



**'TO SURVIVE ON  
THIS SHORE'**

**NEW COLLABORATIVE EFFORT SPOTLIGHTS  
OLDER TRANS, GNC INDIVIDUALS**

**PAGE 14**

Portrait: *Caprice, 55, Chicago, IL, 2015.*  
Photo by Jess Dugan

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## THEATER REVIEW

## Nell Gwynn

**Playwright:** Jessica Swale; **music by** Nigel Hess  
**At:** Chicago Shakespeare Theater,  
 Navy Pier, 800 E. Grand Ave.  
**Tickets:** 312-595-5600;  
**ChicagoShakes.com;** \$48-\$88  
**Runs through:** Nov. 4

BY KERRY REID

"Who would go to the theater to see real people saying real things about the real world? It's preposterous!" So proclaims an actor in the King's Company in *Nell Gwynn*, Jessica Swale's sparkling—if occasionally formulaic—comedy of Restoration manners, now at Chicago Shakespeare under the direction of Christopher Luscombe. In our current grim times, some merry bawdiness with a scosh of contemporary feminist insight is quite welcome.

Swale's play, featuring sprightly musical inter-

ludes by Nigel Hess, is more anachronistic historical fantasia than docu-drama. But Scarlett Strallen as Nell—one of the first actresses to find fame on the English stage and mistress to King Charles II—brings vivacity, wit and charm galore to the role. The play traces Nell's saga from a saucy orange-seller at the theater to her early forays onto the stage to her "it's complicated" romance with Timothy Edward Kane's monarch.

Nell is the daughter of a drunken brothel-keeper who spent some time as a prostitute herself before being discovered by actor Charles Hart (John Tufts). He tries to school her in acting—which at the time meant knowing a bajillion gestures supposedly indicative of emotional states—acting as semaphore. This doesn't sit well with Edward Kynaston (waspish David Bedella), who previously played the female leads and challenges Nell to depict the "21 varieties of grief as expressed by the left eyebrow." (Changing modes of acting, from stylized to naturalistic, also featured in Lolita Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet* at Chicago Shakes in 2017.)

Think about it.

That may be the only concrete thought you carry away from *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, a scripted but unrehearsed theatrical event running about 60 minutes, subject to 10-minute variations in either direction.

You see, there is no rehearsal or director or set (well, a small table, a chair and a stepladder). At each performance, a different actor receives the script in a sealed envelope and reads/performs it for the first/only time in front of the audience. The actor guides non-threatening audience participation, and at the end he/she drinks a glass of water which may or may not be poisoned. The actor may or may not die as the audience exits. FYI: Poison is one of the 17 suicide methods.

No one believes the poison bit for a second



**Nell Gwynn (Scarlett Strallen) in a musical number.**

Photo by Liz Lauren

But even becoming the favorite mistress of theater-loving Charles doesn't protect Nell from court intrigue. Charles' advisor, Lord Arlington (played by Larry Yando, the obvious go-to for oily-but-deadly villains) shows just how far he's willing to go to remove Nell from court. This plot thread, which dovetails with Nell's abandonment of her sister, Rose (Emma Ladji), and her drunken

mother, Old Ma Gwynn (Hollis Resnik), takes us briefly into awkward melodrama.

The show works best when the machinations of the theater and those of the court are juxtaposed. In Kane's portrayal, fence-sitting Charles is playing at king more than being king (and given that he witnessed his own father's execution in the English Civil War, who can blame him?) A few sly digs at our current administration won't lose any applause opening night.

The scenes with the King's Company get the biggest laughs, as they try to make silk purses out of the sow's ear of John Dryden's work. (Christopher Sheard plays the besieged playwright as an endearing naïf.) Natalie West as Nancy, Nell's addled dresser, is her own master class in comic acting—like a Restoration version of Thelma Ritter's Birdie in *All About Eve*.

But ultimately, it's Strallen in the title role who wins us over with Nell's blend of self-assurance and vulnerability, embodying the irresistible charms of the woman Samuel Pepys called "pretty, witty Nell."

## THEATER REVIEW

## White Rabbit Red Rabbit

**Playwright:** Nassim Soleimanpour  
**At:** Interrobang Theatre Project @  
 The Den, 1331 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
**Tickets:** 312-219-4140;  
**Interrobangtheatre.org;** \$20-\$25  
**Runs:** Mondays only, through Nov. 12

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

Author Nassim Soleimanpour says there are 17 ways to kill yourself, not counting living out your life, which is the longest way to commit suicide.

so there really isn't any tension in *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, which is one reason it isn't really a play. It's a comic piece owing a great deal to mid-20th-century absurdist theater, especially from Iron Curtain countries where playwrights often used animal metaphors, or the tedious repetitions of office bureaucracies, as stand-ins for repressive government. Soleimanpour borrows from that playbook, although he avoids the office setting.

He does, however, offer odd tales of cheetahs pretending they are ostriches, and of bears, rabbits and crows, some in a circus and others (the rabbits) subjected to Pavlovian training by the author's uncle, shortly before the uncle committed suicide.

Soleimanpour, who happens to be Iranian, does

this because he refused to conform to government-imposed conditions. As a result, he couldn't travel and probably was surveilled. Since 2015 he and his wife have lived in Berlin; but *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* was written in Iran in 2010, and the text was snuck out of the country for performances in the West. At one point the actor asks an audience volunteer to take notes on what is said and done, in case the police come around next day to question people.

Soleimanpour's actor (agile and ingratiating Stephanie Shum at the first performance) charms the audience into following various directions and then says, "What are your limits of obedience? You are the audience. ... You have a right to get up and leave." By implication, the actor does not have that right and, too obviously, neither did Soleimanpour as a semi-captive in his own country. Although *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* never is overtly political, it's up to us to make further connections.

Note: Hell in a Handbag co-founder and GLBTQ Hall of Famer David Cerda will perform Monday, Oct. 29.

## THEATER REVIEW

## Indecent

**Playwright:** Paula Vogel  
**At:** Victory Gardens Theater at the  
 Biograph, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave.  
**Tickets:** Victorygardens.org. 773-871-3000;  
 \$29-\$77  
**Runs through:** Nov. 4

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

The Klezmer band welcoming us to the auditorium promises a low-stress evening, but there are things you need to know before the play starts and your playbill doesn't include a syllabus, so here they are:

In 1910, a play by a young Polish author named Sholem Asch premiered in Berlin, titled (in English) *God of Vengeance*. It was an immediate hit, touring throughout Europe for the next ten years and eventually making its way to the United States, where it enjoyed similar success in the Yiddish Theater flourishing on New York City's Lower East Side. On February 19, 1923, however, the English-language version of the play opened on Broadway. Within two



**Kiah Stern in Indecent.**

Photo  
 by Todd  
 Rosenberg

weeks, the company was arrested for presenting an "indecent, obscene and immoral"—and therefore, illicit—exhibition.

What was the abomination that so shocked the cosmopolitan Gothamites? Not a plot revolving on a brothelkeeper who shelters his daughter so she can make a good marriage, nor the dramatic climax when the enraged father renounces the sacred Torah, but a romantic scene between two attractive women wearing wet nightgowns who—gasp!—share a kiss onstage.

This is the agent propelling Paula Vogel's epic-theater examination of the enduring power of art and the necessity for eternal vigilance in protection thereof. After inviting the original production's long-deceased actors to shake off their grave dust, she guides us through a panoramic history of the play that refused to die, but instead defied the censorship of social prejudice and government oppression to instill in artists a never-ending desire for freedom. Even in 1953, as Asch is summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee, a Yale scholar labors on a new translation of the play that changed the lives of its defenders.

Vogel packs a lot of chronicle into 100 minutes, so audience members feeling a step or two behind the text are not alone. Virtuoso director Gary Griffin and an ensemble of agile actors drawn from many sources are quick to assist us in catching up whenever the sprawling narrative and swift pace threaten to render us dizzy with vertigo. If this whirlwind time-travel journey served no purpose beyond introducing Yiddish Theater (other than S. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*) to the classroom curriculum, however, it would still be a timely lesson, worthy of our attention today.

## CRITICS' PICKS

**Frankenstein**, Lifeline Theatre, through Oct. 28. Even the fondest memories of lost family members can still give birth to monsters in this metaphysical take on Mary Shelley's horror classic. MSB

**Not For Sale**, UrbanTheater at Batey Urbano, through Oct. 20. Guadalis Del Carmen's microscopic view of events occurring in the very neighborhood where we are sitting debates the eternal question of Immigration vs. Colonialism. MSB

**The Little Foxes**, Citadel Theatre, through Oct. 28. Lillian Hellman's exploration of greed and family in post-Civil War Alabama has a plot that hits like (spoiler alert, sort of) a heart attack while flaying bare (yes, I do mean flaying) the racism and misogyny of the Deep South both then and now. CES

—by Barnidge and Sullivan



Rashada Dawan and Blair Robertson in *Caroline or Change*.

Photo by Marisa KM

## THEATER REVIEW

### Caroline, or Change

Playwright: Tony Kushner (book & lyrics), Jeanine Tesori (music)

At: Den Theatre's Heath Main Stage, 1331 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Tickets: \$20-45; FirebrandTheatre.org  
Runs through: Oct. 28

BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN

"Don't make me the oppressor," a character in *Caroline, or Change* begs of her father.

But of course, she is: a white woman with a Black maid in 1963 Louisiana, unwittingly using the maid as a pawn to teach her new stepson a lesson about money. *Caroline, or Change* is full of these microaggressions, these white-lady tears. Firebrand Theatre's latest premiered on Broadway to critical acclaim, but in 2004 was overshadowed by splashier musicals like *Avenue Q* and *Wicked*. Now, as illustrated by Lili-Anne Brown's stellar direction and a spellbinding cast led by Rashada Dawan, Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori's musical about race, class and religion is more relevant than ever.

The titular *Caroline* (Dawan) is stoic, often grouchy, as she does laundry for the newly-blended Gellman family, listening to the radio and indulging in one cigarette per day. She may not be nurturing, but she's become a mother figure-

slash-obsession for young Noah (Alejandro Medina), still reeling from his own mother's death and his nebbish father's subsequent remarriage to her best friend, Rose (Blair Robertson). As Tesori's score alternates between Klezmer and doo-wop, *Caroline* struggles with change: both Noah's discarded coins that Rose insists Caroline keep, and the shift in her own world, as a President is assassinated, a Black minister named Dr. King preaches peaceful uprising and Caroline's teenage daughter Emmie (Bre Jacobs) begins to question and rebel.

In *Caroline*, Kushner draws heavily on his own Southern Jewish childhood. (Like Noah's father, Kushner's dad played clarinet professionally.) Writing about one's own experiences can come off indulgent, but thankfully Kushner escapes that trap, infusing nuance in every single character, even Rose's boorish father (Michael Kingston). Noah, Kushner's stand-in, isn't the lovable moppet typical to most musicals: he's isolated and spoiled, imagining "saving" Caroline's family with his spare change, but also lonely and sad, blowing his money on cheap toys and (in secret) Barbie dresses. When *Caroline* finally shows vulnerability, it's not in the form of a soaring gospel tune, as is typical of older Black female characters, but the gravelly "Underwater." Emmie challenges her mother's kowtowing to white folk and is immediately upbraided by Caroline's friend and fellow maid Dotty (Nicole Michelle Haskins): Caroline's job with the Gellmans keeps a roof over Emmie's head.

Is it possible for a musical to age better? If so, *Caroline, or Change* leads the pack. Neither creator is new to the theater-as-social-justice game. At the time he wrote *Caroline*, Kushner had won the Pulitzer for *Angels in America*. Tesori would go on to pen the Tony Award-winning *Fun Home*. Neither are Black, however, leaving wide the possibility for white saviorism or general cluelessness. Instead, *Caroline, or Change* highlights the behavior of well-meaning white people that is just as insidious as out-and-out racism, and even more prevalent. Instead of giving *Caroline* a raise, Rose encourages her to take money from a little boy while calling *Caroline* her "friend." Most significantly, the musical encourages us to acknowledge and celebrate the women like *Caroline*, who may not have marched on Washington, but raised children like Emmie, who would and did. Not all heroes wear capes.

★★★★ (OUT OF 4)  
—Daily Herald

“A SURVIVAL STORY, DEEPLY MOVING IN ITS COURAGE”  
—Chicago Tribune

“STRIKES A RESOUNDING CHORD”  
—Chicago Sun-Times

“POETRY SET TO MUSIC”  
—Third Coast Review

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## SPOTLIGHT

Wildclaw Theatre gets a jump on Halloween with Kristin Idaszak's *Second Skin*, a feminist take on the horror genre and the story of three women with a terrifying secret. The goosebump factor amps up through a trio of monologues that plumb the supernatural undertow, pulling mothers and daughters through generations of family lore. The Wildclaw production runs through Saturday, Oct. 13, at The Den Theatre, 1333 N. Milwaukee Ave. Tickets are \$15-\$30 each; visit [WildclawTheatre.com/project/second-skin/](http://WildclawTheatre.com/project/second-skin/)



Caption: Photo by Joe Mazza/Brave Lux

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THEATRE  
**GOODMAN**



Michael Fabiano in *La bohème*.  
Photo by Catherine Ashmore/  
Royal Opera House

## Tenor Michael Fabiano makes Lyric debut in *La bohème*

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

For many Windy City opera fans, it has taken an unconscionably long time for the internationally acclaimed singer Michael Fabiano to make his debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. So there was much excitement when the Lyric announced that the gay American tenor would star as Rodolfo in its new co-production of *La bohème* this month and again in January.

"It's quite simple, but it's beautiful," said Fabiano about British director Richard Jones' take on Puccini's classic 1896 opera.

Fabiano previously starred as Rodolfo when Jones' production debuted last year at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden. Fabiano's London performance was also captured for a recently released DVD.

For the split Chicago run, Fabiano is joined by Italian soprano Maria Agresta as the sickly seamstress Mimi and Australian soprano Danielle de Niese as the gold-digging flirt Musetta. Both sopranos starred in a London revival of the same production this past summer.

Also making a Lyric debut with *La bohème* is Domingo Hindoyan, a Venezuelan-Swiss conductor who will keep pace for the opera's poor artists as they all sing about love and loss in 1840s Paris.

"*La bohème* is a timeless opera, so I really think that as much as people try to do modern or strange takes on it, it's important to keep some element of relatability in the characters," Fabiano said. "Richard does that for sure."

Fabiano, a native of Hoboken, New Jersey,

### OPERA

largely came onto the radar of opera fans when he was named one of six winners of the 2007 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. That year was significant since Fabiano and fellow winners like soprano Amber Wagner, mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton and tenor Alek Shrader were all captured by director Susan Froemke for her 2009 behind-the-scenes documentary *The Audition*.

Fabiano projected lots of self confidence (some would say outright arrogance) in interviews for the documentary. But as a winner, Fabiano's tactics to calm with his nerves and get himself psyched up before his performance all clearly worked.

"It was a snapshot of a moment in my life in which I was really young and inexperienced," said Fabiano about *The Audition*. "For me, it's not a defining moment."

Indeed, as Fabiano's opera career has grown, he has gone on to win other accolades. In 2014, Fabiano had the distinction of being the first singer to win both the Beverly Sills Artist Award and the Richard Tucker Award in the same year.

Fabiano was also recently signed to an exclusive recording contract with the European label Pentatone—a rarity in these days when many opera fans worry about the state of the classical music industry.

"Even in a generation not devoid of extraordinary singers, Michael Fabiano clearly stands out: His golden-age voice and magnetic performances

captivate audiences on both sides of the Atlantic," said Pentatone vice president of artists and repertoire Renaud Loranger in a statement. "It has been thrilling to watch his career blossom over the last decade."

In addition to Chicago, Fabiano will be making other important debuts this season. Fabiano is set to star as the lecherous Duke in a new production of Verdi's *Rigoletto* for his debut at Berlin's Staatsoper. He also will be making role debuts as Faust in Boito's *Mefistofele* at New York's Metropolitan Opera and Carlo VII in Verdi's *Giovanna D'Arco* for Madrid's Teatro Real (another co-producer of the Lyric's new *La bohème*).

And Fabiano isn't just flying high career-wise. In an interview with BBC Radio 3, Fabiano talked about his love of flying planes and the difficulty he had finding time to pass tests for his pilot's license.

In the early 2000s, American opera singers like soprano Patricia Racette and mezzo-soprano Jill Grove had to be decisive in managing how they would publicly come out (both did so in *Opera News* magazine). But since then as LGBTQ people have fought for more rights in the U.S., that hasn't been much of a concern for Fabiano.

"To be really frank, I don't even think about it," Fabiano said. "I am out, and I am happy, and that's it."

Indeed, many opera fans first learned about Fabiano's spot on the Kinsey scale in August 2017. That's when he publicly announced his pending nuptials to Bryan L. McCalister, a young associate director on the board of the Metropolitan Opera.

"I have a very supportive fiancé," said Fabiano,

adding that the wedding is scheduled for the end of this month. "I couldn't be more happy."

But before then, Fabiano will be singing out Rodolfo's love for Mimi in his Lyric debut.

"The lineage and history of the Lyric is huge, with a strong community of great performers," Fabiano said. "I'm just honored that I'll be able to have a moment on the stage like so many others."

The Lyric Opera of Chicago's new co-production of *La bohème* plays a total of 11 performances in October and January at the Civic Opera House, 20 N. Wacker Drive. The opera is sung in Italian with projected English translations. Tickets are \$49-\$279 (\$99-\$299 for the Oct. 6 opening night). Call 312-827-5600 or visit [lyricopera.org/Boheme](http://lyricopera.org/Boheme).



T.R. Knight.

Image courtesy of Chicago Shakespeare

## T.R. Knight cast in 'Midsummer'

Chicago Shakespeare Theater has announced the cast and creative team for a reimagined *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which will run in the Courtyard Theater Dec. 6, 2018–Jan. 27, 2019.

A company of 21 notably features Grey's Anatomy alum T.R. Knight as Bottom—as well as Alexandra Silber, Edward O'Brien, Cristina Panfilio, Tyrone Phillips, Melisa Soledad Pereyra, Eric Schabla and Sam Kebede.

For more information, visit [ChicagoShakes.com/midsummer](http://ChicagoShakes.com/midsummer).

## 'Cats' to return to Chicago next July

Broadway in Chicago has announced the national tour of *Cats*, the record-breaking musical spectacular from Andrew Lloyd Webber.

The production—which has been performed in more than 30 countries and 15 languages—will play Broadway In Chicago's Oriental Theatre, 24 W. Randolph St. July 16–Aug. 4, 2019. Subscriptions will go on sale in the fall of 2018.

Also, *Cats* will join the line-up of performances at the annual Broadway In Chicago Summer Concert that will take place Monday, Aug. 13, 2018, at 6:15 p.m. at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion at Millennium Park, 201 E. Randolph St.

See [BroadwayInChicago.com](http://BroadwayInChicago.com).

**THEATER REVIEW**

**The Artificial Jungle**

By: Charles Ludlam

At: Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave.

Tickets: 773-327-5252 or Stage773.com;

\$25-\$32

Runs Through: Oct. 28

BY PAIGE LISTERUD

Camp theater aficionados can beat a path to Hell in a Handbag's *The Artificial Jungle* without qualm or hesitancy.

Director Shade Murray's handling of Charles Ludlam's final play is a miniature comedic triumph—one that threatens to be overshadowed by this season's larger, (deservedly) much-lauded *Little Shop of Horrors*. But *The Artificial Jungle* and its smart, energetic, outrageous cast deserves better.

Drawing from classics like *Double Indemnity*, *Therese Raquin* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, Charles Ludlam—one of the creators of the Theater of the Ridiculous—spoofs the well-worn noir tropes of treacherous femme fatales, absurdly gullible husbands, easily-seduced grifters, and old women with dark secrets on the verge.

Sydney Genco's Roxanne certainly fills the bill for first type, towering above her lover and accomplice, Zachary Slade (David Lipschutz) till the man is almost buried in cleavage. Poor Zach is as much her prey as Roxanne's husband, Chester, played with childlike verve by Ed Jones. Much of



Ed Jones and David Cerda in *Hell in a Handbag's The Artificial Jungle*.

Photo by Rick Aguilar Studios

the first act sets up Chester's murder by the bored and voracious Roxanne and her easy target Zachary.

Yet, laced throughout are multiple allusions to devouring nature, largely through aquarium-confined reptiles and piranhas, animated by the puppetry of Corey Strode, created by Mark Blashford. Who knew piranha puppets could be cute ... and

menacing ... and hilarious?

Of course, characters with the biggest wigs reign supreme. This means that the other indomitable female of the set is Mother Nurdiger (pronounced "nyYOORdigger"), played with nuanced camp assurance by David Cerda. While the first act can drag a bit with exposition, the second act explodes with wild, over-the-top guilt and recri-

nations. It is here where Cerda's camp craft goes into full swing, from Mother Nurdiger screaming into a stroke, to her stroked-out attempt at alerting police officer and family friend Franki Spinelli (Chazie Bly) to her dear Chester's murder during dominoes night. The scene is both the greatest send-up and the most cunning deconstruction of Emile Zola's *Therese Raquin* I have ever beheld.

For those unfamiliar with camp as a genre or with *Hell In a Handbag's* long and honorable mission to explore it in Chicago, *The Artificial Jungle* could possibly be the best introduction. Creating farce out of our darkest fears is a proud queer tradition—and possibly just what we need in times like these.

**Danai Gurira play gets Chicago debut**

Steppenwolf Theatre Company is presenting the Chicago premiere production of *Familiar*, written by Danai Gurira (actress from TV's *The Walking Dead*; the films *Black Panther* and *Avengers: Infinity War*; and Broadway's *Eclipsed*) and directed by Danya Taylor.

*Familiar* begins previews on Nov. 15, with the opening being Nov. 26 at 7 p.m. and the production running through Jan. 13, 2019, in the Downstairs Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St.

Single tickets (\$20-\$109) are now on sale through Audience Services at 312-335-1650 or Steppenwolf.org.

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Scarlett Strahlen, photo by Jeff Scortino

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# Paula Vogel talks newest work, hope and political exorcisms



Paula Vogel.  
Photo courtesy of Vogel

BY KAREN TOPHAM

(Note: This is the second in Karen Topham's two-part feature on playwright Paula Vogel.)

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel is angry.

"We're in a terrible place in this country," she said. "I'm really happy that I get to make at least a little contribution, and spend my nights and days thinking about forming community—because that's what theater-making is," she said. "[Theater is] about making something where people come in as individuals but leave feeling part of the audience. Hopefully the conversation goes on past the conversation in the lobby."

The conversation Vogel is focused on at present is the one sparked by *Cressida on Top*, making its world premiere Saturday, Oct. 6 in a staged reading at the Goodman Theatre. The piece has ancient roots and contemporary relevance. "[Cressida] is my channeling the Don Juan story, and looking at women in the military in the future, and what happens if we continue down this road with a pseudo-President in the White House. It's a funny, dark comedy," Vogel said. "I just want not to be alone in feeling these things," she added.

Vogel's feelings run deep, but she senses something positive happening in the country today.

"I'm hoping that the #metoo movement is transformational, I really am. I'm hoping that the Donald Trump presidency becomes transforma-

tional and that [although] we are experiencing this uptick in racism and hideous treatment of immigrants, women and children, we [also] experience a turning point," she said.

Vogel has been dramatizing social issues—honoring in on LGBTQ+ issues in particular—for decades. The *Long Christmas Ride Home* [2003] and *The Baltimore Waltz* [1990], both deal with her brother Carl, who died of AIDS in 1988. *Indecent* [running through Nov. 4 the Victory Gardens Theater] is about a 1923 play viciously censored because of its lesbian love story.

All of her plays reflect Vogel's belief that being a playwright means being an agent of social change. "I think as an artist you're always saying why didn't I go to law school? Why didn't I do something more politically aware with my life? But at a crisis time like this I feel at least the ability to express some of the anger and fear and resolution," she said.

At 66, Vogel is now an elder stateswoman as well as a revolutionary.

"When I was a kid I used to sneak into the butch femme bars in Washington, D.C., and it was just thrilling: all of these older women who, if they saw me, would say, 'oh honey go back home.'"

Perspectives on identity and orientation has changed over the years, she said. Where there was once a rigid binary, there is now "there is all of this flux in terms of what sexual identity means. I think of even heterosexuality now as a spectrum," she said.

"I think of queerness as a perspective; I think

of it as teaching me that identity is always fluid, that there is constant change and flux," she said.

"It's impossible not to be aware of this at least on a subliminal level," Vogel said. "Even in the smallest town or the reddest state, people [are] aware—otherwise we would not be having so much of a backlash. [F]ear has divided us. The ability to redefine what gender is has created this fear.

"Still, there is an even greater fluidity in gender now and that is pretty thrilling," she said.

Fluidity is a watchword for Vogel's style as a playwright. All of Vogel's plays have different structures or forms. People don't live inside a tidy "beginning-middle-end" structure and neither do Vogel's characters.

"I try to have a different plot structure for every play I write," Vogel said. "A beginning middle and end doesn't begin to encapsulate how we feel when we age, how we process our dreams in the morning, how we remember things."

Using a beginning-middle-end format can "really restrict the way people tell their stories. [T] here are so many more ways to play with form and time together with an audience," she said. *The Baltimore Waltz*, for example, tells the story of her brother's death through a fictional series of semi-connected scenes set during a tour of Europe. *The Long Christmas Ride Home* tells its story with puppetry and scenes that move forward and backward in time. *Indecent* is told by a troupe of dead players putting on a play-within-a-play. Her Pulitzer Prize-winning *How I Learned to Drive* [premiered in 1997] uses driving lessons

as a glue to hold together a series of monologues and scenes that tell the story of a young girl who is molested by her uncle.

Their structures differ, but Vogel begins every new play with the same questions: "How do we tell this story? How is this story different from any other story? How do we feel together in the room as an audience traveling through a different kind of time?"

"Each and every time I write I go through the cold sweat: 'How do I write a play I've never written before? How do I tear up everything I've ever done and go a far out there as I can and fall on my face?'" she said.

"If you tell stories in new ways, they have a better chance of breaking through the old ways of seeing. We stop seeing the problems in front of us because they are continual. So how do I make someone stop and see something that is right in front of their face? If you tell me the story in a way that you've always told me the story, with a beginning, middle and end, I might not remember that story," she said.

*How I Learned to Drive* is extremely memorable, but it's also a source of frustration for Vogel. "If anyone had told me that it would be more pertinent now than when I wrote it. ... I don't know what [my] younger self would feel like. We should not still be in this time of continual assault," she said.

But despite the present turmoil, Vogel looks to the future with positivity.

"In my 60s, I believe that it's necessary to have resilience and resolve," Vogel said. "It's necessary to hope."

**Cressida on Top will get a staged reading at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 6, at the Goodman Theatre, 170. N. Dearborn St. For ticket info, go to <https://www.goodmantheatre.org>. Indecent continues through Nov. 4 at the Victory Gardens Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave.; visit <https://victorygardens.org>.**

## 'Hex-a-Long Hocus Pocus' Oct. 7

Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport Ave., will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the film *Hocus Pocus* with "Hex-a-Long Hocus Pocus" on Sunday, Oct. 7, at 1:30 p.m.

The 1993 movie stars Bette Midler, Sarah Jessica Parker and Kathy Najimy as a coven of witches.

Hosted by Dick O'Day, people are invited to shout, sing, cheer and scream along with the movie during the interactive screening. In addition, there will be goody bags full of candy, bubbles, streamers and more.

Admission is \$10-\$13 each; visit <https://www.musicboxtheatre.com/events/hex-a-long-hocus-pocus>.



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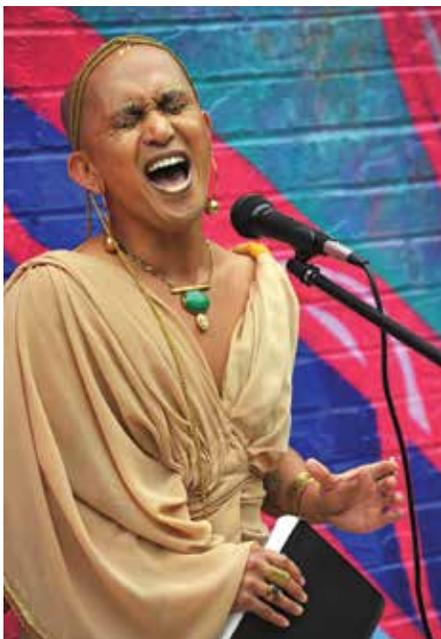


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Left: At the ribbon cutting were (L-R) Ald. Tom Tunney; Kiam Marcelo Junio; artists Sam Kirk, Sandra Antongiorgi and Andy Bellomo; Howard Brown's David Ernesto Munar. Right: The mural's artists. All photos by Vernon Hester



Above: Kiam Marcelo Junio in performance. Below: Supporters at the unveiling.



## Queer Boystown mural unveiled

BY VERNON HESTER

On Sept. 29, Ald. Tom Tunney (44th Ward), Howard Brown Health, Northalsted Business Alliance and Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events unveiled a mural featuring queer interdisciplinary artist and holistic healer Kiam Marcelo Junio at the corner of 3245 N. Halsted St.

The 750-square-foot mural, which is on the side of Howard Brown Health in Boystown, is the work of artists Sandra Antongiorgi, Andy Bellomo and Sam Kirk, and aims to honor non-binary people while opening a dialogue about intersectionality within the LGBTQ community.

During the unveiling Tunney said, "I'm thrilled about [the mural]. ... Art is for the neighborhoods, not just for museums."

The mural features a portrait of Junio and is adorned with 22-carat gold leafing and abstract line work as well as other designs.

Kirk said, "For me, I grew up on the South Side of Chicago. ... I came out 23 years ago. I often found myself in Boystown trying to find my identity. I was that kid who wanted to see something that looks like myself. I still live on the South Side of the city and I don't see those images."

Antongiorgi added, "There's a power in images; creating this was a big responsibility. When we see images, it can awaken something dormant within us, something we didn't know we had, whether good or bad. Painting this mural was about finding the truth and expressing your true self. This wall is about the truth of who we are as a community. It sends a strong message that needed to be heard, and this was the best way to send it."

Howard Brown Health CEO and President David Ernesto Munar said, "This painting vibrates love, it vibrates power. It celebrates the power of our community. At a time like this this work needs to be seen. As they were working on it, so many people kept asking, 'What is it? It's beautiful.'"

Junio, after thanking the artists for choosing them as the subject of what they hope to be the first of several community queer murals celebrating non-binary individuals throughout the city asked the gathering what they thought they "deserve," before launching into a musical interlude. They later said, "This mural is for queer people

### ART

by queer people for queer people, but I do not represent the entire [LGBTQ] community. I represent the power of only one individual. I am the reflection of the people in my life."

They added, "Don't just ask yourself what you deserve, but as an individual ask yourself, 'Who are you?' Are you creating spaces for others to thrive? ... This mural is the cover of a book we are still writing."

THREE-TIME TONY AWARD NOMINEE

BY PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT PAULA VOGEL

DIRECTED BY GARY GRIFFIN

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# Angela Ingersoll salutes Judy Garland with an evening of song

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

Angela Ingersoll has a theory about the eternal impact of Judy Garland, especially within the LGBTQ+ community. “I think it has to do with the unconditional love she showed. And her vulnerability,” Ingersoll said. “Her concerts were a safe space. For the gay community, there weren’t many of those in the 1960s. But at Judy’s concerts, people could love who they wanted. They could express themselves.”

Ingersoll tries to create that safe space when she performs Judy Garland: *Come Rain or Come Shine*, a roster of songs made famous by Judy and stories about the life of Judy Garland. Opening Oct. 5 at Nichols Hall in Evanston, Ingersoll’s one-woman show runs through Oct. 14.

Unlike her Jeff Award-winning performance as Judy Garland in Peter Quilter’s *End of the Rainbow*, *Come Rain or Come Shine* isn’t Ingersoll-performing-as-Judy. If *Rainbow* was about Ingersoll’s almost uncanny resemblance to Garland in both look and voice (and meticulously recreated costumes from many of Garland’s indelible roles), *Come Rain or Come Shine* is about Ingersoll paying homage to her show business hero.

“With ‘Rainbow,’ I play Judy. In ‘Come Rain or Come Shine,’ I walk on stage as me and start with, ‘Hi, my name is Angela Ingersoll. My favorite singer of all time is Judy Garland,’” Ingersoll said.

Part of the production’s homage, she added, is trying to ensure that each number is fully backed with the full emotional freight that Garland’s voice carried.

“It’s as much in the eyes as in the voice,” said Ingersoll. “Judy was so available emotionally. She was this full cup of emotions who was dying to connect and be loved. That was almost her downfall in a way—she never quite learned how to feel complete in herself. But her search was reaching and heroic.”

Ingersoll’s path to worldwide acclaim for her Garland interpretations (she’s taken her shows to Europe as well as across the country) was part pragmatic necessity, part wildly adventurous leap-of-faith.

“I’ve been compared to Judy all my life,” Ingersoll said. “I’ve come out of playing Julie Jordan in ‘Carousel’ and people would be like ‘You look just like Judy Garland.’ And I’d say ‘Do you mean Shirley Jones?’ and they’d say, ‘Nope. Judy Garland.’”

“I have the small frame—she was 4’11, I’m 5’. I have the elfin features. The physical resemblance has always been there. But it wasn’t until 2015 that I considered doing Judy’s music,” Ingersoll said. “That was when I finally got the courage to say ‘I think I can do this justice.’ It’s an audacious thing to promise, but I promised.”

Like most actors over 30, Ingersoll knows that

## CABARET

the necessity of audacity increases with age. The more years beyond playing the likes of Julie Jordan, the more audacity you need in order to succeed in show business. “There’s this threshold you cross somewhere in your 30s,” said Ingersoll, 41. “You can’t play the girl any more. You’ve become more of a woman—and people don’t always know what to do with you.”

Garland helped propel Ingersoll’s career forward, even when others didn’t quite know what to do with her. “I was coming to a point in my career where I wasn’t getting the parts I wanted. I kept getting all these ‘nos.’ Now, I feel like all those ‘nos’ created the path to Judy,” Ingersoll said.

“Judy Garland has been my guiding light for so long,” she added. “In ‘Come Rain or Come Shine,’ I try to make her shine through me. I tell stories about her life, the chronology of ups and downs. And I tell personal stories about my life, and things Judy taught me both as a woman and an artist.”

Over the years of specializing in Judy Garland, Ingersoll has occasionally worked with Garland’s son Joey Luft. In 2017, Luft and Ingersoll teamed up at St. Charles’ Arcada theater for a Mother’s Day Salute to Garland. PBS later televised the event. “Joey has seen what I do, and he appreciates it,” Ingersoll said. “So far, I haven’t learn anything from Judy’s daughters (Lorna Luft and Liza Minnelli).”

Quilter’s play can be “controversial,” Ingersoll added, because of its depiction of Garland’s struggles with addiction and her final concert in 1969.

“I can see where people would think telling that story might be exploitive,” Ingersoll said. “But that’s not what it’s about. My hope is that Judy’s story can help people find peace in their own pain. There are a lot of tears with my concerts, but there is joy as well.”

“One of my family members struggled with addiction. I don’t think I would be able to convey her story responsibly and with compassion without experiencing that in someone close to me. I feel uniquely equipped to understand what people go through with that,” she said.

Like many, Ingersoll can’t precisely remember when she first became cognizant of *The Wizard of Oz* and Garland’s performance as Dorothy. “I can’t recall a time when I was without her,” Ingersoll said. The message in the 1930 movie has stayed with Ingersoll for a lifetime.

“Dorothy’s journey to Oz is the story of someone who has to leave home in order to find home. And someone who finds themselves in this beautiful, colorful world where they can make their own path, write their own story. The symbolism is so beautiful: If society doesn’t offer you a path,



Angela Ingersoll salutes Judy Garland.  
Photo by Amy Boyle Photography

or accept the one you want, you go out and find your own,” she said.

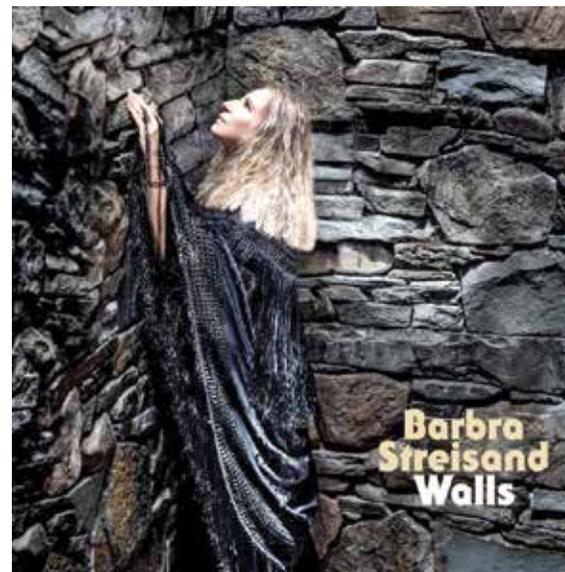
“You can’t underestimate the power of Dorothy,” Ingersoll added. “I was in Italy this year, working with a group of school kids—young, like 11 to 14. They all wanted to sing ‘Over the Rainbow’ with me. We’re almost 80 years out from the movie, and these kids in Italy know every word of the song. That’s the power of Judy.”

Ingersoll’s set list changes with each performance of *Come Rain or Come Shine*. “The show is constantly evolving, depending on who I’m with and where I’m performing” she said. “I did ‘Meet

me in St. Louis’ for the St. Louis performance. When there’s a holiday, I do holiday songs. Some songs are always in: ‘The Man Who Got Away,’ ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow.’”

“When Judy sang, you could feel her love,” Ingersoll said. “You wanted to give it back. That’s what I’m trying to do too,” she said.

**Judy Garland: *Come Rain or Come Shine* runs Oct. 5 through Oct. 14 at Nichols Concert Hall, 1490 Chicago Ave., Evanston. Tickets start at \$34; visit <http://angelaingersoll.com> or [sighttheaterworks.com](http://sighttheaterworks.com).**



Barbra Streisand  
Walls

## Streisand releasing new album Nov. 2

Columbia Records has released “Don’t Lie To Me”—a new single that Barbra Streisand wrote and recorded from her upcoming album *Walls*, due out Nov. 2.

It will be Streisand’s first album primarily consisting of original songs since 2005.

Tracks on *Walls* include original songs like “Better Angels” and “Don’t Lie to Me” as well as covers of such songs as “Imagine,” “What a Wonderful World” and “Happy Days Are Here Again.”

Fans can obtain “Don’t Lie To Me” and pre-order *Walls* at <http://smarturl.it/barbrawalls>.

## THEATER REVIEW

## Tootsie

By: David Yazbek and Robert Horn  
 At: Broadway In Chicago,  
 Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W. Randolph St.  
 Tickets: 800/775-2000 or  
 www.BroadwayInChicago.com; \$35-\$105

BY SARAH KATHERINE BOWDEN

Deep into the first act of *Tootsie*, now in its pre-Broadway premiere at the Cadillac Palace, one actor remarks to another how much better their lives would be if the characters they played in the play-within-their-play were sympathetic. I couldn't agree more. While the hardworking performers selling this comedy should be given their due, *Tootsie* offers little in the way of strong sympathy or personal transformation in a musical adaptation of the 1982 film that really needs to justify its existence in order to dispel skepticism and outright vitriol from this reviewer.

Michael (Santino Fontana, whom you may know from *Frozen* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*) is a struggling actor whose temperamental outbursts and ongoing inability to compromise cost him job after job. After his ex Sandy (Sarah Stiles) asks



From left: Santino Fontana, Drew King, Leslie Donna Flesner, Sissy Bell and John Arthur Greene in *Tootsie*.

Photo by Julieta Cervantes

him to help her prep for a major audition in a musical version of *Romeo and Juliet*—where Juliet ends up dating Romeo's brother Craig—he takes the opportunity to don a wig and a dress and impress Broadway director Ron (Reg Rogers) himself. Michael winds up playing the Nurse to Julie's (Lilli Cooper) Juliet, and soon, their chemistry offstage complicates Michael's deceit onstage.

If you've seen *Tootsie* the movie, there have been adjustments to *Tootsie* the musical that

might allow you to forgive its outdated take on gender performance and identity. For example, Twitter is mentioned a lot, people have smartphones now, and the Broadway stage stands in for the movie's soap opera production. Robert Horn's book makes reference to women being stronger than men, but unfortunately strands each female character in storylines solely about their relationships with men. His references to directors abusing their power were real clunkers

for me, in particular.

Composer David Yazbek, fresh off winning a Tony for *The Band's Visit*, is adept at telling small stories through song, but he struggles to leave much of an impression with the music here. His best moments come from Julie, whose ballad about becoming an actress tells us much about her, while doubly revealing how little we truly know about Michael's motivations. Late in the play, Michael sings to his Dorothy wig, and the mere suggestion that he had a complex identity in acting as a woman would maybe have lightened the impression that gender is a binary and that playing with gender performance, or transitioning, is invalid. But probably not. The writers don't want this show to be about gender. They want it to be about honesty. What they've wound up with is problematic and pointless.

Director Scott Ellis and choreographer Denis Jones keep the pace snappy. Fontana is game, while Stiles and Cooper steal their scenes with ease. But *Tootsie* is an asinine exercise in rehashing troublesome ideas about identity. And by the time Michael apologizes for everything he's done, you might feel the show's creators owe you an apology, too. In the world of *Tootsie*, as is too often the case these days, simply apologizing if you're a man seems to be enough.

## THEATER REVIEW

## We're Only Alive for a Short Amount of Time

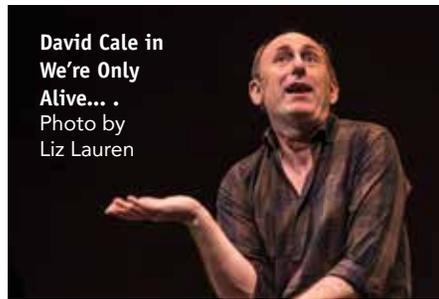
Playwright: David Cale  
 At: Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn St.  
 Tickets: 312-443-3800;  
 GoodmanTheatre.org; \$25-\$70  
 Runs through: Oct. 21

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

The bones of David Cale's "musical memoir" are simultaneously unique and familiar. Traumatized by a troubled youth, Cale escapes horrible circumstances and triumphs as an adult. It's a narrative that fuels everything from Oliver Twist to countless TED talks. What makes Cale's story utterly unlike any other is his mesmerizing depiction of both himself and the people who shaped his life—that, and the shattering plot twist that comes midway through.

Often when performers veer into territory this personal, the drama becomes endangered by indulgence. If you're talking about your own personal trauma, it's tough to keep a clear eye on what does and doesn't play well to an audience. That problem doesn't exist here. Director Robert Falls ensures that Cale's remarkable artistry shines through and that even the most vulnerable moments are in the service of the story and not an indulgence of memory.

Cale begins by describing his youth in Luton, a crime-ridden English factory town that is more of a punchline than a location. His descriptions of it call to mind an industrial version of Cicero: Luton is a place run by thugs who control the only employment options in town. For creative types such as Cale's mother and Cale himself, Luton is a



David Cale in  
 We're Only  
 Alive...  
 Photo by  
 Liz Lauren

dead-end and a death sentence.

As a child, Cale eked out an outlet for his non-conformist penchants. First, he converted a backyard shed into a bird and other animal. Eventually, he added aviaries and began breeding songbirds. In the midst of gray, bleak Luton, Cale built a sanctuary for hundreds of jewel-toned parrots, finches and parakeets.

In his bedroom at night, Cale sang along with Judy Garland records, capturing in sound all the color and beauty of the unlikely birds homing in his backyard: "As I sing, (it's as if) birds are flying out of me." Evoked by Cale's narration and pianist Matthew Dean Marsh's music direction, you will see these flocks with cinematic clarity in your mind's eye.

Cale's evolution from closeted, traumatized boy to acclaimed artist spills out in song as much as words. Gloriously, Cale is rather the antithesis of what we've all been groomed to expect from a leading man: He's slight rather than hulksome, more tenor than basso, more herky-jerky than strutting.

The music he and Marsh weave into the story is profoundly moving and—at times—beautifully odd to an ear trained on the likes of traditional musical theater. The song Luton is the sound of crawling grime and belching factories. Simon is a wrenching love letter to a lost brother. If I'd Gone Left shows the torrential differences that

can result from the tiniest of turns. *Feral Child* is an anthem of hope and deliverance.

The synthesis between monologue and music is extraordinarily effective as Cale's words dart in and among the orchestrations and songs. With conductor Marsh on keyboards, David Beldon

(viola) Michelle Campbell (harp), Desiree Miller (cello), Anna Najoom (clarinet) and Jered Montgomery (trumpet), *We're Only Alive* tells an extraordinary story instilled with remarkable music.

It's a near-perfect fusion of words, music, tragedy and hope.

# Judy Garland: Come Rain or Come Shine

starring Angela Ingersoll

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Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga in *A Star is Born*.  
Photo courtesy of Warner Bros.

## MOVIE REVIEW

# 'A Star is Born' is born again for the 21st century

REVIEW BY JERRY NUNN

The fourth version of the classic tale titled *A Star Is Born* is belting it out for a new generation in 2018, following versions that were released in 1937, 1954 and 1976. The first two films are centered around the acting world and the last two around music. Fans of the previous versions will no doubt spot how various elements from each incarnation have been repackaged in this year's film.

Bradley Cooper, who directed, plays the already famous singer Jackson Maine (an homage to legacy character Norman Maine) and Lady Gaga plays Ally (no last name and named Esther in previous versions), a struggling performer with big dreams.

Maine wanders into a gay bar and hears Ally singing Edith Piaf's "La Vie en Rose." He meets her in the dressing room, she removes her make-up and we all start to fall in love with her. Things get complicated as the two date, marry and experience episodes with addiction.

Cooper and Gaga's chemistry is undeniable, and following an early screening in Chicago, Cooper said that the production team halted the filming for two months to workshop the piece. It certainly paid off.

The film includes many cameos, among them foul-mouthed funnyman Andrew Dice Clay, who plays Ally's father; and another comedian, Dave Chappelle, who plays Maine's best friend. Viewers may also recognize Anthony Ramos, who plays Ally's best friend, from *Hamilton*. Sam Elliott gives another grounded performance as Bobby, the brother and manager of Maine. RuPaul Drag Racers D.J. 'Shangela' Pierce and Willam Belli (whom Gaga hand-picked) are also given a few good one-liners.

Cooper is impressive as a first-time director, with shots that flow together from Maine's massive concert scenes to simple home life with Ally.

At one point, the camera pans over to a picture on the wall, giving a glimpse of Ally's mother and telling the audience all they need to know about this family tree. Cooper knows how to keep scenes intimate and not veer into melodrama, allowing the leads ample opportunity to create raw, emotional performances on the big screen. The movie is meant to be watched in a Dolby Cinema theater, so seek one out as Cooper suggested at the Q&A.

As an actor, Cooper is very likable and that carries over into his character onscreen. Maine suffers tinnitus, an ear condition, along with his multiple addiction issues. Many actors would have gone overboard, especially playing an alcoholic, but Cooper hits the right notes.

He also complements Gaga's singing and holds

his own on the riveting duet "Shallow." When Ally's career moves into her performing shallower pop songs, you can see Jackson appear frustrated without him overdoing it. This makes his character drink more and the cycle continues.

Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta (aka Gaga) hits notes not usually heard from her, and bares her soul in a moving performance that is not to be missed. While she may not take home all the trophies during the upcoming awards season because of the stiff competition, she has proven with this project that she can cross over into the world of starring roles.

At one point in the movie, Ally sits in a parking lot frustrated with her flailing success. I couldn't help thinking of the time she performed at Windy City Media Group's *Idol* competition at the finals

## FILM

and she sat outside the club on the curb and no one wanted an autograph. She has since proven she's a star worthy of more attention, and this movie is a reflection of her meteoric rise in the music world. Sometimes you have to pay your dues in a gay club and fight your way to the top, making one fan at a time. I predict she will now do this in the acting world and silence any of the doubters. Happy new birthday, Gaga—an acting star is born on Oct. 5.

**A Star Is Born opens nationwide Friday, Oct. 5.**

## SIDEBAR

### The many lives of A Star is Born

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Director Bradley Cooper's 2018 version of *A Star is Born*, reviewed by Jerry Nunn this week, is the fourth—and some fans would say the fifth—version of the classic story that asks the question, what price Hollywood? Few industries are as self-reflexive as Hollywood is, so it's little surprise that so many films have returned to this particular well over the years.

William Wellman's 1937 version of *A Star is Born* set the story of upstart Esther Blodgett, a.k.a. Vicki Lester, and Norman Maine in the movie business, and starred Janet Gaynor and Frederic March. Produced by David O. Selznick (*Gone With the Wind*), the film shared many of the same narrative beats as 1932's *What Price Hollywood?*, which was directed by gay film-

maker George Cukor and starred Constance Bennett and Lowell Sherman. The 1937 film is not an official remake, but the stories were close enough that the distributors of *What Price Hollywood?* considered legal action.

Some 17 years later, Cukor returned to the story for a lavish 1954 Warner Bros. remake that starred Judy Garland and James Mason. Filmed in CinemaScope, this new film was produced by Garland's then-husband, Sid Luft, and utilized songs from Harold Arlen and Ira Gershwin, among others.

Production on the 1954 film was tumultuous however, and the film initially ended up running well over three hours. Warner Bros. cut the film down to about 154 minutes, over Garland and Cukor's protests. Nevertheless, the film was positively received and Garland and Mason were both nominated for Oscars. Years later, preservationist Ron Haver spearheaded a massive restoration effort to get the 1954 near its original length; he found much of the footage and most of the soundtrack, using production

stills as well, to bring the film back to a 183 minute running-time. That is the version widely available on home video now.

One other performer with a huge gay following, Barbra Streisand, tackled the story in 1976. Her co-star was Kris Kristofferson, who played John Norman Howard to Streisand's Esther Hoffman in a story that was reset in the world of rock music. The film was a labor of love for Streisand as well as for her then-partner, Jon Peters, who produced. Peters, who had previously been a prominent Hollywood hair stylist, subsequently was one of the most powerful producers and studio executives of the '80s and '90s; among his hits was 1989's *Batman*.

The film received generally poor reviews, with many critics of the time ribbing Streisand for what they perceived as her ego peering from the screen. But paying audiences were kinder: The 1976 *A Star is Born* was a hit, and it provided Streisand with her song "Evergreen," which was one of the biggest hits of her career.



Rebecca Root in *The Sisters Brothers*.  
Photo courtesy of Annapurna Pictures

## Rebecca Root discusses new film roles

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Actress and stand-up comedian Rebecca Root—known to British audiences for her work on the BBC series *Boy Meets Girl*—appears in two new films, *Colette* and *The Sisters Brothers*. Root, who is also a prominent voice coach, spoke to *Windy City Times* about the films and the career challenges often facing transgender actors.

**Windy City Times: One of the things that surprised me the most in watching and later reading about *Colette* was the progressive casting, in that it had not one but two trans actors in cisgender roles. What does this say to you, since, during your time, it has generally been harder for trans actors to find work?**

Rebecca Root: I think Wash Westmoreland—the director—made inspired casting choices. I mean he didn't just cast trans people in cis roles. He cast actors of different ethnicities to the ethnicity that the person they were portraying at being in real life possibly. And I think that was inspired really and frankly visionary. I think we need to see more casting like that.

**WCT: I know, it almost reminded me of the *Hamilton* musical.**

RR: Right, although I haven't seen *Hamilton*. I've seen clips, so I know what you're talking about.

**WCT: Regarding your role of Mayfield in *The Sisters Brothers*, how did you approach the role and what type of direction did you get?**

RR: Well, I approached the role in the same way that I do any other role. So I do as much background reading as I can. I researched the period.

I look at pictures, arts, read literature from that time. I tried to get a flavor of the atmosphere of the world that is being depicted. Obviously, I read the source material, so I read the novel. I like having to think about people that are similar that I could draw on, or maybe take some take some inspiration from. I felt that Mayfield had something of Margaret Thatcher about her—tending to be not motherly but certainly quite charming, trying to be charming and trying to make sure that everything's running smoothly but with a heart of steel or stone or iron—if there was a heart at all. That was the kind of inspiration that I had for Mayfield.

You asked about the direction. The direction came from one of cinema's great masters. Even though we were working largely through an interpreter, we already had established a close relationship in terms of there was great amity on set and certainly I felt I could just trust Jacques. I trusted him, so I just followed everything that he wanted and tried to deliver as best I could.

**WCT: If you were in charge of an entire town, is there anything that you could do in real life?**

RR: You really put me on the spot with that one. I would probably lower the age of voting. I would up the legal age of smoking. I would definitely aim for gender parity on pay—male and female need to be paid the same. I would certainly instigate working hours legislation so people can't be taken for a ride working 18 hour days without a break. That kind of thing.

This is just completely off of my head.

**WCT: Now things seem to be changing here**

**in the U.S. ever so slowly. What's the current state of things across the pond? I know that you found success a few years ago in the BBC sitcom, *Boy meets Girl*.**

RR: I think we are catching up with the States. We've got trans actors in two soaps. Annie Wallace is in a soap called *Hollyoaks*. It's a young kind of person soap. Ash Palmisciano is in a more sort of a middle-age kind of soap called *Emmerdale*. He is a trans man. Annie is a trans woman. Previously, we had we had Riley Carter Millington in *EastEnders*, which is a major soap in the UK. They're very visible in our in our TV screens. I think we're catching up. I think we're giving you guys a run for your money.

**WCT: What else do you have coming up?**

RR: I'm rehearsing a play in Dublin at the moment called *Rathmines Road*, which is a co-production with a company called *Fishamble* and the *Abbey Theatre*, which is basically the *National Theatre of Ireland*. It's part of the *Dublin Theater Festival*, which is a major international festival of theater. The play runs until the end of October. ... It's a world premiere by a very exciting contemporary playwright by Deirdre Kinahan.

After that, I have a couple of TV things that I filmed earlier this year coming out; [the first is] a show called *Flack* in which I guest in one episode that's coming out sometime in the autumn or maybe new year. I'm also in an episode of *The Romanoffs*, which is the new Matthew Weiner piece. That's hitting Amazon—I think—in October or November. My episode is at the end of November.

And then I did a voice for guest role in a TV animated series called *Moominvalley*, which is based

on *The Moomins* by a Finnish writer, Tove Jansson. So that's coming out in February. It's an exciting project. It has Kate Winslet and Rosamund Pike—a high-profile cast in that show. So yeah, lots of things coming up which I've already done. After the play, I have an empty diary. Hopefully, it will fill up soon.

**WCT: What advice would you offer to a trans actor looking to break into the industry?**

RR: Read. Read plays. Go to the theater. Read screenplays. Go to the movies. Watch DVDs or watch movies on Netflix. Try to get an understanding of the industry. Listen to radio. Listen to radio dramas. Listen to audio books. Listen to what people do with the voices. Train your voice. Take class. Do improv class. Engage with the industry. It's not just all about being a star, but being part of an industry. Support your union. Pay your subs. It's all about the practicalities of being an actor. Being famous or getting a Hollywood star on the *Walk of Fame* or whatever—that's really kind of the icing on the cake. The cake itself—the 99% of the rest of it—is all about the work that you put in, the spade work, the hours, the craft that you build, develop, polish and hone over the years. Things don't necessarily happen quickly. Keep going. Have faith. Believe in your ability. Believe in your talents.

I would say that talent wins out. So if it doesn't happen this year, it may happen the following year. Just keep going. Never give up. That's my advice.

# NUNN ON ONE morgxn carries queer 'weight'

BY JERRY NUNN

Indie artist morgxn started music at an early age and eventually left his roots of Nashville to make pop-soul music in LA. The new singer prefers his name in lower case and came out at age 18. During the interview, he mentioned to Windy City Times he prefers being described as queer and feels it's colorful.

His debut studio album *vital* is available now accompanied with music videos depicting the LGBT community in various ways. His song "carry the weight" was used in HBO's Share the Love Pride campaign. Robert Smith approved his version of The Cure's "boys don't cry," showing he knows how to provide his own take on a classic.

He created a new track with Walk the Moon's frontman Nicholas Petricca called "home," then sang it together at Lollapalooza this past summer for the first time live. He sat down to talk about his life right before that performance with Windy City Times.

**Windy City Times: How do you say your name?**

morgxn: Morgan—the "x" is implied.

**WCT: Where are you from originally?**

morgxn: Nashville, Tennessee. I grew up and went to school there. My parents are from there also.

**WCT: Did you study music?**

morgxn: I literally have been singing my whole life. My mom says I was singing before I made sentences.

I found a voice teacher in Nashville when I was nine who opened my world up to all sorts of music. Coming from Nashville there was mainly one kind of music. That never felt like where I was. The voice teacher turned me on to Stevie Wonder and Luther Vandross. I learned about my sexuality through this voice teacher and the music he brought into my life.

**WCT: He was a gay teacher?**

morgxn: He was. Now in retrospect, there were many gay teachers in my life. They were men who were not out. This was a different time and I wasn't even out. I was around 10 years old.

It is interesting how I was drawn to these role models and people who I realized were gay later on. It was a tough time to be gay and in Nashville. I couldn't be myself. I think some of that still exists even with the openness of sexuality. I am grateful to be open. There is still a stigma about being open, especially in the South.

**WCT: When I lived in Nashville, there wasn't a Pride parade at that time.**

morgxn: Oh yeah, to even have a gay street, as it does now, did not exist. Being gay was very secretive. That is something I thought about growing up. Why is sexuality painted as sin or something to be ashamed of? Sexuality is blood and water. It's essential and vital to who you are. Holding that in can hurt.

**WCT: And it can come out in other ways. I was raised Southern Baptist.**



morgxn.  
Photo by Jerry Nunn

## MUSIC

morgxn: Gurl, I was the voice of Jesus once for LifeWay Christian Magazine as a Jewish closeted gay kid in Nashville.

**WCT: Here you are now...**

morgxn: Here I am now living my life. My journey as an artist is about learning to let myself to come out and come through.

**WCT: What inspired you to make a Cure cover song?**

morgxn: If I am going to cover something I want to tell some version of it that is different than the original. I feel like the song found me. My producer Ryan Marrone suggested The Cure.

It is a very simple melody, but it is so effective emotionally. When he had suggested the song, it was right after my dad had passed. The lyrics felt like a message to my dad, who grew up in a time when a man showing emotions was wrong and against the rules.

We recorded it in a small room and that is what came out. That is what music is to me, a necessity.

**WCT: Did you come up with the "home" video?**

morgxn: Both Moses Moreno, who is the director of that video, and I have queer stories that are different but similar. We wanted to tell the story of a boy finding his version of a home.

We made the video with both a boy and a girl in it. When we cut it to just have the boy, then it brought the whole story forward.

That boy we found the day before the shooting. The drag mother in the video is the cousin of the boy in real life. He had just come out and been taking voguing lessons at the local dance center. It felt like a documentary it was so real when we were shooting it.

**WCT: Talk about "carry the weight."**

morgxn: HBO using "carry the weight" as a song for pride and love is the whole reason I am an artist. I am here to make music that speaks to people on that level.

That song came out of a place where I am still learning to speak up for myself. At this time we are often told that who we are is not allowed. Corporations make money on people feeling they are not enough. "carry the weight" is my anthem to myself that says I am enough. I am here and queer!

See morgxn on tour with Dreamers and Weathers at Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln Ave., on Wed., Oct. 10, at 7 p.m.; visit [lh-st.com](http://lh-st.com).

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# Collaborative work spotlights older trans, GNC individuals

BY KELSEY HOFF

In 2012, photographer Jess Dugan and social worker/assistant professor Vanessa Fabbre began interviewing and photographing transgender and gender nonconforming adults older than 50, beginning with people they knew.

They began collaborating out of a shared desire to shed light on this underrepresented group. More than five years of work snowballed into *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults*—consisting of a book released in September, an exhibition, a portfolio for museums and teaching institutions, an expansive archive of oral history and much more. The project documents images and experiences of older trans adults all over the country, but it has deep roots in Chicago.

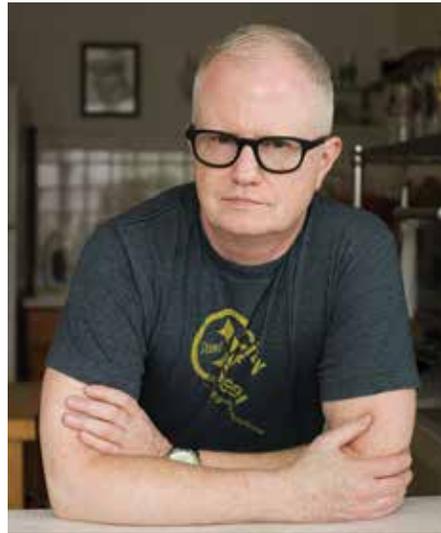
“Chicago was the place where all of my interest developed in LGBT aging issues,” said Fabbre. Though both partners live in St. Louis now, they have strong professional ties to Chicago. They met many of the eight or nine Chicago residents included in the book through involvement in Chicago’s trans community. During the ten years she lived here, Fabbre earned her Ph. D. in social work at the University of Chicago, worked as a social worker at Rush University Medical Center and volunteered as a psychotherapist at the Center on Halsted. Dugan was working on her MFA in photography at Columbia College Chicago when she met Fabbre and began working on the project. She is represented by the Catherine Edelman Gallery in River North.

“When we began working on the project, we really wanted to include a diverse group of people, and we sought out diversity in a number of ways including age, race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic class, geographic location and life narrative,” said Dugan. Fabbre added, “We wanted to capture real challenges but also to show all the different ways that people find a sense of authenticity and joy, and a way of making peace with things as they age.” The team traveled to their subjects’ homes or locations with personal significance. Fabbre interviewed the narrators for about an hour, which often led to ideas for the location, poses or props used in the portraits. Dugan then shot photos for thirty minutes to an hour.

“My style of photographing required a significant amount of collaboration and participation from each person,” said Dugan. She shot most of the portraits in natural light, using a tripod and slow shutter speeds to capture rich detail. Signs of the subjects’ geographic locations are evident in many of the photographs, from cacti and stucco walls in the Southwest to graffiti, stone stairways and wrought iron fences of cities in the Northeast.

“Space and place are really important parts of [the subjects’] stories and how they’ve come to think of themselves...Surviving challenging places required that they engage and make community and change the places that they live to make them be more accepting,” said Fabbre.

The cover portrait of Gloria Allen was taken at the intersection of Surf and Pine Grove in Lakeview, in front of an affordable senior hous-



Portraits from *To Survive on This Shore* include (L to R) Mickey, 60, Chicago, IL, 2014; Gloria, 70, Chicago, IL, 2016; and Alexis, 64, Chicago, IL, 2014. Photos by Jess Dugan

ing building she was living in at the time of the shoot. In her interview, she spoke about challenges she faced living there: neighbors who were not trans-friendly and navigating challenging social situations as an older adult. Now Gloria lives in an apartment at one of Chicago’s LGBTQ community centers. Dugan and Fabbre chose her for the cover photo after long consideration: representation and mood were important factors in their decision.

“I think Gloria seemed like the perfect photo for the cover because she is so proud. It also shows her in a real place, in a city, so you think about her experience in the world,” said Dugan. “Also visually and formally, we really love the portrait of Gloria and we love that she’s looking right out at the viewer and...sharing her world in a way.” Dugan shared that the average life expectancy for trans women of color is 35. At 70 years old the day her photo was taken, Gloria emerged as the perfect example of surviving and thriving under difficult circumstances.

“One of the things that’s been really nice to see is that ... the project serves as a collection of representations and role models ... for younger trans people, but it also serves as more of an educational piece and an entrance point for people who don’t know anything about the trans com-

## PHOTOGRAPHY

munity because they can relate to the aging element,” said Dugan. Though the project was only recently finished, the portraits and interview content are already being used by various organizations for advocacy and education. A group in San Francisco has used some of the portraits for an advocacy campaign, and a group in Boston is creating a training module using the photos and interviews to educate other older adults about trans older adults that they might encounter in senior centers or nursing homes.

“We’ve spent the past five years getting to this point, and so in some ways, the creation of work is done, but we’re really really hopeful that with the release of the book that we’re just beginning the advocacy and education phase of the project.



We’re looking to collaborate with as many nonprofits as possible who are interested in using the work for education or training,” said Dugan. She hopes the book lands in places that aren’t art-specific, such as senior centers, nursing homes and hospitals.

Many of the participants are likewise just beginning their involvement with the project. Book release events are the first chance Dugan and Fabbre have had to invite the participants to sit on panels with them, such as one that took place Sept. 30 at Andersonville’s Women & Children First Bookstore. Three of the subjects from Chicago—Mickey Mahoney, Alexis Martinez and Gloria Allen, the subject on the book’s cover—participated. (See sidebar.) The Museum of Contemporary Photography has acquired some of the photos for its permanent collection.

## Dugan, Fabbre hold ‘Survive’ signing at WCF

BY VERNON HESTER

On Sept. 30, Women and Children First presented a book signing and discussion with photographer Jess T. Dugan and social worker Vanessa Fabbre for their book *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults*. The presentation also included a question and answer dialogue with several interviewees from the book, among them Caprice Carthans, Mickey Mahoney, Gloria Allen and Alexis A. Martinez.

Life partners Dugan and Fabbre spent six years chronicling the struggles and joys of growing older in the transgender community within the complex intersections of gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic class and geographic locations.

The authors spoke about the process of finding participants for their project. “We knew there was a lack of representation for older



Subject Gloria Allen signing a copy. Photo by Vernon Hester

individuals and so many younger trans people have never even seen an older trans person,” said Dugan.

Fabbre added, “What we wanted was to push back a bit that transgender is not a ‘new thing’...some younger people think they invented it. Obviously, we’ve had trans people for a long time though it was not called that. We wanted to factor in the language and how that changes with older and younger generations. For some younger people the word ‘queer’ is liberating, but for an older generation it’s very difficult.”

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# Women and Children First hosts book launch celebration for activist Charlene Carruthers

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Women & Children First bookstore hosted a book launch celebration for Southwest Side Chicago native and social justice activist Charlene Carruthers, the founding national director of Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Sept. 25 at the University of Chicago's Logan Arts Center.

Carruthers' book, "Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements," is a 21st-century activist guide centered around making Black liberation more radical, queer and feminist.

Activists Miranda Goosby, Keron Blair and Aislinn Pulley opened the event by reading excerpts from Carruthers' book and speaking about the impact her work and words have had on their lives. A video featuring Carruthers telling her story culminated in questions every activist needs to ask themselves: Who am I? Who are your people? What do we want? What are we building? Are we ready to win?

Historian, author, long-time activist and University of Illinois Chicago Social Justice Initiative Professor and Director Barbara Ransby and Chicago-based organizer, Black feminist scholar and incoming BYP100 National Co-Director Janae Bonsu co-lead the panel discussion.

Carruthers spoke about the significance of this event being at the University of Chicago, where "resistance is ongoing."

Ransby had "a unique experience" with Carruthers when they co-taught a class. She did not

## BOOKS

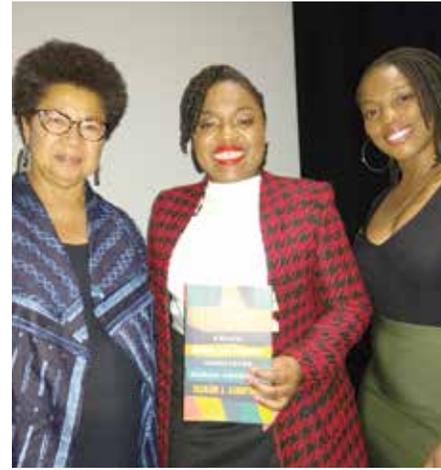
know what to expect before they worked together, but what she found in Carruthers, she said, was "patience and a commitment to deep thinking."

"This book is Charlene the teacher, Charlene the organizer and Charlene being patient with us on every page to reveal to us what her experience has been doing this work, but also provoking and nudging us on to do better ourselves," added Ransby.

Bonsu sang praised Carruthers, both for being a mentor in the fight for social justice and writing such an informative book. Ransby asked Carruthers about the importance of a quote, "Chicago made me and the world raised me," as well as the significance of local organizing and global solidarity movements.

Carruthers, who attended Sen High School, said that her father introduced her to the world through food, and encouraged her and her siblings to "discover the world" further. Due to that interest in the world around her, one of her majors in college was international studies.

"International studies in many ways is the study of capitalism, imperialism and the military, but I did not hear that from most of my professors," said Carruthers. "A white South African who was involved in the anti-Apartheid movement was the only one of my professors who talked about it



Barbara Ransby, Charlene Carruthers and Janae Bonsu.

Photo by Carrie Maxwell

that way."

Traveling around the world has changed her views on everything and caused her to interrogate how she thinks about a variety of issues.

Bonsu mentioned that Sept. 25 was National Voter Registration Day, and asked Carruthers her thoughts on some of the progressive electoral victories this year.

Carruthers said Bonsu's question reminded her that the event was also being held on what would have been Laquan McDonald's 21st birthday, and asked everyone to observe a moment of silence to honor his memory. She recounted BYP100 and other grass-roots POC-led organizations' role in amplifying McDonald's story by protesting his death by Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke.

## Author launches 'Semi Queer' book with reading

BY VERNON HESTER

On Sept. 28, author Anne Balay presented a reading and discussion of her new book *Semi Queer* at Women and Children First, 5233 N. Clark St., as part of its nationwide launch. The reading also featured a round table discussion with several LGBTQI individuals who shared their stories of working in the trucking industry in the book. *Semi Queer* follows Balay's 2014 book *Steel Closets*, which focused on queer steel mill workers in Indiana.

*Semi Queer*, which focuses on first-person narratives and experiences of LGBTQI and African American Truckers, coincidentally came about as the industry saw an enormous increase in queer and African American drivers. Balay originally started writing the book with the intention of shattering stereotypes about both truckers and other working-class people as being politically conservative, anti-gay and anti-feminist, and the assumption that the majority of queer people are economically prosperous. As she conducted the interviews and met more queer truckers, she found an entirely

Carruthers also spoke about their call for the removal of former Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez by galvanizing young Black voters to educate themselves on the issue and go to the polls in 2015.

"A shout-out to Mayor Rahm Emanuel not running for office again," said Carruthers. "We actually got all three—Alvarez, former Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy and Emanuel—out of office."

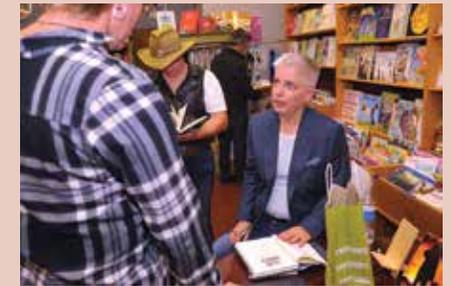
Focusing on issues is more important than individual candidates because they come and go; among those issues is reparations for those who were torture victims of Jon Burge and other officers, Carruthers said.

"Jon Burge, ding dong the witch is dead," said Carruthers to cheers from the audience.

Other topics included what freedom looks like, the abolition of the prison industrial complex, sexual violence and activists versus organizers and the need for both groups.

Carruthers has worked on grassroots and digital strategy campaigns for Center for Community Change, Women's Media Center, Color Of Change and National People's Action. Carruthers has been featured in numerous national and local publications and news outlets as well as written for *The Root*, *Colorlines* and *The Boston Review*. She is also the recipient of the YWCA's Dr. Dorothy I. Height Award and has been recognized by *The Root* 100, *Ebony Magazine* and *Chicago Magazine*. Additionally, Carruthers has spoken at various institutions including her alma mater Illinois Wesleyan University.

See <https://www.charlenecarruthers.com/> for more information and to order the book.



Anne Balay at the reading.

Photo by Vernon Hester

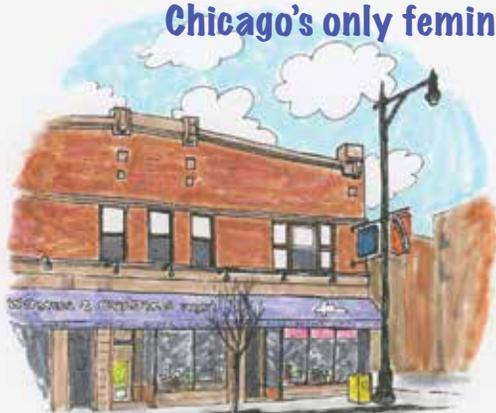
different perspective from what she expected.

Balay said that the industry has suddenly mushroomed in part because of financial incentives from trucking companies in recent years, and that the presence of queer and African American truckers has increased as well. In an earlier interview with *Windy City Times*, she said, "Any trucker space you go to, there's lesbians, there's gay men, there's trans people ... they're everywhere and they're happy to talk about it. That's one of the reasons I wanted to write about it; it came as such a shock to me after my steel mill experience."

In *Steel Closets*, participants kept their identities hidden to avoid harassment and violence in the work place.

Turn to page 21

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# Chicago poets bear witness to LGBTQ-lived experiences in four new collections

BY KELSEY HOFF

Chicago is famous for a lot of things, but one of its best-kept secrets is a thriving community of some of the country's most innovative poets. They can be found hosting and performing at reading series and slams, teaching inside and outside of the classroom, working at bookstores and literary organizations and on the shelves of bookstores nationwide. Four new collections released by Chicago poets this fall are deeply rooted in their racial and LGBTQ identities: *Black Queer Hoe* by Britteney Black Rose Kapri, *Refuse* by Julian Randall and *If They Come For Us* by Fatimah Asghar make their debut along with *On My Way to Liberation*, the third collection by H. Melt. I spoke with each of these writers about their poetics and their thoughts on this good news for the Chicago poetry scene.



**Fatimah Asghar.**  
Photo by CassidyKristiansen

Fatimah Asghar put her own work into context, saying "A lot of what I learned about Chicago and Chicago poetics is a real anchor and a grounding...in the act of witnessing. When you think about Chicago's history of poets like Gwendolyn Brooks and Studs Terkel you get this deep, deep sense of portraiture and real-life observation and kind of elevating everyday moments into poetry and that impacted my craft and how I wrote and how I approached poetry." Brooks and Terkel both used their work to celebrate and magnify individual experience, Brooks in her poems and Terkel

## POETRY/SPOKEN WORD

in collections of oral histories. Chicago's poetry community just celebrated Brooks' one hundredth birthday with *Our Miss Brooks 100*, an eighteen month-long series of events.

Three of the four poets publishing this fall were quick to identify themselves as the speaker in their poems. Kapri commented that "I think often folks think they are empowering 'silenced' voices by speaking for them when usually all you're doing is furthering their silence." H. Melt echoed this, saying "There is a way to show complexity without hurting and alienating the people whose lived experiences you're trying to discuss."

"Most of the poems align with a speaker who's very similar to me," said Randall, acknowledging that his speaker is also a character in a creative work. His poet/speaker shares his timeline of major life events, such as moving from Chicago to Minneapolis in ninth grade, but Randall takes poetic license with other details. His poet/speaker has an imagined conversation with Barack Obama in one poem, and a series of poems was written from the perspective of Randall's father.

Several of the poets acknowledged a nuanced sense of responsibility tied to writing in their own voice. "Speaking even a kind of reality towards power has stakes, has consequences. In trying to figure out how to make these poems the best that they are I had consider, what are the stakes? What am I willing to risk in order to tell this particular reality as I know it and as I've seen it?" said Randall.

However, these poets write about their own identities with specific goals in mind: "I want my work to be useful in ways that make the world more welcoming for queer and trans people," said Melt. On poems about her family, Asghar said, "There's a lot of love I feel for my family even amongst hardship, so there was a way that I wanted to really present that sense of a complicated relationship." Randall explained, "Poetry does the work of starting towards empathy building...I'm building this experience and I want you to live inside of it so you can see as best I was able to see it."

As vividly as the speaker/poets' bodies and voices are re-created in their poems, these poets purposefully signal geographic place in meditations on self and home. "I've spent pretty much all my life trying to get back to Chicago in a way that would allow me to stay here," said Randall, in reference to both his writing life and his living situation. "For me to pursue my joy in my home, against all odds of gentrification and all other forces involved in capital--that's what brings me



**Julian Randall.**  
Photo by Nicholas Nichols

back home."

Kapri describes her symbiotic relationship with the city: "Chicago is me. No matter where I go or what I do, Chicago is me," she said. "Place also informs your diction. You know if I call someone a 'goofy' it's a very serious form of disrespect cause of where I am from. So you always have to be aware when you're writing pieces that can be misinterpreted when they leave home."

"Place, and more specifically home, is a major theme of my writing," said Melt. "What does it mean to feel at home? Who would you want around you? One of the poems in this collection called 'Ode to the Gay Sex Shop' defines home as a site of misrecognition. My writing is decep-

tively simple and direct on the page. It's utilitarian and the Midwest definitely influences that. I want people to read and understand my poems. I want them to be useful."

Possibly the most striking similarity between these poets is the enthusiastic love they express for their community. "I think that's something that pervades every person I've ever known from Chicago...they want to know what you're working on and they want to know how they can help. It's such a collaborative, wonderful, beautiful city for that," said Randall. "We're part of the same community, we've taught together, performed together, written together, we are very much in each other's lives, and our poems are too. It makes complete sense that our work would be related because we're related, we're family," said Melt.

Asghar cites collaboration as an integral part of her writing process, from her first slam team to writing workshops. "I think that's so much of why I make art--because I'm looking for that moment of connection with people. That moment of being able to say this is how I felt; this is a particular kind of loneliness I feel and to reach out with that loneliness in the hope to...get people to feel a little bit less lonely. The answer to isolation is community."

It seems the strength of Chicago's poetry community, on the page and in collaboration, is related to its complementary values of individuality and empathy. On the changing role of the poet at work, Randall mused, "It's been cool to dream wildly like that alongside a bunch of other people who are dreaming wildly about like, what future selves are we making paths for?"

Watch Teddy's story at  
[www.MissingTeddy.com](http://www.MissingTeddy.com)

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# AIA Chicago to create LGBTQ architect group

BY ARIEL PARRELLA-AURELI

As the executive vice president of the American Institute of Architects' (AIA's) Chicago chapter, Zurich Esposito always has his hands full.

Throughout his 12-year career with AIA, Esposito has created many programs for members, helped start the Chicago Architects magazine in 2007 where he is now publisher and was this year's honorary member for notable contributions and service of people outside of the architecture profession. Now, the architecture ambassador is helping to create the first LGBTQ group at AIA Chicago to increase the organization's diversity and inclusion.

"There are groups in Chicago that are supportive of women in architecture, Latinos in architecture, African-Americans in architecture; yet there is no specific group made up of and supporting the LGBT members of the community," Esposito said.

As part of both communities, Esposito said this alliance is necessary to help eliminate any perceived and real barriers LGBTQ architects face. While it may look as though the architecture and design community is headed by white, straight men, he said the reality is there is a lot of diversity in the industry. But seeing it is not so visible or accessible, so he hopes the group will make that clearer and show successes of LGBTQ architects and designers. Being a resource and inspiration for aspiring LGBTQ designers is an important piece of the group, too, Zurich added. Representation in the industry will help open doors for new, diverse professionals.

"If a young, emerging architect can see that there is a place for them in the architecture community that is largely perceived as a profession headed by white straight men, [they can say], 'Oh, there's a place for me in the profession of architecture,'—maybe something they didn't see before," he said.

The group is still in the development stage and has no name or specific practices. Esposito, who has served on the national council of diversity for the AIA, said it came out of discussion with other AIA members who questioned the chapter's involvement with LGBTQ professionals. The AIA aims to showcase diverse individuals and adhere to equality and inclusion for the betterment of the industry and has been taking steps to make its organization more diverse, according to its website.

Who will be part of the Chicago group, what kinds of events or goals it will address and its leadership are all still up for debate, Esposito said. However, he wants to make sure the group will be foremost a support and networking community for LGBTQ architects and provide mentorship, education and resources. He also wants the alliance to help LGBTQ professionals with leadership and career opportunities and make sure that access and awareness is present. These discussions are similar for other minorities in the field, he said, like making sure women and ethnic professionals are well represented and can climb the career ladder to higher levels of the profession.

## ARCHITECTURE

"The field is diversifying," he said. "The student bodies enrolled in architecture schools are diverse groups, and we are going to watch the profession become more diverse as those individuals become employed."

Esposito said that he wants everyone to feel welcome in the industry and is happy he has never felt any disrespect or discomfort for being gay. He acknowledged his past career in finance was not as open to letting him fully express himself and be comfortable at work, which is crucial to any career that one devotes their life to, like architecture. He said part of his decision to switch trajectories was so he could feel comfortable being his full self—an issue that some LGBTQ designers face, and one the group wants to change.

To better understand how this group can support the LGBTQ architect and design community,

Zurich will host a meeting Oct. 5 to discuss what AIA members want the group to be. He said it is crucial to hear everyone's voice and work together to create the group's backbone. He said members are excited about the new initiative and he hopes more will attend the meeting and make their voice heard.

The chapter has about 3500 architects in its organization, and in a strong LGBTQ community like Chicago, Zurich sees this group as being beneficial on multiple levels. It is a melding of architecture and the LGBTQ community, just like the Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St.

"Initiatives like the Center on Halsted, a very thoughtfully-designed building, communicates value to the people who use it and it says they are valued," Esposito said. "Architecture can be communicative and powerful. We are lucky to be in a city with great architecture and people who appreciate it. I know that is strongly felt in the LGBTQ community."



AIA's Zurich Esposito.

Photo by Ariel Parrella-Aureli



WINDY CITY TIMES

ARTS+THEATER

artsandtheaterweekly.com

WEEKLY

THE INTERNATIONAL  
EXPOSITION OF  
CONTEMPORARY  
AND MODERN ART

EXPO  
CHICAGO

# EXPO Chicago caps another successful year

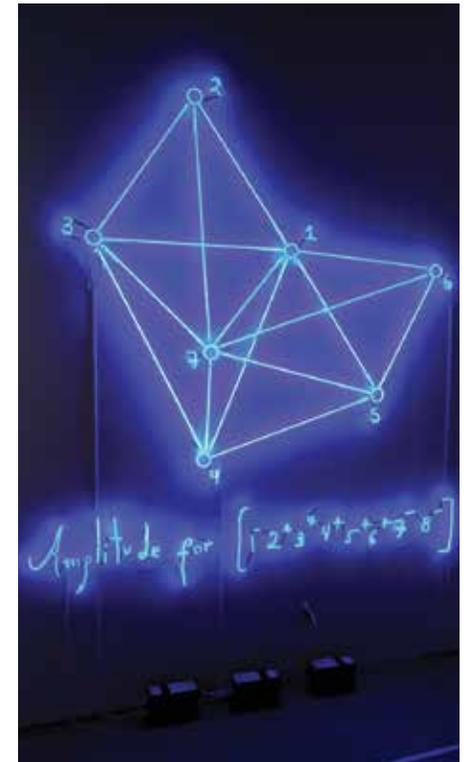
Hundreds of people attended EXPO Chicago: The International Exposition of Contemporary & Modern Art took place Sept. 27-30 at Navy Pier's Festival Hall.

The seventh annual exposition hosted 135 galleries from 27 countries and 63 cities, and introduce diverse programming. Said programming included the Dialogues panel series, featuring artistic discourse with leading artists, curators, designers and arts professionals on the current issues that engage them; IN/SITU, featuring large-scale sculptures and site-specific works; EXPO VIDEO, highlighting a dynamic screening program for film, video and new media works; and more.

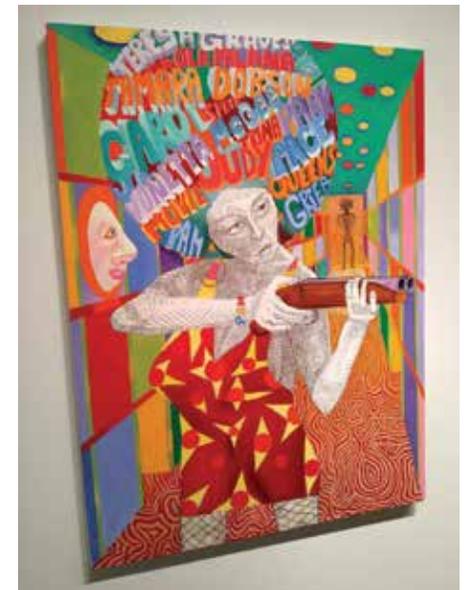
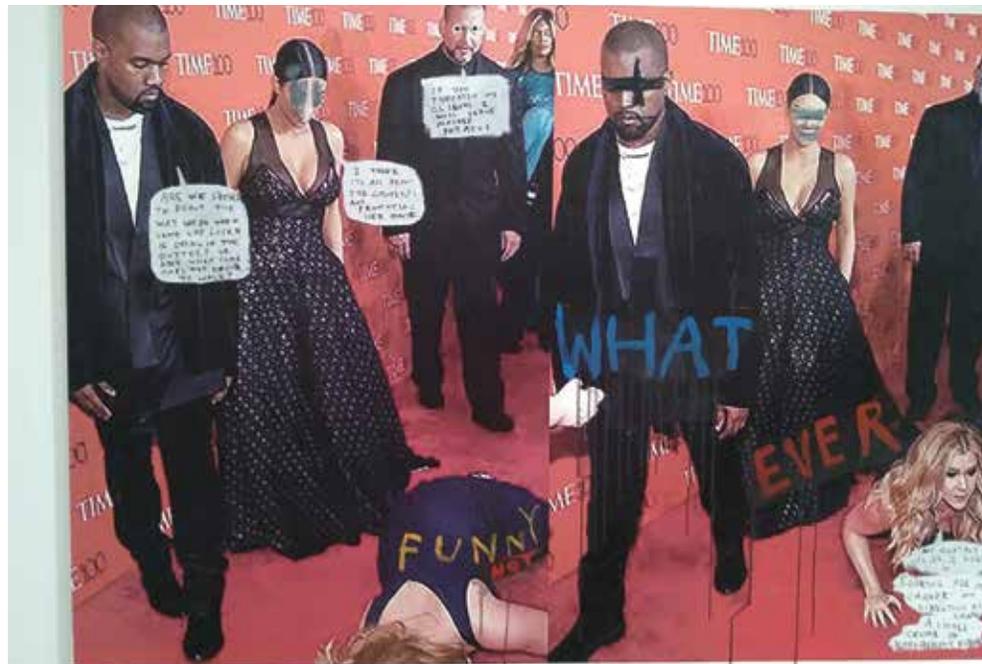
## ART

Just a few of the exhibitors will include Anglim Gilbert Gallery (San Francisco), BorzoGallery (Amsterdam), Stephen Daiter Gallery (Chicago), Fort Gansevoort (New York), Kavi Gupta (Chicago), Rhona Hoffman Gallery (Chicago), GALLERY HYUNDAI (Seoul), Kalfayan Galleries (Athens), Galerie Kornfeld (Berlin), Galeria Javier Lopez & Fer Frances (Madrid), Praz-Delavallade (Paris; Los Angeles), Ronchini (London) and Wexler Gallery (Philadelphia).

See <https://www.expochicago.com/>.



Photos by Andrew Davis



# Lesbian makeup artist on business, planning own wedding

BY VEE L. HARRISON

Growing up gay usually means that family and friends are convinced it's just a phase.

For 30-year-old Chicagoan Casseita Sutton, better known as Missy, that phase has turned slowly into her upcoming holy matrimony. Missy said she knew since she was 10 that she was gay. However, what she did not know at that young age was that she was a gifted makeup artist. That revelation didn't come until 10 years later, and when Missy stumbled across her first set of makeup brushes—while an undergraduate at Southern Illinois University—her life would never be the same.

Sutton currently works as a full-time makeup artist at So Bella Beauty Bar, 5937 W. North Ave., and said that makeup adds a level of fashion that's an absolute asset to any outfit, shoes or hairstyle. Sutton had no idea how vital makeup was; for her, it was just part of having a good time with friends. She had no idea that she was emerging into an actual industry, and what her gifted hands meant to fashion.

"My friends in college would let me do their makeup, and I kept being told that I was pretty good at it," said Sutton. "People kept telling me to take it to the next level."

She didn't realize what the next level meant, or if it was even meant for her. At that time, she was studying psychology and trying to come to terms with her sexuality.

"I came out when I was 20 years old to my cousin," Sutton recalled. "We are really close and that was a relieving moment and good feeling."

But being gay and accepted by some isn't all rainbows. Sutton has memories of being shunned by many, including her own father, who lives in Minnesota.

"He was furious after he had learned from my mom that I had come out," she recalled. "He didn't talk to me for three months. It was extremely devastating because, before that, we were really close and would talk on the phone every day."

Additionally, she said several friends who were unhappy to hear that she had come out and were uncomfortable to see her dating women.

"People would tell me I was too pretty to be gay," Sutton said. "I don't get that. And it started to not matter. I stuck to who I was then and who I am now."

Her future wife is what she calls "an escape," adding that she fondly remembers the proposal and didn't see this part of her life coming. After being in a few prior abusive relationships with women, Missy never imagined a life where not only she was free to express her love for a woman, but respected and loved as well.

"Everything that was lacking is fulfilled now,"

## FASHION



Casseita "Missy" Sutton.  
Photo courtesy of Sutton

said Sutton. "This is my gateway."

Sutton now has a partner on her side to encourage her talents as a makeup artist, in an industry that is currently very competitive.

"This experience is helping me service the community and open doors to give back," she added. "When my clients are in my chair, I get to know them. We open up and it makes the experience of doing their makeup even more fulfilling. When in my chair, I get to know them and they get to know me."

Sutton realizes that mentioning that she is marrying a woman possibly rubs her older clients the wrong way, and has even lost some clientele.

"I don't let that impact my work," she said. "But it does bother me to lose clients. It's like a light get turned off when certain clients learn that I'm gay. The conversation gets dry."

None of that has dampened her excitement over her upcoming wedding. Sutton said she is especially excited for all of her clients that are soon to be brides. Her makeup chair is a place to transform, discuss and exhale.

"I wake up every morning excited to see what the day has to offer and how I can service people with my gift of makeup artistry," she added. "I practice constantly and I notice that I'm coming more into myself, in so many ways."

Follow Sutton on Facebook at Missy Le'Rohn, on Instagram at don't\_miss\_ur\_beat, or book an appointment to sit in her chair at DontMissUrBeat.com.

## THEATER REVIEW

### Downstate

Playwright: Bruce Norris  
At: Steppenwolf Theatre Company,  
1650 N. Halsted St.  
Tickets: 312-335-1650;  
Steppenwolf.org; \$20-\$99  
Runs through: Nov. 11

BY KERRY REID

Bruce Norris either got the worst or best possible week to open his new show at Steppenwolf, depending on one's point of view.

In *Downstate*, now in a world premiere under Pam MacKinnon's direction, Norris puts four pedophiles in a group home south of Chicago and asks us to view sexual predators as fully dimensional human beings. Provocative? To a point. But unfortunately, Norris' imaginative skills run short when it comes to creating fully dimensional victims of sexual assault.

The first act of *Downstate* (which, at two-and-a-half hours, feels overstuffed and underdeveloped simultaneously) is mostly sharp. Norris, who started out as an actor, knows how to write dialogue that actors love to deliver and the interplay among the men is delicious and often funny.

A visit from the men's parole officer, Ivy (Cecilia Noble) provides the most insight. She sympathizes with the draconian rules under which they must live. She also sympathizes with the fact that they never asked to be born with an attraction to children. Yet she has no patience for their self-pitying excuses and desire to play the victim. (The high recidivism rates for pedophiles gets short shrift overall.)



K. Todd Freeman in *Downstate*.  
Photo by Michael Brosilow

Unfortunately, Norris makes false equivalence between their self-pity and that of the one victim we actually meet. As the play begins, Andy (Tim Hopper), who was molested as a child by the now-disabled Fred (Francis Guinan) is visiting, hoping that Fred will sign a "reconciliation contract" admitting to what he did. As is too often typical in Norris' plays, Andy's wife, Em (Matilda Ziegler), is a parody of a controlling yuppie.

When Andy returns alone in the second act, he becomes even uglier. Norris takes a page from David Mamet's *Oleanna* by suggesting that Andy's desire for confrontation comes from a "group" that he's been a part of, instead of his own need to hear his abuser own up. Hints of "false memory" are sprinkled in, courtesy of K. Todd Freeman's vivacious Dee, who also suggests that the physical abuse he suffered as a kid trumps Andy's sexual assault. And for a soupcon of easy villainy, Norris has Andy talk about how his work as a "financial advisor" is his way of paying back. If you need to create a neon sign reading "BAD PERSON," just make the character a banker. Meantime, there are broad-as-a-barn hints as to where the story is heading.

Treating pedophiles as humans with a sick compulsion who require both legal restraints and the opportunity for redemption isn't necessarily a bad argument. But there is a whiff of self-congratulatory posturing undercutting Norris' work here, along with a mean-spirited mockery of assault victims. Thankfully, Guinan, Freeman, Hopper and Noble in particular find resonances in small quiet moments here and there. But Norris isn't being as daring as he imagines, and lazy dramaturgical shortcuts cause *Downstate* to grow slack by the end.



KJ Whitehead.  
Photo by Lindsay Williams

# KJ Whitehead: A tug of war between laughter, justice

BY ADA CHENG

When KJ Whitehead showed up for this interview in mid-September, they were rocking a more feminine attire and look, wearing a piece of clothing their mother bought for them.

This was a long time coming for their relationship: Their parents were gradually coming to terms with their radical act of shedding vestiges of the so-called appropriate manhood or Black masculinity for that matter, important for their

family full of football players.

This they denounce or want to redefine. Whitehead is forever changing, growing and evolving—in person, in appearance, and in the standup comedy they have been doing since September 2013.

As the queen of radical comedy, Whitehead got into comedy because “I had something to say. I figure the best way to get it out there was to make people laugh while saying it.” But the long answer was because they grew up in the South-

## COMEDY

side watching the original Kings of Comedy like Bernie Mac, Steve Harvey, Cedric The Entertainer, and D.L. Hughley. The presence and the success of these Black comedians was the source of inspiration for them.

Having performed on stage for five years, they want to broaden the scope of standup comedy as well as to challenge and stretch it. They said, “Growing up I realized didn’t really fit as a Black man in my own community. And I found that queer people and trans people were often the butt of the jokes. I never saw them as jokes or myself as a joke. I saw them as people. I figure instead of looking for this representation that I want, which is out there now thankfully, I will be that representation. That’s why lately I have been going about doing radical comedy. I have found a way to take the harsh things I want to say, put it out there, make it a joke and make people laugh.”

For Whitehead, the journey in comedy and in their personal identity can be both tumultuous and revolutionary. With regards to whether comedy was the vehicle to convey the social justice messages they wanted to convey, they stated, “I think comedy may not be the best vehicle, but it is one vehicle. I talk a lot of Brown and Black liberation. Other people can use storytelling or other art forms to convey messages. It may not be the best art form, but I believe it can be one for me.”

They want to re-envision what comedy can be. “The one thing I struggle with is that people come to comedy to escape the trouble outside. However, if the particular performer you are watching is a queer person, a trans person or a trans person of color, they can’t escape that. We are limited by the expectation what comedy should be. I think we will have more fun if we think about what comedy can be,” they stated. Going beyond “what is” has been what Whitehead is striving for.

Whitehead faces challenges navigating in both predominantly White space and predominantly Black space since they often don’t fit in depending on the “norm” of the context. Performing in each sometimes becomes a game of survival in the space in between.

In the predominantly white space, they confront the racism against them as a Black person while

also having to experience the transphobia against them as a trans queer person of color. While in a predominant Black space, a space with which they are familiar, they confront the homophobia and transphobia against them.

The main issue comes from having to justify one’s presence and existence even before one starts the comedy routine. They risk being challenged, not simply based on comedy materials, but based on others’ assumption of their very right to existence.

The art, then, gets pushed to the background because their presence becomes jarring to some people.

Whitehead is no stranger to being attacked on stage, to the point where they don’t know if they want to do stand up comedy or be themselves at all. “It’s like I have to come out multiple times during the set. That’s part of it. One is obviously I am Black. And then I have to explain to the audience why I look like Dennis Rodman. Transgender is different from homosexuality. People aren’t ready for that yet. A lot of folks in the queer community feel that they can’t be racist. Part of being an ally is to know that you can be problematic. And then on the South Side with mostly Black audiences, they don’t often come across people like me. It’s all around,” he stated. It took a long time for their art to be recognized. As Whitehead said, “I am known now. People have seen me. They know me. So they can hear me now. They wouldn’t say anything to me to interrupt me.”

Compromises do have to be made at times for safety concern. They balance their principles with concern for safety, “I put a disclaimer on my website. I am pro Black Lives Matter, pro liberation, pro women, pro trans right, against police brutality. These views are reflected in my materials. Don’t book me if you don’t feel comfortable. Watch my videos. I am willing to work with people.”

Whitehead has been pondering what’s next as they continue to work on their craft. While Chicago is home, the dreams may lie somewhere else. At this point, everything is possible.

Note: This writer met KJ Whitehead the first time they told a story at Am I Man Enough?: A Storytelling/Podcasting Show, one of the storytelling shows I produce, at The Pride Art Center early this year. Check out KJ Whitehead’s work at <http://iamkjwhitehead.net/>.

## SEMI QUEER from page 16

“The people who talked to me as I was writing [Semi Queer] were women, gay men and trans individuals. (Straight) Men wouldn’t talk to me ... They couldn’t understand what I wanted.”

On the subject of financial rewards, queer trucker Shelle Licht spoke about how she had to take her twins, who were two at the time, on her routes because as a single mother that was the only option. She added, “The check we got for welfare was five dollars short of the rent ... So where was I supposed to get money for diapers or food? I knew where, I had to find a way to make it work.”

When a “good neighbor” reported her situation to child-welfare authorities, an agent investigat-

ed and was dumbstruck when Licht asked during her investigation, “If I were a man would we be having this conversation?”

A major focus of the discussion and the book was how things have improved for LGBTIQI individuals in regard to visibility, acceptance and insurance. Balay said, “The culture in the trucking industry can be very dangerous, but the older truckers are retiring and younger people are coming in, and there’s a lot of change going on.”

Answering a question from the audience about social media trans trucker Keaira Finlay, Balay further noted, “It’s a double-edged sword, but it helps an awful lot. With social media you’re never alone ... There’s a lot of crap online, but there’s also an awful lot of support out there as well.”



## THE GLENWOOD

Getting trivial every Thursday.  
Joseph Stevens Photography



# DRAG IT UP!

Our list of all the regular drag shows in and around Chicago. To include your show in our listings, please submit info to [kirk@windycitymediagroup.com](mailto:kirk@windycitymediagroup.com).

### MONDAYS

**Chicago's Best Worst Drag Show**, hosted by Arby Barbie, weekly, 2 a.m., no cover. The Jackhammer Complex, 6406 N. Clark St.

**Vamp**, featuring Mimi Marks, hosted by Mercedes Tyler, weekly, 11 p.m., no cover. Progress Bar, 3359 N. Halsted St.

**Lipstick & Mascara**, hosted by Mz. Ruff 'n Stuff, weekly, 11:30 p.m., no cover. Hydrate, 3458 N. Halsted St.

**Plot Twist**, hosted by T-Rex, every 3rd Monday, 10:30 p.m., Berlin, 954 W. Belmont Ave.

### TUESDAYS

**Killer Babes**, hosted by Lady Ivory, every 3rd Tues., 10 p.m. @mosphere, 5355 N. Clark St.

**Roscoe's Drag Race**, Chicago's longest-running amateur weekly drag competition hosted by Frida Lay, Roscoe's, 3356 N. Halsted St.

**Dixie Wins a Talent Show (while Alexis Bevels stage-manages)**, featuring Dixie Lynn Cartwright and Alexis Bevels, a showcase for local drag queens, performance artists and comedians, last Tues. of the month, 9:30 p.m., Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted St.

### WEDNESDAYS

**Honeys on Halsted**, hosted by Mimi Marks and Mz. Ruff 'n Stuff, weekly, 11:30 p.m., no cover. Hydrate, 3458 N. Halsted St.

**All Things Beyonce**, hosted by Dixie Lynn Cartwright, featuring Dida Ritz, Saya Naomi and guest queens, 2nd or 3rd Wed. of the month, 9 p.m., Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted St.

**The Baton Show Lounge**, shows weekly at 8:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. 436 N. Clark St.

### THURSDAYS

**Babes in Boyland**, featuring Monica Beverly Hillz, Lila Star, Teri Yaki and Otter Chaõs, weekly, 1 a.m., no cover. The Jackhammer Complex, 6406 N. Clark St.

**Sirens of Splash**, featuring Lila Star, Mimi Marks, Aura Mayari and Silky, weekly, 9 p.m., no cover. Splash Chicago, 3339 N. Halsted St.

**POP ROCKS**, dance party with drag from Alexis Bevels and Saya Naomi, get on stage to Win with Dixie Lynn Cartwright, weekly, 9 p.m., Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted St.

**Body Beautiful**, hosted by Danika Bone't and Alexandria Diamond, 4th Thu. of each month, shows at 11:30 p.m., 12:30 a.m. and 1:30 a.m., no cover. Charlie's, 3726 N. Broadway

**The Baton Show Lounge**, shows weekly at 8:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. 436 N. Clark St.

### FRIDAYS

**Beauties and Beaus**, hosted by Naysha Lopez, Mimi Marks and Mz. Ruff 'n Stuff, weekly, 9:30 p.m., no cover. Hydrate, 3458 N. Halsted St.

**Dining With the Divas**, featuring Angel LeBare and CeeCee LaRouge, shows weekly at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m., Hamburger Mary's Oak Park, 155 S. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park, Ill.

**The Baton Show Lounge**, shows weekly at 8:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. 436 N. Clark St.

### SATURDAYS

**Drag Matinee**, hosted by T-Rex, weekly, 10:30 p.m., Berlin, 954 W. Belmont Ave.

**#POPular**, featuring 2018 Fan Favorite Tiffany Diamond, hosted by Veronica Pop, weekly, shows at 10:30 p.m., Charlie's, 3726 N. Broadway

**Beauties and Beaus**, hosted by Naysha Lopez, Mimi Marks and Mz. Ruff 'n Stuff, weekly, 9:30 p.m., no cover. Hydrate, 3458 N. Halsted St.

**Drag shows at Manuevers: 1st Sat.: Raven's Ravishing Revue**, hosted by Raven Samore; 2nd Sat.: **The Dymond Standard**, hosted by Diamond Calloway; 3rd Sat.: **Diva's Den**, hosted by Sasha Love; 4th Sat.: **Noche Latina**, hosted by Aleyna Couture. All shows at 11:30 p.m., no cover. Maneuvers, 118 E. Jefferson St., Joliet

**Stardust**, hosted by Natasha Douglas, 1st Sat. (starting Nov. 2018), 8:30-10:30 p.m. @mosphere, 5355 N. Clark St.

**Sofia's Dragtacular Review**, hosted by Sofia Saffire, every 2nd Sat., 10:30 p.m., Shakers on Clark, 3160 N. Clark St.

**Ashley Morgan Presents A Drag Revue**, featuring Coco Shonnell, Dominique Diamond, Vivian Dejour and Juan M. Wette, hosted by Ashley Morgan, every 3rd Sat., 9:30 p.m. seating, \$5 suggested donation, The Call Bar, 1547 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.

**6 Queens 1 Diva**, hosted by Muffy Fishbasket, every 4rd Sat., 10 p.m., \$5 cover, The Call Bar, 1547 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.

**Dining With the Divas**, featuring Angel LeBare and CeeCee LaRouge, shows weekly at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m., Hamburger Mary's Oak Park, 155 S. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park, Ill.

**The Baton Show Lounge**, shows weekly at 8:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. 436 N. Clark St.

### SUNDAYS

**Reinas de la Casa**, featuring Windy Breeze, Veronica Pop, Zafina Hasheesh and Danika Bone't, hosted by Alexandria Diamond, 2nd Sun. of each month, shows at 11:30 p.m., 12:30 and 1:30 a.m. Charlie's, 3726 N. Broadway

**Angel LeBare's Fish Hatchery**, contest for aspiring drag queens, every 4th Sun., 8 p.m. @mosphere, 5355 N. Clark St.

**The Baton Show Lounge**, shows weekly at 7, 9 and 11 p.m. 436 N. Clark St.



## BILLY Masters

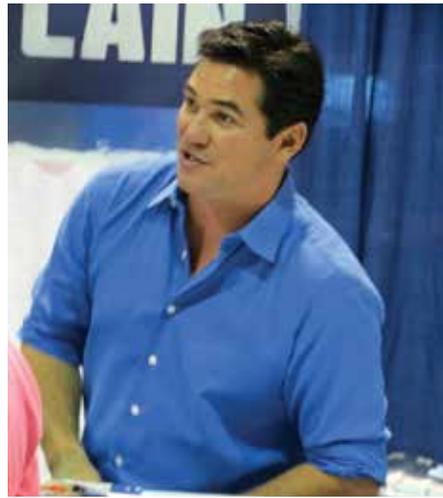
"What do you expect? I'm a Black lesbian."—**Wanda Sykes'** response when asked why she made jokes about Trump at a recent show in New Jersey. More than 1,500 people cheered, while a dozen or so walked out.

If you were wondering if the summer was over, this past week cleared it up. It ended with **Bill Cosby** being carted off to jail. At dinner his first night in the clink, someone threw a hot dog bun at him. Oh, the humanity! And what was dessert? Vanilla pudding! And not even Jell-O, but a knockoff brand. You can't make this shit up.

I'm sure you were all glued to the Kavanaugh hearings. I dunno what really happened, but I have serious doubts about somebody writing what he did in his yearbook and then saying he never blacked out from drinking (100 kegs or bust, my ass). Do you want someone that angry making decisions that affect our lives? I thought he was gonna have an aneurysm on the stand. But let's discuss the gay angle. You may not have heard, but Brett had two roommates at Yale, and one of them was Kit Winter, who is gay. Winter describes Kav and his friends as "loud, obnoxious frat boy-like drunks" and claims that during the year they lived together, they never spoke. That's not to say they didn't have any interaction. Once Winter came home to find a dead pigeon nailed to his bedroom door! Winter said, "I interpreted it as an act of social hostility/terrorism. I thought it was a very clear message. 'We don't like you, and we don't want you here.'" Maybe someone was just letting him know what they were serving in the caf. It was definitely a sign—of what, I'm not sure. I'll have to rewatch The Godfather.

While everyone was focusing on Kavanaugh, news about **Vice President Mike Pence** slipped by. He became the first sitting VP to speak at the Values Voter Summit. That's an event which our current president previously appeared at (four times), sponsored by the Family Research Council, an anti-LGBT group. Pence was trying to motivate Evangelicals to vote during the midterms.

As luck would have it, **Dean Cain** also appeared at the Values Voter Summit to screen his new film Gosnell, in which he plays a detective who puts an abortion doctor in prison (so you can see why this would be appealing to them). However, Cain also considers himself one of our straight allies. He tweeted, "I'm speaking there. And I support gay rights. And I'm pro-choice until viability. End of story." GLAAD jumped in and tweeted, "We know that you've professed your support for LG-BTQ people in the past, so why are you speaking at an event hosted by the anti-LGBTQ activists at @FRCdc?" Cain responded, "I'm discussing a film—and I'm happy to speak to any group. I don't change my beliefs based on the audience. Perhaps it will spark a good conversation." It certainly sparked some good Tweets! I say give Dean a break—his last job was trying to track down Bigfoot!



**Dean Cain had a spirited discussion with GLAAD, Billy says.**

Photo by Jerry Nunn

**Murphy Brown** has been known to tackle a vice president or two. Alas, the reboot of the sitcom had a whiff of desperation, with jokes far below the usual standards of creator **Diane English**. **Candice Bergen's** characteristic wooden delivery seemed positively petrified, but perhaps she'll loosen up a bit as the show meanders along. **Murphy's** son, **Avery**, is all grown up and now being played by the very appealing **Jake McDorman**. But why not use **Haley Joel Osment**, who played Avery as a child? They're about the same age, and Osment has the advantage of being able to see dead people. That would have made interacting with this cast a piece of cake!

Last week, **The Bachelor** made history when two of the female suitors left the competition—with each other! To clarify, this was on the first season of **The Bachelor: Vietnam**. During the rose ceremony, **Quoc Trung** (the Bachelor) eliminated **Minh Thu**. **Thu** said, "I went into this competition to find love, and I've found that love for myself. But it isn't with you, it's with someone else." At that point, she went over and hugged another female contestant's bosom! She told **Truc Nhu**, "Come home with me," at which point **Nhu** gave the Bachelor his rose back and walked off with **Thu**! This lady-loving twist was short-lived. Within minutes, **Nhu** came back and said she changed her mind. You don't have to read the subtitles to figure out who will be eliminated next week!

**Kevin Spacey's** troubles are far from over. He was just sued over a 2016 incident with a masseur (shades of **Travolta**). According to the complaint, "Spacey assaulted and battered plaintiff by forcing plaintiff to touch his scrotum, testicles, and penis, grabbing plaintiff's shoulders and pulling him in for an apparent attempted forced kiss, and grabbing plaintiff's genitalia. During these assaults, plaintiff repeatedly asked Spacey to allow him to leave, but Spacey blocked access to Spacey's massage table and the door with his naked body." There's more to come, I'm sure.

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Henry in Rhode Island: "Did you hear about **Batman's penis** being in the latest comic? I looked online and I couldn't find it—did I miss it?"

Last week, **Batman: Damned #1** was released and created a buzz by including full-frontal nudity—as if a drawing of a penis is a big deal. People scoured the digital edition and found no Bat penis. That's because DC Comics decided to expunge the elusive dick from the online edition, thus making the print version even more valuable. While that's something I applaud, it won't stop me from presenting the prohibited penis on **BillyMasters.com**.

When folks are banning a comic cock, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Isn't it interesting—we had **Batman's** penis and **Superman** speaking to an anti-gay group the same week. If only **Teri Hatcher** would do something relevant. Alas, you won't find her on **BillyMasters.com**—the site that's here each and every week: same Bat time, same Bat website. If you have a question, send it along to **Billy@BillyMasters.com** and I promise to get back to you before we see **Dick Grayson's** Batcave! Until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

# the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in  
WINDY CITY TIMES

## SAVOR Walton Street Kitchen + Bar; Chicago Gourmet

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Maybe it's because I just saw a Chicago Cubs game before writing this review/profile, but Ballyhoo Hospitality Group has hit a home run with new spot **Walton Street Kitchen + Bar/Lounge** (912 N. State St..

Chicago-based, award-winning design group 555 International is behind the interior design of the two-level space—which is a study in contrasts. The atmospheric lounge is a dark (it took a few minutes for my eyes to adapt) spot which makes you feel like you're in a mansion library; the second-floor restaurant is cool, airy and a little bit retro. By the way, if you're lucky enough to sit next to the open windows on a nice day, that enhances the experience even more.

I would return to either one of these spots separately—something I don't think I've ever written about a space. The lounge is the perfect place to wind down after a long day at work—and Jim and Max (the staffers there when I visited) made things even more pleasant by being extremely knowledgeable about the 37 (!) pages



**Amaro sour at Walton Street.**  
Photo by Andrew Davis

of drinks. There's even an introductory drink called the "bartender's handshake," although I absolutely adored the amaro sour I ordered. (My friend also really liked her drink.)

Things even got better upstairs—and for an appetizer, one could hardly do better than ordering the roasted king crab (\$32), a massive meat-filled item that comes with a sambal cocktail glaze, citrus conserva and tobiko (flying fish roe). It's simply divine.

The menu feels familiar, but is diverse—and items are consistently cooked perfectly. Other appetizers include pizza rolls, potato skins, lamb bacon skewers, hamachi crudo and more. Main dishes range from spaghetti and clams, to roasted sunchoke (with white-corn grits), to wild salmon. I had a pork chop with a side of charred cauliflower, and could not have been happier. Also, a shout-out has to go to server Tamsen, who was as helpful as the duo was in the lounge.

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

## Chicago Gourmet marks another successful year

Bon Appetit once again presented **Chicago Gourmet** for the masses in Millennium Park this year Sept. 26-30.

Things kicked off with an Italian Feast on the Symphony Center Stage on Sept. 26. On Sept. 27, at River Roast, a "Blues, Booze & Bites" event was held; Sept. 28 marked the popular Hamburger Hop on the Harris Theater rooftop, feeding the attendees who braved the rain.

Sept. 29 attendees sipped an opening toast with Sam Toia, the president and CEO of the Illinois Restaurant Association, a variety of celebrity chefs and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who spoke of his recent ordinance that allows landlords to rent their spaces for pop-up restaurants.

This year, music was in the air with a "Rock the Fork" theme, music pop-ups and playlists

created especially for the events. The music did not distract from the long lines of sampling on the Millennium Park lawn, especially the Supreme Lobster & Seafood Co.'s usual mob of people craving a taste at its pavilion. Some standouts that were worth the wait were the brisket sandwiches from Old Crow Smokehouse and the sheer variety of samples at the Mexican Tasting Pavilion. To wash it down, there were many wines to try, along with mixed cocktails.

There were live cooking demos, book-signings and many vendor booths to occupy the bustling sold-out crowd on the weekend.

The Gran Cru closed the festivities Sept. 30 at the Harris Theatre rooftop, with more unpredictable weather and excellent food.

Save Sept. 27-29, 2019, for another packed Chicago Gourmet schedule, with information at [ChicagoGourmet.org](http://ChicagoGourmet.org).

—Jerry Nunn



**Chicago Gourmet.**  
Photo by Jerry Nunn



## CHARLIE'S

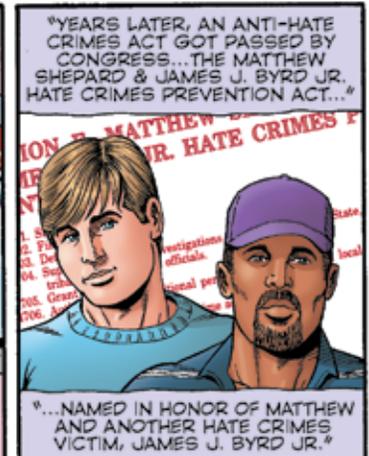
All play is fair play at the Windy City Empire's turnabout show.  
Joseph Stevens Photography



**SIDETRACK**

Dancing queens at release party for Cher's album of ABBA covers.  
Joseph Stevens Photography

**KYLE'S B&B PRESENTS: MATTHEW SHEPARD**  
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# WINDY CITY TIMES COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## Wed., Oct. 3

**1968 DNC Protests exhibit ongoing** Exploring a watershed moment in U.S. politics—the 50th anniversary of the convention protests—with the new virtual-reality experience. From photographs and documents from the Chicago History Museum’s archives to the site of the demonstrations. David Farber, Ph.D., narrates the 14-minute VR tour that can be viewed through YouTube; the Chrome browser; or with Google Cardboard VR glasses. 12:00pm Chicago History Museum 1601 N Clark Chicago <http://chicago00.org/experiences.html#dnc>.

**Two authors in joint reading** Joshua Chambers-Letson and C. Riley Snorton, authors *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* and *Black on Both Sides: A Social History of Trans Identity* 7:00pm Women & Children First, 5233 N Clark St, Chicago, [www.womenandchildrenfirst.com](http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com)

## Thursday, Oct. 4

**Cultural Stigma of LGBTQ Domestic Violence Panel** For Domestic Violence Awareness Month, panel on domestic violence across races, ethnicities, cultures. Co-sponsored by UN Women Chicago Chapter. Panelists Lauren Miller of Youth Programs American Indian Health Service of Chicago and Radhika Sharma, Outreach and Education Apna Ghar. Free 6:00pm - 8:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.centeronhalsted.org/newevents-details.cfm?ID=15499>



## DYNAMIC DUO

Wed., Oct. 3

Authors C. Riley Snorton (above) and Joshua Chambers-Lesson will hold a joint reading at Women & Children First.

Photo by Carrie Maxwell

**American Veterans for Equal Rights monthly meeting** AVER is a non-profit, chapter-based association of active, reserve and veteran servicemembers dedicated to full and equal rights and equitable treatment. This monthly meeting supports the chapters work in outreach and visibility for LGBTQ veterans year round. On Facebook, see AVER Chicago Chapter. 7:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago

**Happy Underground’s Secret Origins: An Improvised Superhero Event** Audiences create new and fantastic heroes and villains with the help of Chicago improvisers, culminating in an epic showdown in the final week of Oct. 26. \$10 10:00pm Otherworld Theatre, 3914 N. Clark St.

<http://www.eventbrite.com/e/secret-origins-an-improvised-superhero-origins-event-tickets-49881639326>

## Friday, Oct. 5

**The Sip online show** Live show every Friday night, three gay men from diverse occupations and life journeys discuss everything from world headline news to pop culture from a Black LGBTQ perspective. 6:00pm - 7:00pm On line <http://goo.gl/pL7wWA>

**Project&’s Pan premieres otherworldly music** Pan Creative Team. Working with young people at Chicago West Community Music Center and youth at The People’s Music School, community collaborators from Chicago creating and performing otherworldly music with Project& Fellow and MacArthur Fellow Claire Chase with Levy Lorenzo’s sound design. Free and open to public, please RSVP 7:00pm - 8:30pm Garfield Park Fieldhouse <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/pan-chicago-premiere-tickets-50133176681?aff=ebdsbdestsearch>

**OPALGA Potluck** Please bring a dish to share and BYOB. All are welcome—members, guests, straight allies, etc. 7:00pm - 10:00pm Private Oak Park home. Contact organizers for location <http://www.facebook.com/events/1244016565740128/>

**Patience & Sarah: A Pioneering Love Story** An artist and a farmer’s daughter meet and fall in love in 1816 and escape mendacity to live freely in an opera directed by Jenn Cox. Through Oct. 31. Third Eye Theatre Ensemble at Theater Wit 7:30pm Theater Wit 1229 W Belmont Ave. Chicago <http://thirdeyete.com/>

**Joan Baez: Fare Thee Well...Tour 2018** Protest and folk music for 60+ years. Farewell tour extended into 2019. 8:00pm The Chicago Theatre (Chicago)

175 N State St Chicago <http://www.msg.com/calendar/the-chicago-theatre-october-2018-joan-baez-fare-thee-well-tour-2018>

## Saturday, Oct. 6

**The Great Amazing Race Chicago-Aurora** Family Friendly Adventure Run/Walk for Adults & Kids modeled after the TV show with two-person teams completing a 1.5-mile XC course speckled a variety of fun-filled challenges. \$49.99 per team 3:00pm Phillips Park, 1000 Ray Moses Dr., Aurora <http://www.GreatAmazingRace.com>

**Original Warrior opening** Explores the complex Native American relationship between warrior and community, warrior and war, and warrior and service, featuring the work of Native American artists: 4:00pm - 7:00pm, [http://www.nvam.org/Module/Event/EventDetail/Upcoming\\_Exhibit:\\_ORIGINAL\\_WARRIOR?id=52&mc\\_cid=2ef3877352&mc\\_eid=6483c94ee9](http://www.nvam.org/Module/Event/EventDetail/Upcoming_Exhibit:_ORIGINAL_WARRIOR?id=52&mc_cid=2ef3877352&mc_eid=6483c94ee9)

**The Artificial Jungle** Mild-mannered wner of a dilapidated pet store is in the way of the life his wife craves. She and a mysterious drifter have to make a plan. Through Oct 28. 7:30pm Box Theatre 1225 W. Belmont Ave Chicago <http://www.handbagproductions.org>

## Tuesday, Oct. 9

**Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop** Managing Work & Life in Academic Careers panel discussion featuring post-doctoral teaching fellow Michael Dango (English), CSRPC fellow Jenn Jackson (Political Science), and Professor Kristen Schilt (Sociology). Light refreshments 5:00pm - 6:30pm First floor seminar room of 5733 S. University Ave <http://voices.uchicago.edu/genderandsexuality/>

**Evening with Eva Schloss, Stepsister**

**of Anne Frank** A story of survival and memories of her stepsister Anne Frank. Chabad Jewish community in Lakeview hosts. \$0 - \$180. 6 p.m. VIP reception 7:00pm Lane Tech <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-historic-evening-with-eva-schloss-stepsister-of-anne-frank-tickets-49864727743>

## Wed., Oct. 10

**Self-defense class for LGBTQs** As a part of its series of events for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Center on Halsted will be hosting 90-minute self-defense classes, taught by IMPACT Chicago, to help empower LGBTQ community ebers to protect themselves in the face of interpersonal violence. 6:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.facebook.com/events/1106911946126486/>

**Author Robert Fieseler** discusses his new book *Tinderbox: The Untold Story of the Up Stairs Lounge Fire and the Rise of Gay Liberation*. Fieseler will engage in conversation about the book with Owen Keehnen. 7 pm Unabridged Books, 3251 N Broadway, [www.unabridgedbookstore.com](http://www.unabridgedbookstore.com)

## Thursday, Oct. 11

**It’s Only a Play By Terrence McNally** Comedy set behind the scenes of a Broadway, celebrities pouring in and insiders upstairs in the bedroom await the reviews. Through Nov. 11 8:00pm The Broadway, Pride Arts Center, 4139 N. Broadway 866-811-4111 <http://www.pridefilmsandplays.com>

**Athleisure Underwear Collection** Richard Dayhoff, celebrity catwalk and local designers. Latino Fashion Week Chicago. Reception 7 p.m. 8:00pm , <http://www.latinofashionwk.com/>



# ARTS+THEATER WEEKLY



[artsandtheaterweekly.com](http://artsandtheaterweekly.com)

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