

WINDY CITY TIMES

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

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KURT ALLEN

Real-estate broker and leather man dies.

Photo by Ed Negron



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POLICE ACTION

CPD has new LGBTQ liaison.

Photo of Ofc. Megan Woods courtesy of Woods

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'BOY' CRAZY

The groundbreaking Boys in the Band comes to Chicago.

Photo by Michael Brosilow



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Equality Illinois (EI) Institute Board Chair Butch Trusty (left) and EI co-founder Art Johnston. Photo by Kat Fitzgerald (www.MysticImagesPhotography.com)



EVENT HORIZON

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At gala, Equality Illinois looks ahead, honors Baim and Rainbow Cafe

KEEPING COMPANY

Business partners—and friends—Dan Earles and Bill Rossi

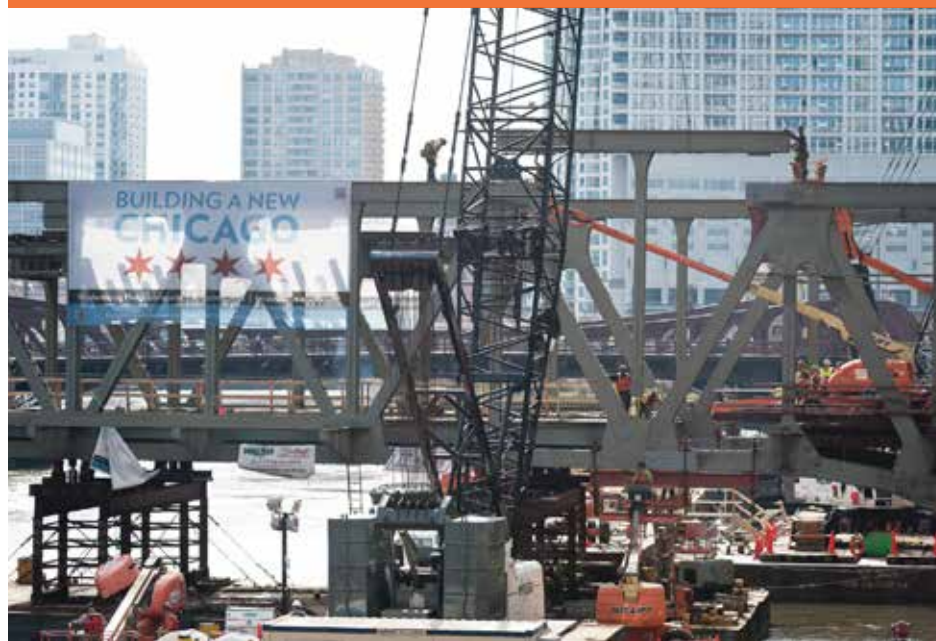


Photo by Jacquelyn Brazzale

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UPCOMING 2020

WINDY CITY TIMES PRINT DATES:

Feb. 5, 2020	April 1, 2020	June 10, 2020
Feb. 5, 2020	April 15, 2020	June 24, 2020
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March 4, 2020	May 13, 2020	July 22, 2020
March 18, 2020	May 27, 2020	Aug. 5, 2020

online exclusives at
www.WindyCityTimes.com



LOOKING BACK

The co-founders/authors of a new book about OPALGA+ shared memories of the LGBTQ organization's early years.

Photo (left) of the OPALGA+ exhibit by Carrie Maxwell

GETTING SCHOOLED



Bob Chikos (above) writes an op-ed about a more inclusive "trans-formal" education.
Photo courtesy of Chikos

SEASON OF LOVE

Check out WCT's roundup of restaurants to celebrate Valentine's Day.

THAT'S SHOW BIZ

Find out the latest about Lil Nas X, Bradley Cooper and The L Word.

plus
DAILY BREAKING NEWS



IMAGE CREDIT: gu wenda, *united nations: american code*, 2019, Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

Everyday Material, Radically Reinvented.

The Allure of Matter features works made from a range of humble materials not traditionally used to create art, such as human hair, half a million cigarettes, 300,000 iron nails, melted plastic, paper-thin porcelain, and desiccated Coca-Cola. These works, many monumental in scale, explore how intentional material choice has become a means of expression for a number of leading contemporary Chinese artists.

theallureofmatter.org



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Real-estate broker, Mr. Leather64TEN 2018 Kurt Allen dies

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Real estate broker and Mr. Leather64TEN 2018 Kurt Allen died unexpectedly Jan. 26. He was 56.

Allen was born May 26, 1963, in Wabash, Indiana, and graduated from Wawasee High School. He received a bachelor's degree in marketing from Ball State University and, later, an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University.

Most recently, Allen was a Keller Williams Real Estate broker and a volunteer with the LGBTQ-focused Indiana Youth Group and Toys for Tots in Indianapolis. He also helped raise money for Broadway Youth Center.

Additionally, Allen was an active member of the Leather scene throughout the Midwest. Due to his status as Mr. Leather64TEN 2018, Allen was invited to be an International Mr. Leather (IML) 40 participant.

Allen is survived by his husband of four years, Chris Aiello; children Craig Allen (Jessica) and Sydney Allen; parents Luther and Janet Allen; sister Jill Usher (Hal); two nieces; and countless chosen family members and friends. He was preceded in death by his infant daughter, Taylor Allen.

"Kurt was the kindest, most generous person I have ever met," said Aiello. "He would do anything for anyone. This is not just a devastating personal loss for me but a loss for our entire community. One that has been brought into sharper focus for me through the out pouring of love and support that I have received."

"My dad was a beacon of hope and light to the

LGBTQ community," said Sydney. "He was a gentle soul that loved deeply and had a passion for making the community a better place. No matter where he went, he made sure that every single person felt included and safe. My dad lit up every room with his smile and his contagious laughter. He lived his life to the absolute fullest and his legacy will continue on."

"The first thing I remember when I met Kurt was his passion about life," said Leather64TEN owner and longtime friend Eric Kugelman. "Our conversation soon went to what he was raising money for. His enthusiasm towards helping LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, in most cases because they were kicked out of their homes by their parents. My fondest memories will always be what we accomplished together in raising money for both Indiana and Chicago programs, but also of how proud I was to see him so happy on the IML stage. I enjoyed watching Kurt grow in his Leather Life experiences that expanded his horizons. He will forever hold a place of honor here at Leather64TEN."

"Kurt was like a son to me," said mentor and close friend Ms. Kendra. "I remember the first time I met Kurt he was competing in a contest. I instantly loved him. His energy and zest for life were always so engaging. Kurt was a wonderful Leatherman who gave so much too so many people. He will remain a close Leatherman to me always and I am better for having had him in life. Thank you Kurt for everything you gave us. Sir Jim and I were always so very proud of you. We will love you forever."

"Kurt was one of the most pure, selfless, kind hearted men that I have ever met; and that is not even scratching the surface," said another close friend, Brett Michael Seibert. "He cared a great deal about helping others succeed—the less fortunate, LGBTQ+ youth and his family. Kurt and I met several years ago in Indianapolis through mutual friends at a local event. He and his then partner Chris were so welcoming but the true jokester was Kurt. His laugh stood out and his smile could light up a room."

"When Kurt proposed to Chris they asked me to plan their wedding and that is when our friendship blossomed. From monthly to biweekly meetings, we spent half the time laughing or better yet, [with] Kurt calling Chris a Bridezilla—all in good fun, of course. Together, we planned a beautiful beach wedding in Florida with their closest friends and family, and then another bigger reception a week later back in Indianapolis. From there, the couple kept inviting me to help them plan other gatherings from Kurt's famous Pride brunches to Indiana Youth Group and Toys for Tots fundraisers all because those charities spoke to his heart. In our community, it is hard to find genuine people who want to lend a helping hand without anything in return but Kurt was all about giving back. Our community lost a



Kurt Allen.
Photo by Ed Negron

strong advocate and leader and there will never be another one like him."

"Kurt was a top notch man that was full of love and compassion for all those he encountered," said friend Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton. "His contagious laughter would fill the room and give everyone there great joy and happiness. Kurt's compassion for the children and youth of the community encompasses his enduring legacy. He would be seen throughout Indianapolis, helping raise funds for Indiana Youth Group and his annual Toys for Tots party. Kurt was also our personal

realtor, helping my husband and I buy our first house together. He would swing by our house and drop off small gifts that were both meaningful and reminders to the wonderful memories we had together. Kurt will forever be in our hearts and someone that cared more for others than he did for himself."

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that people make donations to Indiana Youth Group (IndianaYouthGroup.org) and/or Toys for Tots (Indianapolis-in.toysfortots.org).



Kurt Allen (right) and Chris Aiello on their wedding day.

Photo courtesy of Chris Aiello

PASSAGES

Carl L. Davenport

Carl Lamar Davenport—an exceptional floral designer and co-owner of Davenport Design who was born in Pennsylvania and raised in Macon, Georgia—passed away unexpectedly at home in Evanston on Jan. 23. He was 54.

He is survived by his beloved partner of 30 years, Scott Christopher Rigney. Carl was also the son of the late Joyce Lee Stewart and Carl Lee Davenport; in addition, he is survived by siblings Connie (Richard) Peterman, Michele (Timothy) Rowland-Daoust Hill and Robert H. Rowland Jr.

Carl was the beloved uncle of many; devoted godfather of Savastiana "Savi" Valle; and the faithful companion of Acacius the Big Black Dog.

Carl was an irrepressible spirit with a huge heart and will be missed deeply.

A springtime memorial service is being planned.

Contributions may be made in his name to Growing Knights Outreach, 135 S. Harrison St., Enon, Ohio, 45323-1315.

Arrangements by Cremation Society of Illinois, 773-281-5058 or Cremation-Society.com



Carl L. Davenport.

Photo courtesy of Cremation Society of Illinois



IMAGE CREDIT: Zhu Jinshi, *Wave of Materials*, 2007, Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

48 works of art. 26 artists. 2 venues.

Only on view in Chicago through May 3, for the first time, *The Allure of Matter* features monumental artworks divided into two unique halves, taking up the entire footprints of the Smart Museum of Art on the South Side and Wrightwood 659 on the North Side. To fully experience the exhibition, guests are encouraged to visit both locations.



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theallureofmatter.org

CPD's 19th District acquires new LGBTQ liaison officer

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

Officer Megan Woods has been working with the 19th District police department since 2014, and now she is additionally serving and protecting as the district's LGBTQ liaison officer, having been in the role since last October.

"It's really exciting for me because I'm part of the community that's why I decided to go to the 19th District," said Woods, who identifies as a bisexual trans woman. "So I'm very passionate about it, especially being trans. ... I have a personal stake in it. So, I get to reach out to the community. I have an opportunity to do things that I wouldn't be able to do if I was just in a patrol car, so I kind of get to reach out and touch people that actually need more help that usually go unnoticed."

Born and raised in Cicero, Woods went to high school at Morton West in North Riverside. After high school, Woods joined the Marines. Within months of separating from the military, in 2003, she went straight into the police department to be an officer.

Looking back, she explained, she picked what is traditionally viewed as a masculine career in order to hide who she felt she was.

"My parents are my biggest supporters and it took me a really long time to realize that my family loves me no matter what and a lot of people don't get that and that's why I like to reach out to them," said Woods.

Around 2014, Woods began her transition, saying there just came a point where she "couldn't live anymore hiding that and I had to be myself."

"I never really had anyone that I could look up to and so I want to be looked up to, but I want people to know that it's okay to be yourself, to be trans," said Woods in terms of serving as a role model for other trans people, something that she did not have at a certain time in her life. "You don't have to hide from anyone. So, I love sharing my story, so people know 'Hey, I have a voice.' I believe representation is important."

Once she decided to take this journey, she got a good therapist.

"We have Weiss [Memorial] Hospital, which has the Center for Gender Confirmation in it, and that's where I got my gender confirmation surgery. ... They don't have those kind of resources in other places, and Chicago has so many resources for our community."

Woods is also a parent to two daughters, 13 and 8.

Outside of keeping the community and her children safe, Woods is an artist. In particular, she draws and designs tattoos for friends and loves it as an artform. She shared that she has a lot of tattoos from around the world, calling it a great collection of artwork from different places and different artists.

"As a child, my father worked in a tattoo shop



Officer Megan Woods.
Photo courtesy of Woods

and I kind of grew up around that and just growing up, my whole life, I was fascinated by it in all forms," said Woods.

She added she is also attracted to graffiti art and sews as a hobby, which she learned from necessity. One of her biggest thrills is going to thrift stores and tailoring items to fit her specifically.

The liaison job is unique as it is a new position, and not every district has one. When it comes to Woods' LGBTQ liaison efforts, she is looking out for people who experience a crime outside the police department and in the community that need to feel safe within an LGBTQ-friendly space due to feeling judged or threatened.

Community members, she explained, can reach out to the Office of Community Policing if they're afraid to report something that happened to them. Instead of reporting to a police officer, they can report directly to Woods as the LGBTQ liaison officer and she can take a report for a more comfortable experience.

"I get to actually go out and try to help people who normally wouldn't call the police because they're afraid," Woods explained of her position as LGBTQ liaison officer for the 19th District police department. "That's huge for me because the LGBTQ community is marginalized, especially the trans community. It's very underserved and a lot of people don't know that they need a lot of resources. They don't even know that themselves that [resources] are available and I get to seek those people out and try to help them."

Woods was also asked about the controversial security matter involving Center on Halsted,

which is in her district. [On Jan. 22, the Center released a statement saying it is replacing Walsh Security, which faced charges of racism, with Quantum Security.] She initially said, "I really have no comment on what security company they go with. If the community put pressure on the Center on Halsted to change security companies and they did, then that's all there is to it." However, after reading Windy City Times' article on the Center's security issues and change, Woods

stated, "I just feel like this neighborhood is a place of refuge for all LGBTQ people and I hate the idea that anyone would feel or was made to feel unwelcome for any reason. ... It's sad to see that there was a racial component involved. I wish that wasn't the case."

For more information on the Chicago Police Department's Office of Community Policing, visit home.chicagopolice.org/office-of-community-policing.



Jenine Wehbeh.
Photo courtesy of David Pickard

Former WCT 30 Under 30 honoree among Golden Apple finalists

On Jan. 23, Golden Apple—an Illinois nonprofit committed to preparing, honoring and supporting great educators who advance educational opportunities for students—announced the 2020 finalists for the prestigious Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching.

Thirty educators from across the state were selected as finalists for the award. Among them is Jenine Wehbeh, of Chicago's John B. Murphy Elementary School. Wehbeh—a former Windy City Times 30 Under 30 honoree—teaches social studies to seventh- and eighth-grade students. A press release stated that she "empowers her students to be active participants in their communities, inspiring them to do things like going to D.C. to meet with elected officials about issues they are passionate about (e.g. preserving DACA, restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated people)."

Award finalists will be honored Saturday, Feb. 22, at the Golden Apple Celebration of Excellence in Teaching & Leadership at the Q Center in St. Charles, Illinois.

The 2020 Golden Apple Award recipients will be notified in the spring with surprise visits at their schools. Northwestern University, Golden Apple's partner for more than 30 years, provides a spring sabbatical to award recipients at no cost. In addition, each Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching recipient re-

ceives a \$5,000 award. Award recipients also become Fellows of the Golden Apple Academy of Educators—a community of educators who support current and future teachers and deepen the learning of students.

Award-worthy event happens during PHIMC/Safe Schools ceremony

In a surprise move during the Jan. 26 reception to celebrate the union between Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (the Alliance) and Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago (PHIMC), PHIMC Executive Director Karen A. Reitan presented the Inaugural Mary F. Morten Award for Justice to its namesake.

A nationally recognized advocate for equity and justice, Mary F. Morten is the president of Morten Group, LLC, a national consulting firm established in November 2001 to focus on clients in the nonprofit, for profit, and foundation fields. Morten is a founding member of the Alliance and will continue her leadership role by serving on the board of directors at PHIMC.

In July 2019, the Alliance merged with PHIMC. The reception held at Edgewater's Historic Colvin House on Jan. 26 was a celebration of this merger, with nearly 80 guests raising glasses to support this combined work.

Photos by Gracie Meier



PHIMC Executive Director Karen A. Reitan (left) with awardee Mary F. Morten.
Photo by Gracie Meier



IMAGE CREDIT: Xu Bing, *1st Class*, 2011, Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.



WRIGHTWOOD
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THE ALLURE OF MATTER Material Art from China

On view at the Smart Museum of Art on Chicago's South Side
and Wrightwood 659 on the North Side.

February 7 - May 3 | theallureofmatter.org



Equality Illinois reflects on past, future at annual gala

BY MATT SIMONETTE

As numerous speakers appeared onstage at Equality Illinois's annual gala, held Feb. 1 at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, many uttered the same observation: "What a difference a year makes."

Indeed, the past year has seen many changes within the city and state's political landscape. The city of Chicago elected its first openly lesbian mayor, for example, and a requirement that Illinois schools include LGBT-history within their curriculums became the law of the land.

Gov. JB Pritzker provided introductory remarks, saying he hoped "Illinois will serve as a beacon of hope for the world's LGBTQ-plus community."

Pritzker also mentioned the number of openly LGBT persons throughout his administration; Equality Illinois CEO Brian Johnson later added that the governor had, indeed, built "the queerest administration in Illinois history."

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot gave keynote remarks, reflecting on all that had changed for her since she'd attended the 2019 gala. At the time, she was one of many candidates competing to be mayor.

"The idea that I was viable was never discussed," Lightfoot recalled. But she added that Equality Illinois' endorsement for her candidacy was instrumental in gradually changing the perception of her viability over subsequent weeks.

"Equality Illinois refused to write me off," she added.

The mayor discussed the January meeting during which she chastised City Council members who had invoked anti-LGBT stereotypes to question a proposal for set-asides for LGBT-owned businesses in the city—an effort that she has been vigorously backing.

"I was furious, but I was also heartsick that I needed to speak," Lightfoot said. "In this time, in this moment, I will not be silent."

Johnson said that Equality Illinois had three principal goals for the year ahead. Among those was a law requiring LGBT-affirming sex-education in Illinois; the state is among 21 states without any statewide sex-education requirements.

The organization will also work to get LGBT Illinoisans on boards and commissions throughout the state, where they can potentially add influence to institutions ranging from schools to the

state's prison system. Lastly, Johnson added, Equality Illinois would fortify its support for LGBT-rights organizations outside of the Chicago region, to strengthen civic power for the state's other LGBT communities.

One such organization, Carbondale-based Rainbow Cafe, was recognized by Equality Illinois

journalist, historian and activist. In her remarks, she acknowledged the longtime support of her family but recalled that many LGBT folks throughout the AIDS crisis of the '80s were forced to form new families-of-choice.

While overall acceptance of the LGBT community has evolved, Baim said, the impetus now falls on the community itself to make sure that all of its members have access, resources and acceptance.

"Now, we have to be a little bit more conscious about creating family for those in our community who might need family," she added.

Besides Pritzker and Lightfoot, elected and appointed officials, as well as candidates, in attendance included Illinois House Majority Leader and state Rep. Greg Harris; state Reps. Kelly Cassidy, Lamont Robinson, Sam Yingling, Kathleen Willis, Anna Moeller, Rita Mayfield, Lindsey LaPointe, Karina Villa, Diane Pappas, Terra Costa Howard, Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, Ann Williams, Will Guzzardi and Jehan Gordon-Booth; state Sens. Christina Castro, Heather Steans, Robert Peters, Ram Villivalam and Sara Feigenholtz; Illinois Senate President Don Harmon; U.S. Reps. Mike Quigley, Raja Krishnamoorthi and Sean Casten; Judge Mike McHale; Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx, as well as one of her opponents, Bill



Clockwise from top left: Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker; Chicago Reader publisher Tracy Baim; Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot (left) with wife Amy Eshleman; Equality Illinois CEO Brian Johnson and representatives of Rainbow Cafe.

Photos by Kat Fitzgerald (www.MysticImagesPhotography.com)



Feb. 1 and awarded its 2020 Organization Award. Rainbow Cafe, which provides resources for downstate LGBT youth, gives those youth "the affirmation they deserve," said Planned Parenthood President and CEO Jennifer Welch.

Chicago Reader Publisher (and Windy City Times owner) Tracy Baim was recognized with Equality Illinois' 2020 Freedom Award for her work as a

Conway; and Cook County Commissioners Kevin Morrison, Bridget Degnen and Bridget Gainer.

Also in attendance were Chicago City Clerk Anna Valencia; Alds. Scott Waguespack, James Cappleman, Matt Martin and Tom Tunney; State Board of Education Chair Darren Reisberg; Hammond, Indiana, City Councilman Barry Tyler Jr.; candidate for Cook County Circuit Court Clerk

Left: Alexis Bevels, Dixie Lynn Cartwright and Aunty Chan.

Photo by Kat Fitzgerald (www.MysticImagesPhotography.com)

Jacob Meister; candidate for Illinois House 12th District representative Yoni Pizer; Illinois Department of Human Rights Director Jim Bennett; Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi; and former state Rep. Ellis Levin.

Other attendees included Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Commissioner Josina Morita; former state Sen. Toi Hutchinson; Chicago Commission on Human Rights Commissioner Mona Noriega; East Aurora School Board Member Alex Arroyo; Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul; former Gov. Pat Quinn; and Lieutenant Gov. Juliana Stratton.




BIG ISSUES AHEAD FOR WINDY CITY TIMES

A graphic featuring several large, overlapping spheres with the American flag's stars and stripes. The word "VOTE" is partially visible on one of the spheres.

**PRIMARY
ELECTION
ISSUE
MARCH 4**

A circular portrait of a smiling Black woman with short, curly hair, wearing a purple patterned top.

**SPRING
MUSIC &
ARTS
ISSUE
MARCH 18**

A group of men in various costumes, including leather, military-style uniforms, and a "BOOTHLE" sign, standing on a stage.

**OFFICIAL
IML GUIDE
MAY 13**

A group of three people at a Pride event. Two women in the foreground wear white t-shirts with "PRIDE" and rainbow graphics, and colorful beaded necklaces. A third person is partially visible behind them.

**PRIDE
ISSUES
JUNE 10
JUNE 17
JUNE 24**

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Rush University launches LGBT health initiative

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Officials from Rush University Medical Center marked the launch of the new LGBT-focused health program, Affirm: The Rush Center for Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Health, at an event in the facility's lobby on Jan. 21.

Affirm combines "clinical, educational, research and community health initiatives to provide the highest standard of care to members of the LGBTQ+ community," according to a Jan. 20 statement.

The program is comprehensive in scope and will be integrated at numerous levels within the Rush organization, which is comprised three hospitals and over 30 other facilities. LGBT patients should

expect culturally competent care at every point of service, said Christopher Nolan, Rush's community health and benefit system manager.

"It's thinking about how we as a healthcare system are best serving the LGBTQ+ population," Nolan added. "While Affirm does have administrative space and clinical space with our community-based practices, the real goal is giving a place—all throughout the health system—for people to go, knowing that they have providers."

That includes navigation services to direct patients to appropriate providers, Nolan said. Another component of the program includes requirements for physician education; Rush University medical students have LGBT-related cultural competency integrated throughout their curricu-

lum, rather than as a one-off unit as in many programs.

During public remarks, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said, "We know that health inequities exist, not only along racial, but gender lines [as well], and within the LGBTQ community. ... All Chicagoans deserve to have compassionate and culturally competent healthcare."

State Rep. Greg Harris said that his office gets frequent calls about the availability of LGBT-centered healthcare and said the Rush program would likely "change lives."

Harris told Windy City Times, "The best part [of the program] is that they're going to make it

easy to access, not just in one location but across all the Rush practices around the county—that makes it so much easier, and more convenient and accessible, for patients to come in for their care and counsel. It's a wonderful resource for the LGBTQ+ community."

Indeed, Nolan added that Affirm's goal is evolving "to be even more for the fabric of the community. The West Side of Chicago is the size of the city of Miami, for example. Of course, we'll partner with our colleagues at Howard Brown [Health] and Center on Halsted, but we want for people to receive care in the neighborhoods in which they live."

Report: 6% of sexual-minority adults say they are queer

An estimated 6 percent of sexual-minority adults in the U.S. identify as queer, according to a new study ("Exploring the Q in LGBTQ: Demographic characteristic and sexuality of queer people in a U.S. representative sample of sexual minorities") by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

Those who identify as queer are overwhelmingly cisgender women or genderqueer/nonbinary (GQNB)—and the poll found they are also younger and more highly educated than other sexual minorities.

Researchers examined a representative sample of sexual minorities in the United States from three age groups—young (18-25), middle (34-41) and older (52-59)—to determine the demographics and sexuality of people who identify as queer, compared to those who identify as lesbian/gay, bisexual or as other sexual-minority identities.

Among the findings were that:

—Among sexual minorities, 6 percent identify as queer, 50 percent identify as lesbian/gay, 41

percent identify as bisexual, and 7 percent use another sexual minority identity (e.g., pansexual);

—More than one-third of queer people identify as GQNB (34 percent), including 27 percent who were assigned female at birth and 7 percent assigned male at birth; and

—47 percent of queer cisgender men report attraction to both men and women, and 72 percent were attracted to both cisgender and transgender men.

The full report is at <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-70145-001>.

Holocaust Museum to run 'Notorious RBG'

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center will be opening "Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg" on Sunday, Feb. 9.

The exhibition, based on the book and Tumblr account, showcases Ginsburg from her childhood in Brooklyn, to the prejudices and challenges she faced early in her career, and her impact as a lawyer and scholar on the issue of equality.

For more information, see ILHolocaustMuseum.org/rbg.



Affirm's Christopher Nolan, Sally Lemke and Ravi Iyengar.
Photo by Matt Simonette



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Sara Feigenholtz sworn in as state senator at ceremony

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Call her state senator instead of state rep.

A packed house of dignitaries and other supporters gathered Jan. 21 at the Ann Sather on Belmont Avenue in Chicago's Lake View neighborhood for the swearing-in ceremony of now-state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz. Feigenholtz stepped down from her 12th state representative seat to take this post.

Cook County Circuit Court judicial candidate and notary Jill Rose Quinn administered the oath of office. Feigenholtz chose Quinn for this honor.

According to Cook County Commissioner Kevin B. Morrison (15th District), Quinn may be the first out transgender person in Illinois state history to swear in an incoming elected official. However, Windy City Times was unable to obtain confirmation of this.

Prior to the ceremony, North Side Democratic committeemen met at Sheffield's Chicago to decide who would fill newly retired state Sen. John Cullerton's 6th District seat. There were no other candidates vying for this seat and every committeemen present voted in favor of Feigenholtz's appointment.

"I feel like I am the guy who made all of this possible," said Cullerton. "Let's hurry up and get her sworn in before anybody changes their mind."

Cullerton also spoke about his history with Feigenholtz and called her "a fantastic [work] partner for all those years."

Attendees cheered and chanted "Sara" after Quinn finished administering the oath.

Feigenholtz praised Cullerton as "one of the greatest leaders we will ever know."

"We are all here at a time in our lives when our country and state are at a really critical juncture," said Feigenholtz. "We have a lot of work to do and have also done great things in this state in the last year including protecting a woman's right to choose no matter what the federal government does."

Feigenholtz gave a shout-out to state Rep. Kelly Cassidy (14th District), who was unable to attend. She said the Illinois General Assembly's priorities have to include protecting the environment, funding education, affordable housing access, property tax reform and solving the pension problem. Feigenholtz spoke about her decades-long advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ people, those with health insurance issues, elder caregivers and other disenfranchised groups to enact new legislation that would improve their lives.

Newly elected state Senate President Don Harmon (39th District) said, "I cannot wait to have you in the Senate. You are going to do so well there and the caucus is eager to have you. I will tell you after all that time in the House you are going to love the Senate."

Following the ceremony, Feigenholtz, Quinn and attorneys Giovanni Randozzo and Michael C.



State Sen. Sara Feigenholtz.

Photo by Carrie Maxwell

Dorf signed the official Senate appointment document and House resignation letter—the latter removing Feigenholtz from the March 17 Democratic primary ballot. Feigenholtz will be on the Nov. 3 general election ballot for her new state Senate seat.

Alds. Tom Tunney (44th Ward), James Cappleman (46th), Michelle Smith (43rd) and Harry Osterman (48th); state Rep. Ann Williams (11th District); Rep. Mike Quigley (5th District); Sidetrack's Art Johnston and José "Pepe" Pena; retired state Sen. Carol Ronen; and retired state Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie were among the many dignitaries present.

'Drag Them to the Polls!' Feb. 20

"Drag Them to the Polls!"—a voter education effort to get out the LGBTQ+ vote in the Chicago area by celebrating the city's history of drag art and activism—will take place Thursday, Feb. 20, 7-9 p.m., at Sidetrack Chicago, 3349 N. Halsted St.

The Illinois primary will take place Tuesday, March 17.

In addition to drag performances, there will be event will feature a meet-and-greet with openly LGBTQ+ candidates.

See DragThemToThePolls.com.

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viewpoints



**Dana
RUDOLPH**

MOMBIAN

Parenting on 'The L Word: Generation Q'

The L Word: Generation Q, the sequel to the groundbreaking queer television drama The L Word, just ended its first season on Showtime.

There is much to praise about the new show, including more varied representation in many dimensions of identity. Here, I want to explore the parenting storylines of both series to see what they might tell us about the changing representation of LGBTQ parents.

The main parenting storyline of the original series, which ran from 2004 to 2009, centered on characters Bette (Jennifer Beals) and Tina (Laurel Holloman). In Season One, they go through various antics while searching for a sperm donor—an overused trope among shows that depicted two-woman couples in the mid-2000s. Fast forward through some break-ups and reunions, and they have baby Angie in Season Two.

We see only a few storylines related to Angie, however, notably one in which her moms try to get her into an elite preschool by showing that they're the most diverse family vying for the spot. (That same storyline was used by ABC's Modern Family two years later for gay dads Mitchell and Cameron and their daughter Lily.) In a later season, too, Bette and Tina try to adopt, but this falls through.

Character Helena Peabody (Rachel Shelley) also had children, but they didn't live with her and played a minimal part in the show.

About transgender character Max's (Daniela Sea) pregnancy, the less said, the better. While a trans man being pregnant could make a fine storyline, this one was handled clunkily and only served to underscore the character's otherness.

Shane (Katherine Moennig) also acts for several episodes as guardian of her nine-year-old half-brother Shay. We see Shane struggle with that responsibility, though, and Shay eventually goes back to live with their father.

The new show has brought parenting even more fully into more characters' lives, as all of the returning cast members are now dealing with children in some fashion. (Minor spoilers for the season follow.) The new cast also includes Angie (Jordan Hull), now 16, with storylines of her own. Bette and Tina, though no longer together, are both very involved in her life. We find out, too, that Angie has a crush on her best friend Jordi—a sign that we're moving beyond fear of perpetuating the myth that LGBTQ parents will create LGBTQ kids. Statistically, some of us will have them, though, and that's just fine.



From left: Laurel Holloman, Jordan Hull and Jennifer Beals in *The L Word: Generation Q*. Photo by Hilary Bronwyn Gale/Showtime

We also see Alice (Leisha Hailey), also from the original series, now in a relationship with Nat (Stephanie Allynne, a real-life queer mom), who is sharing custody of her two kids with her ex. Alice tries to learn parenting skills like dealing with a sick child or packing snacks for a swim meet, while also figuring out how she fits into the family.

And Shane, who struggled in the original show to balance her guardianship responsibilities with the freedom she wanted in her life, is facing the same struggle again because her ex-wife Quiara, who wants to reunite, is pregnant. Shane must decide whether to help her parent.

Shane is hesitant, but after advising Angie on her relationship with Jordi, sees that there's something rewarding about parenting. She says she'll do it. After Quiara's first ultrasound, however, Shane is afraid that she isn't feeling the deep emotions a prospective parent should. Quiara wisely advises, "You'll feel exactly what you're supposed to feel on your own time." That's as good a piece of parenting advice as I've ever heard.

Parenting wisdom among the show's melodrama shouldn't surprise viewers. New showrunner and co-executive producer Marja-Lewis Ryan and her wife had a baby last year, and original showrunner and LW:GQ co-executive producer Ilene Chaiken is a mom as well.

While LW:GQ will never be focused on parenting in the same way as, say, Modern Family or The Fosters, Freeform's 2013-18 drama about a two-mom couple and their five kids, it feels natural that several of the LW:GQ characters have or want kids or are trying to decide if they do. Advances in acceptance, legal protections, and reproductive technologies

have made it increasingly easy for queer people to become parents (even as we recognize that out LGBTQ parents have existed for decades and our full history goes back, arguably, to Sappho). And a 2019 study by Family Equality has shown that 63 percent of LGBTQ millennials—the "Generation Q" of the show's title—are considering starting or growing their families.

The show's writers recognize this shift. In the season finale, real-life writer and professor Roxane Gay guest stars as herself, being interviewed by Alice on her talk show. Alice asks her, "Can you be a bad queer?" referencing Gay's book *Bad Feminist*, which calls for broadening what "feminist" means to include those who may not adhere to some perfect ideal. Gay answers, "Historically, in the queer community, we've tried to resist heteronormative ideas. And, so, these days, to be a bad queer is probably to want a wife and two kids and a picket fence."

We see the tension of that in Shane, the least conformist of the three original characters, as she grapples with whether she can be a parent and still be herself. Yet Bette and Alice are also parents. Are they "bad queers"? Hardly.

But the definition of "queer" now includes parents as well as those who aren't, by choice or circumstance. It makes sense, then, that even on a queer show that's not "about" parenting, we're seeing more parents and more "everyday" parenting moments. Yes, some of us may want a picket fence—but we can paint it in rainbow colors.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.



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From Windy City
Playhouse's production of
The Boys in the Band.
Photo by Michael Brosilow



Windy City Playhouse gets immersive with 'The Boys in the Band'

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

The Windy City Playhouse's artistic staff couldn't believe their luck when they got permission to produce *The Boys in the Band*.

"We applied for the rights, thinking that we weren't going to get them," said Windy City Playhouse Associate Artistic Director Carl Menninger.

Mart Crowley's groundbreaking 1968 drama about a group of gay friends celebrating a contentious birthday party has been off limits lately. That's due to the Ryan Murphy-produced 50th-anniversary Broadway production that went on to win the 2019 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play.

And then there's Murphy's Netflix adaptation due out later this year. Like the 1970 movie version that featured the original 1968 off-Broadway cast, the forthcoming film features the acclaimed 2018 revival

cast, which has gay stars like Jim Parsons, Zachary Quinto, Andrew Rannells and more.

So the Windy City Playhouse pounced when the rights to do *The Boys in the Band* became available. This professional Chicago company, famed for "immersive" productions like *Southern Gothic* and *Noises Off*, wanted the chance to put their own stamp on Crowley's classic gay drama.

"It's one of my favorite plays," Menninger said. "We want to give the audience an experience that they might not have had in a traditional theater environment."

This time around, audiences are not separated from Crowley's partying characters by a traditional proscenium setup. Instead, Windy City Playhouse allows an audience of 40 at each show to be fly-on-the-wall (actually cushioned benches) observers within the swinging 1960s apartment of Michael, *The Boys in the Band*'s troubled leading man. Each ticket also includes two cocktails, so audiences can grow as tipsy as Michael's party guests.

"I've been very interested in how we can specifically show that this is 1968, and convincing the audience that they've stepped back in time," said scenic designer William Boles, who agrees with director Menninger that *The Boys in the Band* needs to be a period piece.

Boles jokingly laments that since queer history isn't often taught in schools, he often learns it when he's hired to design historical gay plays like *Angels in America* or *The Boys in the Band*. In doing his research, Boles took his main inspiration from British interior designer David Hicks.

"It was so fun to design," said Boles during a recent walk-through of the set, pointing out bold Hicks patterns on walls and the ceiling, and other period details like a lesser-known Andy Warhol portrait.

Turn to page 19

THEATER REVIEW

The Mousetrap

Playwright: Agatha Christie

At: Court Theatre, 5535 S. Ellis Avenue

Tickets: 773-753-4472;

CourtTheatre.org; \$37.50-\$84

Runs through: Feb. 16

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

Fans of *The Mousetrap* and other Agatha Christie masterworks are challenged not only to discover whodunit, but how they dunnit, which usually is so improbable (although never quite impossible) as to defy detection.

The *Mousetrap* itself (the 1952 London original still is running) receives surprisingly few professional productions, so this staging is a Chicago rarity. It's beautifully designed and amusingly acted but it's definitely eccentric, which isn't surprising given that the director is imaginative auteurist Sean Graney.

Graney's frequent approach with older classics—say, the Greeks or Gilbert & Sullivan—is to exaggerate characters in cartoon-like ways, while greatly stripping down the story and slashing the text. I call this the "Classics Illustrated" approach, referring to the once-popular, kid friendly comic book versions of great novels. But Graney can't touch *The Mousetrap* text—copyright law, y'know—so the physical production and character portrayals must do the job.

Alison Siple's colorful, playful costumes grab the most attention. They suggest no fixed time period, although the text suggests 1950s England. Mollie Ralston (Kate Fry) wears apropos and gorgeous late-1950s clothing, but exaggera-



David Cerda, Allen Gilmore and Kate Fry in *The Mousetrap*. Photo courtesy of Court Theatre

tions follow. Young architect Christopher Wren (Alex Goodrich) is in kinda-sorta late-1960s mod clothes; Major Metcalf (Lyonel Reneau) wears a comic operetta military uniform; Mrs. Boyle (Carolyn Ann Hoerdemann) sports a loud leopard-patterned outfit; and mysterious Mr. Paravicini (David Cerda, in a rare time-out from Hell in a Handbag Productions) is utterly fantastic in purple floral shorts and jacket. Most men wear tight trousers ending above the ankle, with ankle high lace-up boots. The question is why? The costumes are amusing but do little to enhance the characters or context.

Scenic designer Arnel Sancianco handsomely depicts the high, wide main room of Monkswell Manor in black, white and gray with appropriate massive stone fireplace, gothic door frames and marvelous chairs upholstered in black and white (one with a skull pattern). Still, there's exaggera-

tion: One corner juts towards the audience, narrowing to a sharp point with a tiny radiator. It's a good joke, if intentional, about the shortcomings of English central heating.

As directed by Graney, the actors scarcely play realistic characters. Fry and Allen Gilmore (as Mollie's husband Giles Ralston) come closest, due to how their roles are written, and Tina Munoz Pandya (Miss Casewell) and Erik Hellman (energetically on his toes as Sgt. Trotter) are runners-up. Graney's approach is fun for a while, especially combined with the costume designs, but it fails to ratchet up the tension essential to the play, and the acting rings false when things turn solemn in Act II. *The Mousetrap* is real Agatha Christie, not one of many parodies, and perhaps Graney should consider that someone out there might not know whodunit or how.

THEATER REVIEW

The Leopard Play, or sad songs for lost boys

Playwright: Isaac Gomez

At: Steep Theatre, 1115 W. Berwyn Ave.

Tickets: 773-649-3186 or SteepTheatre.com; \$27-\$39

Runs through: Feb. 29

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

A world-premiere play commission is always a crap shoot. And Steep Theatre came up with snake eyes with *The Leopard Play, or sad songs for lost boys*.

This adults-only and dramaturgical mess by Isaac Gomez (La Ruta, the way she spoke) is ostensibly a contemporary Latinx family mystery set mainly in El Paso, Texas. It's centered around the generically named gay protagonist "Son" (Brandon Rivera).

When he returns home for a memorial, Son asks a lot of uncomfortable questions about a decade-old suspicious death of a drug-running uncle. Son also hooks up a lot!

The incongruity of Son's sexual exploits and his relations' in-fighting is just one head-



Alec Coles Perez and Brandon Rivera in *The Leopard Play*.

Photo by Gregg Gilman

scratching aspect of the play. There's also an abundance of Elton John songs and artsy/symbolic staging moments by director Laura Alcalá Baker.

For example, Son reveals early on that he can't help but imagine his male relatives writhing to Rihanna songs when he copulates. So choreographer Breon Arzell has the often scantily clad male ensemble comply by twerking around Rivera as he simulates sex acts with Alec Coles Perez as "Boy," the designated sex partner(s) of Son.

Just what Gomez is trying to say with *The Leopard Play* is puzzling. Is Son's penchant for

risky and anonymous sex a reaction to toxic masculinity, Catholicism and his other ongoing daddy issues from his childhood? Or are Son's hard-drinking father, brothers and uncles also to be seen as victims of U.S. racism and machismo culture? Is this why there are no onstage female characters, even though it is mentioned that Son's mother is alive?

It's ultimately hard to care, since Son is so hypocritical and insensitive. For example, Son callously ignores the increasingly desperate voicemail messages from his gay and scatterbrained Little Brother (Juan Munoz).

The play's final confrontation between Son and Dad (Victor Marañá) also feels like an unresolved first draft. But maybe Gomez is trying to show how many gay men never end up seeing eye to eye with their parents.

If Gomez's script is a disappointment, at least *The Leopard Play* impresses with performers trying to make the most of their thinly drawn characters. Scenic designer Arnel Sancianco and lighting designer Alexander Ridgers also work well together to differentiate the play's many locations from rough El Paso neighborhoods to the gay fantasies inside Son's head.

So heed Steep Theatre's many production warnings about the extreme sexuality, racist language and other potentially triggering aspects of *The Leopard Play*. But also be aware that it all doesn't add up to much by the end.

THEATER REVIEW

Sheepdog

Playwright: Kevin Artigue

At: Shattered Globe Theatre

at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave.

Tickets: \$42; Runs through: Feb. 29

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Have you heard the story about the investigation of a white cop who shot a Black suspect? Of course you have—just as you've heard the one about the co-workers on the police force who fall in love and embark on a plan to marry.

Oh, and let's not forget the one about the woman torn between her own misgivings and her loyalty to her on-and-off-duty partner. How, then, does Kevin Artigue succeed in generating so much empathy, excitement and introspection from a collection of literary premises explored to exhaustion in recent years?

First, his discourse concerns itself with facts: you will find no dinner-table speculations swapped by opinionated family members, but instead, an unswerving focus on the question of what actually happened. ("I'm not a forensic psychiatrist," declares our protagonist, "I don't deal in the Whys.") Second, the fatal event has already occurred, offering the possibility of an "objective" answer to our query, albeit with motive still subject to argument. Third, while we make firsthand acquaintance of two characters, only one is permitted to address us directly, making for an uncommonly spare and uncluttered narrative line.

What most elevates Artigue's procedural above the plethora of boys/babes-in-blue literary exercises, mass-produced by screenwriting workshops and op-ed columns in recent years, is his rejection of sexist gender stereotypes so ubiquitous as to be visible only when absent.

To be sure, differing personalities are required to generate the conflict necessary to dramatic tension, but even if officers Amina Duckett and Ryan Tilson are of similar age, ambition and a history of hardscrabble childhoods, the former is the more mature, experienced, streetwise and stoical of the partners, while the latter's upbringing has rendered him nurturing, introverted, impressionable and thus, vulnerable to influence by misanthropic peers like those subscribing to the values promulgated in an unapproved manual dividing the world into villains and victims ("wolves" and "sheep") with the "sheepdogs" characterized as wolves protecting all that is Good. Ryan, being white, is oblivious to the racist subtext concealed in this simplistic cosmology, but which Amina recognizes immediately. Too late, both come to identify the real villains as a society whose goal is the furthering of hostility and confusion.

Under the direction of Wardell Julius Clark, Leslie Ann Sheppard and Drew Schad resist their well-made play's potential reduction to symposial disputation, instead navigating Artigue's eloquent dialogue to deliver exemplary performances steeped in discovery commanding our attention amid the never-seen, but vividly invoked, environment conjured by Christopher Kriz and Smooch Medina, whose on-point replications of crime-scene footage forever dispel the myth of cameras never lying.

THEATER REVIEW

How to Defend Yourself

Playwright: Liliana Padilla
At: Victory Gardens Theatre,
2433 N. Lincoln Ave.
Tickets: VictoryGardens.org
Price: \$25-50

BY KAREN TOPHAM

Liliana Padilla's *How to Defend Yourself* focuses on a college campus as students try to deal with an extremely violent assault by two fraternity men on a sorority girl that has left her hospitalized.

Although all of the women on campus understand intuitively that they are never really "safe," this rape drives the point home in dramatic fashion and leads Brandi (Anna Crivelli) and her Zeta Chi sister Kara (Netta Walker) to start a women's self-defense class in a gym.

Unfortunately, despite the immediacy of the situation, only three young women come out to the class. Two of them, Diana (Isa Arciniegas) and Mojdeh (Arianna Mahallati) seem to be there as much to create an "in" with Zeta Chi to help their chances of being rushed as to learn anything. The other, a terminally shy young woman named Nikki (Andrea San Miguel), self-consciously wanders in late and clearly needs nurturing to help her to learn to assert herself. There are also two fraternity men, Andy (Ryan McBride) and the



How to Defend Yourself.
Photo by Liz Lauren

imaginatively named Eggo (Jayson Lee), whom Brandi invited to assist with the training.

Padilla's dialogue is wonderful: their language and cadences are perfect, as is their ability to differentiate among the younger women, older women, and the men in how they speak to each other; they even play with writing multiple simultaneous dialogues, as would occur when a class splits into pairs for an exercise. And director Marti Lyons feels like a perfect choice to stage it: she knows how to get the most out of the overlapping dialogue, how to use music and movement to help shape moments, how to help these actors build characters that are more complex than they appear to be. Most of all, though, she and Padilla are on the same page about the sheer confusion of sex in 2020.

No one seems to know just where the boundaries are. Though they all speak of "affirmative consent" and talking about what you desire,

there are many indications of just how confounding that can be for both sexes. The mixed signals they all give and receive make everything about sex a muddle in which everyone is constantly on the lookout for perfect clarity they will not find.

Young people today are coming of age in a world in which sexual politics are more perplexing than ever but sex itself is commonplace. (Even shy Nikki talks about how she gave a guy a blowjob in a lavatory at a gas station.) And Padilla's play, despite its title, acknowledges that, perhaps, there is no surefire way to defend yourself (short of Diana's gun). You can learn techniques and practice as much as possible, but disengaging yourself from a partner in a gym will never be the same as doing it in the real world with a man who is bigger than you and wants to harm you. Nothing is certain except that kids will push boundaries ... even when they know better.

'A Night with Oscar' viewing party Feb. 9

Center on Halsted will hold its annual "A Night with Oscar" viewing party Sunday, Feb. 9, 6-11 p.m. at the Park West, 322 W. Armitage Ave., with the red-carpet arrivals starting at 5 p.m.

There will be a dinner, libations and a live broadcasting of the Academy Awards ceremony. A deluxe silent auction and raffle will also take place.

See CenterOnHalsted.org.



From past Center on Halsted Oscar party.
Photo by Jerry Nunn

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Dan'yelle
Williamson.
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NUNN ON ONE: MUSICALS

Dan'yelle Williamson: Working hard for the money in 'Summer'

BY JERRY NUNN

Hailing from Boston, Donna Summer went from the church choir to disco dance floor over the years. She broke through music boundaries with hits like "Love to Love You Baby," "Dim All the Lights" and "I Feel Love."

Summer announced to Windy City Times in 2009 that she would never retire, then sadly passed away from lung cancer in 2012. In 2013, she was inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and, in 2018, Summer: The Donna Summer Musical was created to continue her legacy.

Performer Dan'yelle Williamson plays Summer in her later years in the stage show, as well as Summer's mother Mary Gaines during her early years. Williamson brings experience from other musicals to the table such as Mamma Mia!, Memphis, The Lion King and Wicked.

Windy City Times: Where are you from?

Dan'yelle Williamson: I'm from Tampa, Florida, originally. I attended Howard W. Blake High School of the Arts.

WCT: Did you always want to be in musicals?

DW: No. [Laughs] I didn't know I wanted to

do musicals until much later. I knew I wanted to sing, because I had always been a singer. I grew up in the church and sang in the choir. I wanted to keep singing and musicals found me. It's cool when your purpose finds you.

When I went to college, then I decided to do musicals.

WCT: Did you like Donna Summer songs in the past?

DW: I actually didn't listen to her music at all growing up. My parents were more into Parliament, Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston. We listened to soul and funk.

I wasn't familiar with her life either, so I learned a lot at the beginning of this process. Some cast members in the show have been following her forever.

WCT: Do people say you look like her?

DW: Yes. People do say that a lot!

WCT: How deep does the storyline go into her struggles?

DW: They touch on some challenging topics in the show. Overall, the show focuses on the highlights of her life. Some of the topics are brief and I wish that they went a little deeper.

I want a deeper understanding of her as a full woman, mother, sister and wife. She was so many things. She wasn't just the disco queen, but the show is very fast, so we are in and out.

WCT: Why is your character described as the "Diva Donna?"

DW: There are three different Donnas. Each Donna represents a stage in her life. Olivia Elease Hardy is the "Duckling Donna" that is Donna in her younger years when she sings in church. Alex Hairston is "Disco Donna" and goes into her teen years. My character represents Donna Summer in her later years. She is already established as a huge megastar. With my character they introduce her journey as a mother and wife, while being in the music industry.

WCT: So she wasn't a diva who demands things in her dressing room?

DW: No. I never met Donna, but her husband Bruce Sudano said she was very loving, kind and giving. She wanted her children to know she was their mother first and not some big star.

WCT: So the family is very involved with this production?

DW: Yes. Bruce came to a few of the rehearsals.

He was very close to the project. He had a lot to say in regards to his wife and her journey.

WCT: When I interviewed Donna in the past, she spoke of wanting to make a musical about her life called Ordinary Girl. Was that part of this production?

DW: Yes. That was the book she wrote, so they pulled things from the book to put it in the show.

WCT: She told me she wanted to try opera.

DW: She did? Well, she does have a very versatile voice and it was something no one had heard before.

WCT: Do you have a favorite song of Summer?

DW: I liked "Hot Stuff" and "Bad Girls" for a while, but lately I like "She Works Hard for the Money." I have had my own challenges with this tour, so that song is really resonating with me right now.

WCT: What does the Summer show have for gay fans?

DW: As her character, I do address the controversial situation that happened where she called out gay fans. That is something I wish we elaborated more on in the show. It felt like it was put

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James Lee as
Larry in Windy
City Playhouse's
*The Boys in the
Band*.
Photo by
Michael
Brosilow



BOYS from page 15

"We latched onto the fact that Michael is living well beyond his means and he talks about it a lot," Menninger said. "From my point of view, he took all of his money from a film script sale and blew it on this apartment."

Like the production's period decor, *The Boys in the Band* also comes with a long-standing stigma of pre-Stonewall attitudes. Throughout the years, many LGBTQ activists have criticized the play for its portrayal of gay people as "self-loathing."

"When you see it on the page, when you see the film, it is angry, it is hostile, and there's a lot of discord in it," Menninger said. "But I think we try to end the play in a place of hope."

Menninger and his acting company's approach to *The Boys in the Band* is that Michael's apartment starts out as a celebratory safe space. But things change when Michael's heterosexually married friend, Alan, becomes an intruder.

"That call from Alan is very triggering for Michael," Boles said. "Otherwise there's a lot of love that's there in that community keeping them together, especially in 1968 being gay within those safe spaces."

"You can recognize a lot contemporary queer life in this situation," said Menninger, noting

that Crowley tackles issues like open relationships, substance abuse and more in *The Boys in the Band*.

"And there's that line that Michael says, 'If we could just not hate ourselves so much,' which is completely relevant," Boles said.

"The actors are so passionate and hungry. They invest so much time and energy outside of rehearsals and ask so many questions to understanding the period of 1968 and the context that we have placed it in," said Menninger about his cast. "What we are attempting to do is show the relevance of this."

The regular-run schedule for Windy City Playhouse's *The Boys in the Band* is 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 3:30 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, and 1:30 and 6 p.m. Sundays.

Tickets are currently on sale through April 19. Tickets are \$75-\$95, which includes two cocktails. There is also a special performance to benefit Lambda Legal with a post-show discussion with famed photographer and gay activist Tom Bianchi at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 13. Benefit tickets are \$150.

For more information, call 773-891-8985 or visit WindyCityPlayhouse.com.

Kyle Patrick as Cowboy in Windy City
Playhouse's *The Boys in the Band*.
Photo by Michael Brosilow



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TELEVISION

Freeform airs LGBTQ—and Chicago-filmed—film 'The Thing About Harry'

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Director/actor Peter Paige, best known for playing Emmett Honeycutt on the U.S. version of *Queer as Folk*, admitted to Windy City Times that he has long been “a giant rom-com fan.”

“Back in the ‘90s and early-2000s, Friday night—opening night—if Sandra Bullock or Julia Roberts were starring in a movie, I was there,” he added.

Paige was in Chicago last fall, directing his own contribution to the romantic comedy genre, the LGBT-themed romantic comedy *The Thing About Harry*, set to air on Disney’s Freeform network Saturday, Feb. 15.

“I would sit in the audience and I would love those films,” added Paige, who also appears in *The Thing About Harry*. “But it always made me a little sad that I had to translate them—while they were ‘for me,’ they were not [really] for me. I was so excited that there might be the opportunity to make this rom-com that queer boys wouldn’t have to translate.”

The film follows straight-laced gay Chicagoan Sam (Jake Borelli, a regular on *Grey’s Anatomy*) as he reconnects with Harry (Niko Terho), his once-closeted and now-pansexual high school bully, when they end up on a road trip together.

“Harry is just a free-spirited, fun-loving dude,” said Terho. “Whatever is happening in the moment is what interests him. ... He wasn’t so out in high school, like Sam, but he’s [now] fully embraced his sexuality—he’s pansexual. He doesn’t think about a lot of things; he just goes into them with an open mind.”

The *Truth About Harry* is the first romantic comedy for Borelli, who is a regular on *Grey’s Anatomy* and is, like his character on that series, openly gay.

“The fact that this is a queer romantic comedy is massive for me,” he said. “...We get to explore a side of rom-coms that we didn’t get to see before. As a queer person, [I think] ‘Finally, I get to see myself reflected back in this genre.’

Actor Britt Baron, who plays Sam’s best friend Stasia, said she enjoyed the role reversal wherein a queer character is in the the lead instead of embodying the “best friend” romantic-comedy archetype.

“To play the heterosexual white female friend character has actually been fun,” Baron noted. “Usually I’m the main character falling in love. But I love playing the best friend. Peter wrote her in such a complex real way; she’s so flawed—like we all are.”

Paige described *The Truth About Harry* in essence as being about his twenties, adding, “It’s all about the ways I was seeking love then, and stitching them together into the usual structure of a romantic comedy.”

The filmmakers chose Chicago because it had a strong and vibrant gay community and hadn’t been overexposed in other films and television programs, Paige said.

“One thing I also love is that intersection of ‘midwestern’ and ‘urban,’” he added. “It’s a very polite city. It’s a very friendly city, which is lovely. There was something about these particular boys at the heart of the story, and their ‘midwestern-ness,’ that I thought was very interesting.”



Jake Borelli
in *The Thing About Harry*.
Photo
courtesy of
Freeform/
Parrish Lewis

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Nico Terho and Jake Borelli in *The Thing About Harry*.
Photo courtesy of Freeform/Parrish Lewis

CAKE announces venue change, cites Center controversy

After being at Center on Halsted for several years, the Chicago Alternative Comics Expo (CAKE) 2020 organizing committee announced the weekend-long alt-comics event will take place June 13-14, 11 a.m.-6 p.m., at Broadway Armory, 5917 N. Broadway.

Like previous CAKE events, this year's expo will host local and multinational comics artists and publishers, including notable special guests selling their books, prints and other wares.

In a press release, CAKE listed several reasons for the site change, saying, "Broadway Armory provides more space and more amenities to contend with the event's ever-growing popularity."

However, CAKE also stated, "Members of the CAKE organizing committee dedicate themselves to maintaining the expo and all events associated with it to be safe, [welcoming] spaces for all. It is with this spirit that CAKE made the decision to end their relationship with Center on Halsted."

"There is no doubt that [the Center] has made significant contributions to the health and welfare of Chicago's LGBTQ community. However, in a Medium article written by Loyola professor Devon Price, troubling revelations came to light concerning the security firm hired by [the Center] and its chief's documented history with racist violence."

"Deeply concerned by Price's report, CAKE organizers requested that interventions be made



Vendor C. Spike Trotman at CAKE Chicago 2019.
Photo by Andrew Davis

by [the Center]. When action was not taken in a timely and satisfactory manner, CAKE organizers decided as a group to relocate."

Windy City Times has also reported extensively on the matter, most recently noting that the Center selected a new security provider, according to a Jan. 22 statement. The security firm—Quantum Security, LLC, whose other clients include Howard Brown Health Center, Broadway Youth Center, Triple S, La Casa Norte Pierce House and the Firehouse Community Arts Center—comes after a selection process that began last September. Quantum is replacing the controversial Walsh Security.

See CAKEChicago.com.



Aunty Chan in a still from Aunty Chan-ASMR Summer Snacking.
Image courtesy of the artist

Queer Valentine's Day event at MCA

"Odd Pleasures: A Queer Valentine's Day Event" will take place Friday, Feb. 15, 7-8:30 p.m., at

the Museum for Contemporary Art (MCA), 200 E. Chicago Ave.

Chicago drag queen/comedian Aunty Chan will host the variety show, which is intended for people 16 and older. The event is described as "an evening designed to engage multiple senses in pleasures big and small including live ASMR, drag, comedy, short movies and youth-designed artist interactions."

Admission is \$8-\$10/person; visit MCACHicago.org/Calendar/2020/02/Odd-Pleasures-A-Queer-Valentines-Day-Event.



@windycitytimes

Obama portraits in Chicago in 2021

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery has announced a five-city tour next year of the portraits of President Barack Obama and Mrs. Michelle Obama by artists Kehinde Wiley and Amy Serrano, respectively, that will launch during the summer of 2021.

The tour will commence in Chicago, June 18, 2021, and will continue, with the works traveling across the country, through May 30, 2022. The portraits will be at the Art Institute of Chicago during June 18-Aug. 15, 2021; other venues will include the Brooklyn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Atlanta's High Museum of Art and Houston's Museum of Fine Arts.

Next year, in mid-May 2021, the Obama portraits, commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery, will temporarily go off view from the museum's exhibitions for tour preparation.

In addition to the paintings, the tour will include an audio-visual element, Portrait Gallery-led teacher workshops and curatorial presenta-

tions in each location. In anticipation of the tour, the Portrait Gallery is also publishing a book in partnership with Princeton University Press; The Obama Portraits will be released Feb. 11.

'With Love From Andersonville' Feb. 14-16

In the spirit of giving back, With Love From Andersonville returns this year with a Valentine's Day charity promotion in Andersonville! Kicking off this year on Valentine's Day and continuing through the weekend, Feb. 14-16.

Andersonville businesses have joined forces to give back 14 percent of their sales to a charity or non-profit chosen by the business.

Just a few of the participating businesses include Be Yoga Andersonville, Early to Bed, Milk Handmade and the Swedish American Museum.

See Andersonville.org/events-2/with-love-from-andersonville-valentines-day-weekend-fundraiser.

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BOOKS

Ross Mathews drops names, opens hearts in new celebrity tell-all

BY TONY PEREGRIN

Until recently, the dishy and endearing celebrity stories featured in Name Drop were tales Ross Mathews—a Chelsea Lately alum and current RuPaul's Drag Race judge—only divulged over happy hour.

Name Drop—dedicated to “everyone who never got to sit at the cool kids table in the cafeteria”—spills the tea on some of Hollywood's most iconic celebrities, from Liz Taylor to Lady Gaga.

The Name Drop Tour, which launches in New York City Feb. 4, combines elements of stand-up, game show, and audience Q&A.

“Right now, I'm in L.A. and I am feverishly doing laundry and getting myself prepped to go on this 30-city tour, which is just insane,” Mathews told Windy City Times. “I've never done this before in my life, going on this big of a tour. So really, it's about logistics right now: Who's watching the dogs, and when?”

Windy City Times: You write in the prologue that “no celebrity was harmed in the making of this book.”

Ross Mathews: But I go there. we tell every story because I am the superfan [who] won the golden ticket and got to go sort of beyond the red carpet and meet these people. And sometimes they blew me away and were better than I ever could have imagined; and sometimes they broke my heart. So, we tell the truth in this book. And it's so funny and it's an emotional rollercoaster—and I think people are going to love it. Not to toot my own toot-er, but toot-toot!

WCT: Were you nervous about spilling some of this hot tea?

RM: No. I wasn't nervous about spilling tea because I don't think anyone's going to read this and have their heart broken, because it's just what happened.

I write about experiences like when I was a co-host on The View with Barbara Walters, and she was not exactly be who I wanted her to be. But then I also write about coming to terms with that and then meeting her so many years later and realizing that she was just doing her job. It was therapeutic for me to write this book because some of the experiences I had been holding onto when people didn't exactly live up to who I wanted them to be—I kind of got to let go of it and forgive them a little bit.

WCT: My favorite story is the one about Lady Gaga and her appearance on RuPaul's Drag Race. Gaga revealed to you on set that she had watched you on TV on the red carpet right before the Golden Globes, where you announced you were excited, in fact, to see Lady Gaga. She let you know that she had been very nervous that night because she didn't feel, as a singer, that she belonged with all of those movie stars at the event—but hearing you say that empowered her to go out there for Ross and all the other Rosses out there.

RM: I never anticipated what would happen when she pulled me aside in front of everybody and told me this story, which I think is the best Lady Gaga story of all time. It really made me realize how human all these people are—the people who I used to cut out of magazines and obsess over, they're just human beings. And I know that sounds so stupid, but to have somebody of her level say that she heard something I said and what it meant to her made me realize the strength of this platform that I'm so lucky to have.

WCT: On Dec. 6, you tweeted a memory of being sent out by Jay Leno 18 years ago to cover the Ocean's 11 premiere, and that David Duchovny, who was at the event, was your first celebrity interview. Looking back, what advice would you have for young-intern Ross?

RM: Well, I would just say trust your gut. I mean, at that point, nobody on the planet thought that I'd be sitting here talking to you and going on a 30-city tour with my second book, 18 years later, but I am. I just knew it in my bones. I had no other skillsets, so there was no other option for me, but I just knew it. Lean into what makes you different. Because I think a lot of people try to change it or avoid it or hide whatever it is, but what makes you different can make your life if you celebrate it and lead with it.

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Ross Mathews.
Photo by Ricky
Middlesworth

'Love Out Loud' ball Feb. 8

In Demand Entertainment and CSU Royal Court are presenting the Love Out Loud Ball on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2-10 p.m., at Chicago State University's Student Union Building, 9501 S. King Dr.

The ball-approved event is offering up to \$14,000 in prizes, incentives and scholarships, with the latter sponsored in part by In Demand Entertainment, Chicago State University, South Side Help Center, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, The Chicago Center for HIV Elimination, STAR Team Agency and The HIV League Scholarship.

The emcees will be Icon Neiman Marcus Escada and The Adonis 007.

See "17th annual Love Out Loud Ball" on Facebook.

Chicago Auto Show Feb. 8-17

The next Chicago Auto Show will take place Feb. 8-17 at McCormick Place, 2301 S. Lake Shore Dr.

North America's largest auto show, the event spans more than 1 million square feet of floor space of the McCormick Place complex and displays multiple world and North American introductions and a complete range of domestic and imported passenger cars, trucks, sport-utility vehicles, minivans and concept cars.

Admission is \$13 for adults, \$8 for seniors age 62 and older as well as children ages 7-12, and free for children 6 and younger.

In addition to the public show, First Look for Charity will also take place. The black-tie-required affair will be Friday, Feb. 7, 7-11 p.m. There will also be two vehicle giveaways: a 2020 Ford Explorer. Follow it at #FLFC2020.

See ChicagoAutoShow.com.

'...Love Is Queer to Stay' throughout Feb.

The Laughing Stock Theatre production The Masquerade; Or, Love Is Queer to Stay presents a queer spin on classical tropes, and will run at the Crowd Theater, 3935 N. Broadway Ave. on Feb. 8, 15, 22 and 29 at 8 p.m.

The cast includes Aaron Quick as Flaminio, Claire Proepper as Signora Rosaura, Jeffrey "JR" Rubin as Pedrolino, Jennifer Mohr as Smeraldina, Martin Downs as Lelio, Shea Lee as Pantalone, and Steven Yandell as Capitano. There will also be direction and choreography by Proepper, fight choreography by Yandell, sound design by Quick, and music composed by Downs, Quick and Proepper.

All shows are pay-what-you-can; visit <https://dime.io/events/Masquerade>.

'Bug' through March 8 at Steppenwolf

Performances have begun for Steppenwolf Theatre Company's production of Bug—the skin-crawling cult classic written by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning ensemble member Tracy Letts, and directed by Tony Award winner David Cromer.

The cast of this Steppenwolf debut features ensemble members Randall Arney (Dr. Sweet), Carrie Coon (Agnes White) and Namir Smallwood (Peter Evans), along with Jennifer Engstrom (R.C.) and Steve Key (Jerry Goss).

Bug runs through Sunday, March 8, in the Downstairs Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St. Single tickets (\$20-\$125) are available through Audience Services at 312-335-1650, or Steppenwolf.org.

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Tom Goss.
Photo by Daren Cornell

NUNN ON ONE: MUSIC

Out singer Tom Goss talks newest work, bears, 'Mean Girls'

BY JERRY NUNN

Out singer Tom Goss released his newest album, *Territories*, in 2019.

With the record, he created videos for several singles that spotlight relationships. The LA-based singer-songwriter is known for tackling LGBT issues with his studio albums and, in a past video, even documented his own marriage ceremony.

Goss has worked with gay singers such as Matt Alber, Max Emerson and Matthew Olshefski, also known as "The Shirtless Violinist."

Not only did he contribute to three songs on the soundtrack to the indie movie *Out to Kill*, but he also starred in it.

His latest video for "Quebec" dropped Feb. 13.

Windy City Times: You are from Quincy, Illinois?

Tom Goss: Yes. All of my family is from Illinois. My dad is from the Quad Cities area and my mom is from Chicagoland. I was raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

WCT: You moved to Washington, D.C., after that?

TG: Yes. I went to college at the University of Central Missouri and after that I decided to be a catholic priest. I moved to D.C. to join the seminary.

WCT: You came out at that point?

TG: Yes, it was a great revelation. I spent most of my life really believing that I was asexual. Sexuality didn't mean that much to me.

When I was in seminary, I fell in love with another man. This man happened to be a bear. It was through that process is when I realized I am attracted to bears. Before that, I was trying to ascribe my ideas to the societal norms what I should be attracted to. It wasn't until I fell in love with an older man that was hairy and chubby, with physical attributes that turned me on that my eyes were opened. I realized that I was attracted to a certain gender or type. It just wasn't something that I was expecting.

WCT: Who you are attracted to came out in your music after that?

TG: Well, I think it's important to note that I spent a good portion of my life not understanding who I was attracted to. From the flip side of

it, I think a lot of beautiful men spend time feeling unattractive. I don't think that's innate to us. I think that's learned behavior. We are constantly bombarded by what society deems as beautiful. If we don't fit those standards, we don't see ourselves as beautiful.

I have a chance to showcase different kinds of beauty and to be authentic to my voice as to what I see as beautiful every day. I would be doing a disservice to myself if I cast the romantic lead as a twink.

WCT: How did you get involved with [Mean Girls actor] Daniel Franzese for the video "Quebec"?

TG: Danny and I have been friends for a little bit. I did a video for a song called "Round In All the Right Places." It was more of an adult follow-up to the song "Bears."

I have always admired Danny for being a voice for body positivity. I was casting and wanted to get his perspective. I wanted to be sensitive to the subject and find out if he knew anyone that would be a good fit for a role. We talked about it and that project wasn't right for him.

When we started making "La Bufadora," I talked to the director Michael Serrato. I suggested Daniel and Michael was already a fan of his work. We decided to make a trilogy of videos together.

WCT: Were you a fan of Mean Girls before?

TG: Yes, but I haven't seen it in so long. I feel bad because we are such good friends and I haven't gone back to watch it again.

WCT: You had a love scene with Daniel. How was that?

TG: It was really fun! [Laughs] There were moments when I got lost in it. I forgot a camera was there.

WCT: You made pancakes for breakfast afterward in the video. Do you cook?

TG: Yes. I didn't make those pancakes, but recently I started putting powdered peanut butter in the batter. It's so good. You should try it!

WCT: How was performing with singer Andy Grammer?

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ROSS from page 22

WCT: Does leaning into what makes you different play a part in how you approach dating as well? You've said you've been dating a fair amount and that you're good at it. How so?

RM: I'm confident and I'm inquisitive and kind. I'm imperfect, but I think if you can be those things, I think you'll be fine. I never had this kind of confidence when I was younger. And so it's a different experience to be in the dating world and not being necessarily apologetic for myself or my body or my success or my opinion, to just sort of own it. And you take it or leave it—that's kind of liberating.

WCT: It sounds like you've been dating some legitimate snacks at this point!

RM: I know. Isn't that great? Wonderful people too, really interesting people, kind.

WCT: I want to ask you about Drag Race All Stars 5. Social-media chatter suggests that the details around the new season are being held hostage due to the fandom complaining about Drag Race burnout.



RM: I just heard that doing interviews—I hadn't heard that, it hasn't been on my radar. And, to be quite frank, I don't really pay much mind to it because I think we're making the best show on television. I don't think there's burnout. I'll tell you this: All Stars 5 is great. The way the producers keep it fresh and keep you on your toes is so impressive. And I think when people see All Stars 5, there will be no talk of burnout.

WCT: While we're talking drag, give us an update on your Dragtastic Bubbly Brunch events in Chicago.

RM: Well, I love drag queens and I love brunch—and now we're in 16 cities across the country and in Puerto Vallarta, and this includes Chicago. So, we've taken a couple months off in Chicago and as we're spreading out we want to make sure everything's up to snuff. So, I would imagine we'd be back in Chicago very, very soon.

WCT: What happens when Ross Mathews swans into Sidetrack or Roscoe's? Do people recognize you instantaneously?

RM: They do, but people are nice. I love it. I

don't know what I would do if they didn't. I feel like I have friends everywhere I go. Sometimes people will tweet me later: "Oh, my God. I saw you Ross, and I was too scared to come up." That drives me bonkers because [you shouldn't] be scared. If you see me, don't just come say hi—give me a hug. I want to meet everybody, and I mean it.

WCT: A 30-city tour is quite a large undertaking. What is the most outrageous question you've ever been asked by an audience member or fan?

RM: They'll ask me everything from who was the rudest celebrity you've ever met to [if I'm] a top or a bottom.

WCT: And?

RM: You'll have to buy a ticket to the show. I'll see you in Chicago!

Name Drop: The Really Good Celebrity Stories I Usually Only Tell at Happy Hour is now available. The Name Drop Tour arrives in Chicago at the Athenaeum Theatre on Saturday, Feb. 29; visit AthenaeumTheatre.org.

Batter up: Softball tourney coming to city during Pride weekend

BY ROSS FORMAN

Pride Week next June is getting a bit more sporty. The inaugural Chicago Pride Softball Classic, run by the Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association (CMSA), will be played June 26-27 at Horner Park on Chicago's North Side, with 36 teams in three divisions.

"I've long heard, 'Why don't we have a tournament in Chicago? Why do we always have to travel to [out-of-state] tournaments?'" said Mark Sakalares, commissioner of CMSA's Open Sunday Softball, which is coordinating the 2020 event. "I also have long heard from out-of-state players, 'Why doesn't Chicago host a tournament? Chicago is a destination city!'"

That will change in June, when "safe" and "out" calls will echo around the nine fields that will be used, with teams anticipated to play from across the United States, and possibly Canada, too. There will be a C-Division, D-Division and Master's games—and the total number of teams can be expanded depending on interest, Sakalares said.

Registration will start in January through

CMSA's website—and the two-day tournament is endorsed by the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance (NAGAAA), which runs the annual Gay Softball World Series.

"To have a well-run tournament coordinated with an event the likes of Chicago Pride could do nothing but succeed," said NAGAAA commissioner John Defee.

NAGAAA Athletic Director Jeff Sloan added, "NAGAAA fully supports CMSA and the city of Chicago rejoining the circuit of NAGAAA member association tournaments with a Pride weekend tournament. Chicago is a premier, world-class

destination and would be an attractive tournament to our members across North America."

Pride weekend in Chicago already features the annual Pride Bowl, a two-day flag football tournament that draws teams from across the country. Plus, Proud To Run has been held in Chicago since 1982, raising funds to support the local LGBT community. The Proud to Run 5K and 10K races as well as the half-marathon are presented by Frontrunners Chicago.

"We're not looking for the same people—those who would be playing in the Pride Bowl and this softball tournament," Sakalares said. "Those who would play football will play football, and those who would play softball will play softball. It'd be hard for people to play in both tournaments."

But, they will discuss joint branding, marketing and social events for football and softball participants, Sakalares said.

"We really want to put on a quality event and make sure everyone has an enjoyable time in Chicago, and this [tournament] then will become a destination event, not just a softball tourna-

ment," he said.

Sakalares said talks have begun to allow the tournament winners to ride on a float in the parade, though it likely won't happen in 2020.

Horner Park, 2741 W. Montrose Ave., has 12 fields, with nine that will be used for the tournament. None have a home run fence and two have lights.

Games will likely start both days at 8 or 9 a.m.

"As a former member of CMSA Open Sunday Softball and current tournament director for the Lone Star Classic in Houston, the opportunity to enjoy Chicago's competitive spirit on the field and to celebrate community during Pride weekend would be relished by members from Montrose Softball League and others throughout North America," said Matt McGary.

David Rill, who plays in the Open Sunday Softball league, will be the tournament director.

CMSA last played host to the NAGAAA Gay Softball World Series in 2011 and Chicago also hosted the quadrennial Gay Games in 2006. The city also has hosted the Senior Cup in the past.



Left: David Rill. Right: Mark Sakalares. Photos courtesy of Sakalares

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BUSINESS

Dan Earles and Bill Rossi: Longtime business partners—and friends

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Dan Earles and Bill Rossi have known each other for a quarter-century—and that has involved everything from making crucial decisions about joint businesses to attending (more than two dozen) Cher concerts together.

Rossi's and Earles' lives are deeply intertwined. Earles, the principal of Earles Architects & Associates, has more than 35 years providing design and space-planning advice. He also owns the commercial furniture dealer SEAATS as well as the Dyer, Indiana-based business Epic Gourmet Popcorn—the first and only U.S. popcorn company the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce has certified. In addition, he's an active member of the American Institute of Architects' LGBTQI+ Alliance and the LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois.

Rossi is the CFO of Earles Architects & Associates and SEAATS, where he is part-owner. He oversaw the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce certification for both companies as well as the launch and expansion of Epic (which, incidentally, has some delicious varieties). Like Earles, Rossi is a member of the LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois.

"We went on a joint trip together," Rossi said. "We sat on noodles for about eight hours and talked and talked and talked. That's how our friendship started." Earles added with a laugh, "Yeah—it was just a bunch of gay boys in the Ozarks."

After the friendship started, they became roommates—and, then, something more professional blossomed. "I actually headed the marketing department for one of the biggest engineering firms in the world, and then I realized I wasn't happy in that culture. I then moved into the investment

world, and was actually pretty happy there. We owned a bunch of buildings across the country, and Dan was the architect. Then the recession hit in 2008 and I was hit with the difficult decision of taking a severe pay cut or look for another job. And just as I was about to look for another job, this one here [pointing to Earles] scooped me up."

And their lives constantly meshed through the years. That included the LGBTQ dating service In Good Company (now the mainstream business It's Just Lunch), which Rossi headed and where Earles found a now ex-partner. [Note: Windy City Times wrote about In Good Company in 2005.]

As for the formation of SEAATS, Rossi said that "Dan had always outsourced to furniture companies—and when you do that, a lot of things are going to be problematic. He wanted to add the commercial furniture component so we could all have it in house." Earles added, "Bringing it in adds to our clients and it helps to make for a more integrated project and a more cohesive design."

When it comes to staying successful in the ever-evolving market of architecture, Earles explained that diversity is the key—and that it starts with himself. "If I can inspire someone else by coming out or encourage someone by being true to myself, it's [great]," he said. "It's a passion of mine, and being open and inclusive is important. If people are comfortable with who they are, they can just come to work and do a great job."

Then there's Epic. "Bill brought it to me as an idea in 2017 as an investment opportunity. It's kind of the fun side of the organization—and who doesn't like popcorn?" Rossi said, "It also allows us to use it as the giving arm of our organization, to support causes we believe in." Epic has, among other things, celebration boxes for



Bill Rossi (seated) and Dan Earles.
Photo by Jacquelyn Brazzale

people who, for example, come out.

And Epic is mushrooming, with an expansion Rossi mentioned to Windy City Times. Unfortunately, the details cannot be revealed just yet—but the company has even gotten the attention of a certain presidential candidate. "We customized green chili jerky popcorn for Pete Buttigieg," Rossi said, with a smile. "He liked it—but, for me, let's just say it's an acquired taste."

As for advice for aspiring entrepreneurs, Earles

said, "You have to have a passion for what you want to do—you have to enjoy it. [Also,] you have to surround yourself with good people to help you make good decisions." Rossi advice is having the "passion, drive and dedication to succeed. You have to be willing to accept failure, and the successes will come out of your failure. Just persevere and make quick decisions—I go with my gut."

FAST FACTS

about Dan Earles and Bill Rossi:

- They both reside in northwest Indiana.
- Favorite snacks: For Earles, it's peanut-butter pretzels; for Rossi, it's Twizzlers and pretzels.
- If you could ask President Trump one question, what would it be? Rossi said his question would be "Do you really dislike LGBT people?" Earles would ask "Why do you lie so much?"
- Favorite TV show: Rossi likes The Masked Singer and Schitt's Creek, while Earles (a die-hard Star Trek fan) likes Star Trek: Discovery.
- A surprising thing each revealed about the other: Of Earles, Rossi said, "I tell everyone that Dan is the next closest thing to God that I know. He's really involved in his church; he runs everything there." Regarding Rossi, Earles revealed that he's battling a condition: "As healthy as [Bill] is, he has a severe heart condition—hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. He went through heart surgery in 2018."



BILLY Masters

"I better hear no lip-syncing tomorrow."—**Lady Gaga**, from the stage of her Miami show on All Super Bowls Eve. She added, "I love you, J. Lo. I love you Shakira." I think she may love them a little less today. Shakira didn't even attempt to hide her lip-syncing, while Lopez stuck to her strengths and spent most of her stage time pole-dancing.

My favorite part of the Super Bowl is the commercials. This year, we had **Molly Ringwald** hawking avocados, Winona Ryder doing something in the snow, **MC Hammer** selling Cheetos, a **Queer Eye** pushing Pop Tarts, **Ellen and Portia** extolling the virtues of Alexa, and a trio of Bostonians (**Chris Evans**, **John Krasinski** and **Rachel Dratch**) endorsing Hyundai. I was excited when I heard **Sofia Vergara** was in a commercial called, "When We Come Together." Alas, it was nothing like I expected.

Then there was the spot for Sabra hummus starring **Kim Chi** and **Miz Cracker**. Many media outlets reported that this was the first time drag queens appeared in a Super Bowl commercial. Not true. Way back during the 2000 Super Bowl, **RuPaul** starred in a commercial for WebEx, a video-conferencing site. Since the supermodel of the world wasn't yet a household name, the commercial began with her saying, "This meeting is a real drag." Check it out on BillyMasters.com.

Many of you have asked me about the Netflix docuseries, **Killer Inside: The Mind of Aaron Hernandez**. There's been a lot of criticism that the show focuses too much on the former tight end's sexual orientation. It even kicks off with the song "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." Subtle. In addition to his brain injuries, there is conjecture that his being outed on the radio led to his suicide two days later (an allegation echoed by Aaron's brother). The doc spent an inordinate amount of time blaming his violent tendencies on his internal sexual conflict.

I've previously told you the allegations of former Marine, **Dennis SanSoucie**. He claims to have had a "relationship" with Aaron from seventh grade until they were juniors in high school. He also states that while Hernandez didn't want to be gay, he "participated" with many people: "I was a small piece of Aaron's sexual activity." And yet, to the best of my knowledge, no other "participants" have come forward. Dennis says Aaron was terrified of his father finding out, stating, "Mr. Hernandez was well-known as a man's man—a father that slapped the faggot right out of you." However, Mr. Hernandez died when his son was 16. It seems that rather than free Aaron, it made him snap. Of course, his mother shacking up with his favorite cousin's husband probably didn't help.

I don't think the doc ever mentioned Aaron having beards or girlfriends—aside from his fiancée, **Shayanna Jenkins**. In a recent interview, Shayanna weighed in on all the speculation, saying, "You can't describe someone's sexuality without them being here. Although I've had a



Miz Cracker and Kim Chi didn't quite make history during the Super Bowl, Billy says.

Teaser created by VaynerMedia

child with Aaron, I still can't tell you what he was feeling inside." Her words came back to me during a sequence in the documentary where they played a prison call between the couple. When he mentions being in "an all-male jail ... besides 'those things,'" Shayanna chastises him. "Stop calling them 'those things.' Stop it. That is so rude. They are called transgender. Don't call them 'those things.'" When Aaron giggles and says that's what the other inmates call them, Shayanna says, "Don't be hopping on the bandwagon. Be a leader. They are not 'things.' They are humans—just like you." Regarding his sexuality, Shayanna says, "If he did feel that way, or if he felt the urge, I wish that I was told. I wish that he would have told me because I wouldn't have loved him any differently. I would have understood. It's not shameful."

In an ironic codicil, the docuseries ends with footage from Aaron's funeral—at the Faggas Funeral Home.

Every once in a while, someone asks me if **Matt Gutman** is gay. Can't blame them—he's the hottest reporter this side of Chris Cuomo's wet T-shirt during a hurricane. Unfortunately, Matt is married with children. However, he recently made news—or, rather, he made fake news. He mistakenly announced on live TV that Kobe Bryant was killed with all four of his children. Ouch! Although he later corrected the error, the damage was done. ABC suspended him for an undisclosed period of time. To help you over the hump, we've found some hot photos of Matt—the most interesting featuring him between fellow reporters David Muir and Gio Benitez. Then there's one where he shows off his vacation beard. I know my readers will enjoy the footage of Matt showing off his tight Gutman. Cuz that's what we do at BillyMasters.com.

Meanwhile across the pond, **Doctor Who** is making history. For those of you who don't know, the titular character of the venerable series has been played by 13 actors since 1963. I read an article that Doctor Who is being played by **Jodie Whittaker**. Well, I got all excited—the little boy from Family Affair finally got a gig! Then I realized **Johnny Whitaker** PLAYED Jody (with a Y) on the show—twin to Buffy, who died of an overdose as a teen. This Jodie Whittaker is a woman, and she's been Doctor Who since 2017. The person playing the latest incarnation is actu-

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ally **Jo Martin**, which is historic because Jo is the first Doctor Who of color (to say nothing of a female Doctor Who of color). And how clever of the Brits to do this right in the middle of Brexit and Megxit.

By the by, guess who returned to Doctor Who? Our very own **John Barrowman**—as Captain Jack, naturally. Why did it take Barrowman 10 years to rejoin to the franchise? Apparently the previous showrunner was not a fan. However, Chris Chibnall was recently hired—and he had previously been the showrunner for Torchwood (the Doctor Who spin-off starring Barrowman as Captain Jack). So that led the way to his return. Although Barrowman's appearance was a one-off, I am told he could be back in the future.

When I can write so much about the Super Bowl without ever mentioning the game, it's time to end yet another column. Let me quickly remind you to check out BillyMasters.com—the site that sticks to what it knows. If you have a question, drop an e-mail to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Meghan Markle is cast as the next Doctor Who! Until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

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the DISH

Dining Guide in
WINDY CITY TIMES

SAVOR

Turkitch Turkish Kitchen; AFC event

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Turkitch Turkish Kitchen (turkitch.us) has opened in three locations in Chicago—the flagship location at 565 W. Diversey Ave. as well as sites in the Raffaello Hotel and Chicago French Market—and they all promise to provide a delectable foray into Turkish cuisine (or for those who are familiar with the food, a re-indoctrination into authentic Istanbul fare).

Ozkan Yilmaz (an engaging fellow with a gift for marketing) and his wife, Feyzan, founded the main spot 10 months ago—and, judging



Offerings at Turkitch Turkish Kitchen.

PR photo

by the constant patron flow, it's become quite the popular spot. (To provide some background, the family's life changed in 2015, when they won a green card and moved from Istanbul to

the United States, initially settling in Milwaukee before moving to Chicago—and have plans to expand even more, Ozkan told Windy City Times, even unveiling a Turkish superhero who could be.)

Turkitch's menu is specially designed to include authentic and delicious dishes from Turkey, including pastries, baklava, sandwiches, main dishes and Turkish coffee and teas available for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Main dishes include pogaca (a savory bread), soujouk omelet (over easy eggs served with beef sausage), menemen (a kicky tomato, pepper and egg scramble that surprised me a bit with the spice), waffle and kofte. There are also salads such as bosnak boregi, a Turkish cheese and potato roll salad with yogurt and red sauce; and kisir, a spicy bulgur wheat salad with tomatoes, onions and olive oil. Turkish dinner favorites include meatballs served with piyaz, a mixture of beans, onion, tomato and parsley; chicken shish kebabs; and more. (Many food-delivery options are available in case you don't feel like making the sojourn to one of the locations.)

Of course, specialties such as Turkish tea and coffee (both strong) are available. (Among

other things, Ozkan said that the tea is best made inside a copper vessel—and that beverage certainly was memorable.)

And if that's not enough, there's a market inside that sells all sorts of Turkish items, ranging from yogurt drinks to cheesecake.

So I heartily recommend Turkitch—a restaurant/bakery/market that houses delectable food, inviting staff and a cozy vibe. (Versions of U.S. pop hits are played over the sound system—and you haven't lived until you've heard a Turkish take on "It's Raining Men.")

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

Chinese New Year Dinner on Feb. 8

The LGBTQ group Asians & Friends Chicago (AFC) will hold its Chinese New Year's Dinner 2020 on Saturday, Feb. 8, at Phoenix Restaurant, 2131 S. Archer Ave.

Cocktails will be at 6 p.m., with dinner at 7 p.m. There will be a multi-course dinner with a cash bar.

Tickets are \$40/person pre-sale and \$50 at the door per person; see AFChicago.org.



Mr. Chicago Leather (MCL) 2020 Butch Romero (left) and IML 2019 Jack Thompson.



Touche's David Boyer.



Leather Archives & Museum Executive Director Gary Wasdin (left) and MCL emcee John Pandal.



MR. CHICAGO LEATHER 2020

Congratulations to Butch Romero, the newly-chosen Mr. Chicago Leather 2020. Butch gained the title Saturday, January 25, at Leather Archives & Museum, 6418 N. Greenview Ave. The party continued at Touche, 6412 N. Clark St., with fellow titleholders, friends and many former Messrs Chicago Leather. The weekend's festivities also included the 10th anniversary of Full Kit Gear, 5025 N. Clark St.

Joseph Stevens Photography

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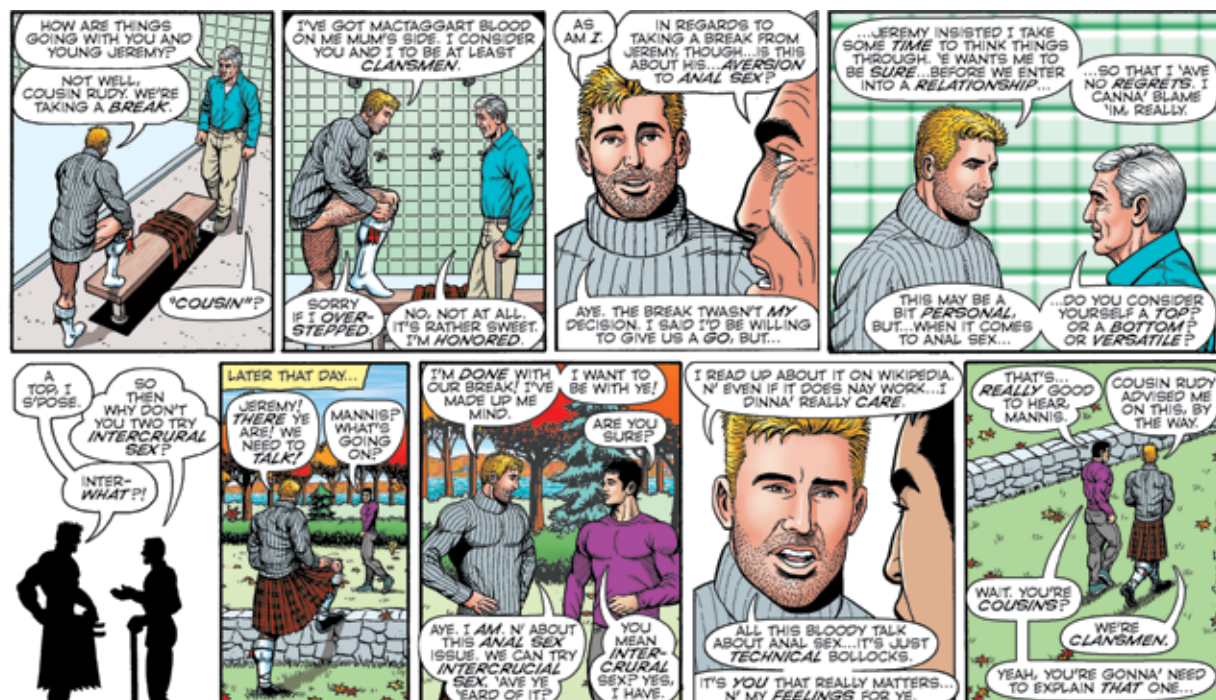


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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., Feb. 5

Sean Hayes at Goodman "Legacy & Promise" Education and Engagement Luncheon Goodman Theatre, now in its 95th season will have Emmy-winning and Tony-nominated actor best known for his role as Jack McFarland on the NBC sitcom Will & Grace, for which he won a Primetime Emmy Award and four SAG Awards, along with six Golden Globe nominations. \$250 12:00pm The Palmer House Hilton, 17 E. Monroe St. 312-443-3811 ext. 220 Tickets: <http://www.goodmantheatre.org>

King Princess King Princess, known for the album, Cheap Queen, songs about happiness, heartbreak and bottoming 7:30pm The Riviera Theatre 4746 N Racine Chicago <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/NUNN-ON-ONE-MUSIC-King-Princess-ruling-the-musical-realm/67819.html> Tickets: <http://RivieraTheatre.com>

Thursday, Feb. 6

Author conversation, Taking Sexy Back and All the F*cking Mistakes In All the F*cking Mistakes, Gigi Engle offers no-nonsense advice on learning how to take back your confidence in a world full of slut-shaming. Registration encouraged. 7:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://womenandchildrenfirst.com>



HAPPY HAYES

Wed., Feb. 5

Actor Sean Hayes will be at the annual Goodman luncheon.
PR photo

Friday, Feb. 7

LGBTQ Artists Gallery Opening Exhibit Angelica Campbell & Alan Emerson Hicks. The opening night event is the official premiere of the work by the artists. Cash bar. \$5 6:00pm - 8:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago

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Asexual Erotics book launch, panel Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality. Each speaker will engage with a different chapter of the book. 7:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>

Voice of Good Hope, dramatic portrait of Barbara Jordan The life of the late lawyer, educator and politician, the first African American elected to the Texas Senate and the first Southern African American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Through Feb. 23. 7:30pm Venue, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. Tickets: <http://www.brownpaper-tickets.com/event/4254900>

Saturday, Feb. 8

Chicago's Cupid's Undie Run Hundreds of Chicagoans will brave the cold in just their undies. Funds research of neurofibromatosis (NF) through our partner, the Children's Tumor Foundation (CTF). 12:00pm - 4:00pm Sluggers, 3540 N. Clark St <http://www.cupids.org/cur/chicago>

Day of Action Beginning in the campaign office, join Mayor Lightfoot in campaigning door to door for Yoni Pizer 1:00pm 3221 N. Broadway <http://www.yonifor12.com/events/day-of-action-with-mayor-lightfoot>

17th annual Love Out Loud In Demand Entertainment and CSU Royal Court present all inclusive, old Ball order. Awards Ball approved event offering up to \$14,000 in prizes, incentives, and scholarships. Emcees: Icon Neiman Marcus Escada and The Adonis 007. Workshop 2pm-4pm, Paid Study 4pm-6pm, ViP Reception and Special Performances 6pm-8pm, and LSS and Ball 8pm-10pm Student Union Bldg. rotunda!, Chicago State University, 9501 S. King Dr 773-495-1059 <http://facebook.com/events/2552317304857651/?ti=icl>

Asians and Friends Chinese New Year Dinner 7 p.m. dinner. \$40 presale per person/\$50 at the door. Raffle during the multi-course meal and a musical "Rat Pack Review." Mail-in checks to Asians & Friends Chicago, P.O. Box A 3916, Chicago, Illinois 60690-3916 or purchase online. 6:00pm Phoenix Restaurant 2131 S. Archer Chicago Tickets: <http://www.afchicago.org>

Sunday, Feb. 9

A Night With Oscar Academy Awards viewing party. Fanfare arrival, cocktails, buffet dinner, silent auction and raffle. This is the last year for A Night With Oscar and will feature a peak at next year's Strike Your Pose in partnership with Chicago's legendary ball scene. RSVP online 6:00pm Park West Chicago 322 W Armitage Ave Chicago Tickets: <http://community.centeronhalsted.org/anwotickets?erid=11348084&trid=9c1550c1-939a-4bee-9ea0-0241b2419fad>

OPALGA+ Oscars Viewing Party Find OPALGA+ on Facebook for details 6:00pm TBA <http://opalga.org>

Wed., Feb. 12

Panel on Lesbians & Feminism in Chicago Moderated panel on Lesbians and Feminism in Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s in connection with Lavender Women and Killer Dykes: Lesbians, Feminism, and Community in Chicago current exhibit 6:30pm Gerber Hart Library

and Archives 6500 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.gerberhart.org>

Thursday, Feb. 13

Ryan Podes for Illinois State Rep. Final fundraiser 5:30pm - 7:30pm, Tickets: <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-election-drawls-near-tickets-90270261783>

The Boys in the Band one-night benefit for Lambda Legal Windy City Playhouse will host a special presentation of their new staging of The Boys in the Band, the Tony Award-winning classic exploring young gay men's lives in pre-AIDS New York. After the show, a special conversation with legendary photographer Tom Bianchi, whose work chronicling gay life coincided with the "Boys" mid-century premiere. \$150, with \$100 of every ticket going directly to Lambda Legal. Doors 6:30 p.m. 7:30pm Windy City Playhouse, 3014 W. Irving Park Rd. Tickets: <http://boxoffice.diamondticketing.com/windycityplayhouse/events>

Friday, Feb. 14

Queer Valentine's Day Celebrate the most heteronormative of holidays with a queer variety show hosted by ASMR Youtuber Aunty Chan, with drag performances, screenings, and comedy 7:00pm - 8:30pm, <http://mcachicago.org/Calendar/2020/02/Odd-Pleasures-A-Queer-Valentines-Day-Event>

Tuesday, Feb. 18

Chicago Queer Sober Social Sober queers looking to socialize. Second monthly meeting \$5 at door or pre-register to use a card. 6:00pm - 9:00pm 2557 W North Ave. Tickets: https://www.facebook.com/events/665854483954269/?active_tab=about

WILLIAMSON from page 18

in there because it happened, then we move on to the next thing.

I do believe the music will have everyone on their feet. This show speaks to everyone and anyone. We have all had challenges in our careers and this is a very relatable show in that way. Last night, people were dancing in the aisles for "Last Dance."

WCT: You play Mary Gaines in the show?

DW: Yes, I play Donna's mother as well so I have a very intricate role. I play the narrator, Donna Summer and her mom.

WCT: Are you changing clothes backstage all the time?

DW: I am doing costume changes every five seconds. If I am offstage, I am changing into another outfit, then running to the other side of the stage to enter for a scene.

WCT: What changed from the original production for the tour?

DW: As opposed to the original production, I know all the props and set pieces for our show

are being manually operated by cast members. Our ensemble does so much for this show. They play men. They play women. They work so hard and don't get enough recognition.

WCT: You performed in Wicked here in Chicago?

DW: I did. It was my first professional job after college.

WCT: Were you in the Wicked cast with Telly Leung or Brian Justin Crum?

DW: Telly came in after I left, but I was in the group with Brian. I booked The Lion King tour, so I left in 2008.

WCT: Is there anything you want to accomplish after the tour?

DW: I want to shift into TV and film after this. It's something that I've been actively working towards for a while now. I am hoping, with the platform of this show, that the opportunity will come to fruition this year.

Summer: The Donna Summer Musical feels the love at the James M. Nederlander Theatre, 24 W. Randolph St., Feb. 12-23. Tickets and information can be found at BroadwayInChicago.com.

GOSS from page 24

TG: He was super-awesome. I loved the first album. When the second record came out, "Honey, I'm Good," it turned him into a superstar. It was great to watch him perform at an outdoor mall. Everyone was around 12 years old and girls, which is a very different audience than what I am used to. It was great to see how my music connected with those fans as well. My music translated with everybody.

WCT: Your album Territories is out in vinyl?

TG: Yes. I had trouble with the manufacturer and delays, but when it came none of that mattered anymore. It was so beautiful and such a piece of art. The cover is by Franz Szonyi, who is a brilliant photographer.

WCT: Would you like more film roles like you did in the movie Out to Kill?

TG: Yes. After moving to LA and working with different people like Michael Serrato, I have really honed my acting chops. I have become strong in the past several years.

I'm not really pursuing it, but I feel I am get-

ting some on-the-job training that I need. I auditioned around when I first moved to LA. I was already getting rejected as a musician, so getting rejected for acting was tough. I decided to just take opportunities as they came with acting. I'm happy where I am at.

WCT: What are you working on next?

TG: I am working on "Regretting" as the third part in this video series. I really like that narrative. The thing about music videos is it's an experimental medium. You can do whatever you want. It's also very limiting in the sense that you are dealing with a very short amount of time.

What I wanted to do is dive deeper into a sensitive story that I am trying to tell and tell it from all different perspectives. Our goal is to tell it with these three videos and I think everyone has done a really good job.

WCT: Where do people keep up with your videos?

TG: Everything is under TomGossMusic.com. It's the same with social media handles. If you want me to retweet cute animals, then follow me on Twitter!

CONNEXIONS

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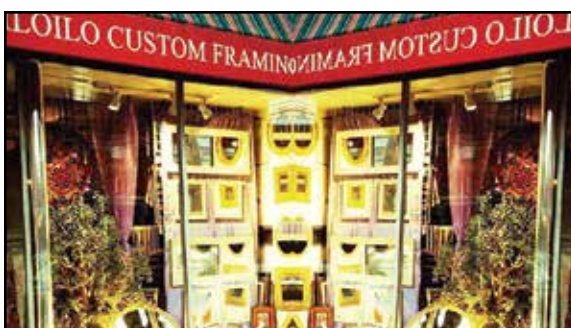


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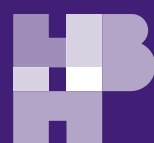
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