently important to require full briefing and argument before being decided," wrote Stevens.

Unfortunately, it takes at least four justices

to agree to hear an appeal and so, in the case of *Doe v. Commonwealth's Attorney for Richmond*, the appeal was not taken. Instead, the Supreme Court majority affirmed the lower court decision without hearing arguments. Stevens, Brennan, and Marshall asked that the record show they would have heard the appeal.

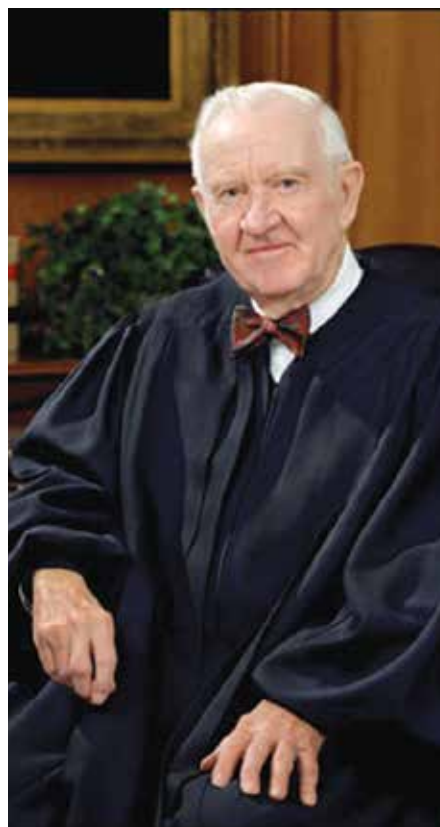
"We now know—based on a string of cases beginning with *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 and culminating with *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015—that the summary affirmance [in *Doe*] was incorrect and failed to appreciate the full aspect of liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment," wrote Stevens in his 2019 biography *The Making of a Justice*.

Ten years later, the high court did take an appeal from a gay man challenging a sodomy law. The case was *Bowers v. Hardwick*, from Georgia. In a five-to-four decision, the court upheld the law as it applied to same-sex couples.

Stevens wrote one of the two dissents to that decision, saying it was "plainly unacceptable" to think that same-sex couples do not have the same interest in liberty as others. The principle that "all men are created equal," he said, "surely must mean that every free citizen has the same interest in 'liberty' that the members of the majority share."

"From the standpoint of the individual, the homosexual and the heterosexual have the same interest in deciding how he will live his own life, and, more narrowly, how he will conduct himself in his personal and voluntary associations with his companions."

To allow a state to enforce a ban on "sodomy" against one group and not all people, he wrote, the government should have to identify a legitimate interest "more substantial than a habitual dislike for, or ignorance about, the disfavored



Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens.

Photo from the official Supreme Court website

group."

Stevens was clearly proud of his actions in *Doe* and *Bowers*. In his biography, he wrote that he had felt "particular satisfaction in seeing the seeds I planted in my *Bowers* dissent...grow to strike down anti-sodomy statutes" in the court's 2003 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*. And that decision "led to an even greater expansion of liberty and equality for our fellow citizens in later decision *United States v. Windsor*, which struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, and *Obergefell*, which recognized the fundamental right to marry cannot be denied to same-sex couples.

"Tony Kennedy was of course instrumental in these groundbreaking decisions," wrote Stevens in his biography, "but I like to think that, even though I had left the bench, I had a hand in them as well."

Jennifer Pizer, Law and Policy Director for Lambda Legal, agreed that Stevens' dissents in *Doe* and *Bowers* planted the "seeds that bloomed 17 years later in *Lawrence v. Texas*, with active cultivation by movement lawyers and many others." She also credited Stevens' intellect and interpersonal skills with creating a relationship with Justice Kennedy that "helped shape Kennedy's opinion for the Court in *Lawrence v. Texas*, and then his decision in *Obergefell* a dozen years later, after Justice Stevens had retired."

"In other words, although he has been less recognized popularly within the LGBTQ movement than Justice Kennedy, Justice Stevens' voice articulating core principles of personal rights and equal dignity over three and a half decades on the Court was among the most important foun-

dation-layers for the LGB rights breakthroughs of recent years," said Pizer. "His role was immeasurably important. And his continuing voice since his retirement—one of constitutional principles, humane social critic, and call to civic engagement—will be dearly missed."

In 1987, one year after *Bowers*, Stevens, an appointee of Republican President Gerald Ford, had the third best voting record in support of equal rights for gays and lesbians (behind Marshall and Brennan). By 1992, when Marshall and Brennan had retired, he and Justices Harry Blackmun and David Souter (all three Republican nominees) had the best voting records on LGBT-related cases.

In 2000, Stevens led the dissent against a five-to-four majority that held the New Jersey law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations could not be used to require the Boy Scouts of America to accept openly gay scout leaders. The case was *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*, and the majority said the First Amendment's right to association protected the Scouts' right to exclude gays.

Stevens' dissent in the Boy Scouts case in 2000 sounds like language suited to defend LGBT people against cases today asserting business vendors have a right to exclude LGBT people based on the business vendors' professed religious beliefs. He criticizes the majority for accepting at face value the Boy Scouts' claim to be acting on a belief that being gay is "not morally straight."

"I am unaware of any previous instance in which our analysis of the scope of a constitutional right was determined by looking at what a litigant asserts in his or her brief and inquiring no further," wrote Stevens. Asserting a belief at odds with an anti-discrimination law, he wrote, "is not a freedom to discriminate at will...."

"If this Court were to defer to whatever position an organization is prepared to assert in its briefs, there would be no way to mark the proper boundary between genuine exercises of the right to associate, on the one hand, and sham claims that are simply attempts to insulate nonexpressive private discrimination, on the other hand. Shielding a litigant's claim from judicial scrutiny would, in turn, render civil rights legislation a nullity, and turn this important constitutional right into a farce."

While Stevens voted in favor of LGBT interests in more than two-thirds of the cases that came before him, he did not always land on the pro-LGBT side. In 1987, for instance, he voted with the majority to say the government had no authority to stop the U.S. Olympic Committee from barring the organizers of the Gay Games from calling their event the "Gay Olympics."

And in 1995, he voted with the unanimous court to say that a Massachusetts law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations could not be used to force the organizers of Boston's annual St. Patrick's Day parade to exclude an openly gay contingent.

Stevens retired from the court in 2010 at the age of 90. He died July 16, at age 99, from complications related to a stroke. His funeral and burial at Arlington National Cemetery were scheduled for July 23.

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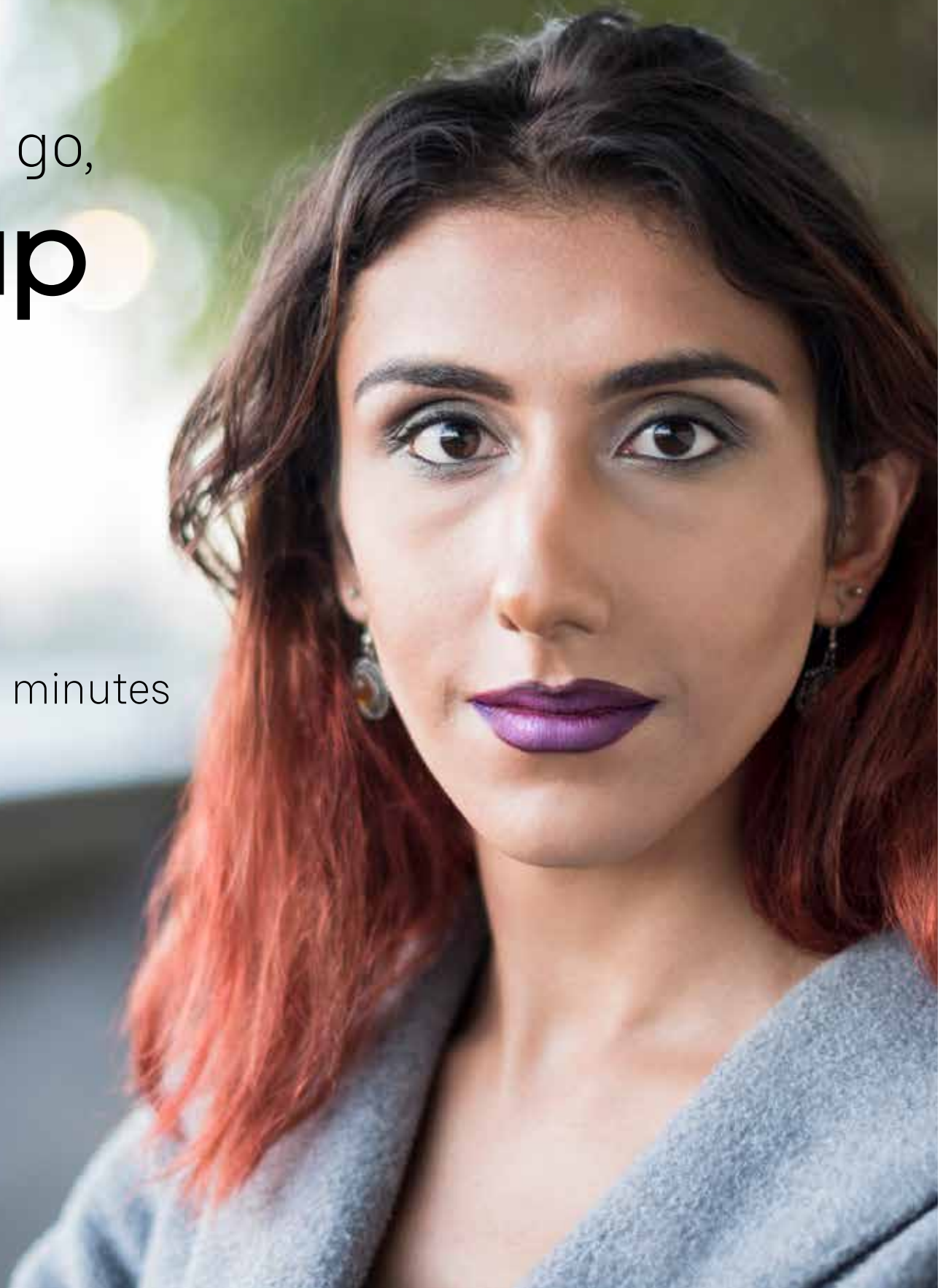
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Grassroots political organizer/LGBTQ activist Cole N. Ansier dies

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Grassroots political organizer and LGBTQ activist Cole N. Ansier died July 13 due to complications from a genetic health condition. He was 35.

Ansier was born April 10, 1984, in Rockford, Illinois, and grew up in Janesville, Wisconsin, where he graduated from Janesville Craig High School. He received a drama, arts and stagecraft bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2007.

In 2009, Ansier moved to Chicago to work as a production manager at NORC at the University of Chicago and was working there at the time of his death. Prior to coming to Chicago, Ansier worked for the University of Wisconsin Foundation as a floor manager.

When Ansier was not working, he campaigned for numerous local, state and national Democratic candidates, taking part in Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential race; the campaigns of many Congressional candidates; Kevin B. Morrison's and Donna Miller's Cook County Board races (which they won); and the electoral contests of Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and various city aldermanic candidates.

Ansier also organized the Feb. 25, 2017, Stand Up for Transgender Rights rally with Morrison to protest against the Trump administration's anti-trans policies. He volunteered for many LGBTQ, immigrant and anti-violence organizations and set up a website called Let's Unfuck America with his friend Robin Dusek that included information about Democratic races across the country.

Dusek told Windy City Times that Ansier loved data, politics and democracy and spent countless hours putting together a searchable spreadsheet that included all House and Senate races, the partisan lean of the state/district, how much fundraising the Democratic candidate had achieved and polling averages. This spreadsheet was widely distributed and allowed users to target donations to where their dollars could be most impactful during the midterms.

Ansier is survived by partner James Maines; father Nick Ansier; grandparents Daniel R. and Judith Ansier and Al Lembrich; many aunts, uncles, cousins and extended family as well as his chosen family and friends. He was preceded in death by his mother Diane L. Lembrich and grandmother Nancy Lembrich.

"Cole was, by far, the single most impactful



Cole Ansier (right) and partner James Maines. Photo courtesy of Maines

person that has come in to my life," said Maines. "His caring spirit, loving heart and commitment to public service are only a few of the numerous qualities that solidified my love for him. He encouraged and inspired me to be my absolute best and to stand up and fight for the rights and wellness of all people. I will honor him by living my life as he did. I am so lucky to call him mine, but I could not be prouder to see that all who came in contact with him also saw him for the incredible person that he was. He will be in my heart forever. I love you Cole."

"Cole gave selflessly to the world," said Dusek. "He was an activist who never once centered himself in the process and always gave so much more than he ever asked for. Where others talked, Cole listened and absorbed so that he could better support his friends, community and country. His patience, caring and gentleness made those around him feel safe and supported, but he would always battle for what was right and just."

"He made himself vulnerable in ways few people do. It is so difficult to describe him, but he would check in and ask how my dogs were doing, or if my cats had found a good place to sleep. But he would also work to understand ways he could support marginalized communities by truly listening what individuals had to say and also examining data that could shed light on issues not captured in conversations of those he interacted with. I am angry he died so young because he should have had so many more decades to make

the world a better place. I will miss him and especially his gentle and compassionate nature."

"I am heartbroken and at a loss for words," said Morrison. "Cole was a great friend and a tireless advocate. I met Cole for the first time at O'Hare during the Travel Ban protests and we became fast friends. We organized together, traveled to [Washington, D.C.] for the Progressive Change Candidate Committee candidate training and went to Detroit for a DNC forum. We were sitting together in the Senate Chambers, and witnessed the historic moment when then Sen. John McCain voted 'No'. Losing Cole is a great loss for Chicago and our country. He and his activism will be sorely missed, but never forgotten."

"Cole was an incredible, caring and gentle soul," said friend Keelie Fallon. "His kindness and generosity of spirit, time and energy will live on through everyone touched by his life. I still cannot believe he has been taken from us. We will miss him so much."

"Your presence and passionate advocacy will be painfully missed Cole," said friend John West. "The world lost a great person who dedicated many hours of volunteering to elect good people and right the wrongs in society. We will miss you dearly."

A funeral mass will take place at 11:30 a.m. Friday, July 19, at St. John Vianney Catholic Church, 1245 Clark St., Janesville, Wisconsin.

Ansier's Chicago friends are planning a local memorial for him that will be shared soon at <https://coleansier.com/>.



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PASSAGES

Michael O'Reilly, aka Penny

BY WEB BEHRENS

Longtime Chicagoan Michael Francis O'Reilly—a queer artist, activist, Radical Faerie and sometime provocateur best known as Penny—has died at age 57. After surviving decades with HIV, he received a lymphoma diagnosis last autumn; he passed away peacefully June 10, surrounded by friends and family in his Rogers Park home.

Born in 1962 in Lansing, Michigan, Penny moved with his parents and four siblings to Wilmette in the early '70s. He attended New Trier East High School, where he was president of the 1980 graduating class. He studied engineering at Rice University in Houston, where he also came out. After college, he lived in Kankakee, Illinois, before settling in Chicago. Penny worked for many years as a phone installer for AT&T, then took an early retirement and worked for himself as a painter, handyman and declutterer.

Those varied professional skills abetted his artistic pursuits. For a 2001 large-scale public-art/activism project, he constructed and painted an enormous canvas with a pro-environment message, which he used to cover an abandoned billboard on Peterson Avenue just west of Ravenswood. Meanwhile, his penchant with telephone technology led to a few occasions of him performing in drag as Ernestine, Lily Tomlin's classic phone-operator character.

In 2002, Penny and his then-partner and dear friend Matthew Gleeman Long bought a home in Rogers Park that the pair envisioned as a small urban sanctuary for faeries. They dubbed it "The Castle," although it's known to most as the leopard-print house, thanks to Penny's bold animal-print paint job. Penny and Gleeman welcomed dozens of faeries, queers and artists under The Castle's roof—both as permanent residents and as travelers. Some of those wandering through hailed from rural faerie communities in Tennessee and Minnesota, both circles in which Penny was active.

Penny Michael O'Reilly is survived by his siblings, nieces and nephews: sister Camille; sister



Michael "Penny" O'Reilly.

Photo courtesy of Web Behrens

Eileen, her husband Tom Gerspach and their children Ryan, Megan and Annie; brother Kevin and his son Dylan; and brother Steve, his wife Christine and their sons, Joseph and Eric. (The middle child of five, Penny often joked that he was "the youngest girl, oldest boy.") He is also survived by many aunts, uncles, cousins and countless friends.

In his final years and months, Penny found great joy and fellowship in the Queer Contra and Chi-Town Squares dancing groups. The Queer Contra group is dedicating its Saturday, July 27, dance gathering to Penny's memory. All are welcome; details are on Facebook (at <https://www.facebook.com/events/315922625977629/>). A private memorial will be held Saturday, Sept. 14.

His family requests that donations can be made in his name to Howard Brown Health Center (HowardBrown.org/donate/), where he long received care.

CWB Chicago reported July 20 that Bates was in a head-on collision along Halsted. Gerrick Birt was charged July 20 with felony DUI causing an accident with bodily harm, two counts of misdemeanor DUI and various traffic violations. Birt's blood-alcohol level was three times the legal limit.

Bates was taken to Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center, where he underwent surgery July 21 for a broken pelvis. He posted regular updates to Facebook—promising that Gigi Mayonaë would return—but passed away from a pulmonary embolism caused by a blood clot.

The fundraiser is at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/dream-girl-fund>. The CWB Chicago article is at <https://www.cwbchicago.com/2019/07/tragedy-popular-drag-performer-injured.html?f>.

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Fundraiser set to assist family of Gigi Mayonaë

An online fundraiser has been established to assist with funeral expenses for Jherion Bates, who performed under the drag persona of Gigi Mayonaë, who was killed as the result of an accident in Boystown the early morning of July 18. He died July 21.

"This GoFundMe is to help raise the necessary funds to help cover the costs of a proper funeral for our departed sister," said organizer Maxine LaQueene at the fundraiser's site. "We don't fully know when the funeral is to be planned, but her family gave us the go ahead to start raising funds for whatever miscellaneous costs they will incur."



Rebecca J. Ernst.
Photo courtesy of Denise Ellis

PASSAGES

Rebecca J. Ernst

Rebecca J. Ernst passed away April 28. She was 67.

Becky Ernst was born in the Midwest on Dec. 28, 1951, and moved to Alaska with her parents in the early '60s to begin her adventures. She was always curious and willful and, even at a young age, her dream was to marry a horse! She became an accomplished guitarist and singer, influenced by Joan Baez and Peter, Paul and Mary, participated in theater, fished commercially, built log cabins, homeschooled three children, and traveled with her sons and husband around the United States in an RV.

Becky moved to Chicago in the mid 1990s, enjoying the big crowds and big experiences. She absorbed and exuded the energy from everywhere, loving public transportation, walking and chatting and connecting with everyone she could. Becky's spirit evolved and thrived on new experiences. She was a true Renaissance woman.

Becky opened and managed Serendipity Massage Therapy, at 5301 N. Clark St., for 20 years. She revelled in Andersonville's vibrant community.

With her spouse, Denise, Becky enjoyed a creative, expansive and warm life. They took care of their cherished moms and shared their home with many close friends who became family. Guests were welcome anytime. She and Denise enjoyed rich conversations, cooking, concerts, theater, gardening, birds, and travel. They relished in the Lake Michigan beaches, a centering piece of their life.

Becky lived with breast cancer from 1992. She had years of cancer-free living until 2011, when metastatic cancer appeared. She never focused on dying, always hopeful for a cure, and lived each day with joy and determination.

Becky's warm smile and piercing eyes made you

feel immediately comfortable, peaceful, and energized. Becky Ernst, still peaceful, passed away at her home in Chicago surrounded by her spouse, children, sister and nieces and nephews.

She is survived by her spouse, Denise Ellis; her sons Zach (Becky), Eli, (Shannon) and Abe Porter; her grandchildren Braeden, Sadie, Emily, Eden and Madeline; her sister RoseMarie (Jerry) and brothers Randy (Carol), Robbie (Q); sisters-in-law Cindy (Bob) and Kathy; brother-in-law Carl; nieces and nephews Peter, Amy, Seth, Matt, Jenny, Heidi, Tyler, Logan, Annaleah, Devin, Aaron, Beth, Ellie, Melinda, Dean and Bradley; and their families. She was preceded in death by her father Raymond, mother Sally, brothers Rick and Butch, and sister Ruth.

Join us for a celebration of Becky's rich life at Unity in Chicago, 1925 W. Thome Ave., on Saturday, Aug. 24, at 3 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation in memory of Rebecca Ernst at BCRF.org.

PASSAGES

James Krueger

Many are grieving the loss of James Krueger, who passed away peacefully on June 3 after a long illness. A North Side resident for more than 30 years, Jim belonged to the Rodeo Riders Social club—first as a maverick and then as an elected president.

Jim was an avid reader and an aspiring writer. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Roosevelt University. To pay the bills, he became a teacher; however, finding that teaching wasn't his passion, he moved on to find a position as a case worker for the Social Security department and remained there until he retired. Never giving up his dream, he continued to write and submit his stories in his spare time.

Jim and his life partner, Rod Baker, shared their lives and love together for more than 30+ years.



James Krueger.
Photo courtesy of Barbara Townsend

They enjoyed the beauty in everything, whether they were traveling to exotic places, collecting rare and unusual art, or giving love and attention to their feline companions. Together, they created an amazing backyard paradise that they were so proud of—full of flowers and trees, and unlike any other in the city.

Once sons of the Windy City, they now travel

Evanston's inaugural Pride Fest on July 25

In an effort to extend Pride celebrations past the month of June, the City of Evanston will host an inaugural Evanston Pride Fest on Thursday, July 25, 6:30-8:30 p.m., at Fountain Square Plaza. Pride Fest will occur in coordination with the Thursday Night Live! event hosted by Downtown Evanston.

Admission is free and open to all ages.

At the City Council meeting on June 10, Mayor Stephen Hagerty proclaimed June as "Pride Month" in the City of Evanston, encouraging all residents to recognize the enduring efforts and ongoing contributions of the LGBTQ+ community. The City also raised a rainbow flag outside of the Morton Civic Center in honor of Pride Month.

The Pride Fest and Thursday Night Live! schedule is as follows:

—6:30-7 p.m.: Welcome statement, proclamation reading, stories

—7-8:30 p.m.: "Let's Play" mobile recreation trailer, chalk art activity by One River School, button making by nicelena & Friends, wax hand making by Waxed Hands, Evanston Pride selfie/photo area.

—7-9 p.m.: Classic rock cover band "Chicken Bone," Smylie Brothers Brewing Company tent, Downtown Evanston sponsor and vendor tents

Fountain Square is located at Davis Street, between Sherman and Orrington avenues. Orrington Avenue will be closed to vehicular traffic from Grove to Davis streets from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sherman Avenue will be open to vehicular traffic.

More information is at <https://www.cityofevanston.org/Home/Components/News/News/3446/17> as well as "Evanston Pride Fest at Thursday Night Live!" on Facebook.

Bisexual health summit takes place in Chicago

More than 100 people gathered July 9 to discuss bisexual health and community building at an event that was Chicago Bisexual Health Task Force's (CBHTF's) largest event to date.

The Bisexual Health Summit featured local activists, healthcare providers and researchers discussing key issues facing bisexual people, such as discrimination, violence, mental health, substance use and access to healthcare.

The summit—held at the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile—as a part of the 2019 National Sexual Health Conference. The event followed the 50th anniversary of the

together in the wind. Who knows where it will take them?

Jim was preceded in death by Rodney Baker; his father, James Krueger; and his brother, Richard Krueger. He is survived by his mother, Betty Borske; sister, Barbara (John) Brunner; brother, David (Linda) Kruger, and sister-in-law, Jane VaNoss; and many nieces and nephews.

Stonewall Uprising and connected earlier activism to current health concerns among bisexual people.

Some of the panelists included activists Michael C. Oboza and Paige Listerud; Howard Brown Health nurse Aiden Harrington; and the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing's Dr. Christina Dyar, Ph.D.

The Task Force was officially formed in 2018 after a group of community members, researchers, and health providers started meeting in August 2017 to discuss bisexual health. Lauren Beach and Brian Feinstein are the CBHTF co-chairs.

Mineral Point to display AIDS Quilt

In Wisconsin, as part of Mineral Point's 3rd annual Pride celebration, sections of the internationally celebrated AIDS Memorial Quilt—the 54-ton, handmade tapestry that stands as a memorial to more than 96,000 individuals lost to AIDS—will be on view Aug. 8-10 at the boyoyoboy! contemporary art gallery, 22 High St., Mineral Point.

Mineral Point Pride is hosting this free display of the quilt.

Established in 1987, The NAMES Project Foundation is the international organization that is the custodian of The AIDS Memorial Quilt. The quilt began with a single three-foot-by-six-foot panel created in San Francisco in 1987. Today, The quilt is composed of more than 49,000 individual panels of that size—each one commemorating the life of someone who has died of AIDS.

The gallery describes itself as an art collective specializing in contemporary South African art.

See boyoyoboy.com.



The AIDS Memorial Quilt.
Photo courtesy of the NAMES Project

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Couple face challenges, pursue justice for foster daughter

BY MATT SIMONETTE

A North Side queer couple who, for two years, have been foster parents to a special-needs toddler are awaiting the court hearing that could decide the punishment for the man who is accused of shaking and injuring the child.

Mary Otts-Rubinstein and her wife, Rachel Rubinstein, took in their foster daughter Evelyn in 2017. Born drug-dependent to a mother in Louisiana in May of that year, Evelyn's birth mother had arranged a private adoption with an Olympia Fields couple, Jordan Schroeder and Kory Risner.

But Evelyn was admitted to a hospital in June after being allegedly shook violently by Schroeder.

"Initially, the doctors thought it was meningitis—she had a fever and neurological symptoms," Mary said. "But when they did a CT scan, it pointed more towards not-accidental trauma [which] is characterized by three different things: swelling on the brain, bleeding on the brain and hemorrhaging behind the eyes."

Hemorrhaging behind the eyes, Mary added, requires a repetitive motion. "[But] she was a little bit protected because she was little."

According to Cook County State's Attorney's Office spokesperson Tandra Simonton, Schroeder is charged with one felony charge of aggravated battery to a child. His next court date is scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 15, before Judge Michele Pitman in Markham.

Evelyn was placed with Mary and Rachel in July 2017, after the child been in the hospital for a month. Her brain was severely injured, so Evelyn will likely have impaired communication and mo-

bility for her entire life.

Shaken baby syndrome, according to the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, is often underreported since children many not have any immediate external signs of injury. But internal injuries can be severe, and may lead to cerebral palsy, mental retardation, paralysis, seizures and/or vision loss.

"I don't think we understood shaken baby syndrome when she came here," Mary said. "We understood that she'd have neurological deficits. We did not understand the devastation that shaking causes."

Mary and Rachel are committed to Evelyn's longterm care and hope to formally adopt her, but Mary admitted that commitment comes with enormous financial and physical sacrifices. Mary mainly works from home as executive director for a national organization, but Rachel is a private therapist for whom taking time off for doctor's visits and hospitalizations is difficult.

"When she's not seeing clients, she's not getting paid," said Mary.

Evelyn's care requires not just overseeing her medical treatments, but involved and complex engagements with Medicaid and other financial assistance bureaucracies, as well as managing nurses and a nanny for the child. Mary and Rachel are active in various Chicago Jewish communities, and credit their friends there for providing much assistance and support. When the couple became foster parents, they'd assumed they'd get an older child placed in their home, so they were not immediately unprepared for a child with Evelyn's needs. Mary recalled that, after they put the word out to their friends, they "everything we



Mary Otts-Rubenstein.

Photo by Matt Simonette

needed within 24 hours."

She added she is not sure how she feels about Schroeder's prosecution and whether the single charge against him is sufficient punishment; if convicted, Schroeder likely faces several months in jail. Mary admitted to being uncomfortable with publicly calling for prosecution of a gay man, but questioned whether he comprehends the gravity of Evelyn's situation. When prosecutors asked whether Mary and Rachel would like to see the matter go to trial or would prefer Schroeder be offered a plea bargain, they nevertheless

said they'd prefer the plea.

"He would have to say, 'I did this,' and how he did this, and we would have the opportunity to present [both] Evelyn's biological mom's impact statement and something written by us on Evelyn's behalf," Mary said. "Now that she's two, [Evelyn] can't reliably lift her head. She can't roll over. She can't talk. This is every person's issue ever [in these situations]—we just want the other person to understand the full impact of what has been caused."

Report: Program head resigns after violating sexual harassment policy

A report has stated that Eduardo Alvarado—the head of the Illinois Department of Public Health's HIV/AIDS program—resigned in May after it was recommended he be fired for violating the agency's sexual-harassment policy and verbally abusing staff, The Chicago Tribune noted.

An investigation the Office of Executive Inspector General conducted also revealed that Alvarado falsified information on his initial application for a job with the department and on his time cards.

In one case, a program employee told investigators that Alvarado "greeted him with a kiss on the lips once or twice" in the agency's office. Alvarado, while meeting with investigators, said "that greeting people with a hug or kiss is 'normative behavior' for gay men, and is the traditional greeting in Spanish or Latino culture," according to the report.

Alvarado resigned May 22—several days after he attended a Springfield news conference at which Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced the launch of the "Getting to Zero Illinois" plan, which aims to halt the spread of HIV in the state by 2030.

The Tribune item is at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-illinois-health-department-sexual-harassment-20190719-rlkezoyc6f-gzbkce5rjbnuprsy-story.html>.



Eduardo Alvarado.
Facebook photo



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Chicagoan helps put AIDS Survivors Syndrome in the spotlight

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Among the many effects of the AIDS crisis are the constellation of residual mental-health issues that can face individuals who cared for or lived with someone facing AIDS, or otherwise experienced the crisis on its proverbial front lines.

Those issues—frequently grouped together under the label AIDS Survivors Syndrome—include forms of survivors' guilt and depression, among other symptoms. Until recently few professionals knew much about how they have affected persons left behind in the AIDS crisis. Chicagoan Joseph Knell, however, has recently formed a new discussion group at Center on Addison so area residents can gather to talk about those issues.

AIDS Survivors Syndrome is a complex form of PTSD, Knell noted, adding, "It's similar to what soldiers in World War I experienced. ... Nine of the symptoms have been validated in the MACS [Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study] study."

Knell recalled that, when doing research on HIV case management for his job in December 2018, he chanced upon writings by Tez Anderson, a San Francisco-based activist who has widely discussed AIDS Survivors Syndrome; Anderson himself coined the term in 2013.

"[Anderson] was experiencing different symptoms like depression, lack of future orientation, irritability—there's a whole list of symptoms [now] identified with AIDS Survivors Syndrome," Knell explained.

In reading Anderson's book, however, Knell recognized a lot of those same symptoms in himself.

"Now I understand while I felt so bad for so many years," Knell said. " ... The MACS was with both HIV-positive and -negative people. What they found was that it didn't matter whether you were positive or negative; what mattered was that you lived through the epidemic."

Knell long battled depression. He said it got worse with the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando.

"After that, I started having these [episodes] where, out of the blue, I would just feel incredibly sad—one of the symptoms is extreme sadness," he said. "Another symptom is social withdrawal and isolation, and there were times when I just felt like staying home. A lot of the issue is this feeling that nobody else can understand what I went through. Until you've sat with your best friend and watched them die, you won't understand what it's like."

Knell had multiple friends with AIDS over the years.

"There were friends whom I was with in the hospital and there were friends who didn't want anyone to see them, and we just found out about it," he recalled. "That can be just as bad because you weren't there for them."

Knell contended with survivors' guilt as well.

"Sometimes I feel guilty that I'm still here," he

explained. "I was doing the same thing my best friend was doing. We were all experiencing our lives and having fun. Why am I still here 24 or 25 years later, and he's not? A lot of those things just come up."

Those issues came to a head in 2018.

"I was feeling really bad," Knell recalled. "I was having really dark thoughts and feeling depressed. But I at least worked for a great company and had good health insurance, and could go talk to somebody about this."

Going into therapy was useful, but his therapist did not know the intricacies of AIDS Survivors Syndrome. Reading about it in December 2018 was revelatory, however.



Joseph Knell.

Photo by Matt Simonette

"I had been in support groups for grief and things like that," Knell said. "My first thought was, 'Now I know what's wrong. Now I know why I've felt this way for 20 years. If I'm feeling this way—there are lot of gay men who lost people during that time, people who are HIV-positive and -negative, lesbians who were on the front lines helping out, family members, straight people—there are other people feeling the same thing.'"

Knell emphasized that a group most at risk for completing suicide are men in their fifties.

His discussion group has become a personal mission.

"It's real and this is affecting people," he added. "People are out there and suffering, and they don't know what's wrong. I worked in health care—I even worked in psychiatry for a while—and I didn't know what's going on. That's the real challenge—people aren't aware."

The AIDS Survivors Syndrome Support Group meets Saturdays from 12:30-2 p.m. at Center on Addison, 808 W. Addison St. For more info, see <http://www.centeronhalsted.org>

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Lighthouse Church holds racial-justice summit, announces new foundation

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

In the wake of the recent controversy surrounding Boystown's Progress Bar, Lighthouse Church of Chicago UCC held a "Racial Justice Summit: Boystown & Beyond" event July 13 at Lincoln Park's St. Pauls United Church of Christ.

The packed event happened after a controversial internal email from Progress Bar owner Justin Romme that told DJs to stop playing rap music was made public on social media. What resulted were an outcry from LGBT activists, a June 2 protest across the street from the bar and demands from activists—to which Romme agreed.

Lighthouse Church of Chicago Founder Rev. Jamie Frazier spearheaded the event and gave the keynote address. He also announced the formation of the Lighthouse Foundation and its community-organizing arm, Coalition of Allies for Racial Justice (CARE)—of which he is the founder and board member—as a response to racism that occurs in Boystown and other Chicago neighborhoods.

According to the foundation's press release, it is a "non-sectarian, non-profit organization that will address the needs and advance equity and justice for the African American LGBTQ+ population throughout Chicagoland. The Lighthouse Foundation aims to empower African American LGBTQ+ people through entrepreneurship, empowerment, education and entertainment."

Frazier said "CARE will collaborate with allies organizing for [fair] treatment in Boystown and beyond."

Lighthouse Foundation member Edward Davis, St. Pauls United Church of Christ Senior Minister

Matt Fitzgerald, Illinois Conference UCC Associate Conference Minister Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers (who serves the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the UCC) and Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches Rev. Jackie Beilile spoke ahead of the panel discussion that focused on the lived experiences of three Black LGBTQ people and their interactions with Boystown.

Davis said this summit was the culmination of multiple injustices against Black LGBTQ people in Boystown while Fitzgerald said he and his church has been glad to partner with Lighthouse over the years and with the new foundation.

Powers spoke about the UCC church being "a place of safety and sanctuary for all God's people and especially those who are hurt or wounded."

Beilile said "enough is enough" and explained that the need for visibility and connection is so important to LGBTQ people on the whole.

Moderator and Lighthouse Foundation member Karlyn Meyer led a discussion with panelists Lighthouse Foundation African American Trans Caucus Leader Lyric Lee, Lighthouse Foundation African American Lesbian and Bisexual Caucus Leader Alicia Lee and Lighthouse Foundation African American LGBTQ+ Entertainers Caucus Leader Cleo Pockalipps.

Meyer asked everyone what their level of comfort is with Boystown.

Alicia said she has heard from Black LGBTQ people who said they used to feel comfortable in Boystown but lately they feel profiled due to their race. She explained that it used to be easier to navigate the neighborhood at places like Belmont Rocks until it shuttered.

Lyric spoke about being a recent Chicago transplant from San Antonio, Texas, and her experiences since moving here. She said that, while working a second job in the area, some customers hurled anti-trans slurs at her; the managers allegedly did nothing about it, causing her to quit. Lyric explained that she cannot get from point A to point B anywhere in Chicago without worrying about her safety.

Pockalipps—noted as the Roscoe's Drag Race Reigning Champion and the first Black person to hold that title—spoke about performing at a variety of Halsted Street bars. She said recently Sidetrack made her the "All Things Beyonce" host—but added that this came after years of her working harder for fewer opportunities. Pockalipps explained that progress overall is too slow for Black LGBTQ people, including being chosen as a performer at PrideFest and Northalsted Market Days. She spoke about the situation involving the Halsted Street store Beatnix and allegations of racism and anti-trans bigotry there, including selling Confederate flag merchandise and profiling certain customers based on their race and gender identity.

Frazier's keynote highlighted the Stonewall Uprising and the Black and Latinx LGBTQ people



From left: Alicia Lee, Lyric Lee, Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers, Tim Wolfe, Jamie Frazier, Cleo Pockalipps, Karlyn Meyer and Edward Davis.

Photo by Julia Hale

who led the fight, especially Marsha P. Johnson whose cause of death remains a question. He spoke about the 11 Black transgender women who have already been killed in the United States this year.

"Black LGBTQ folks recognize that we are the heirs of Marsha P. Johnson, the mother and midwife of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement," said Frazier. "We have come to challenge her beneficiaries, mainly white gay men, for our inheritance. Black LGBTQ folks+ demand justice, particularly here in Chicago."

Frazier spoke about the key issues the Foundation will be addressing including Beatnix (a Boystown-area store that has had complaints of racism), the Halsted Street parking ban, Walsh Security and the Center on Halsted (the Center). He said Walsh Security operated without a private contractor's license when the Center chose the company and its owner Thomas Walsh Sr., who was a Chicago Police Department (CPD) officer, was suspended from CPD in 2017 for beating a Black man and calling him the N-word. (Center COO Kim Fountain attended the event.)

In terms of the Center, Frazier said the leadership there should end their business relationship with Walsh Security and do better outreach in the Black and Latinx LGBTQ communities.

"I am not interested in casual conversation. I am interested in community-driven demands," said Frazier.

Fitzgerald also spoke as a white ally alongside Ravenswood United Church of Christ Pastor Jason Coulter and Gather Church founder/pastor Tim Wolfe.

Fitzgerald said that white people should be better allies, adding that he met Frazier at a protest in front of the Moody Bible Institute president's office when the Nashville Statement (an anti-LGBT) evangelical Christian statement of faith) was released while Coulter said "until everyone is free, no one is free."

Wolfe explained that his church is focused on "the reclamation of LGBTQ+ Christians who have been shunned and traumatized by faith." He said

most people spend all their time studying and planning an issue but do not execute it or measure its successes and failures. Wolfe challenged everyone to execute plans and less time talking about them.

Frazier ended the event with a call for Black LGBTQ folks throughout Chicagoland to join Lighthouse Foundation through one of its seven caucuses that he said encompass the "full spectrum of the Black queer experience." He encouraged allies of Black LGBTQ people to join the Foundation's organizing arm, CARE.

Among the event's co-sponsors were the Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches and the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the UCC.

See <https://www.facebook.com/lightfoundchi> for more information on the Foundation.



Rev. Jamie Frazier speaks.

Photo by Lathaniel Marshall

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POLITICS

Gay man talks about running for state rep

BY MACKENZIE MURTAUGH

Every morning, Ken Meija-Beal awakes to his alarm at 3:30 a.m.

The first thing on his mind is to respond to each and every message he received overnight. After that, he heads to the gym. To him, his day is structured to communicate with people. He bases much of his productivity around his conversations and if he has invited people of color, different sexual orientations, races and socioeconomic backgrounds to the table.

When he announced his run for state representative for the 42nd District on July 15, Meija-Beal was not fazed by the lack of discourse the former representatives allowed in his community.

"I am running to be a representative who actually communicates with the community, and by the community, I mean the entire district," Meija-Beal told Windy City Times before the announcement. "There is no representation, no one is communicating with us, our voices are not being heard."

Meija-Beal represents more than a gay, Black man with a passion for representation—he said he attempts to respect and highlight every underrepresented group he can with his campaign.

"We are the middle class, poor people, people of color, the LGBT community, senior citizens," he said. "The opposite of that would be the folks with a lot of money. That's who our district is."

Before announcing his run for state representative, Meija-Beal was a community organizer for Chris Kennedy's gubernatorial campaign, and is a member of the Democratic National Committee and operates in DuPage County.

Meija-Beal intends to apply what he learned

in his past positions and utilize them to develop a relationship with his community that other politicians don't have.

"What I will do is exactly what I have been doing, which is talking to people and understanding what makes them tick," Meija-Beal said.

Meija-Beal's platform centers on three major issues he intends to change in his district. First, he promises to halt any revenue increases on alcohol, saying the increases tend to hurt small business and bar owners.

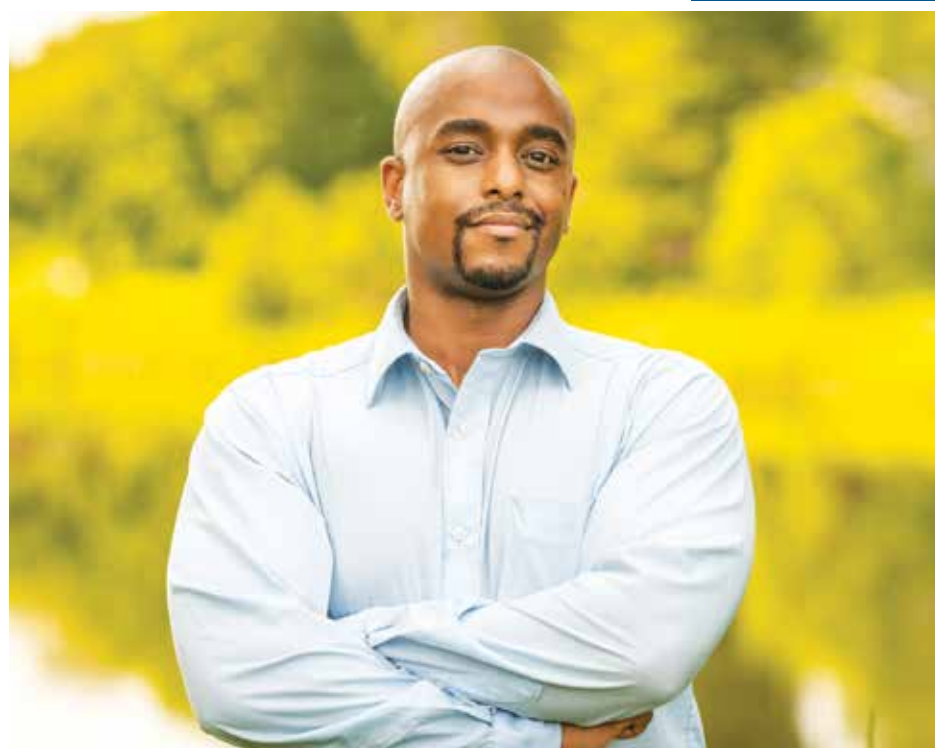
He also wants to help his community with a simpler distribution of affordable insulin and HIV medication. Meija-Beal said that without insurance or an excess of funds, many low-income citizens and LGBTQ+ community members cannot afford the necessary medication for their illnesses.

His third promise is to end puppy mills in Illinois. The living situation that the mills supply for the animals is fundamentally abusive, according to Meija-Beal. "If the conditions are deplorable, it's disgusting," Meija-Beal said. "It's simply not okay in our state. We have so many animals that need to be adopted."

With these main issues, he hopes to be successful in placing a magnifying glass on underrepresented groups who may feel ostracized by their current and former representatives.

"I want people to know that I see them," Meija-Beal said. "We are in a culture, and not just in our state but the entire country, where so many people are fighting just to be seen. They're not being seen because of socio-economic issues. If you don't have enough money to take a trip to Springfield, how are you going to be seen here?"

He vowed to make himself as available to his community as possible by allowing them to call,



Ken Meija-Beal.

Photo courtesy of Meija-Beal

text, email and message him through social media to address any issues they have. After a day at their nine-to-five, U.S. workers may not want to call their representatives. Knowing this, Meija-Beal has acknowledged the ease of sending a text message or an email, as opposed to a phone call. By making his personal information public, Meija-Beal said he hopes to develop a more reciprocal relationship with his community than other representatives.

"That's the reason I'm running because I actually do care," he said. "I'm definitely not doing this for any other reason. I am someone who's just a normal guy who, for years, I felt like no one

saw me. I took it upon myself to be seen, to get heard and to get those stories out there."

Using the adversity he has faced as an openly gay Black man prompted Meija-Beal to use his voice to uplift people in places he has experienced.

"[My experiences] affect the way I view government because a lot of people, especially in today's age, don't understand what it's like to have to wait for the government to say you can live your life. I do, so when I heard people say the government is stalling on X, Y and Z, I understand. I know what that's like."



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Incoming Chicago House CEO, board chair speak about the future

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Both Michael Herman, the incoming CEO of Chicago House, and Ryan Garrison, that organization's new board chair, say that Chicago House that "has their heart."

Herman is taking Chicago House's reins over from Scott Ammarell, who announced in March that he would be departing. Herman had previously done work with the organization but was, until recently, vice president of development for Kohl Children's Museum, where he oversaw a \$15-million development campaign as well as a significant expansion of services.

"That was great training, because Chicago House is expanding and growing," said Herman. "Using the skills I acquired in my five years at the museum will be fantastic as we look at how we are growing as an organization, and bringing in the capital funds that we need to do that."

When the CEO position opened, he added, "It wasn't an opportunity that I was going to pass up. It was core to my commitment of serving communities of poverty, working with housing and working with an LGBTQ community. It really

fit all my passions in terms of what I wanted to be doing. It had a huge part of my heart, so it was very easy to go back to a place that I loved."

Garrison is heading into his fifth year on the board; he is taking over the board chair position from attorney/activist Ray Koenig.

"I was very fortunate to serve on the board of an LGBTQ nonprofit in southwest Michigan in St. Joseph called the OutCenter," he said. "I've been involved with fundraising since a young age."

He added, "When I moved to Chicago, I wanted to get involved [with Chicago House]. ... I started attending Chicago House events. I'm incredibly passionate about housing, which is core to all the vital services that LGBTQ nonprofits offer throughout the city."

Herman said that growth needs to be a focus for Chicago House officials.

"Obviously, Chicago House has been around for nearly 35 years and is a staple of the community, but we think there are infinite possibilities in terms of meeting the needs of population, especially in the area of housing," he explained.

That means looking beyond the Chicago city limits, Herman said, adding, "Just because we're



New Chicago House CEO Michael Herman (left) and Board Chair Ryan Garrison.
Photo by Matt Simonette

called Chicago House doesn't mean we can't go outside the city—that's where there's a lot of need, and we think that we're better positioned to provide that."

Garrison said, "Howard Brown [Health] does healthcare amazingly well. Equality Illinois does policy. I think Chicago House does housing exceptionally well, so I think finding additional synergies where possible is going to be a goal for the board."

Chicago House has also been part of the coalition of advocacies and agencies that launched the Getting to Zero initiative driving to eventually eliminate all in new HIV transmissions in the

state. Both Herman and Garrison said supporters can expect that commitment to continue under their watch.

Herman added that participating in a statewide initiative like Getting to Zero aligns with the idea of expanding Chicago House's focus throughout the region.

Garrison said, "It's very difficult to be adherent to HIV medication or PrEP if you don't have stable housing. You also are unlikely to attend doctor's appointments if you don't have stable housing. So a large part of what we're contributing to that [Getting to Zero] movement is intrinsic to who we are."

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Volumes of racism, xenophobia on blast

The first time I heard the racial trope “Go back to where you came from,” I was getting off of a school bus in a white section of town in Brooklyn.

Little did I know then I’d hear those words from kindergarten through 12th grade, and the N-word was usually coming at the end of the phrase than the beginning. By my senior year in high school, very few white students and their parents hurled those words at us Black kids who were in the school’s new college-bound program. And, many of our white teachers, school administrators and staff employees didn’t have to—because it was not what they said to us, but rather their treatment of us.

The treatment of “otherness” I experienced from my years of being bused, I learned had less to do with the people targeted, like myself, and everything to do with the group in power. I learned that their perceptions of birthright, citizenship, ownership and racial entitlement were bolstered by laws and institutions keeping their belief system in place.

It is the belief—at least, in my generation and older—that it takes a long time for attitudes like that to change, if they change at all, because changing those people, their systems and laws can take more than one lifetime. However, not with the four Democratic congresswomen called “The Squad”—Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts.

When The Squad called out the president and his administration for the inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrants detained in cages, and the deplorable and squalid conditions they are forced to live under, Trump, in his inimitable style of *ad hominem* tweets, stated the following rather than address the crisis head-on:

“Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came... These places need your help badly, you can’t leave fast enough.”

Trump’s statement illustrates how perceptions of birthright, citizenship, ownership and racial entitlement have upped the volumes of xenophobia and racism to blast these days. Many more people feel emboldened to call the cops on Blacks, to tell perceived foreigners to leave this country, and to concoct birther conspiracies of American born children of immigrant parentage, like presidential hopeful Kamala Harris, and former President Barack Obama.

While many U.S. residents are shocked that more than 90,000 people liked Trump’s tweet, and many of his fellow Republicans stand behind him, Presley clapped back at Trump, stating, “THIS is what racism looks like” —and she’s right.

Trump espouses a racist nostalgia of his childhood during the 1950s-’60s Jim Crow era—which, to him, was when the United States was great. Most see how racist the country was back then. However, do we see it now?

I realize, however, I am not alone in my telling of being outside of my perceived racially confined area. A Red Sox fan recently posted in the New York Times comments section: “As a young person of color in Boston, I would hear ‘Go back to Roxbury where you belong.’ This while I, an American-born citizen, ventured out of the public-housing projects to the downtown area or to Fenway Park.”

The volume and the degree to which everyday

white U.S. citizens have called 911 on Blacks for sitting at Starbucks, barbecuing in a public park, playing golf to slowly, or napping in a school’s college lounge, to name a few, not only speaks of Trump’s vile acts as aberrant to secure his perceptions of birthright, citizenship, racial entitlement and ownership of this country. It also speaks of and to other ordinary white residents, too.

While the public has heard Trump utter *ad nauseum* his now-familiar refrain “I am the least racist person you have ever met” when it comes to defending his racist behavior, similar refrains are spoken by ordinary white people.

When the American Colonization Society failed to send all freed Blacks and slaves “Back to Africa,” the dominance and societal backing of the white gaze allowed for the “othering” and policing of non-whites. While it began with the slave codes, which did not permit Blacks to assemble without the presence of a white person, it didn’t end there. The white gaze morphed into various permutations of policing over history: KKK, segregation, white citizen council, and white privilege, to name a few. And, each of these permutations makes clear that a white person’s discomfort, unease or suspicion of the “other” trumps a non-white person’s civil rights.

President Trump’s proclivity for racist remarks comes as no surprise. His comment stating a preference for immigrants coming from a Scandinavian country like Norway than from Africa and Haiti which he depicts as “shithole” countries with nothing to offer the U.S. is based solely on his xenophobic racism.

The Squad has a lot to offer this country. They are the hope of what democracy should look like. And, for the record, all of them are U. S. citizens—three born in the States, and one (Omar) becoming a naturalized citizen in 2000.

letters

Responding to Roe

To the editor:

I am writing this letter in a recent letter to the editor in the Windy City Times.

Perhaps one of our greatest gifts is the gift of life. I cannot ethically or morally support anti-abortionists when they pick and choose from the consistent ethic of life, nor can I support pro-choice advocates, male or female, when they mix ideology with morality, and try to stifle dialogue and understanding in the name of political correctness. Jesus has entered the world and, for me, that changes everything.

Respectful dialogue can be a lesson in self-discipline, mercy and compassion. Name-calling does nothing more than highlight one’s judgementalism and stifles honest dialogue while at the same time understanding any objective dialogue as a dangerous endeavor. The abortion question calls for serious minds to enter a mentality that celebrates, and understands life’s beauty and wonder. How do we speak about abortion without addressing the full spectrum of life issues?

In the discussion of abortion, we cannot look away from prenatal care for the unborn—a truth that may be uncomfortable for some, when it is not in line with a political ideology that blocks out all forms of reason. However, it is intrinsically interwoven to human dignity.

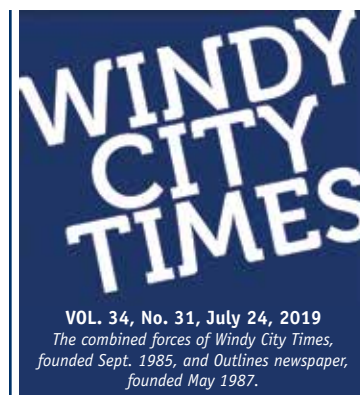
Hoffman’s letter is about celebrating the 46th anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade*—and the Rainbow Sash Movement also celebrates this anniversary. Roe is the law of the land, and still, it could be overturned. This conversation should not focus on our divisions, but rather our diversity of thought.

In my opinion, no one speaks for the LGBTQA community regarding abortion. I applaud Hoffman’s commitment to women’s health and for calling our attention to Roe’s anniversary.

From my perspective, there is a linkage between poverty and abortion. That is why we should listen closely to what the poor have to say about abortion.

Joe Murray
Chicago

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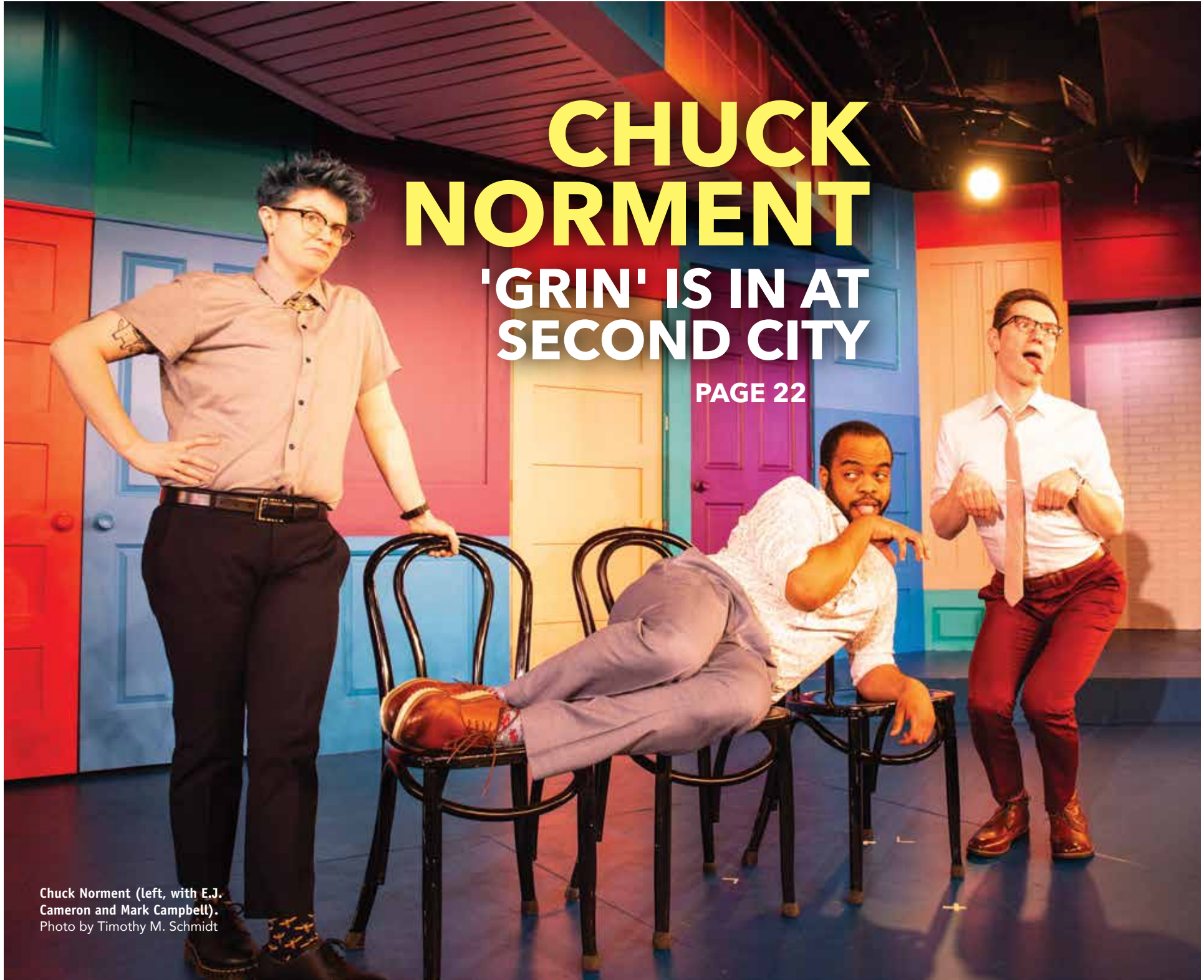
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WEEKLY

CHUCK
NORMENT'GRIN' IS IN AT
SECOND CITY

PAGE 22



Chuck Norment (left, with E.J. Cameron and Mark Campbell).
Photo by Timothy M. Schmidt

THEATER REVIEW

Ghost Quartet

Playwright: Dave Malloy
(book, music & lyrics)

At: Black Button Eyes Productions,
Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave.

Tickets: 773-327-5252 and Stage773.com;
\$30

Runs through: Aug. 17

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

The Music Man at Goodman Theatre is an excellent production of a traditional feel-good musical comedy with bright tunes and a clear story, if that's your taste. However, if you'd rather see the most singular, unique and brilliantly-performed musical in Chicago, you should head pronto to Ghost Quartet. This mash up of gothic horror, fairy tales and fantasy is an intimate masterwork by U.S. musical polymath David Molloy (born 1976).

This nearly through scored 90 minute piece re-

jects linear narrative, choosing instead to interweave characters and fantasies from sources as varied as Poe, the Arabian Nights and the Brothers Grimm. There are 18 characters played by four actors, and locales from 14th century Persia to modern New York, but don't worry if you fail to recognize them. Most of them aren't really there as far as I could determine, but that's OK.

Molloy dubbed this 2014 work a song cycle rather than a story show, and staging it wasn't intended. It was a musical gift for several friends who were the original performers. With neither a published score nor orchestrations for Ghost Quartet, director Ed Rutherford (Black Button Eyes artistic chief) and bloody brilliant musical director, Nick Sula, worked from the composer's lead sheets, and what a fabulous job they've done!

Ghost Quartet has 23 songs drawing on a dozen musical styles: jazz (shout out to Thelonious Monk), bluegrass (and its Scots-Irish roots), klezmer, Semitic minor key chant and lots of close harmony and acapella. The four performers accompany themselves on keyboards, acous-



Rachel Guth and TJ Anderson in Ghost Quartet.
Photo by Michael Brosilow

tic guitar, accordion, trumpet, ukulele, drums and autoharp among other instruments, some played for only a few measures in one song. The two women do the vocal heavy lifting while the two men carry the instrumentals, but all four share

both tasks with consummate artistry.

The endearing, versatile and greatly talented players are T. J. Anderson (baritone, keyboards), Alex Ellsworth (baritone, cello), Rachel Guth (mezzo, autoharp) and Amanda Raquel Martinez (alto, accordion); each individually a treat and collectively remarkable. Still, you'll be awed by Ellsworth and his brilliant ability to use his cello as multiple instruments by bowing, plucking, striking the strings or playing the bloody thing sideways like a guitar!

It's such a pleasure to see four such gifted young performers that the stories they tell almost don't matter. Still, there's a ghost story, a subway murder, a variant on Poe's Fall of the House of Usher, a wild bear with a honeypot and a whiskey tribute. They intertwine and interconnect but never come straight, which t'aint no matter this time around.

As if Ghost Quartet were a concept album, each song/scene is announced by a side and track number. The animated projections by G. "Max" Maxin IV are witty and charmingly whimsical. Ghost Quartet deserves an extended run.

THEATER REVIEW

True West

Playwright: Sam Shepard

At: Steppenwolf Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St.

Tickets: Steppenwolf.org

Runs through: Aug. 25

BY KAREN TOPHAM

What is the "true west?" Deserts and prairies and stories about unassailable heroes and black-hatted villains? California, with Hollywood's fantasy machine? Or is it to be found in the pleasant suburban homes that have sprung up seemingly everywhere in what once were wide open spaces? Steppenwolf Theatre explores all of these aspects of the American West in its revival of the play

that put it on the map back in 1982: Sam Shepard's True West.

Jon Michael Hill (who some of you may recognize from the TV series Elementary) and Nimir Smallwood star as, respectively, Austin and Lee—two brothers with vastly different value systems. Austin, an educated man with a wife and family, is trying to make a name for himself as a Hollywood screenwriter, using the solitude of his mother's house to finish his script. To his dismay, he is visited by his older, intimidating brother—a drifter who robs houses to make money. When Lee, who initially makes fun of Austin's "art," decides to try to sell a story he has come up with, the brothers end up on a collision course that leads to the collapse of the younger brother's ideals and self-image.

Looming over them both is the image of their

father—a broken, destitute, alcoholic failure who (like Lee) lives somewhere in the desert. Both of them are afraid that, in some way, they could become him. At the start, Lee seems more likely to fall into this trap, but Austin is not as far away as he'd like to believe, and as he slips more and more into desolation after his dream is usurped by a brother who can hardly even write. Nothing, not even his respect for their mother (Jacqueline Williams), can stop his more base nature from taking over his life.

Hill and Smallwood are both phenomenal here. These are two of the newer members of Steppenwolf's ensemble (Francis Guinan, reprising his role in the original, is on hand to represent the old guard), and they handle this iconic material with an aplomb that comes as no surprise whatsoever. What is more surprising, though, is how

funny this play is. Shepard is not known for his comic stylings. Here, however, despite the serious undertones of the plot and the violence (oh, yes, there is violence) that occurs, Arney and his actors keep the audience laughing throughout. It doesn't diminish the drama of the play; it enhances the realism.

To judge from this play, the true west is realized more by the wild call of the desert than the undramatic sameness of suburbia. Harkening back to its roots, Steppenwolf once again puts this on display with its focus on the sometimes volatile nature of human beings, but at the same time delivers a production that never fails to entertain. Revisiting one of its greatest accomplishments, it has created a brilliant new one to add to the mix.

THEATER REVIEW

Wolf Play

Playwright: Hansol Jung

At: The Gift Theatre, 4802 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Tickets: \$20-\$40;

<https://www.thegifttheatre.org>

Runs through: Aug. 18

BY KAREN TOPHAM

The Gift Theatre's midwest premiere of Hansol Jung's Wolf Play is like nothing I've ever seen.

Directed by Jess McLeod, this little gem is full of unusual characters, an inventive plot, strong acting, laughter, and real emotion. If it weren't for the fact that its ending made me very angry—an interesting reaction on my part that I can't really discuss without giving things away—I'd go so far as to call it one of the best plays of 2019.

The play centers on an 8-year-old boy whose adopted father (Tim Martin) has decided that he's too much to handle and goes online to see if he can give him away. Online, he meets up

with a very nice couple he believes will be fine. It isn't until he has signed all of the documents to give the boy away that he realizes that this is a lesbian couple; his homophobic reaction comes a bit too late.

The boy, played by a puppet with dialogue spoken by Dan Lin, claims to be a wolf. Within his mind, he understands the world as a wolf would and responds to it accordingly, which (as one might imagine) results in a lot of aggressive behaviors both at home and at school.

His new family (his "pack") consists of his moms, Robin (Jennifer Glasse) and Ash (Isa Arciniegas), and Robin's brother Ryan (Al'Jaleel McGhee). It was Robin whose desperate desire to have a child led to this unusual adoption. Ash, working hard to make a career as a boxer under Ryan's tutelage, was not in such a hurry (and absolutely detested the fact that someone would give a child away on the web). But when Ash starts thinking she might want to mother him more than she wants to box, Ryan (not wanting to lose her) uses the boy's propensity for violence as a pretext to try to convince his sister that she has made a mistake.

McLeod's direction is excellent here; she not only guides this cast to uniformly strong performances but also makes great use of Arnel Sancianco's fascinating scenic design. The whole ensemble shines: Glasse as a woman with a lot of love to give who feels frustrated when it is not reciprocated, Arciniegas as one who thought she had life mapped out until unexpectedly falling in love with this strange child, Lin as both that child and the narrator (called Wolf), McGhee as the generally well-intended brother trapped by his own dreams, and Martin as a man defined by his worst action.

I simply cannot say enough good things about this show. I'd see it again, despite the ending. And about that: I wasn't at all prepared for it to conclude as it did, but maybe the fact that I could get so viscerally and emotionally involved in a play as to hate its ending with such vehemence says something ultimately very positive about Jung's writing overall, the characters she created and the way this company has brought them to life.

CRITICS' PICKS

The Music Man, Goodman Theatre, through Aug. 18—Mary Zimmerman's buoyant, festive staging of one of America's most festive musicals celebrates a more optimistic and big-hearted USA; it's a perfect summer show and antidote for today's inglorious bastards. *JA*

King Lear, Redtwist Theatre, through Aug. 4. Shakespeare's tragedy of intergenerational family conflict is rendered timely, coherent and swift by Redtwist's intimate storefront space and a vigorous performance by Brian Parry as western drama's worst parent. *MSB*

Six, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, through Aug. 4—This acclaimed and proudly feminist British fringe musical smartly reimagines the six wives of King Henry VIII as contemporary pop song contestants in a flashy sing-off. *SCM*

Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Theo Ubique Theatre, through July 28. More like down-and-dirty rock concert than razzle-dazzle musical, Will Lidke delivers a tour-de-force performance as the jilted sexually-ambiguous heroine of the 1998 cult classic. *MSB*

—by Mary Shen Barnidge,
Jonathan Abarbanel and Scott C. Morgan

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Mal Blasingame with the cast of 20/20.
Photo by Michael Brosilow

THEATER REVIEW

20/20

Playwrights: About Face Youth Theatre members

At: Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St.

Tickets: 773-784-85665 or
AboutFaceTheatre.com; \$20 or
pay-what-you-can

Runs through: July 28

BY SARAH KATHERINE BOWDEN

The About Face Youth Theatre Ensemble is celebrating its 20th year by looking back in 20/20, a devised production that celebrates the queer lives being lived its performers now, while shining light on those who have come before.

Directors Megan Carney and Donny Acosta blend stories from previous ensemble members and Chicago artists with the current ensemble's life experiences—and the result is a powerful, joyous and moving evening of theater.

The performers have set their walk through history during a nebulous ball. The time could be now. It could also be the 1980s at the height of ballroom culture, and it often is. (The audience erupted at the needle drop on Janet Jackson's "Nasty" at the performance I attended.) The evening's emcee is tour de force Angelica Grace, whose confident moves on the runway match her ability to pump up the crowd.

Each ensemble member has a story to share, or a moment to shine, as in Sharon Pasia's inviting admission that she sees figuring herself out as a process, or Mal Blasingame's breakdown of

their rightful place as the queer Messiah. Jessica James, Dara Prentiss, Keyonna Jackson and Nina Cajuste all lovingly share the stories of queer folk who have come before, while Lucian Sheldon-Wesley transforms one of the poem they discovered in the About Face archive to a devastating and relevant look at how rejection fuels pain and loss. And because all these stories are told at a ball, there's also a ton of posing and group dancing.

Carney and Acosta smartly let their performers be themselves—a central theme of the show. Before the production's start, each cast member wandered through the audience, welcoming the

crowd with genuine clarity. The ensemble members are at their strongest when they support one another as a group, taking one another's hands organically, or lead a round of snaps, or calling out a hard moment. Their bond envelops the audience, as we are included in dance numbers, and encouraged to shout out our own responses to their threads.

Claire Sangster's bright pink lights and Ariel Zetina's bumping music support the celebration and party on display, while the About Face Youth Theatre Ensemble has generated a warm and welcoming space to celebrate queerness and look forward to the future.

SPOTLIGHT

Eclipse Theatre Company, one of Chicago's most versatile off-Loop troupes, dedicates each season to one playwright, and the 2019 choice is iconic gay playwright Christopher Durang. Over a five-decade career, Durang often has written about people desperate to fall in love and be loved back, who are stymied by sexual identity, religion, commitment issues, devouring parents, urban absurdity and the traps/false promises of contemporary psycho-analytical babble. Durang's 1981 comedy **Beyond Therapy** finds straight Prudence and bisexual Bruce attempting to find soul mates, guided by their respective shrinkers. Will it be love at first sight? Almost certainly not in Durang's quasi-farical and sardonic universe. The Eclipse production continues through Aug. 18 at the Athenaeum Theatre; visit Eclipsetheatre.com. Photo by Scott Dray



THEATER REVIEW

Pomona

Playwright: Alistair McDowall

At: Steep Theatre, 1115 W. Berwyn Ave.

Tickets: SteepTheatre.com
and 773-649-3186; \$27-\$38

Runs through: Aug. 24

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

In the course of our 85-minute play, an enthusiastic gamer will instruct a cool-cookie tyro in the protocol of Role-Playing Games (aka RPGs)—specifically, the game called "Cthulhu Awakens," based on the stories of science-fiction author H.P. Lovecraft.

Also, a pensive property owner will muse on the principle of "selective education" and issue a warning on the dangers of untoward curiosity ("getting involved"), citing instances of unlucky individuals proposing to overreach the limits of their authority, only to suffer punishment at the hands of powerful civic bosses—atrocities so terrifying that miscreants choose suicide rather than risk capture.

We are unlikely to recall these helpful facts when we most need them, however, since they are preceded by a dizzying cavalcade of disturbing images, beginning with a leisurely drive around the perimeter of Manchester (England) in a vehicle resembling a "Dark-Ride" carnival-car, piloted by a motley-garbed Zeppo. Occupying the passenger seat is punkish teen Ollie, and in back is a black-robed figure with the head of a squid.

Ollie, we learn, has come seeking Zeppo's aid in finding her missing sister. After advising her to

think carefully before embarking on the search, he directs her to Pomona, a now-deserted amusement park (named for the benevolent Roman goddess, not the Los Angeles suburb). This urban ruin, kept in isolated disrepair by its tenants and guarded by a pair of hired sentries, now houses a brothel where Ollie's sibling may have sought refuge and whose proprietor does not hesitate to order up a reluctant hit squad to eliminate troublemakers.

Oh, and by the way, playwright Alastair McDowall presents us with this information in non-chronological fragments, thus guaranteeing that the path of our heroine's quest, instead of resolving the mystery of the runaway girl, serves to raise more questions: who is the frightened young mother clutching a stolen laptop as she flees hidden pursuers? Why does one of the security guards beg to be beaten, even killed, by his partner? Why are all the characters named for early Hollywood icons? Are they avatars in a Dungeons & Dragons-style game played by the aforementioned RPG nerds, or are they the anesthetized visions of an unconscious patient undergoing surgery?

McDowall's merciless descriptions of a dystopian universe border on Grand-Guignol horror at times (if hospitals give you the creeps, be prepared to cover your ears), but never do director Robin Witt and the Steep Theatre ensemble abandon us to the confusion generated by our author's calculated mosaic narration. (Did I mention the talking seagull with a scatological agenda?) However unsure of our footing we may be after stepping off his vertigo-inducing carousel ride, we are secure in our knowledge of where we went before arriving at our destination.

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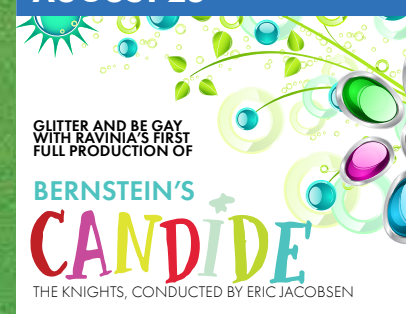
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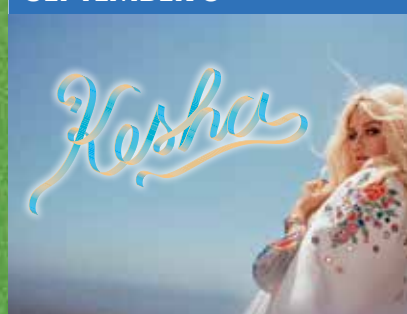
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NUNN ON ONE: COMEDY

Chuck Norment: 'Grin' is in at Second City

BY JERRY NUNN

The Second City e.t.c.'s 43rd Revue: Grinning from Fear to Fear continues an open run, with many sold-out shows on the second floor of 230 W. North Ave. The troupe consists of returning cast member Andrew Knox and first-time ensemble members Atra Asdou, E.J. Cameron, Mark Campbell, Laurel Krabacher and Chuck Norment.

Norment (pronouns: they/them/theirs)—from Newport News, Virginia—have been in Second City's national touring company and was a featured performer in The Second City and NBCUniversal's Break Out Comedy Festival in 2016.

Windy City Times: Did you study comedy in Virginia?

Chuck Norment: Yes. I grew up in Southeast Virginia, so kind of close to the ocean. Around college time, I moved to Northern Virginia, closer to D.C. That's where I got into comedy. I actually came to Chicago during my junior year and did comedy at Second City. That's what sparked ev-



Chuck Norment (left, with E.J. Cameron and Mark Campbell). Photo by Timothy M. Schmidt

everything and now I have been doing it for about eight years.

WCT: What is the comedy scene like in Virginia?

CN: Not great. It's a lot of lawyers that live on Capitol Hill who want to do comedy as a hobby. People have fun, but don't take it as a serious craft.

WCT: What is the LGBT scene like there?

CN: There are a lot of cool bars and spaces in D.C. The oldest lesbian bar was in D.C., but it

closed recently. I think queerness has opened a floodgate in the last few years with the verbiage. Lesbian spaces seem to be dwindling. Look at [former bar] T's, here in Chicago.

WCT: What does the title of the show—Grinning from Fear to Fear—mean?

CN: It's one of the more earnest shows I have seen at Second City in a long time. It's not very political, but dives into the heart and the anxieties one experiences day to day. We have a lot of view points on that stage. It's a show about anxiety and overcoming it. It's also about finding relief in the people you love and that love you.

WCT: So the cast writes the sketch show. Was there personal things in the show for you?

CN: Yes. I have a scene in the show called Treehouse and it's not based on real life, but instead an ideal situation where I would tell my parents that I am trans. They know that I'm gay, but they don't know that I'm trans, because that has been very hard for me to express to them. It's a scene of me and my dad in a treehouse where I'm telling him that I'm trans. It's a very vulnerable scene. I won't tell you how it ends.

WCT: Will audiences cry at the show? Isn't it supposed to be comedy?

CN: I think so. It's a show that you can laugh and cry. It tugs the heartstrings.

WCT: What are some other topics in Grinning from Fear to Fear?

CN: Sleepless nights is a thing and anxiety is in every single sketch.

There's a scene that Andrew Knox wrote that's a game-show scene. It's the brain keeping someone up all night. Your brain is the game host. It's a gamut of nonsense that your brain thinks of late at night when you are trying to fall asleep.

WCT: Are there other LGBT people in the cast?

CN: I'm the only one. I'm the first trans person to ever be on one of their stages. It is exciting that I can create a trail for other people.

WCT: How was touring with Second City in the past?

CN: I loved it. It was one of my favorite jobs because I got to be somewhere new almost every day. It was challenging sometimes because we

would be in very small cities. The six of us would stand out so aggressively as city kids. We got to show people a perspective that they hadn't seen a lot. I would meet teens that hadn't come out yet and hadn't identified as being queer or trans. They would be very excited to see any kind of representation.

WCT: Are you still working for iO Theater on the side?

CN: Yes. I have done tons of shows at iO. Now I do a lot less because of Second City. I perform with their shows Virgin Daiquiri and Meridian. I did a lot of improv shows there.

A while ago, I ran a show called Gender Is a Drag. It was a gender queer variety show. I would bring in drag queens and other queer comedians in the scene.

WCT: What do you like about Improv?

CN: The spontaneity of it and the fact I get to be other people. I get to live in weird, strange versions of myself. Being able to create something in the moment is always very exhilarating for me. There's no right or wrong way to do it.

WCT: How is it working with this particular Second City cast?

CN: Everyone is very professional. It makes you want to be better. Andrew Knox has done three revues and this the first review for the rest of us. I look up to him a lot and I like the way he performs. It's nice to have someone better than you to make you keep up and makes you better because of it.

WCT: Where would you like your career to go?

CN: I would like to write and star in my own TV show and eventually get a movie. That's the big goal.

I'm working on writing a pilot right now. In media, there's a lot of coming out stories and I want to stray from that. I want to create something that has comedic content, but is just about queer people existing. We don't get that very often. I think I can get good at that and create an avenue for it in the next five to 10 years.

For tickets to The Second City e.t.c.'s 43rd Revue: Grinning from Fear to Fear, visit SecondCity.com or call 312-337-3992.

The Company of SIX, photo by Liz Lauren

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ART

Scholars talk queer representation, identity in 'Community' panel

BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN

What does it mean to be queer?

A new art exhibition explores the past, present and future of queerness. "About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and New Queer Art" runs through Saturday, Aug. 10 at Wrightwood 659, 659 W. Wrightwood



Pennsylvania and chair of the doctoral program in Visual Studies at the University at Buffalo. Wrightwood 659 exhibitions manager Lauren Levling moderated the panel.

"About Face" is organized into five sections—Transgress, Transfigure, Transpose, Transform and Transcend—and features almost 500 portrait-



Left: Panelist LaSaia Wade. Above: Panelists Sarita Hernández, Brendan Fernandes, Jessie Mott, Lisa Stone and Lauren Levling.
Photos by Lauren Emily Whalen

Ave. On June 28, the gallery hosted "Voices From the Community," a panel in which five local artists, curators and LGBTQ+ advocates discussed themes within the exhibition.

Located in Lincoln Park, Wrightwood 659 was designed by Tadao Ando, a Pritzker Prize-winning architect. According to its website, the gallery is intended "as a site for contemplative experiences of art and architecture, and as a place to engage with the pressing social issues of our time." The About Face exhibition was curated by Jonathan D. Katz, PhD, a Visiting Professor of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at The University of



One of the works in the exhibit—Daddy I Would Love To Dance by Deborah Kass (2008).

based works of 43 artists, from queer icons Keith Haring and Harvey Milk to late Chicago surrealist Roger Brown to current multidisciplinary artists like Tianzhuo Chen and Sharon Hayes. In a program note, Katz calls the exhibition "diverse" and "a state-of-the-field survey of queer art today."

Several panelists disagreed with this assessment.

"I didn't see myself when I walked through," said LaSaia Wade, executive director of Brave Space Alliance and the first trans woman in Illinois history to be honored in Women's History Month. "Normally, I have to pick what intersections I hold [Wade is an Afro-Puerto Rican Indigenous trans woman], but I didn't see myself as a Black queer trans person within this art." A notable exception, said Wade, was a video installation featuring Black queer individuals dancing. "I spent a good 10 minutes watching it," she said.

Canadian artist and current Whitney Biennial participant Brendan Fernandes agreed. "I'm a dancer, so the first thing I do [in an exhibit] is walk through the space," he said. "Walking through the space I was asking, where do I fit in?" Jessie Mott, a Chicago-based visual artist and social worker, agreed that the exhibition felt "a little bit whitewashed. We can't have a queer show without acknowledging trans people of color. Where are those voices?"

"I think it is a wonderful show that asks a lot of important questions," Mott said. "But I think there are so many more."

It wasn't just the lack of diversity, added Sarita Hernández, arts educator and co-founder of Marimacha Monarca Press, a South Side "creative familia" for queer and trans people of color. "The

[exhibition's] narrative was missing something," she said. "When the setting is framed in Stonewall, we are talking about police violence. I was hoping to engage in more of a discussion around it. LGBTQ people of color experience so much police violence."

Lisa Stone countered, speaking positively about the exhibition. "One of the things that struck me [about the exhibition] was the self-deliberation and self-identity," said Stone, curator of the Roger Brown Study Collection and senior lecturer in the Department of Art History, Theory and Criticism, both at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. "I feel like most, if not all, of the portraits show an incredible sincerity. Some kinds of portraiture can be more attitudinal, but these were about the self."

The discussion moved on to the definition of "queer" and how it is defined in About Face.

"Older people see the word 'queer' as something offensive and shameful. For younger people, 'queer' is all they want to use," Mott observed.

"Growing up as a Black person in a Black household, that word was weaponized against me," said Wade. "Seeing a new generation bring positivity to the word, brings light to the future of language."

"I am a lover of the ever-changing language," Hernández agreed. "I also think it's frustrating when the word queer is used as a blanket term. Queerness is such a resistance to violence so I get frustrated when people throw it around without understanding the struggle behind the word."

"We all have different definitions of queer. I think it's beautiful," Fernandes said. "[But] something about the way it's used in the exhibition makes it static. [In the exhibition] queerness is heavily connected to gender and sexuality, and I think we need to get away from that."

Panelists agreed that though About Face rightfully celebrates queerness, the struggle is still real.

"We want to celebrate, but we need to remember that the work still continues," Fernandes said. "I think this panel is doing that: we're trying to find new strategies and new possibilities."

"For me, everyone connects queer and gay and lesbian to happy," Wade said. "It's not. It's struggle. I'm still at Stonewall."

She added in closing, "And Pride don't stop on [June 30]. Period."

For tickets and more information, visit Wrightwood659.org.

Cell Block parties to benefit HIV services

Cell Block, 3702 N. Halsted St., is holding a series of fundraising parties to benefit HIV services.

The new owners of Cell Block—a longtime LGBT leather and kink space in Chicago's Boystown—said they're committing to a \$10,000 fundraising goal for Center on Halsted's 2019 Chicago AIDS Run & Walk team.

The Cell Block crew chose to get behind the Center on Halsted AIDS Run team because of close proximity between Cell Block and Center on Halsted—the largest LGBTQ community center in the Midwest.

The linchpin of the bar's fundraising efforts will be three pop-culture themed parties. The bar is hosting a Golden Girls game night on Saturday, July 27; "Dolly's Country Picnic" on Sunday, Aug. 25; and "Rays of Light," a Madonna fundraiser, on Sunday, Sept. 29. All parties will be 6-9 p.m. (Note: No celebrities are slated to appear at these events.)

Other parts of Cell Block's fundraising plan include bar employees collecting individual donations for the AIDS Run & Walk. Also, the bar will donate a percentage of the tips brought in from its Northalsted Market Days beverage tent on Aug. 10-11.

See "Cell Block Chicago" on Facebook.

Writing group for LGBTQ youth forms

Chicago community activist Steve English and licensed professional counselor Patti Ahern are joining forces to create an artist/writers group for LGBTQ and questioning adolescents ages 12 and older.

The purpose of the group is to help young artists and writers explore their creativity, while at the same time, helping them feel comfortable in an atmosphere where they are welcomed and accepted.

The first meeting will be Tuesday, Aug. 6, at 7 p.m., at English's place of business: The Blossom Boys, 1810 W. 103rd St.

To confirm attendance, email artistbydesigns@gmail.com or PattiRMA@aol.com.

'CLLAW XXXIII' in town July 27

The Chicago League of Lady Arm Wrestlers (CLLAW) returns to Chicago with "CLLAW XXXIII: A Midsummer Night's Smack Down" on Saturday, July 27, at Logan Square Auditorium, 2539 N. Kedzie Ave.

Participants will include individuals such as Sir Elton Brawn, Stone Cold Jane Austen and Aunt Nance.

Doors open at 9 p.m., with the first match beginning at 9:30 p.m. Tickets, priced at \$20, are available in advance at CLLAW.org; or they are \$25 at the door. All proceeds from CLLAW XXXIII will benefit Sideshow Theatre Company and Girls Rock! Chicago.

Attendees must be at least 21 years old.

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Bitch.
Photo by
Shervin Lainez

MUSIC

Queer musician Bitch on Pride, politics and musical hiatus

BY MACKENZIE MURTAUGH

L.A.-based queer musician Bitch is no stranger to thinking outside of the box. After years on hiatus, she came back with a political punch in early 2019 with her single "New Year," which is an upbeat anthem for women who reclaim their space and time from those in power.

Windy City Times caught up with Bitch just a month ahead of her headlining Arlington Heights show on Thursday, Aug. 1 at Hey Nonny.

Windy City Times: How did you celebrate Pride Month?

Bitch: Yeah, mainly [I did] a residency here in L.A. every Saturday night at the Hotel Cafe—and it's been very gay. L.A. is very fun. Our Pride was the first weekend in June, and there's a very fun event called Dyke Day L.A. where they take over a park and there are DJs and food, and it's very fun.

WCT: What's your favorite part about performing? Your shows can be very electrifying and kind of in-your-face with the audience.

B: You know, probably the fact that every audience is different. I really enjoy kind of rolling with that. The audience's energy and personalities are always different, and I enjoy interacting in that different way every night.

WCT: Does anyone ever get unruly at your shows? Maybe bachelorette parties?

B: I'm always on the lookout for the people. For some reason, they don't come to my shows, but really they definitely should.

WCT: Going back to Pride Month, this year's has been particularly polarizing, with proposed Straight Pride Parade, which may be held in August. How do you respond to all of this?

B: I mean, it's always Straight Pride. You need a parade, too? That's my reaction.

WCT: It's very much like... Isn't the Thanksgiving Day Parade kind of Straight Pride?

B: Yes! I didn't realize that it was an actual thing that was going to happen. It's similar to

when the Black Lives Matter movement started and then people started saying "All Lives Matter." But there's a reason the Black Lives Matter movement is here; the list [of reasons] is endless. It seems like the same mentality.

WCT: So, after listening to some of your

songs, there are some political, social and gender issues you try to discuss. What does have these issues in your song do for you in today's political climate?

B: It's a great time to be alive right now. I hadn't released new music in a few years, and

BOOK REVIEW

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

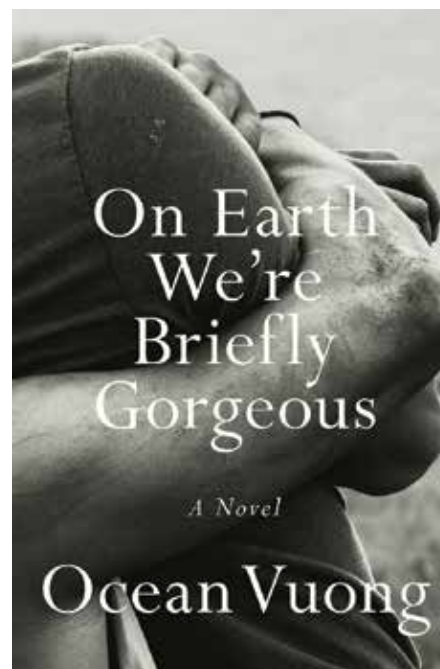
Book by Ocean Vuong
\$26; Penguin Press; 256 pages

REVIEW BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN

One quote on author Ocean Vuong's website refers to him as "the Walt Whitman of Vietnamese-American literature." Vuong's poetry collection, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, was a New York Times Top 10 book of 2016, the recipient of two literary awards and nominated for several others. Born in Saigon and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, now an assistant professor in University of Massachusetts-Amherst's MFA program, he's both an American success story and a wry observer of immigrant trauma that can manifest in destruction.

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous is Vuong's debut novel, named one of the most anticipated novels of 2019 by *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *Entertainment Weekly*, the *Los Angeles Times* and many more. Starred reviews abounded and best-selling authors Celeste Ng and Tommy Orange raved. Vuong toured the country in June after the novel's release.

Sadly, the book itself is much ado about nothing. Though beautifully written in Vuong's signature poetic voice, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is a fast read with a forgettable narrative. Inspired by Vuong's own experiences and written



in a world of his own making, most of the novel's pivotal events (parental abuse, first love, shared trauma) are written in ways everyone has read before.

The book is structured as a long letter from the narrator Little Dog to his mother, who cannot read due to violence invading her Vietnamese home as a school-age child. Both Little Dog's mother and grandmother hold disturbing memories inside: offspring who didn't survive, sex work

after the Trump takeover, I just thought, "Man, I've got to start sharing again because this shit is bonkers!"

My latest single is called "Easy Target." I wanted to dedicate it to all the women who have been coming out and the Time's Up and Me Too movements and just how women, no matter what, are going to be extra critiqued and shamed when they take a stand. I wrote that song based on my own experiences, but it's been very meaningful to people who rise up and at the same time as being completely devastated by what's happening in our world. I'm also very inspired by what we're all doing by standing up and reacting to it.

WCT: Earlier you mentioned your break from music. Is there anything different from what you're doing that you did before your break?

B: I know there is because the work has definitely transformed. The songs and the sound is different, but I can't say what it is. I can't put my finger on it.

WCT: Do you feel like a different musician or performer?

B: I would say I have taken my time to be more specific and clear. I've created my live show to be more portable and accessible. In today's climate, we have to use every tool in our cauldron to be accessible but still fun.

WCT: How do you balance your work life, performing and your social life?

B: Most of my friends and acquaintances are other artists and creative people. It's pretty easy. I go and support my friends' shows and they

Turn to page 29

as the only means of putting food on the table, deceiving loved ones to make a better life for their families. In the case of Little Dog's mother, the bad thoughts are made plain in beatings and tough love that feels like just the opposite. As Little Dog comes of age in hardscrabble Hartford, he realizes that he's different from his peers and embarks on a relationship with another closeted teenager whose home life is even more dire.

On Earth shines brightest when Vuong returns to his poetic roots. In an elegy to a friend who passed away too young, he uses free verse rather than prose and the results are a stunning tribute that's highly relatable to anyone experiencing grief. Vuong uses poetry a few other times in the novel, and it's there his voice feels most authentic.

The rest of the book is not nearly as strong. Though the plot points are compelling, Vuong's depiction of them often descends into cliché (his first lover lives in a trailer with his abusive drug addict father, typical of much fiction featuring gay teens in small towns). Perhaps Vuong is uncomfortable with prose and therefore describes the most unique parts of Little Dog's life in the ways every reader will expect.

Poetry and prose are each their own beast, and it's a rare writer who can do both well. Vuong may have fared better by formatting *On Earth* as a novel of poems and letting his unique perspective come through. As it is, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is just as the title says: there's beauty to be found in Vuong's debut novel, but it's fleeting.

For more about the author, visit oceanvuong.com.



BILLY Masters

"I have had sex—and Jesus still loves me. And with how you feel, me fucking in a windmill, you probably want to leave. I didn't just go to the Fantasy Suite. I fucked in a windmill. And guess what? We did it a second time."—**Bachelorette Hannah Brown** tells Crazy (but Hot) Luke about her date the previous day with Peter in Greece. As a public-service announcement, let me caution you about sex in windmills. You could get a nasty splinter in your Acropolis!

While boarding my transatlantic flight, I found myself winched next to a very hot foreign body. He looked as if he wanted to ask me something ... perhaps how to spell "ocupado." I took the proverbial bull by the horns and initiated conversation. In his broken English, he said, "You let this happen?" Well, sure, I'll let anything happen at 30K feet! Then he clarified—he was asking how citizens of this country could let politics get so out of control. It's getting harder and harder to be an American overseas. Happily, it was just as hard on that plane.

Who would have predicted **Patti LuPone** would be in the middle of a political controversy? LuPone directed her ire at Trump apologist U.S. **Sen. Lindsey Graham** on Twitter, saying, "Lindsey Graham you are a disgrace. On a personal note, why don't you just bite the bullet and come out? You might just come to your senses." This led to numerous responses that by outing Mr. Graham, Patti was being homophobic—a rationale I don't quite understand.

What I have no problem understanding is those charges against **Kevin Spacey** in Nantucket being dropped. As I predicted, the district attorney dropped the charges in light of the accuser, Will Little, pleading the Fifth Amendment. Little was also unable to provide the cellphone he used on the night in question. No evidence, no witness, no case. Nobody is saying Spacey is innocent of... well, of anything. But, in terms of this particular crime, it couldn't be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Of course, I don't hold myself to those standards; he did it.

Elsewhere in Massachusetts, Netflix is prepared to bring the organizers of Boston's Straight Pride Parade to court. The heterosexuals built a website to promote their event and included Netflix's logo under the list of "prospective sponsors." The media conglomerate threatened legal action, and Straight Pride posted the following: "Sadly, we have learned that Netflix is a heterophobic company steeped in hatred and bigotry." Is that what we've learned?

Emmy nominations were just announced, and the heterophobic Netflix nabbed a record 117 nominations—well, a record for it. What I found fascinating is that several trade publications took great pains to point out that the lobby of the Television Academy's Wolf Theatre is now called the "Netflix Lobby." I'm sure they're not implying anything unsavory—probably just singling out a curious decoration, much like I'd identify a lovely scone (something I've never done). By the way,



Baz Luhrmann has found his man, according to Billy.

Photo of Luhrmann by Hugh Stewart

perennial Emmy leader HBO once again led the pack with 137 nods.

There was quite a bit of queer love at the Emmys. **RuPaul's Drag Race** snagged 14 nominations—which is not only a record for the show, but also the most nominations ever for any show on VH1. I wouldn't be Billy Masters if I didn't point out that series was initially developed for Logo, the all-but-defunct gay network.

Billy Porter's nomination as Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for *Pose* was also historic. Apparently, this is the first time that an openly gay Black man was nominated in this category—a narrow distinction, but a distinction, nonetheless. As they say, it's an honor just to be nominated. But here's something that could be a good omen—the Emmys take place Sept. 22, and Mr. Porter turns 50 the day before. I can guess what his wish will be as he blows out that candle, or whatever he's blowing on All Emmys Eve.

Ever since **Baz Luhrmann** announced his next project would be a big-screen biopic about Elvis Presley, people have been wondering who would be cast in the lead. Well, wait no more—the role has been filled by **Austin Butler**. He's appeared on TV in *The Shannara Chronicles*, *Arrow* and *The Carrie Diaries*. More legitimately, he's held his own on Broadway in *The Iceman Cometh* alongside Denzel Washington.

I must admit, none of these credits helped me place him. Because I live to serve, I discovered that Austin is one of those tight young blonds who are so appealing and yet so interchangeable. Then I saw some photos of him alongside his girlfriend **Vanessa Hudgens**, and something caught my eye. How do I say this politely? Let's just say something in that photo stuck out. I can't put my finger on it—but I'd like to. It looks like I might need to use my whole hand. I'll use the other hand to post the pics to BillyMasters.com.

What's better than Superman? Would you believe two Supermen? In the past, both **Brandon Routh** and **Tyler Hoechlin** have played the Man of Steel (Routh on the big screen in *Superman Returns*, and Hoechlin on the small screen in *Supergirl*). Plans are afoot for both men to once again don Spandex and play Superman at different points of his life on The CW's next Arrowverse crossover.

Could it be that a certain sexy stud has fallen

off the wagon? So say several insignificant others who tell me the patriotic pup's long-cherished sobriety came to a crashing halt just before his latest venture—one which comes with numerous temptations on a nightly basis. While he's still singing a sweet song professionally, his off-stage behavior has become downright reckless. I'm told that should you be fortunate enough to encounter him at a vulnerable moment, your encounter is bound to include just about anything. And I do mean "anything" (and, potentially, "bound"). And I'm told it's usually more than just the tip.

When I'm giving a blind item away, it's definitely the end of yet another column. That story about Straight Pride got me thinking. While reminding you to check out BillyMasters.com, would it be OK if I said the site has Kevin Spacey as a prospective member? I mean, isn't he? Then again, isn't everyone? Speaking of questions, I'm always happy to answer yours. Just send them along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before anybody accuses me of being heterophobic (as if I turn down straight guys). So, until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

the DISH

Dining Guide in
WINDY CITY TIMES

SAVOR

The Purple Pig

BY JOSHUA IRVINE

The Purple Pig has gone—next door. The popular establishment moved to a new, larger location at 444 N. Michigan Ave. this June, with an updated menu.

Chef Jimmy Bannos Jr.'s establishment seats more than 100 people in red leather booths and chairs, with wood and marble tables and countertops to match. Lunchtime finds the restaurant comfortably full, with a blend of locals and out-of-towners whose conversation you might find interfering with your own in a somewhat noise-challenged space.

The menu divides its offerings into snacks, vegetables (a blessing for vegetarians and vegans at a place whose name might intimidate those diners), pasta, seafood and meat, with an ample beverage list replete with French and Italian wines as company.



Potato chips with caviar and potato ice cream at The Purple Pig.

Photo by Joshua Irvine

The ham croquettes, one of the snacks, resembled high-class carnival food. The dish sees the central animal rendered to a creamy puree and fried in a ball, with the ease at which the golden exterior yields to the near-paste underneath invokes funnel cake.

The vegetable portion of the menu includes the grilled broccoli, a unanimous favorite among myself and my fellow diners. An anchovy vinaigrette is the secret to success, with a note of vinegar and salt that couldn't be further from Lays' offerings.

Among the seafood offerings, a potato ice cream accompanied by caviar-laden waffle chips make for an indescribable experience in all

meanings, transitioning from sweet and creamy to crunchy and salty with a rollercoaster of sensation in between. Be sure to eat it before the ice cream melts and the flavor profile is muddled.

Perhaps most surprising is the rather modest offering of the milk-braised Berkshire shoulder, a popular holdover from the prior establishment. Most of the dish's flavor comes from a peppery gravy; the tender meat melts in your mouth with the gravy and mashed potatoes—but not as quickly as the flavor does, such that chewing continues a bit too long after other sensations have faded.

Returning to the impulse of the ham croquette is an iris—a goose's (fried) golden egg of confectionary chocolate and ricotta filling, while an expertly executed cheesecake shows the menu excels at standbys just fine.

Diners had little reason to doubt Bannos or his establishment, but its comforting nonetheless to see a little change can't rock the Purple Pig's boat.

Note: Restaurant profiles/events are based on invitations arranged from restaurants and/or firms.

Ross Mathews' brunch at City Winery

Ross Mathews Presents Dragtastic Bubbly Brunch will take place July 28, Aug. 11 and Sept. 15 at 12 p.m. at City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph



THE CALL

Windy City Court marks Stonewall at 50.
Joseph Stevens Photography

ROGERS PARK SOCIAL

All vinyl 45s night with DJ Brian 'DJMB' Borden & DJ Teebot.
Joseph Stevens Photography

St.

In a statement, Mathews said, "I wanted to combine my love for Drag with my love for mimosas, and I really think I nailed it. For an hour and a half, we can all shut the door on the outside world to smile, cheers and sing along."

Mathews, a judge on RuPaul's Drag Race, is behind the event. (However, he is not guaranteed to be at every brunch.) Drag Race and local queens will show off their talents as the audience sips mimosas and enjoy a City Winery brunch.

See CityWinery.com.



PROFILE BY
TONY PEREGRIN
DRAG PROFILE OF THE WEEK
SHERRY FLAMBÉ

NAME

"I've always been inspired by cooking and the artistry of food presentation. My good friend, Gigi, actually helped me come up with the name 'cause I've always had a fiery wit and personality. Hot off the pan and ready for stage, it's Sherry Flambé!"

FIRST DRAG PERFORMANCE

"I started doing drag five years ago at Club Krave in Blue Island. Before I stepped on stage to lip synch, I would go out on karaoke nights in drag. It wasn't until April 26, 2014, that I had my first performance. All my friends and co-workers came out to see me—I performed 'Slow Down' by Selena Gomez and 'Waking Up in Vegas' by Katy Perry."

DRAG INSPIRATION

"My drag inspiration varies from '80s video vixens to improv comics like Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. Sherry Flambé is always full of surprises—you never know if she's gonna pull out something sultry and seductive, comedic, or even something spooky. I've learned to become quite versatile in my drag over the years."

GO-TO NUMBER TO SLAY A CROWD

"My 'Roar' parody mix, but the number I'm most known for in Chicago is my Meg Griffin (everyone's favorite weirdo on Family Guy) impersonation."

FAVORITE PIECE IN YOUR CLOSET

"I have a couple of favorite pieces, including my emoji catsuit and my fully rhinestoned blue evening gown!"

GUILTY PLEASURE

"Re-watching Parks and Recreation while I rhinestone my costumes for shows."

SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram: @thesherryflambe

Twitter: @shadyserry

Facebook: Sherry Flambé

Photo by
Sam Doyle

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DIGNITY/CHICAGO Supporting LGBTQIA Catholics, their committed relationships, families, friends + allies. Mass Sunday at 5pm, 3344 N Broadway, Chicago. **Visit www.dignity-chicago.org for more info. (10/30/19-13)**

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BITCH from page 26

come to mine. There's a lot of socializing that gets caught up in the creative process, so there's kind of a natural balance to it.

WCT: Do you catch up with old friends when you're back home?

B: Yeah. You know, my parents are divorced. So there's definitely a little bit of a rift there because I don't go back to the same house. As I get older, I'm definitely trying to stay in touch with those older friends from my past, but it can be a challenge.

WCT: So what's next with you? What's coming at us in the future?

B: I'm about to shoot the video for "Easy Target." I should be putting that out maybe August or September. I'm just going to keep releasing songs, and I really hope to make a video for every song I released this year. At some point, there will be an album.

Bitch will be performing at Hey Nonny, 10 S. Vail Ave., Arlington Heights, on Thursday, Aug. 1, at 8:30 p.m. Tickets can be found at <https://www.heynonny.com/>.

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Photo © Todd Rosenberg Photography. Dancers: Ari Israel & Greig Matthews.
Attire: Chiara Boni La Petite Robe provided by Neiman Marcus.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., July 24

Andersonville Farmers Market Every Wednesday through Aug. 28. 3:00pm - 8:00pm Berwyn Ave. between Clark and Ashland

Thursday, July 25

Escaping Gilead: The Handmaid's Tale Fan Discussion Meet other fans and discuss the acclaimed book and TV series *The Handmaid's Tale*. Plus, get a coupon for a \$2 Grande Teavana Tea (Cafe stores only.) 7:00pm, Barnes and Noble, 1130 N. State St.

Friday, July 26

Out of the Closets and into the Streets: Power, Pride & Resistance in Chicago's Gay Liberation Movement Exhibit continues through Sept. 19, free. Check site for hours. 12:00pm - 4:00pm Gerber Hart Library and Archives 6500 N Clark St.; <http://www.gerberhart.org>

The About Face Youth Theatre Ensemble Celebrates 20th Anniversary with 20/20 Devised, performed by The About Face Youth Theatre Ensemble. Co-Directed by Megan Carney, Donny Acosta.



MONAE TALKS

Aug. 1-4

Janelle Monáe will be one of the many acts at Lollapalooza, in Grant Park.

Photo by Jerry Nunn

Through July 28. 7:30pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago 773-784-8565 Tickets: <http://aboutface theatre.com>

Andersonville Summer Sidewalk Sale 40+ participating businesses sales, bargain antiques, one-of-a-kind merchandise, fashion apparel, furniture, books music, buskers and kids' entertainment. Through July 28. 9:00am - 9:00pm 4800-5800 N. Clark St <http://andersonville.org>

Saturday, July 27

Activists and Icons: Photographs of Steve Schapiro, Challenging Status Quo through Lens of a Camera Forty-six powerful large-format documentary photographs showing issues of the civil rights movement are still deeply relevant today. from Rosa Parks, James Baldwin and David Bowie to an unnamed sanitation striker. 10:00pm - 5:00pm Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center 9603 Woods Dr. Skokie, IL 60077 <http://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/activists-and-icons/>

1919 Chicago Race Riot anniversary commemorated Readings from Carl Sandburg's visceral reporting on the 1919 Race Riots, bike tour of Bronzeville and Chicago Race Riots Commemorative Project discussion. 8:30am Various <http://chicago1919.org/bughouse-square>

Annual Used Book Sale Women & Children First's Used Book Sale is an annual tradi-

tion benefiting the Women's Voices Fund 10:00am - 5:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>

Chicago Poetry Block Party Festival of poetry, music, art, and community for audiences of all ages. featuring workshops, giveaways, community resources, all-ages activities, and an open mic. Free. 3:00pm National Museum of Mexican Art 1852 W. 19th St. Chicago <http://PoetryFoundation.org/CPBP>

OneWheaton LGBTQ and Allied Alumni Summer BBQ Free event. Kid friendly. Hosts will prepare dinner, including vegetarian and gluten-free options. Bring drinks 4:00pm. See Eventbrite.com.

Thursday, Aug. 1

Ariana, Gambino, Monáe in Lollapalooza Ariana Grande, queer musician/singer Janelle Monáe, Childish Gambino, Twenty One Pilots and The Strokes are among the headliners for Lollapalooza. Through Aug. 4. \$130 Time:TBA Grant Park 337 E. Randolph St Chicago <http://http://www.lollapalooza.com/>

American Veterans for Equal Rights GLBTQ Veterans Monthly Meeting Chicago Chapter of American Veterans for Equal Rights, the national organization of LGBT veterans formerly known as Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Veterans of America (GLBVA). 7:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.averchicago.org/>

Iliana Regan, author Burn the Place, Book Launch Party Burn the Place is a galvanizing memoir that chronicles Iliana Regan's journey from foraging on the family farm to running her Michelin-starred restaurant, Elizabeth. 7:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>

Saturday, Aug. 3

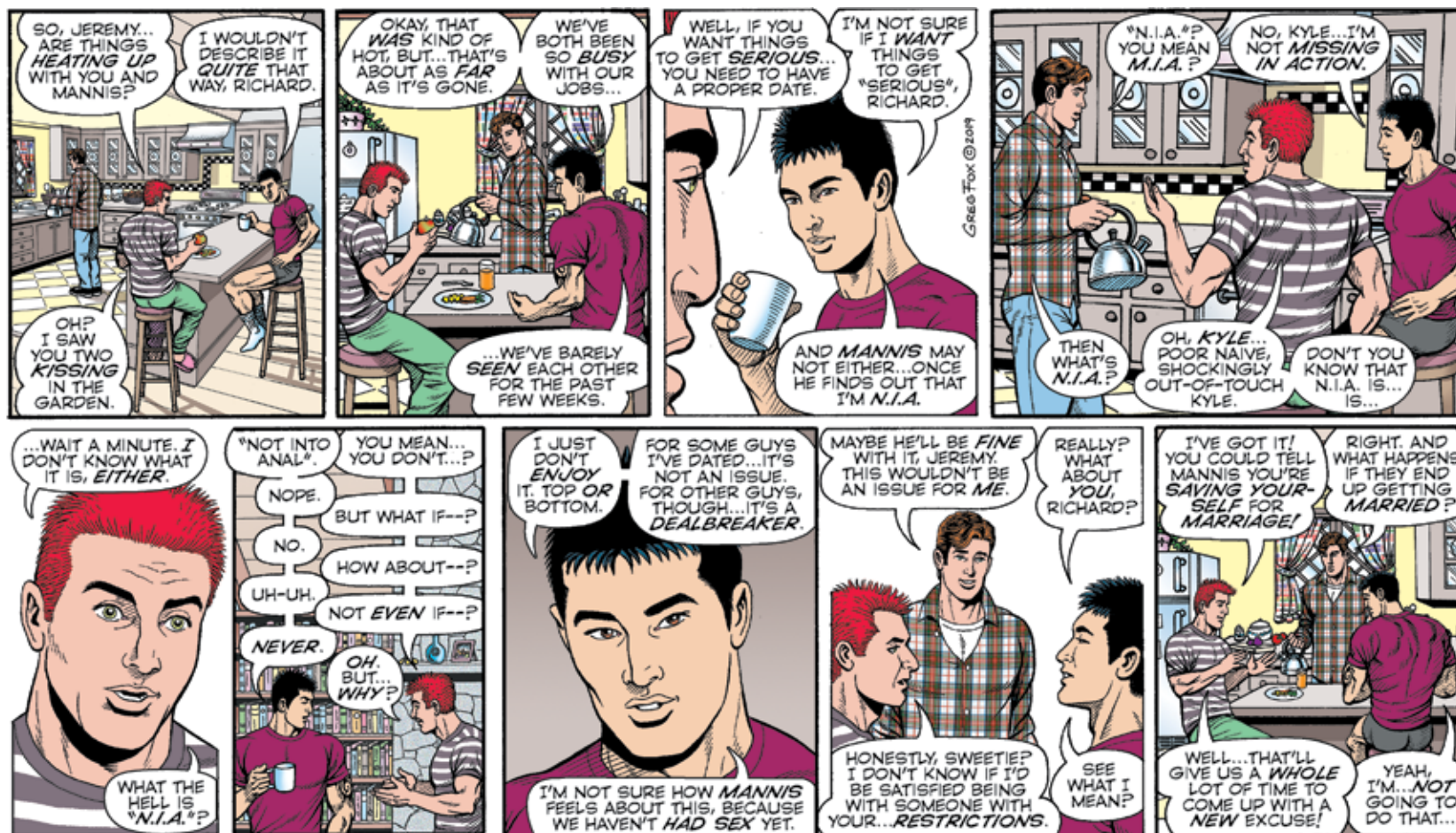
Bisexual Queer Alliance Chicago Writers Group—August Meeting Come ready to write and share, and with a short piece of writing on this month's prompt: Inspiration. 2:00pm - 4:00pm Next Door Chicago, 659 W Diversey Pkwy. See Meetup.com.

Wed., Aug. 7

Gregg Shapiro, More Poems About Buildings and Food and Sunshine State Two new poetry collections 7:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>

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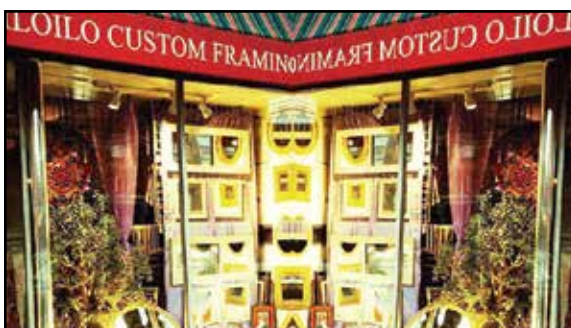


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