

**ENTERTAINING THE GUESTS**  
**WITH OUR SUGGESTED THANKSGIVING ACTIVITIES**

Sam Massey, Nicole  
Frydman and Michael  
Idalski in *The Book of  
Merman*.  
Photo by Christopher  
Semel





# ARTS+THEATER

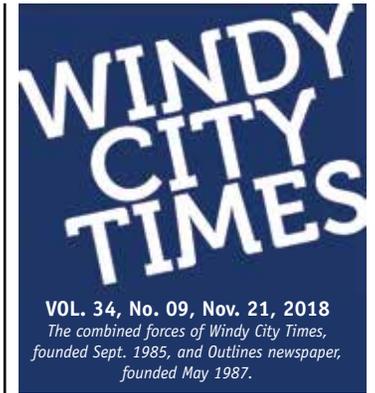
WEEKLY

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**PUBLISHER** Terri Klinsky

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR** Andrew Davis

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**NATIONAL SALES** Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863  
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**DISTRIBUTION** Ashina, Allan, Dan, John, Sue and Victor  
**WEB HOSTING** LoveYourWebsite.com (Lead programmer: Martie Marro)  
**PRESIDENT** Tracy Baim  
 (773) 871-7610 FAX (773) 871-7609  
**Editorial:** andrew@windycitymediagroup.com  
**Sales:** terri@windycitymediagroup.com  
**Calendar:** calendar@windycitymediagroup.com  
**Circulation:** jean@windycitymediagroup.com  
**Art/ad copy:** kirk@windycitymediagroup.com  
**Theater:** cateysullivan25@gmail.com

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A photograph of two women in a medical setting, overlaid with a red tint. One woman is standing and adjusting the shoulder of a patterned dress worn by a seated woman. Medical equipment is visible in the background.

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## THEATER REVIEW

## Rightlynd

Playwright: Ike Holter  
 At: Victory Gardens Theater,  
 2433 N. Lincoln Ave.  
 Tickets: 773-871-3000;  
 VictoryGardens.org; \$27-\$55  
 Runs through: Dec. 23

BY KERRY REID

Meet Nina Esposito. She's just taken on a long-time alderman and won a seat in City Council by one vote. She's eager to stop the forces of rapacious gentrification and official social neglect that have led to school closings and unchecked crime in Chicago's 51st Ward, a.k.a. Rightlynd. She's fired up and ready to go.

Good luck with that.

Ike Holter's latest play bears the name of his fictional neighborhood, and is designed to be the first chronologically in his "Chicago cycle," which has already included acclaimed titles such as *Exit Strategy* and *The Wolf at the End of the Block*.



Monica Orozco and Sasha Smith in *Rightlynd*.  
 Photo by Liz Lauren

In *Esposito*, he's created a character who feels like a cunning blend of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Tommy Carcetti, the "reform" mayor from the

HBO series *The Wire*, who finds himself sucked in by the same forces he campaigned against.

Rightlynd's biggest enemy is the Applewood Foundation (embodied by the oily rep played by Jerome Beck), which has been landing "urban renewal" deals throughout Chicago and pushing out small businesses. But as Monica Orozco's Nina quickly finds out, campaigning in poetry and then trying to govern in prose means disappointing your constituents—even if you're not making side deals with drug dealers.

Director Lisa Portes nimbly handles all the narrative devices Holter uses to create this tough, funny, scabrous and sorrowful world. These include dance sequences, comic asides (Robert Cornelius as Robinson, the plainspoken owner of a Rightlynd auto-repair shop, gets a lot of zingers), and even a terrific street-fight sequence (created by violence director Jaq Seifert) that goes from exhilarating to horrifying.

That tension between comic absurdity and grim reality doesn't always gel successfully here. In particular, the central relationship between Nina and ex-con Pac (Eddie Martinez) feels like it could use some more fire and pushback from Pac,

who more than anyone else we meet here has suffered from the callousness and injustice of the status quo.

The alderwoman wins trust easily, including that of Benny (Anish Jethmalani), a reporter for the *Daily News*. (Jethmalani, at times, seems to be channeling the mix of cynicism and hope embodied by the *Daily News*' most famous columnist, Mike Royko.) But Nina herself doesn't always feel like someone deserving of that trust. She has passion, to be sure. But we don't see enough of her own roots in the community, other than her loyalty to her late mother's long-closed corner shop and her on-the-verge-of-being-closed old high school. What exactly is her base? What is her coalition? I don't think Holter is going for docu-realism here as much as allegory. Yet when Nina cries out late in the play about the community not supporting her, it's hard not to wonder "Who do you think your community is, exactly?"

Then again, that might be the cogent point Holter is making—and that political outsiders learn over and over. Winning isn't the hard part. Staying in power without losing sight of your goals is.

## THEATER REVIEW

## The Safe House

Playwright: Kristine Thatcher  
 At: City Lit Theatre at Edgewater  
 Presbyterian Church, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.  
 Tickets: CityLit.org; \$32  
 Runs through: Dec. 16

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

There's this house, you see—a modest mid-20th-century family-sized dwelling in Lansing, Michigan. The ambience is a study in Norman Rockwell warmth and tranquility, with a laundry room in

the basement, a garden by the kitchen door and a grandmother who grows vegetables that she cooks into hearty stews (recipe in the playbill).

To be sure, grandma Hannah has been experiencing occasional lapses of memory, but refuses the advice of her son Mathius, who wants her to relocate to a "retirement center" so he can sell the property to pay his brother and sister-in-law's medical bills. Complicating matters further is the recent return of Hannah's granddaughter/Mathius' niece Bridget, an aspiring artist and soon-to-be divorcee who champions Hannah's wish to remain independent, even it means taking a temporary hiatus from her career.

The reluctance of the old to make way for the young has been a theme in literature since antiq-

uity, but don't be lulled into complacency by a premise nowadays undergoing a revival, spurred by the aging of the boom-generation population. So absorbing is the smartly articulated conflict between the intractable Hannah and the overprotective Mathius that not until late in the story do we consider the motive behind Bridget's craving for the sanctuary offered by childhood refuges and nurturing elders.

A play progressing in linear real-time, its exposition integrated deftly into dialogue uttered by characters of uniform Northern European-ancestry who eventually arrive at a satisfactory resolution to their problems, may seem quaint in an age when fourth wall-breaking monologues and mosaic narratives gobble up the big awards. Chicago

playwright Kristine Thatcher knows her audiences too well, however, to discount the value of a "well-made" play—especially when constructed around a showcase role for a female actor of, um, advanced years.

Doing the honors in this world premiere production at City Lit is the always-captivating marsee Mencotti as the formidable Hannah (whose charms encompass a backstory of immigrant survival and an impromptu song-and-dance just prior to intermission). She is flanked by Paul Chakrin and Kat Evans as the kin whose selfless resilience is the factor elevating Ray Toler's cozy Midwestern hearth above simple nostalgic scenic design into the kind of home we wish had been ours.

## THEATER REVIEW

## Plainclothes

Playwright: Spenser Davis  
 At: Broken Nose Theatre @  
 The Den, 1331 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
 Tickets: BrokenNoseTheatre.com;  
 pay-what-you-can  
 Runs through: Dec. 15

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

Plainclothes is a comedy with a message, although the message is uncertain as audiences may draw interpretations unintended, I suspect, by author Spenser Davis. Baby Boomers (me) may see Plainclothes as a statement about irresponsible, immature millennials, since the play's lead characters are perpetually squabbling, self-interested and distrustful. Closer to the mark, yet perhaps not intended, this world premiere appears to concern crypto-fascism by faceless corporate bureaucracy in Trumpian America.

The story, however, is about several mostly-young department store employees working in

poor conditions to catch shoplifters. They wear street clothes to blend in with customers. Like a fictional movie platoon, there's one of everything: white guy, Asian woman, Latinx guy (well, Hispanic Cuban) and a Black-identifying mixed-race woman along with other store employees, uniformed guards and perps. White supervisor Bobby (Adam Soule) bends over backwards to avoid racist behavior although others manipulate race cards, but when Bobby is promoted, Asian T (Stephanie Shum) is certain it's at the expense of mixed-race Karina (Carmen Molina). Eventually T chooses to confront unseen store bureaucracy which triggers a catastrophe for nearly everyone. But not right away. T—who is excitable verging on out-of-control—is complicit in a significant cover-up by the security team. Her sudden attack of ethics months later seems motivated by her war with store management, but clearly connects to her views on workplace racism and Bobby.

For all that, Plainclothes turns serious only late in the game. The cover-up isn't revealed until Act II and the precipitating incident—occurring offstage early in Act I—receives no more emphasis than anything else, such as introducing a serial shoplifter nicknamed Booty

Shorts (personable Ben F. Locke) for his provocative dress. Most of Act I plays like sitcom with comic riffs about/between the characters, who engage us as personalities or types rather than real people. Co-directors Kanome Jones and Davis keep it energetic, fast and funny, with pop culture references whizzing by which I didn't get but younger audience members did. Alejandro Tey (the Cubano) and Rob Frankel (store exec Jim) are excellent supporting actors in a capable ensemble.

Davis clearly has writing and directing chops—he sets up situations well, understands pacing and writes good dialogue—but Plainclothes would be stronger performed in one act with more emphasis earlier on the cover-up, which now comes arbitrarily out of left field. Also, characters must say each other's names early and often—Playwriting 101—since the program doesn't list them in order of appearance. Finally, a subplot between Booty Shorts and Mary, an older store employee (astutely performed by RjW Mays), is extremely effective but unconnected to the plot (although it has to do with racism). Can it be made intrinsic to plot?

## CRITICS' PICKS

**Women in Magic** at Chicago Magic Lounge, Nov. 29-Dec. 1. Female magicians are rare, but for one weekend, Ladies of Legerdemain Alba, Jade and Lucy Darling headline the shows in the swanky Andersonville speakeasy. MSB

**Women of Soul**, Black Ensemble, through Jan. 27. Even if you can't define "Soul," you'll know how to recognize it by the time this musical revue finishes paying homage to a pantheon of star vocalists spanning half a century. MSB

**Gypsy**, Porchlight Music Theatre, through Dec. 29. E. Faye Butler is ferocious yet tender in this exceptional production of a legendary musical. Butler was born to play Mama Rose. JA

**Neverland**, Prop Thtr, through Dec. 2; Peter Pan, Bros Do Prose at the Mercury Theater, through Dec. 23. You've got two Peter Pan options this month, with Prop and Bros Do Prose both telling the story of the boy who refused to grow up. If you're a J.M. Barrie aficionado, this is your season. CES

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Sullivan

## THEATER REVIEW

**The Nutcracker**

By: Jake Minton, Phillip Klapperich, Kevin O'Donnell, and Tommy Rapley

At: The House Theatre of Chicago, 1543 W. Division St.,

Tickets: [TheHouseTheatre.com](http://TheHouseTheatre.com); \$20-\$50

Runs through: Dec. 30

BY AMELIA OROZCO

This holiday season, as usual, there are plenty of Nutcracker productions in town.

Thankfully, a Chicago tradition stands strong and stands out at The House Theatre of Chicago. Tommy Rapley's direction and choreography adds a freshness to The Nutcracker and the Mouse, the original story by E.T.A. Hoffman of hopes, dreams and magic. Rapley's The Nutcracker is not a ballet, but a celebration of family and friends amidst grief and sorrow, wrapped and ready to deliver through song and dance.

Part of the experience of this show is seen upon arrival at the venue. A milieu of people in costume are seen talking, laughing and dancing pre-show and during intermission. It has a SNL afterglow feel as the actors interact and mingle with guests who will take their seats just a few steps away, some at floor level. The stage is at center ring and the entire room is a living stage as some action takes place on the walls and spaces behind the seats. In a swirl of dancing and song, theatergoers experience the story up close and personal in this inviting and interactive space of



Haley Bolithon and rats in *The Nutcracker*.

Photo by Michael Brosilow

The House Theatre. The players draw people in with eye contact and in-your-face interactions that tug at the heart.

This adaptation—by Minton, Klapperich, O'Donnell and Rapley—quickly enraptures with an opening Christmas party scene filled with anticipation and joy and then, just as fast, turns into the grim realities of death and loss. This is a brave undertaking by both the creators and actors as they are seamlessly moving from one scene to the next, a wardrobe change at a time and most treacherously of all, from smiles to tears. They are successful at it with all nimbleness of body and mind, bringing light to an otherwise dark tale.

There are many examples of this duality throughout the play. Take, for example, Clara (Haley Bolithon), an endearing child who is seen jumping with glee one moment and literally dropping to the floor the next, as she mourns the loss of her brother, Fritz (Desmond Gray). But her

young heart trusts her Uncle Drosselmeyer (Rom Barkhordar) when he tells her that magic is real when the nutcracker doll he gifts her comes to life as her beloved brother, Fritz.

These imaginings are to the dismay of her grieving folks, David (Nicholas Bailey) and mom, Martha (Amanda de la Guardia) who reject any mention of the life and loss of their son Fritz, who died while serving in the military. Amidst this heavy dialogue, Bailey, de la Guardia and Barkhordar also double as the seedy rat crew, with English accents to boot. Each time, the actors return to their main roles and characters of uncle, mom and dad completely unsullied.

Music, lighting and larger-than-life rat puppets help in illustrating all of these points and it's done in a way that makes so much sense to the imaginative mind of a child. Deep darkness and low notes crescendo into emotional turmoil and turn back into Christmas magic that sweeps in

with prop snow in flurries all around. This, by the way, was a playground of sorts at intermission enjoyed by all.

This Nutcracker is more than about toys that come to life to fight off grumpy rats—it's about cherishing loved ones and celebrating their lives, whether present or not. Clara and her family had lost a loved one and, yet, they still possessed all the elements to create a perfect Christmas but it was difficult to imagine it through their tears. It took the innocence and valor of a little girl to go into the dark places of the heart to battle these fears and finally break the family free from their sorrow, allowing them to once again celebrate with a renewed joy.

A wonderful gift that should also become a yearly tradition for families, The House Theatre of Chicago's Nutcracker will touch the most crotchety to the most sensible member of your family.

## SPOTLIGHT

With *Twelfth Night*, Writers Theatre takes one of Shakespeare's most conflicted comedies and instills it with warmth, wit and emotional clarity. The story launches with a shipwreck and closes snowfall. In between, there are lovers, liars and fools who make the language sing, even when it's weeping. Performances run through Dec. 16 at Writers Theatre, 325 Tudor Court, Glencoe. Tickets are \$35-\$80; visit [WritersTheatre.org](http://WritersTheatre.org).



Photo by Michael Brosilow

# STEPPENWOLF FAMILIAR

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By  
playwright  
Danai Gurira of  
*Black Panther*  
fame





Shawn Goudie, Camille Robinson and Brandon Dahlquist in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago*. Photo by Johnny Knight

## Entertaining the guests: Thanksgiving activities

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Suburban and rural households are seldom dismayed at the prospect of family gatherings. For city dwellers in small apartments, however, multiple-generation reunions often lead to claustrophobic stress. Downtown events are typically swarming with hotel visitors and oversized automobiles, so why not minimize the long waits and the scimmages by entertaining guests—parents, in-laws, siblings, nieces and nephews—away from the tourist districts?

### Non-holiday plays:

—**Blue Man Group:** In the nearly three decades since the enigmatic ceruleans with the squirting vests and splashy drums descended on our city, new generations continue to delight in their unique brand of mischievous spectacle. Four performances daily on Nov. 23-24 and two on Nov. 25 at the Briar Street Theater, 3133 N. Halsted St. Info: [Blueman.com](http://Blueman.com)

—**Women of Soul:** Black Ensemble's musical revue showcases nine powerhouse vocalists paying homage to a glittering pantheon of icons from Mavis Staples to Aretha Franklin. Evening performances Nov. 23-24 and afternoon Nov. 25 at the Black Ensemble Theater, 4450 N. Clark St. Info: [BlackEnsembletheater.org](http://BlackEnsembletheater.org) 773-769-4451

—**Chicago Magic Lounge:** The secret-code entry of this speakeasy-style club (don't be fooled by the washing machines) leads to three swanky rooms hosting a diverse array of close-up magicians. Two shows nightly on Nov. 23-24. All-ages no-alcohol show on Sunday Nov. 25. Info: [ChicagoMagicLounge.com](http://ChicagoMagicLounge.com) 312-366-4500

—**Bonus Round Game Cafe:** Not a theater, but a coffee lounge on the border of Boystown/Wrigleyville with a bazillion kindsa board games for rent and on-site tutors to instruct newbies in how to play them. (Recommended by students at Loyola and DePaul.) Open 11 am-midnight at 3230 N. Clark St. Info: [BonusRoundCafe.com](http://BonusRoundCafe.com) 773-857-7037

### Getting into the holiday spirit:

—**Amahl and the Night Visitors:** Chicago Chamber Opera (assisted by the Ensemble Espanol Dance Company) presents Gian-Carlo Menotti's fable of the three kings bound for Bethlehem and the humble family they meet on their journey. Performances Nov. 24-25 at the Athenaeum, 2936 N. Southport Ave. Info: [ChamberOperaChicago.org](http://ChamberOperaChicago.org) 773-935-6875

—**It's A Wonderful Life:** Live In Chicago: This live-action adaptation of the Frank Capra film classic is framed in an old-time radio broadcast by American Blues Theater. Performances Nov. 23-25 at Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave. Info: [AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com) 773-327-5252

[AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com) 773-327-5252

—**Christmas Bingo:** It's A Ho-Ho-Holiday: The folks who brought you the long-running Late Nite Catechism replicate an interactive game event with a bar, prizes and lots of Yuletide trivia. Performances Nov. 23-25 at the Royal George Theatre, 1641 N. Halsted St. Info: [RoyalGeorgeTheatre.com](http://RoyalGeorgeTheatre.com) 312-988-9000.

—**The Nutcracker:** Not the toe-shoes and tutus version, but House Theatre's heartwarming tale of brave toys, evil rats and a family finding solace in a dark time. Performances 23-25 at Chopin Theater, 1543 W. Division St. Info: [TheHouseTheatre.com](http://TheHouseTheatre.com) 773-769-3832

### Just for grown-ups:

—**The Book of Merman:** Flying Elephant Pro-



**Amahl and the Night Visitor.**

Photo by Lisa Howe-Ebright Photography

ductions spoofs the gloriously vulgar Parker-Stone-Lopez musical while serving up a roster of Ethel Merman's greatest hits, delivered by Nicole Frydman as the immortal Broadway diva, herself. Performances Nov. 24-25 at Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave. Info: [FlyingElephantProductions.com](http://FlyingElephantProductions.com) 773-327-5252

—**SnowGirls-The Musical:** The ribald camp-dragsters of Hell In A Handbag Productions embark on a parody of the 1995 Hollywood sleazeflick with the saga of a pole dancer at the North Pole. Performances Nov. 24-25 at Mary's Attic, 5400 N. Clark St. Info: [HandbagProductions.org](http://HandbagProductions.org) 800-838-3006

### Hanging out on the big day itself:

—**Lincoln Park Zoo** boasts that it stays open every day of the year. Be thankful with the animals from 10 am to 5 pm at 2001 N. Clark St (Lake Shore Drive at Fullerton Parkway). Info: [LPzoo.org](http://LPzoo.org) 312-742-2000

—**Winterland Rink at Wrigley Field.** Marvel at the grandeur of the friendly confines (without the crowds) or rent ice skates for a spin on an artificial pond in the adjoining plaza at 3637 N. Clark St. Info: [GallagherWay.com](http://GallagherWay.com) 773-388-8260

—**Lincoln Park Conservatory** is an indoor museum displaying exotic vegetation of every description at 2391 N. Stockton Drive. Info: [ChicagoParkDistrict.com/parks-facilities/LincolnPark-Conservatory](http://ChicagoParkDistrict.com/parks-facilities/LincolnPark-Conservatory)

—**Oz Park** at 2021 N. Burling St. features open-air sculptures of beloved characters from the L. Frank Baum/Wicked series. Info: [ChicagoParkDistrict.com/parks-facilities/OzPark](http://ChicagoParkDistrict.com/parks-facilities/OzPark).

For those who want to stroll in a green space close by, Chicago's Park District website ([ChicagoParkDistrict.com](http://ChicagoParkDistrict.com)) offers a comprehensive guide to its locations citywide. People can also rent Divvy bikes and work up appetites for pumpkin pie with a ride around neighborhoods.

Sam Massey, Nicole Frydman and Michael Idalski in *The Book of Merman*.

Photo by Christopher Semel





Devon Nimerfroh and Jacqueline Grandt in *Ghosts*.  
Photo by Gracie Meier

## THEATER REVIEW

### Ghosts

Playwright: Henrik Ibsen  
At: Redtwist Theatre, 1044 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.  
Tickets: Redtwist.org 773-728-7529; \$35-\$40  
Runs through: Dec. 10

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Over a century ago, Henrik Ibsen declared Victorian morality—to women, especially. Ever since, allegedly enlightened societies have continued to hide behind equivocation, speculation and flat-out denial in their attempts to rein in the vehemence of his diatribe on the folly of blind obedience to rigidly inhumane convention.

We meet the widow Alving on an auspicious occasion: tomorrow is the dedication ceremony of the orphanage that will serve as the late Captain Alving's legacy, the residue of his estate going toward its operations under the administration of their church leader, Pastor Manders. More welcome to Helene Alving, however, is the return of her long-absent son Oswald from his pursuit of an artistic career in Paris. Little does the devoted mother and wife suspect that this reunion will precipitate the undoing of all her plans, not to mention exposing the futility of her sacrifices on their behalf.

Erin Murray's premiere adaptation mostly adheres to the original text, with a few slight emendations—starting with Mrs. Alving addressed by her given name, Helen. Our locale is designated “an island” in the playbill, and the actors speak without accents (except for Manders' tendency to orate even in casual conversation), but the casting of African-American actors as housemaid Regina and tradesmen Jacob, coupled with reference indicating a maritime-based economy, hint at a colonial-governed outpost.

Playgoers versed in the play's many translations will also note a number of modern motifs inserted by the author/director—some intensifying the anger lying beneath the characters' regrets, but others inadvertently diluting the extent to which they can be held individually accountable for their misdeeds. (Helen's deceased husband, for example, is now represented as a likewise frustrated victim of his own robust appetites instead of a hard-drinking philanderer well-deserving of a memorial founded on criminal activities.)

The cast assembled for this intimate Redtwist production strive mightily to overcome the shortcomings of Murray's as-yet-incomplete framing concept. Jacqueline Grandt navigates Ibsen's literary syntax with virtuoso skill to deliver a delicately nuanced performance as the remorseful Helen Alving, as does Sophie Hoyt as the pragmatic Regina and Lionel Gentle as her wily sire. Ultimately, though, their brave efforts cannot dispel a curiously flattened dramatic tone leading us to wonder what all the fuss was about in 1882.



Jamie Shriner in  
*Wife Material*.  
Photo by Evan  
Hanover

## THEATER REVIEW

### Wife Material

By: Jamie Shriner  
At: The Understudy, 4609 N. Clark St.  
Tickets: UnderscoreTheatre.org; \$20-\$25  
Runs through: Dec. 9

BY SARAH KATHERINE BOWDEN

Jamie Shriner is defiant in sharing her private life onstage.

Her musical *Wife Material*, produced by Underscore Theatre Company and playing at the company's Understudy space, unfurls Shriner's sexual history and romantic woes for the audience, giving her the chance to decide whether or not she has it in her to be the kind of uncomplicated, domesticated wife society expects of her. If the musical does not quite justify its need for the audience to watch her work through that problem, it does provide laughs and a few entertaining songs that had people cheering the night I attended.

This production was adapted from Shriner's one-woman show, which also addressed her love of sex, her bisexuality and her restriction by a patriarchal society that requires her either to be an angel or a whore. She smartly expands the cast to include Caitlin Dobbins and Natalie Rae, playing Angie and Luci, the angel and devil on the shoulder who take on the traits of all the men and women with whom Shriner shares her time. Director Dana Anderson shapes the performance around the changing physicalities of Dobbins and Rae, and the results lead to wonderful sight gags involving Satan and Jesus arriving on the scene, as well as each performer accurately transitioning into the slouches of an angsty teen musician and the predatory leans of cat-callers. Anderson moves Shriner around Nicholas Schwartz's small bar set as if she is a singer at a cocktail lounge, and that attitude and confidence helps keep the audience involved, even when the musical's narrative becomes hard to invest in.

Shriner's “teen with a reputation” years in Indiana, and her messier adult years in Chicago, should make for a relatable experience. There were tons of laughs of recognition or groans of sympathy throughout the performance. But there are so many vignettes packed into this hour and a half show that parsing what matters and what might be a one-off joke is difficult. Shriner's fierceness in sharing ugly moments, hypocrisy, toxic masculinity, and sexual longing is admirable. But none of the relationships we see her engage in have enough time onstage for the viewer to care whether or not Jamie finds answers within them. So it begins to feel as if we are watching a therapy workout, rather than a narrative collaboration between audience and actor.

That said, Shriner's music is delightful, with her girl group/power ballad sound mixing well with lyrics that touch on contemporary hookups and self-love in surprising and funny ways. And music director Kyra Leigh brings energy to the band that adds life to the performance. If *Wife Material* doesn't say anything new about the power of identity and sexuality, at least it leaves people humming a tune.

# CULTURE CLUB

HELL IN A HANDBAG PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF

# SNOWGIRLS

## THE MUSICAL

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# Sukie de la Croix weaves real-life 'Fairy Tale'

BY OWEN KEEHNEN

Sukie de la Croix made such an indelible mark on Chicago's LGBTQ scene when he lived in the Windy City from 1991-2014 that the Chicago Sun-Times proclaimed him "The Gay Studs Terkel."

During his time here, de la Croix authored the award-winning book *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBT Chicago Before Stonewall* and wrote the popular *Chicago Whispers* column in *Windy City Times*. He wrote for numerous other papers as well, including *Outlines*, *Chicago Now* and *Chicago Free Press*. His popular history blog, *Bitter Old Queen*, was published on the Chicago Tribune Media Group's website, *Chicago Now*. His colorful LGBT history anecdotes and engaging personality merged when he scripted and conducted the Chicago Lesbian and Gay Tour for Chicago Neighborhood Tours, a division of Chicago's municipal tourism authority. In addition to being a popular speaker on LGBTQ history, de la Croix has had two plays adapted for the stage and was inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame in 2012.

Since moving to Palm Springs in 2014, de la Croix has remained busy. In addition to maintaining his strong queer presence on social media, de la Croix last year released a novel set in 1924 Chicago, *The Blue Spong and the Flight from Mediocrity*. Last month, de la Croix released his latest work, *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist: A Very British Fairy Tale*, a fantastical tale of his impoverished childhood in Bath, England and the first part of the story about how Darryl Michael Vincent eventually became St. Sukie de la Croix.

**Windy City Times: What did you want to capture with *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist*, the fantastical story of your boyhood in Bath, England?**

Sukie de la Croix: I've never been a Grateful Dead fan. Their music reminds me of a bewildered old man wandering the streets with his fly open, trying to remember where he lives. However, having said that, Jerry Garcia said one good thing. He said, "What a long, strange trip it's been." Life is strange. I may now be living in a four-bedroom house in Palm Springs, but I came from intense poverty. After World War II, Britain was devastated, and I grew up in its wake. Bomb sites, ration books, damaged people—all figured in my childhood.

With *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist*, my initial intention was to write a novel about a little sissy boy growing up in post-World War II Britain. I soon realized I was writing about my own childhood. I've never dwelled on the past before, but this book started to pour out of me. A floodgate opened. I just let it go. My attitude was, "Let's see what happens with this." What emerged was the story of an outcast. A boy who escaped into children's adventure books, then ran away to join the circus.

## BOOKS

I'm at a point in my life where I've given myself permission to look back and ponder.

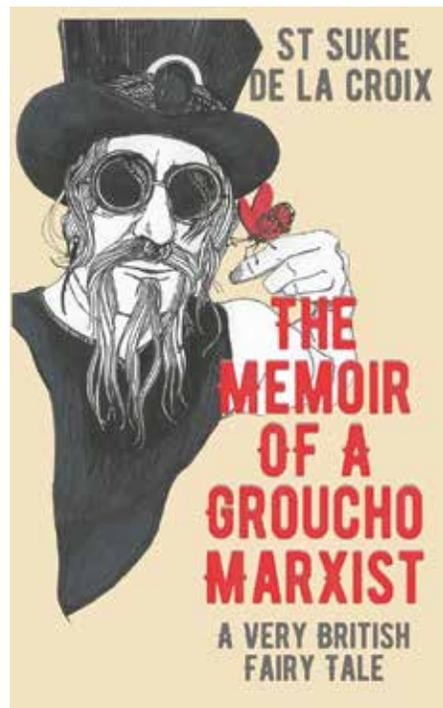
**WCT: If you were to give me a recipe of your childhood, what would the ingredients and proportions be?**

SdlC: My childhood certainly wasn't a gourmet meal with specific proportions. It was a big old pot where anything around me was thrown in. Ingredients included chaos, insanity, isolation, socialism, Buddy Holly, I Love Lucy, children's storybooks, steam trains, butterflies, art, love, Russian spies and the wisdom of the fairies.

**WCT: How do you explain Darryl Michael Vincent becoming St. Sukie de la Croix?**

SdlC: Our birth names are only temporary. They come from our parents. Mine named me after Darryl F. Zanuck, the film producer. However, as I explain in *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist*, I was not really born of woman. I emerged from a badger hole in Midford Woods. Growing up, it soon became clear to me that sissy boys were not welcome in "their" society, so I set off in search of a world where I belonged. That's what LGBT people do, isn't it? Not only LGBT people, but all outcasts. That's our journey and our destiny. In the same way that everyone should have a drag name, we should all have a fairy name as well. St. Sukie de la Croix is my fairy name.

**WCT: Fairies and the spirits of Virginia Woolf, Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde, and others visit and advise you in the book.**



**What's the best advice you've ever been given?**

SdlC: Never disrespect a guinea pig and never take advice from humans.

**WCT: If they visited and spoke to you in Bath, whose spirit spoke to you and advised you during your Chicago years?**

SdlC: For me to write I have to separate myself from what most people call the "real world." I observe it and report what I see. Other people's opinions are irrelevant to me. I get my advice from a more-trusted source. I absorb the wisdom of those who have passed from this earth. Dead people have no agenda.

In the *Introduction to Chicago Whispers: The History of LGBT Before Stonewall*, I wrote: "If you stand on a corner in Chicago and close your eyes, you can hear the past: the rat-tat-tat of Al Capone's machine guns, the Haymarket Rioters, and the screams of the passengers on the SS Eastland capsizing into the Chicago River in 1915. Stand on the corner long enough, peel away those cries from the past like the layers of an onion, and underneath you will hear the whispering of ghosts as they tell their untold stories. These voices belong to lesbians and gay men locked in the closet of Chicago's past. Men and women who lead double lives, lying to the world by day, then turning up their collars to hide their frightened faces as they dart down litter-strewn alleys into unmarked bars at night."

Those are the voices I listened to in Chicago. I listened and wrote that book.

**WCT: I love that. You wrote Chicago Whispers, you have done columns for years on Chicago social history, given numerous tours, etc. What spot, or two, in Chicago should every LGBTQ Chicagoan know about and celebrate as part of our local history?**

SdlC: Henry Gerber, who started the first gay-rights organization in the U.S., lived at 1710 N. Crilly Ct., so that's worth a visit. Also, a mostly gay African-American jazz joint called the Kitty Kat Club at 611 E. 63rd St. It's an empty lot now, but you can feel the history there. I'd also suggest a visit to Bobby Love's, the location of the earliest gay Lake View bar I can find. It was the Inbetween circa 1972, run by a woman, and then it became Augie's, a lesbian bar, the following year. It was two years later that a men's gay bar opened in Lakeview.

**WCT: As a queer historian, what era would you most like to have lived in, and why?**

SdlC: [In the] 1940s, [at] a gay-friendly jazz

joint in Chicago with a drag show called Joe's Deluxe. Why? Who wouldn't want to go see that?

**WCT: As someone with a strong Internet presence, do you consider social media a god-send or a scourge?**

SdlC: Well, it's obviously both. It's like all drugs; some people can pace themselves and others overindulge.

**WCT: Tell me about life in Palm Springs. What is a typical day like in the life of St. Sukie de la Croix?**

SdlC: I'm an early bird. Up between 3-4 a.m. usually. Most days I drive to a gym in Palm Springs, lift weights and work out for an hour. Home, it's breakfast, often sitting outside in the garden. Then I start work in my office. I try to take a break at lunchtime, which is coffee or lunch with friends. I continue working until I'm too tired.

Then I sit outside, make notes, doze off, drink chocolate milk, swim in the pool, read books, make more notes, etc. I'm cutting back on eating out, so I cook, or mostly my husband cooks, dinner. Evenings it's a gallery opening, a movie, a play, TV etc. I always use marijuana in the evenings. I'm stoned by 8 p.m. I lead a very quiet life. I don't drink alcohol anymore, so I only go to a bar once a week. On Sunday afternoon, to a leather bar called the Barracks.

**WCT: Palm Springs must be agreeing with you because you are in an amazingly productive phase. What other projects do you have coming?**

SdlC: Several. I'm putting the finishing touches to *Out of the Underground: Homosexuals, the Radical Press, and the Rise and Fall of the Gay Liberation Front*. That's been a major project. Local artist Curt Miller did the artwork for the cover. That should be published in the New Year. The next book is *St. Sukie's Strange Garden of Woodland Creatures*, a collection of short stories being illustrated by Roy Alton Wald, another local artist here in Cathedral City. The next book is under wraps, but it's a collaborative effort called *Tell Me About It*. I've also completed the next installment of *Chicago Whispers*, but it needs a lot of work.

**WCT: What's been behind your sudden surge of productivity?**

SdlC: I started *Rattling Good Yarns Press*. I wanted control over my own work, covers of the books, etc. Now I'm the literary dominatrix.

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# 10 questions with Vic

Gerami headshot by Stephen Blaha

BY VIC GERAMI

Often, it isn't until after a long time has passed that people fully appreciate and acknowledge a star's legacy.

But that is not the case with **Rose McGowan**, whose natural talents have earned her immense success and critical acclaim; striking beauty has forever elevated Hollywood iconography; exceptional intellect has made her a survivor and a champion; and finally, her charisma and articulation have made her the Joan of Arc of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements.

It is difficult to measure an artist's contribution to society and the countless people she influences and inspires. But it's impossible to ascertain Rose's impact as the defacto heroine of a historical and long overdue global movement. She has conquered acting, singing, writing, producing, directing and public speaking, and they have led her to this new chapter in her life where she sheds old pedals to reveal fresh glorious beauty.

**Windy City Times: Modesty aside, how would you describe yourself?**

RM: Rose McGowan: A good person who just wants the best for everyone.

**WCT: You have emerged as a heroine, a pillar of strength and an inspiration for millions after a tumultuous and controversial year. How are you doing now?**

RM: The past few years have been harder than I could imagine. Surviving the last year most especially. What helped me was the support I got in real life. I've met person after person who said, "Keep going, keep fighting." It has been both humbling and inspiring. It was a hard, hard year, but there were bright spots of joy here and there. I try to focus on those. The answer is I'm healing. I have great friends and a great relationship that is helping with the healing.

**WCT: What have you learned from the last year that you can share with people who might have gone through or are still going through similar experiences?**

RM: I have learned that we are stronger than we know, that tears equal strength, that pain equals growth, and to just hang on because it does in fact get better. Keep going no matter what, keep going.

**WCT: Would you do anything differently?**

RM: There are certain toxic people I wish I'd never let into my life. I had no idea how dark some people's secrets are, and the lengths they'll go to protect those secrets.

**WCT: Do you feel pressure to be strong all the time, considering your strength and defacto role as a leader?**

RM: It's an unusual pressure. We haven't been here before societally; there is no road map. A bit like walking through a jungle with a machete and you have no idea where the drop offs are but you hope for the best. For me, the best is always trying to be ten



**Rose McGowan**

Photo courtesy of McGowan

percent better than I have to be, I use it as a personal challenge and one that may inspire others to be better versions of themselves.

**WCT: You have an impressive resume as an actress in film and TV, but have since added best-selling author with your memoir, Brave, and a documentarian with your four-part docuseries Citizen Rose. Do you miss acting and do you plan to do film or TV again soon?**

RM: I'm proud of my body of work. I did the best I could job wise, despite being heavily blacklisted. TV and film were very separate businesses at the time. The TV producers on Charmed didn't know that I had been canceled in the movie industry. I always tried to communicate with the audience through my eyes; now it's time for my own voice. Through acting I inhabited many skins, lives, voices—so many other people for so many years—it's time for me to just be me. For now, I can't see acting anytime in the future. I do miss directing and crafting a story, but right now I feel like we don't have time for metaphors. What needs to be said needs to be said.

**WCT: Tell me a bit about the album you're working on?**

RM: Planet 9 is the name of my upcoming album. I've been crafting it for three years. I like to say it's music that can take us to space. Suspended in time, given room to feel and move. The album takes listeners on a journey for sure. If you mixed up Pink Floyd, Grace Jones and Stevie Nicks with some propulsive French beats, you have Planet 9.

**WCT: Tell me about your fans, especially people who reach out to you following the past year.**

RM: I have met extraordinary beings this past year. I'm honored to walk with them on this journey, which is why I'm turning my Instagram @rosemcgowan over to others to share their truths on my page for the month. Calling it #NOVember. I'm really excited to highlight and honor those who are fighting the good fight. People that have risen up and are rising; it's a beautiful thing to witness. I hope you'll all join us.

**WCT: What are a few misconceptions about you?**

RM: Ooof, that I'm transphobic. Nothing could be further from the truth. This one hurts a lot because my life has been interwoven with the community since I was 13 years old. I was a runaway taken in by two loving trans women who saved me from a life on the streets. The idea that I'm transphobic makes me physically ill, it hurts my soul. When I said, "What have you done for women?" I meant ALL women.

**WCT: You have traveled quite a bit in the last year. Has your perspective changed being outside of the USA looking in?**

RM: When I came to America [from Italy] as a young girl, I expe-

rienced massive culture shock. That shock never really went away, and it does feel like a gentler life not being there. I think we all know why.

**WCT: Do you have any advice for people who are victimized, bullied and harassed, but feel fearful and powerless?**

RM: Act as if you are brave and you will become brave. It doesn't mean you won't be scared, it just means you do it anyway.

**WCT: What is your favorite charity or cause?**

RM: I really advocate for the smaller charities, the ones that are on the front lines. It is not easy and I tip my hat to them. In the past, I've volunteered at Covenant House helping homeless LGBTQ teenagers, my focus for years being gay rights. I also love the East Los Angeles Women's Center; an extraordinary place doing great aftercare work with rape and human trafficking survivors. Now that this year has settled down a bit, I hope to get back to more volunteer work. We all should.

**WCT: Which living person(s) do you most admire?**

RM: All of us who have survived and come out the other side of pain. Those who inspire. I also really admire my partner, Rain Dove.

**WCT: What project(s) do you have coming up?**

RM: I have a skin-care line called The Only that I've been developing with my aunt Rory for eight years. It's an incredible product mixing science and nature. I'm working on the visuals to go with my album, Planet 9, because I want it to be an experience. Also, starting work on my next book and preparing for Brave to come out in paperback!

**WCT: Tell me a secret—a good one!**

RM: When I'm in America, I eat at Taco Bell at least two times a week. I know I shouldn't, but I just can't help myself.

**For more information on Rose McGowan and to purchase her book, Brave, visit RoseMcGowan.com. To see who Gerami interviews on 10 Questions with Vic each week, visit WindyCityMediaGroup.com.**

## Raul Esparza to be in 'Hamlet' next year

Chicago Shakespeare Theater announced that four-time Tony Award nominee and Law and Order: SVU alum Raul Esparza will lead William Shakespeare's Hamlet, staged by Artistic Director Barbara Gaines, in the Courtyard Theater, April 17–June 9, 2019.

Esparza takes on the iconic title role of a grief-stricken Prince of Denmark as he attempts to navigate his father's death, betrayal and relationships torn asunder in one of the great masterworks of Western literature. The complete casting will be announced in the coming months.

Single tickets (\$48–\$88 each) are on sale now. For more information, visit ChicagoShakes.com/hamlet.



**Raul Esparza.**

Photo courtesy of Chicago Shakespeare Theater

# Reese Witherspoon, Cameron Esposito and more at storytelling event

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

A diverse line-up of women-identified speakers took to the stage at the Hello Sunshine X Together Live storytelling tour Nov. 12 at the Auditorium Theater.

This is Together Live's third year on tour and the first time they have partnered with Hello Sunshine, founded by actor and activist Reese Witherspoon.

Witherspoon joined fellow actor and activist Sophia Bush; award-winning author, speaker and digital strategist Luvvie Ajayi; Thrive Labs Founder and author Priya Parker; lesbian comedian, actor and writer Cameron Esposito; singer-songwriter MILCK (Connie Lim); Together Rising Founder and President, Momastery online community creator, author, activist and philanthropist Glennon Doyle; and retired soccer player, coach, two-time Olympic gold medalist, FIFA Women's World Cup champion and activist Abby Wambach. Doyle and Wambach have been married since May 2017.

The event was moderated by William Morris Endeavor Worldwide Literary, Lectures and Conference Divisions Director and Together Live Tour

## SPOKEN WORD

Founder Jennifer Rudolph Walsh.

Walsh greeted the packed house of more than 3,500 attendees and said the power of storytelling can showcase what is possible for individuals and the wider world.

Parker spoke about what it was like living at the intersection of two diametrically opposite worlds when her parents got divorced and she was shuffled between her liberal Democratic Indian-British atheist mother's house and her white American evangelical Christian conservative Republican father's house.

Walsh said her motto/mantra is, "It is not what happens; it is what happens next," because no one can change the past. She asked everyone else to share theirs.

"Sometimes you do not know you can do it, but you do it anyway," said Witherspoon, referring to starting her own production company.

Esposito said to "hold the door open" so others, especially marginalized people, can have opportunities for success.



Left: Reese Witherspoon. Right: Cameron Esposito.

Photos by Jerry Nunn

"Listen deeply enough to be changed by what you hear," said Parker.

Bush said, "Stop being someone else's definition of 'enough,' and start listening to what you feel is enough."

"Go off the path," said Wambach because that has always been the way she has learned about what is important in life.

MILCK said, "It is hard to hate up close."

"Save as drafts," said Doyle in reference to her outspoken nature and her need to sit with her thoughts before sending them out into the world.

Ajayi explained that hers is, "Put the glass down," because the longer one holds onto things, the harder it will be for them to go out in the world and do things.

Being a "troublemaker for good" was the focus of Ajayi's talk.

"We are so afraid of discomfort we will take comfort over justice," said Ajayi.

Esposito performed an uproarious comedy set that began with her calling herself "a giant lesbian" who looks like "a vacationing Draco Malfoy."

One-on-one conversations took place between Walsh and Witherspoon, Bush and Doyle and Wambach and Doyle.

Walsh and Witherspoon's talk focused on Witherspoon's evolution from being an actor to an actor-producer-activist. Witherspoon said it started with what she called "a crappy script" in 2009.

Bush and Doyle spoke about what drives them, with Bush explaining that "learning to let the lies go" and creating boundaries have been vital to her growth as a person.

"The great loves of my life are Abby, our kids, coffee and boundaries," said Doyle.

Ahead of Doyle and Wambach's conversation on what it really means to be brave and how to make real change in the world, Wambach recognized the handful of men in the audience and those "who may lie somewhere on the gender spectrum."

"You can be grateful and also demand what you deserve," said Wambach.

Doyle spoke about her journey to sobriety and the importance of "feeling every single one of my feelings."

MILCK also performed "O-o-h Child" to open the event and her song "Quiet," which became the Women's March's unofficial anthem, to close out the evening.

See <https://togetherrising.org/> and <https://hello-sunshine.com/>.

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# Amy Ray, opener rock Old Town School

## MUSIC

Indigo Girl Amy Ray made a stop in Chicago on her tour for her new album, *Holler*, at the Old Town School of Folk Music on Nov. 15.

The sold-out show was opened with an acoustic set by alt-country artist Amythyst Kiah on guitar and banjo, setting the tone just right.

When Ray came on it was with her seven-member touring band, who rocked out with vitality and skill. Ray praised their talent between songs, telling stories that showcased the love between them. Banjoist Alison Brown played a couple of short tunes on her own, complete with banjo jokes. ("What has six eyes and three teeth? The front row of a banjo workshop.")

They played mainstays like "The Gig That Matters" and "The Rock is My Foundation" along with a stunning rendition of the Indigo Girls' "The Rise of the Black Messiah." New songs off *Holler* included hard rocking performances of "Sure Feels Good Anyway" and "Dadgum Down," as well as

"Sparrow's Boogie" and "Bondsman" (homages to poet Byron Herbert Reese and the film *Winter's Bone*, respectively). The energetic encore was a cover of Tom Waits' "Refugee."

Photos and text by John Stadelman



**Amy Ray.**  
Photo by John Stadelman

# 'Drag Race' guest judges announced

## DRAG/NIGHTLIFE

VH1 announced the guest judges set to join the fourth season of *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*. RuPaul will be joined by a star-studded line-up of celebrities alongside show regulars Michelle Visage, Carson Kressley and Ross Mathews.

This season's guest judges include Jenifer Lewis, Ciara, Kacey Musgraves, Gus Kenworthy, Keiynan Lonsdale, Zoe Kravitz, Yvette Nicole Brown, Cecily Strong, Rita Ora, Susanne Bartsch, Ellen Pompeo, Frances Bean Cobain, Felicity Huffman, Jason Wu and Erica Ash.

The series will return to the runway with super-sized 90-minute episodes on Friday, Dec. 14, at 7 p.m. CT on VH1.

The 10 competitors will vie for a spot in the "Drag Race Hall of Fame" and a grand prize of \$100,000. The previously announced queens include Farrah Moan (season nine), Gia Gunn (season six), Jasmine Masters (season seven), Latrice Royale (season four and "All Stars" one), Manila

Luzon (season three and "All Stars" one), Monet X Change (season 10), Monique Heart (season 10), Naomi Smalls (season eight), Trinity Taylor (season nine) and Valentina (season nine).

Visit [VH1.com/shows/rupauls-drag-race-all-stars](http://VH1.com/shows/rupauls-drag-race-all-stars).



**Contestant Latrice Royale.**  
Photo by Jerry Nunn

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Fort Lauderdale beach.  
Photo by Bill Malcolm



## A visit to the gay capital of South Florida

BY BILL MALCOLM

Walton Manors, Florida, is perfect for a car free, carefree holiday—and it has arguably the best walkable LGBTQ village in the country.

The small city is just north of Fort Lauderdale, in the southern part of the state.

But Walton Manors is now the unofficial gay capital of south Florida. It is also the first Florida city with an all-LGBT city commission and only the second in the country, according to the *Riverside Times* (the other city being Palm Spings).

Indeed, Walton Manors reminds the visitor of a cross between Palm Springs and West Hollywood. There's lots to do in an around the area.

### Getting there

I took Amtrak down from Orlando through the beautiful countryside to Ft. Lauderdale. I flew back on Southwest.

You won't need to rent a car, much less Lyft or Uber.

The #1 bus serves the FLL airport from the rental car airport for \$2 and you can connect to the #50 for a short trip to Walton Manors.

You can also fly into Miami and take the Tri Rail commuter rail to Ft. Lauderdale.

### Where to stay

I stayed one night at the Best Western Oceanside Inn near the Fort Lauderdalebeach area.

They have bikes to rent and you are just a block to the beach area. The Swimming Hall of Fame is a half mile away and offers public lap swims for

\$4.

Other nearby beach hotels include the Atlantic and the Sonesta.

The #40 bus serves these hotels from the downtown Broward County Transit Center.

Walton Manors itself has only inns and bed and breakfasts. I stayed at the Calypso Inn for \$99/night. It was steps to the bars and restaurants on Walton Drive. The Inn on the Drive, Ed Lugos Resort and Cabanas are other options as is the nearby Ramada in Oakland Park. I have also stayed at the Hampton Inn in downtown Fort Lauderdale, which is very nice. Some of the inns are male only so inquire when you call or check all the options at Sunny.org, the Fort Lauderdale visitor information site.

### Nightlife

The bars and clubs are all on Wilton Drive and they are all walkable from the inns I mentioned.

Georgie's Alibi (of P Town fame) at 2266 Wilton Drive has 2 for 1 drink specials, a lounge act, and dancers and dancing on the weekend.

Hunters (of Palm Springs fame) also has drink specials and a great crowd of locals.

The Pub is also fun as is Drynk.

Johnsons features dancers and has happy hour until 9 pm (and no cover until 8 pm). You will find them at 2340 Wilton Dr.

Rumors Bar and Grill, at 226 Wilton Dr., was just rated the best bar for lesbians by South Florida Gay News. (See page 13 of their Best of LGBT South Florida edition.)

Wilton Drive is the most concentrated area of

LGBTQ nightlife in the country and there is something for everyone and everyone is welcome.

### What to do

Don't miss the Stonewall National Museum and Archives at 2157 Wilton Dr. Details are at Stonewall-museum.org. It details the rich LGBTQ history of the area.

The beach is a must and there are several nearby in Fort Lauderdale.

Being a transit fan, I took the new Brightline

## TRAVEL

train from Fort Lauderdale to Miami. It is a privately run train which serves cocktails in the waiting area and on board (as well as snacks). Look out Amtrak. Once there, you can hop on the Miami Metro Mover.

The Miami Financial District features lots of interesting new architecture or you can hang out along the harbor.

Check out Bayfront Park along Brickell Avenue where you can hop on the Brickell Avenue Trolley to check out downtown Miami.

Take the Metro Mover from the Brightline Station. It is a free people mover that runs around downtown on three separate routes—a mini-version of the L without the noise nor the fare.

On the way home, I took the Metrorail subway to MIA Airport station to hop on the Tri-Rail commuter rail back to Ft. Lauderdale. Details at [miamidade.gov/transit](http://miamidade.gov/transit) or at the Tri Rail website. (You can also catch the 150 bus to Miami Beach from the Airport transit center in Miami.)

A free bus from Tri Rail take you back to the transit center where you can hop on the #50 back to Wilton Manor.

### Where to eat

Start your day at Java Boys Coffee (2230 Wilton Dr.). Rosies is very good for a bite as are the other restaurants like Tee Jay Thai in the area that includes at the Shoppes of Wilton Manor.

### Plan your trip

Sunny.org is the official Fort Lauderdale trip-planning site and has a LGBT section.

Hotspots is your LGBT magazine (hotspots.com). They carry my column. Check out the ads for drink specials and upcoming events.

The Mirror Magazine and South Florida Gay News are also great resources. The latter publishes a nifty guide ([www.sfgn.guide](http://www.sfgn.guide)).

You can't beat south Florida for a wintertime visit. Temperatures rarely dip below the 60s and highs are routinely in the 80s. Using my tips, you can enjoy the area without the hassle of a rental car nor even having to use Uber or Lyft.



Alibi Bar.  
Photo by Bill Malcolm

# THERE'S A LOT TO LOVE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



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**Marty McConnell.**  
Photo from McConnell's  
Facebook page



## Poet Marty McConnell to celebrate book launch at The Whistler

BY KELSEY HOFF

Chicago poet Marty McConnell's book *When They Say You Can't Go Home Again* what they mean is you were never there, winner of the 2017 Michael Waters Poetry Prize from Southern Indiana University Press, was published this fall.

She will perform some of the poems at a book launch party Monday, Nov. 26 at The Whistler, 2421 N. Milwaukee Ave. Windy City Times spoke with McConnell about the process of writing this book, which went through many drafts and iterations before she and her publisher settled on the final version, as well as her influences and how it fits in with her other works.

McConnell wrote the title poem during a week-long teaching session at Sarah Lawrence College—where she earned her MFA—about five years ago, after a feeling she had walking across

campus she describes as “walking through my own ghost.” According to McConnell, most of the poems in *When They Say You Can't Go Home Again* echo this kind of simultaneous location and dislocation through various lenses, ranging from her own home(s) and family to socio-political spaces she occupies as a queer white woman in the United States and a human complicit in Earth's climate crisis.

“There's so much Chicago in the book, especially in the sense that Chicago is always with me,” she told Windy City Times. McConnell said she felt the strong presence of her home in Logan Square while working on the book—and even during a two-week retreat at Hedgebrook Retreat Center off the coast of Seattle.

McConnell and her wife, visual artist Lindsey Dorr-Niro, co-performed an experimental, site-specific installation based on the title poem

### POETRY/SPOKEN WORD

in August 2014 that informed McConnell's approach to many of the other poems. The installation was hosted at The Storefront Theatre in Chicago through The Works Residency program of the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. McConnell and Dorr-Niro performed an interactive combination of poetry and meditation accompanied by a film projection. They envision this as “an ongoing experiment in vulnerability” that may have future iterations at other locations, according to Dorr-Niro's website.

The cover art for *When They Say You Can't Go Home Again* is a plaster sculpture of a head made by Dorr-Niro for their installation project. She smashed the plaster head at the end of the performance, then painted and photographed it. McConnell was drawn to the image because of its resonance with her subject, a disturbing sight that nevertheless compels the viewer to keep looking. The arrangement of the title in concept map format on the cover echoes concept maps that McConnell used during her writing process, a few of which are printed in the book.

“[Home] is a kind of idealized notion that I'm interested in sort of blowing apart,” McConnell said. McConnell's interrogations of the concept of home lead to the conclusion that home is not a static entity, but an invention continuously being made and remade. Acknowledging that her personal notion of home is a privileged one, McConnell said she feels compelled to deconstruct the assumption that home is a safe space one can always return to.

“I couldn't write this book at this time and not address in some way what it means to be a Chicagoan at this point ... and a white queer American,” she added. She said pinpointing her subject matter of vulnerability and “damages that we inflict and incur in the world based on who we are and how we walk through it” helped McConnell determine how and why to write about politically charged topics like race, rape culture and climate

change, choosing to write as herself in current moment rather than taking a genealogical approach. The decision to include love poems also came with this realization, as a survival method for living in a dangerous world.

Compared to her first collection *Wine for a Shotgun*, which McConnell described as “very aggressively queer” since it explores topics of sexuality and queerness in persona, autobiographical and confessional modes, queerness in when they say you can't go home again is still omnipresent, though it comes through more subtly as one thread among many others.

McConnell takes an active role in creating a home space where writers can be vulnerable in the Vox Ferus workshops that she runs out of her Logan Square home. A nonfiction book on this process is forthcoming from YesYes Books next spring, and it is titled *Gathering Voices: Creating a Community-Based Poetry Workshop*.

“A lot of my ... function in the world is to create those spaces and then support people in creating their own version of those spaces that are simultaneously bounded enough to feel home-like, but porous enough that folks can come in and we're not just hearing ourselves talk,” she said.

McConnell chose to hold her upcoming book launch party at one of her favorite bars in Logan Square, The Whistler. Though most book launches in Chicago are held at bookstores, this venue will accommodate the projection and music McConnell plans to incorporate in her performance as a nod to the larger ongoing collaboration with her wife. Guest performers Maya Marshall, co-founder/co-editor with McConnell of *Underbelly*; and Ben Clark, an editor for *Muzzle Magazine* and *Thoughtcrime Press* will join McConnell.

The book launch party for *When They Say You Can't Go Home Again*, what they mean is you were never there will be held Monday, Nov. 26, at The Whistler, 2421 N. Milwaukee Ave. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the show starts at 7 p.m. The venue for those 21 and older; the restrooms will be all-gender. Visit <https://whistlerchicago.com/calendar/marty-mcconnell-book-release-party/>.

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# A Cradle Song: Part Six

WRITTEN BY MARK ZUBRO; ILLUSTRATED BY W.S. REED

A Cradle Song, written by Mark Zubro and illustrated by W.S. Reed, debuts in the Windy City Times as the new holiday classic. Filled with travail and woe, warmth and great joy, it is a story for the ages. It will appear in ten installments from Octo-

ber 17 to December 19 and will also be available for gift giving as an e-book and as a paperback. For the true joy and meaning of the season, this is the book you want to read.

Today **A Cradle Song: Part Six.**

## Chapter Six Part Two

Most often, Matthew stood with one foot in the tiny space between the toy store and the bakery next door. This way he was half in front of each store, and he hoped less noticeable to both. He hung onto a drainpipe with one hand so he could lean farther over. He'd stare for the longest time. He hoped no one noticed his longing gazes at the toys or the bakery.

The smells from the baked goods were nearly intoxicating, fresh bread being his favorite. Once in a while, Matthew could find a discarded sweet snack or bit of bread out back. While waiting for scraps, he lingered out front in the tiny corner with its dripping drain pipe.

In the bakery window, he could see cakes piled high with swirling frosting and bright confections of flowers heaped and nestled in mounds of multi-hued icing and filled eclairs. Nothing like the stale and tough stuff he ate. On the food he found, Matthew often scraped off the moldy parts.

He remembered he'd had a cake on his last birthday. His mom had made it. It was perfect. And his dad had been home. And he'd gotten a tiny little car which had a wonderful sad face. He'd loved it.

His eyes always strayed to the toy store. There were other reasons Matthew didn't dare go into the toy store. He didn't want the look of pity. Or the glare of annoyance of a clerk or the owner after admitting he had no money and them telling him he couldn't stay. He had no mom or dad to keep him company.

The toys displayed in the window were a wonderment of childhood joys. Matthew's favorites were the little trains. They chuffed around on their miniature mountain. He could see puffs of real smoke come out of the trains' chimneys. They ran round and round on tiny tracks that traversed bridges and spanned painted streams. Crossing gates would lower by themselves. Small plastic people waved forever from their silent, unmoving perches. One static man in a uniform held out tickets.

In the window, Matthew also saw metal machines whirr and spin. A million blocks of a zillion colors climbed in a wild array more than halfway to the ceiling. Wisps of cloudy cotton filled every space. Stars twinkled and shone in the ceiling. Every time Matthew looked, there seemed to be more to see and wonder at.

Through chinks in the stacks of toys or when he caught glimpses inside as the front door opened and closed, Matthew could get a little bit of a better view to the aisles crammed with more toys than he ever imagined having as his own in his own house, in his own room.

One time, he saw two little girls about his age admiring some brightly colored paper dresses covered with frills and ribbons. The girls pointed and shyly giggled. When the old man looked at them, the girls hung their heads. Matthew feared for the little girls, knowing how much the old man didn't like it when kids lingered too long. That day, he saw the old man scowling at the girls. As the door opened and closed, he heard him harrumph and grumble. The old man put out his hand to grasp his cane. Matthew knew he was going to chase the little girls away.

Then an older woman appeared between the girls and the old man. She worked at the table with the cash register. She frowned at the old man and said the girls could pick one dress apiece. The woman paid for them herself and told the girls they could go. As they rushed out the door, the little girls were beaming and thankful.

The old man seemed to nod and almost smiled. The girls walked away. The woman returned to her regular perch.

Matthew thought that was really wonderful.

In another direction inside, Matthew could see war toys: cannons and guns and bazookas and tanks, and ranks of plastic, still, tin, or wooden army men. All that unmoving, pent-up violence caused him to frown. He didn't like the danger they represented to his dad. He didn't like that they didn't move. He wanted his daddy to be alive, not rigid, inert, and lifeless.

He tried to look beyond to other shiny, noisy toys with mechanical parts that chuffed and huffed. Some of them tooted and twisted and twirled and sang songs. He didn't like the dolls that seemed to blink at odd moments. He wished he could touch the tiny little cars and trucks, some barely bigger than his thumb. He wished he could touch the little red fire truck that always had a sad look on its face.

If other kids came to the store window, Matthew sidled away. He didn't want them intruding on his dreams and hopes.

On this Christmas Eve, the gray iron sky let loose a few flurries. It was as cold today as it had ever been during Matthew's exile. What light the dun-colored sky had let in was fading.

The Christmas display in the window was even more wondrous with packages covered in brightly colored wrapping paper with cheerful bows spouting from their tops.

This Christmas Eve, Matthew was drawn even closer to the window from his safe perch by the drain pipe. His fingers touched the pane. His nose was an inch away from the glass. He gave a wistful sigh.

Matthew noticed Tawny, the big golden retriever, walking beside his human in the wheelchair as they approached. They came up beside him, Tawny on his right, the man on his left. Tawny sat down next to the boy. The man stopped and rested his hands on the arms of the wheelchair.

Matthew wasn't afraid. He could see the dog's breath in the cold. He had on a harness and a dog coat.

Together, the three gazed at all the wonders on the other side of the window. The golden retriever leaned against him. Matthew felt great comfort in that closeness. He lowered his hand and let his fingers touch the soft fur.

As they lingered, Matthew felt Tawny's muzzle nuzzle under his elbow as if urging him toward the door. Matthew glanced down at the dog. He thought the animal might be smiling. Do dogs smile? The animal looked in his eyes. For several more moments, all three, boy, dog, and adult

stared at the little trains going round and round on the toy mountain filled with tiny humans, bridges, and little trees.

It seemed to Matthew almost as if wheelchair and dog had formed a funnel right to the front door of the store itself.

He found himself grasping the doorknob.

As he opened the door and stepped inside, Matthew looked back for a moment. Man and dog seemed to be smiling. As he closed the door, the little bell at the top tinkled. Neither the gruff old man nor any of the clerks or the woman at the register took note of him.

Matthew stepped farther inside. No one bothered him as he let his feet lead him into the depths of the store, down long wondrous aisles with shelves filled with toys mounting to the ceiling.

## Chapter Seven: The Isle of Misfit Toys

On every continent, in every country, in cities and towns no matter how big or small, most often in the shabbiest part of town, there was always an old toy store. Sometimes it was very hard to find on a not-very-busy street next to where the old dime-store used to be, or around back in the alley behind the last independent bookstore in town, or near a used bookstore, or next to a shoe repair shop, or down a little ways from the closed-up uptown theater, or near the river where it sometimes flooded.

If you were lucky enough to find it, the bell above the door tinkled when you entered. You could wander forever up and down aisles past treasures and glories. Every child could find something his heart desired.

If you spent a long enough time and followed the paths into the depth of the stores, you might stumble onto a winding path that led to a dark passage, which opened onto a sun-lit pathway. This narrow lane had well-manicured shrubbery on each side. Tall trees rose behind it. If you followed the narrow lane for a short while, you came to a metal bridge covered

with little starlights: top, and bottom, and up and down along each metal strut and beam. The bridge arched high over a vast expanse of deep blue water. If you were lucky enough to stumble onto the bridge and walked across to the other side, you came to the Isle of Misfit Toys.

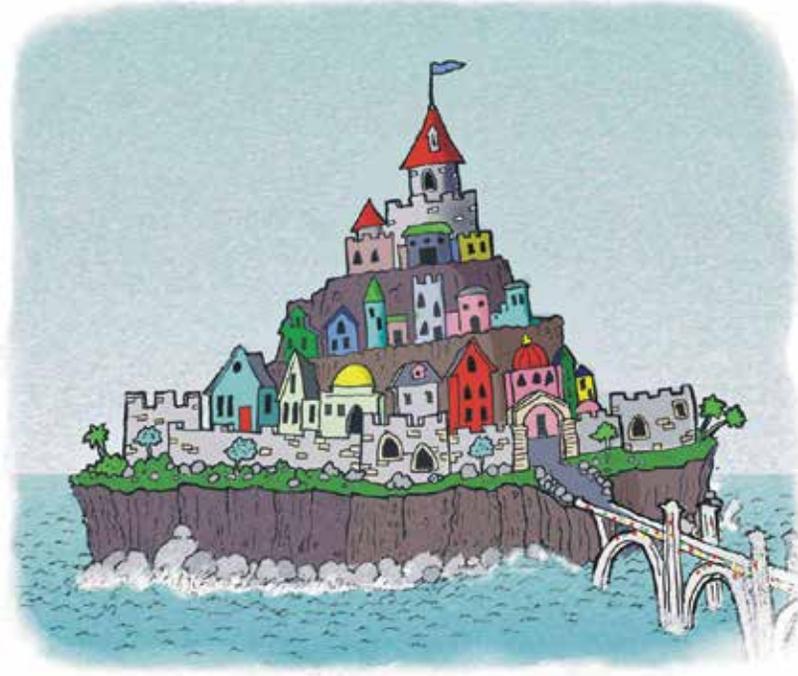
The Isle of Misfit Toys was a magical place.

Its cobbled street stretched in great sweeping curves that wound around and around the mountain that made up the heart of the island.

All along the path the multi-hued buildings gleamed and shone. On the landward side, the street was lined with a myriad of cheerful little stores. On the other side, a small parapet rose over which you could see a magnificent vista of the deep blue sea.

Every kind of toy had its own special store. One might have blocks, all the kinds and shapes and sizes you might ever want were in that store. There were stores specially for action figures, or boy and girl dolls, or board games, or little kids games, or big kids games, music stores, just a myriad of children's delights. There was another store for trucks, and one for cars, and one for trains, and another for fire engines, and on and on from the end of the bridge up to the very top to the castle's drawbridge.

The toys on the Isle were never brand new. These were toys that had been loved and used, or too frequently abused and scorned, many often simply outgrown and neglected. Lost in sandboxes. Misplaced and mislaid. Toys rejected by kids. Toys



whose kids grew up and no longer loved them. Sold in garage sales. Designated for the trash as unwanted or unfixable. Broken toys. Toys with manufacturer's defects. Forgotten or stolen. Overlooked under front porches. Left in the rain. Thrown out and dumped in disgraceful landfills.

No matter their story or background, all misfit toys were welcome here, everyone had a place.

They were delivered from all over the world, from toy boxes, attics, garages, basements, back rooms, and emptied storage spaces.

Many of the toys came to the island in the arms of an army of retired teachers and

librarians who spent their remaining years now dedicated to bringing smiles to children's faces. Mostly, these people were old and kindly and alone, or people with aged and wrinkled faces who lived in homes where their memories were nearly gone. They came, their arms filled with broken toys that they brought to this last refuge.

From the toys they carried, these people caught snippets of remembrance of happier times when they'd known the joy of toys as children.

All helped find the toys and bring them in hopes that these once loved objects would find a new home. All were volunteers. A few were permanent residents who

lived behind or above their stores. A very few dwelt in the castle high above. When they were young, some of these people just came to work or help deliver toys for a few weeks during their vacations.

If you purchased a toy on the Isle and went back the next day to the magical store, and searched for the same aisle that led you away, and the same secret portal that led to the bridge, it was never there. If you returned with greed in your heart just to take more, the memory of the Isle of Misfit Toys faded forever.

If you treasured your toy and were grateful for what you had, the memory remained pure and whole.

When a child talked with a proprietor of a store on the Isle of Misfit Toys, every one of them spoke with him or her in their own language, a Babel of joy. It was one of the bits of magic present on the Isle.

Most importantly, on the Isle of Misfit Toys, on the last day before Christmas they let the poor, homeless, little boys and girls come to the Isle and pick toys for free.

It was always a special, perfect day for the forgotten and neglected, both toys and children alike, to have at least a few moments for the possibility of happiness.

The goal of the Isle of Misfit Toys was to bring smiles to children's faces and delight to the heart of a toy.

In your heart you really had to want them, not just be greedy for things you didn't deserve. That's how you got to pick toys. Some small, some large.

**End of part six. Part seven coming next week.**



"A Cradle Song is my very favorite of Mark Zubro's books. Tender, full of insight and love, it made me cry—but they were happy tears."

—*Jeanne M. Dams,*  
author of the *Dorothy Martin*  
mysteries

"A Cradle Song is a wonderful, heartwarming story, and just right for Christmas. Open this present and enjoy!"

—*Barbara D'Amato,*  
author of the *Cat Marsala*  
series and the recent  
*Other Eyes*

A Cradle Song will be available soon as an ebook and as a paperback online and from **Unabridged Bookstore** in Chicago and **Outwords Books** in Milwaukee.

**Mark Zubro** is the author of thirty-six books and seven short stories. He has won the Lambda Literary award for *A Simple Suburban Murder* and been nominated eight other times. All are available as ebooks and most as paperbacks online or at **Unabridged Bookstore** in Chicago and **Outwords Books** in Milwaukee.

# 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 Chaös, 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 Alexandra 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.



### BEHIND THE NAME

"Alexis because my Muggle name is not too far off from that and *Bevels* because when a lady stands with her knee bent in a little that is called standing in a bevel—think of a chorus girl or a Rockette."

### FIRST DRAG PERFORMANCE

"Around 6 years ago I was performing in a production of *Hairspray* at Drury Lane theatre in Oakbrook. There's a moment in the play when all the boys don dresses and wigs and play the girls' mothers—and it soon became my favorite part of the show. One time I got the note that I was taking it too far and I was too pretty. Haha."

### DRAG INSPIRATION

"I'm a true lover of all things Broadway and of movie musicals. My chief inspirations are Liza Minnelli and Sutton Foster."

### FAVORITE NUMBER

"My go-to right now is live singing 'I Can't Do It Alone' from Chicago."

### FUN FACT

"I can tap dance and roller skate. And sometimes I tap dance in my roller skates."

### WHERE CAN WE CATCH YOU?

Sidetrack on Thursdays; Charity bingo at Hamburger Mary's on Sunday nights; Bingo at The Glenwood on Monday nights; and starting very soon a brand new open mic night on Tuesdays at the Sofo Tap.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: [alexis.bevels](https://www.facebook.com/alexis.bevels)  
Twitter/Instagram: @alexisbevels

Photo by Erik Michael Kommer Photography

## 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 Alexandra 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

"Broadway's Disastrous 'King Kong' is a \$35 million crime against puppets."—Rex Reed's headline for his review of King Kong: The Musical. I haven't read any further, so don't ruin it for me. But do you think he likes it?

Usually I wait till the end of my Thanksgiving column to give thanks. But you know what? I'm thankful right off the bat. I'm thankful to be alive, and I'm thankful you're reading this column. And, well ... that's it. Typically I'm a greedy bitch, but that just about covers it.

Everyone is talking about Michelle Obama's biography, which seems to be the book Mr. Obama would have written if he were free to say whatever he'd like. But you know, U.S. presidents used to maintain a certain level of decorum and discretion. Be that as it may, Mrs. Obama can say whatever she'd like—within reason. One section stood out for me. On the day the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, LGBT folks were celebrating in front of the White House. Michelle wanted to share the historic day with her daughter, Malia. She tried to sneak out of the White House (as if) to join the festivities—not considering she wasn't wearing any makeup ... or shoes! She whipped herself together, and went out incognito with Malia. She wrote, "We just took it in. I held her tight, and my feeling was, we are moving forward. Change is happening."

Jussie Smollett is enjoying having a fiancé on Empire. But it almost turned out quite differently. He said, "There was talk about Jamal having a white boyfriend and I said, 'Fuck no!' Not for any reason except we have a responsibility and we have such a beautiful opportunity to show two black men in a relationship together, in a healthy relationship. But it was important and that wasn't anything against white men. It was just a thing of ... this is what I wished I had seen as a kid because if I had seen certain things as an adolescent, I would have had a much different understanding of who I am in an earlier space." I'm still confused—would he date a white guy or not?

Then there's Jaden Smith, who is going somewhere Daddy never went. At a recent show, he said, "I just want to say Tyler, The Creator is the best friend in the whole world and I love him so fucking much. And I want to tell you guys something—Tyler doesn't want to say, but Tyler is my motherfucking boyfriend, and he's been my motherfucking boyfriend my whole fucking life. Tyler, The Creator is my fucking boyfriend. It's true!" Or is it? Tyler, The Creator (a name I'm fairly confident doesn't appear on a birth certificate) can be seen shaking his head offstage. Then Jaden tweeted, "I told everyone you can't deny it now." Tyler responded with a post of his own (and don't get mad at me—I'm just quoting him): "hahaha you a crazy ni--a man." Part of me believes this. Part of me doesn't. Part of me doesn't have a clue who Tyler, The Creator is. And part of me thinks this is a bunch of straight guys laughing about being gay ... which brings us back to Will.



"Bi" the way, Michael C. Hall has something to say.

Photo of Hall in Kill Your Darlings courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

It wouldn't be the first gay rumors about Tyler, The Creator (and let's hope I don't ever have to type those three words again). Last year, he wrote a song extolling the virtues of Timothee Chalamet. In "Okra" (get ready to sing along), he rapped: "Tell Tim Chalamet to come and get at me, skin glowin', clear of acne." Now, there's a talent. I bet even Cole Porter wouldn't know what to rhyme with acne—let alone Clearasil! Still, it's nice to see Tyler doesn't have a type.

Didya know our acting attorney general has a secret about his private parts? Back in 2014, Matthew Whitaker was on the advisory board of World Patent Marketing Company, which developed a toilet for well-endowed men! Their research showed that well-hung guys' penises dangle into the water when they sit on a toilet. "The average male genitalia is between 5" and 6." However, this invention is designed for those of us who measure longer than that. I estimate that a 12" distance is adequate enough for most well-endowed men. An 'extra long' (XL) version can always be created if needed." This product would be right up Barbara Corcoran's alley on Shark Tank. The company was shut down after it allegedly bilked "thousands of consumers out of millions of dollars." Think about this toilet next time you hear someone say Dump Trump.

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Victor in Detroit. "I just read that Michael C. Hall says he's bisexual. Didn't you write about this years ago?"

Apparently I knew before Mikey did. In an interview with The Daily Beast, he said that appearing in Cabaret made him aware of it: "I think there's a spectrum. I am on it. If there was a percentage, I would say I was not all the way heterosexual. I think playing the Emcee required me to fling a bunch of doors wide open because that charac-

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ter I imagined as pansexual. Yeah, like I made out with Michael Stuhlbarg every night doing the show. I think I have always leaned into any fluidity in terms of my sexuality." He added, "I've never had an intimate relationship with a man." Now, I don't want to call Michael C. Hall a liar, but I think he's a big fat liar—just my humble opinion.

As a bonus, we'll give you a nude nobody asked for. You all watch Will & Grace. And you all know Jack's biological son, Elliot. In the film In a Relationship, actor Michael Angarano appears naked and shows off his assets—if you're into that kinda thing. Check him out on BillyMasters.com.

When our cornucopia runneth over, it's time to end yet another column. In addition to thanking our readers, I want to thank the publications, proofers, lawyers, webmasters and everyone at BillyMasters.com—the site that celebrates giving each and every day. In fact, I'll give you whatever you want—if I can. Send your requests to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I brave my bountiful butt in another blizzard! So, until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

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# the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in  
WINDY CITY TIMES

## SAVOR

### Talking with Travelle's chefs; dining news

BY ANDREW DAVIS

There was a time when dining at a hotel's restaurant was almost an afterthought.

How times have changed. Many hotels across the nation now boast at least dining establishment that features upscale dishes that warrant repeat visits.

Among such spots is Chicago's **Travelle at the Langham** (330 N. Wabash Ave.; [TravelleChicago.com](http://TravelleChicago.com)), which features plenty of items with innovative twists.

Recently, Windy City Times talked with Travelle Chef de Cuisine Jeff Vucko and The Langham Executive Chef Damion Henry (who oversees all culinary operations within the hotel—including its 15,000 square feet of banquet space, Travelle, Pavilion, in-room private dining and exclusive Club Lounge) about what distinguishes the food at the spot—and they both cited a determination to raise standards.

"We keep challenging ourselves," said Henry, who landed here after being in Jamaica, Miami and New York City. "We keep setting the bar. We get five stars, but we don't settle. We want to be the best restaurant in the city.

"There are the big boys, like the Book Group and Lettuce Entertain You, and hotels like the Four Seasons. I like eating at those places, but we want to be in the conversation as well. We want to be the giant-busters and be the giants of the city ourselves."

"We definitely challenge ourselves and we don't want to be comfortable," echoed Vucko, who even was involved in the insurance business at one point, but who said he followed his dream of owning a restaurant. "Never stop."

Vucko and Henry have both been involved with Travelle since it opened in 2013—so why have they remained with this establishment, when so many other people seem to quickly and continuously jump from one culinary spot to another? "The space itself is gorgeous, and I feel like it's on tier with a luxury brand," Vucko said. "I also went through two chefs de cuisine, and learned a lot. We competed in [the culinary competition] Cochon555 and we won this region—twice." He also talked about embracing Chicago's Green City Market—so much so that Travelle has hosted a Green City Market dinner series for the past three years.

From the start, The Langham "was sold as a luxury, five-star dining experience," Henry added. "A lot of times you hear that, but it doesn't come to fruition. But here, the best talent in the country is here, and the backbone of that is still



Chef de Cuisine Jeff Vucko and Executive  
Chef Damion Henry of Travelle.  
Galdo Photography

here."

And the talent these chefs exhibit was apparent during lunch, when I was fortunate enough to try a hearty serving of creamy barley risotto and a perfectly cooked lamb burger. However, there is one experience Vucko described that warrants a return visit.

"There's this 32-ounce tomahawk chop that we bury in salt and put in the oven. Then we crack [the salt shell] tableside, in front of the guests. Then we light a torch and give it a little sear," he said. This writer had heard of fish being prepared that way—and it comes out tasty, without retaining the salt.

Travelle is definitely on its way to being included in those conversations Henry mentioned.

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

#### Dining news

—On Wednesdays, Schaumburg's **Tokio Pub** is offering, for \$12, any combination of three burgers—including the Tokio Sunrise Burger, Eruption Burger and the signature Ramen Burger—with any of the eight beers for 24 pairings. See <http://tokiopub.com/>.

—The **Dearborn's** pie program includes a

choice of key lime (graham cracker crust, key lime curd, vanilla cheesecake, toasted meringue), Dutch apple (traditional pie crust, Granny Smith-and-gala apple filling, streusel topping), brown sugar pumpkin (traditional pie crust, spiced pumpkin custard, mascarpone whip cream) and bourbon pecan (butter crust, caramelized pecans, brown sugar, bourbon). Pre-order by calling 312-384-1242 at least 48 hours in advance. Pies are \$35 each and are available now through Jan. 2.

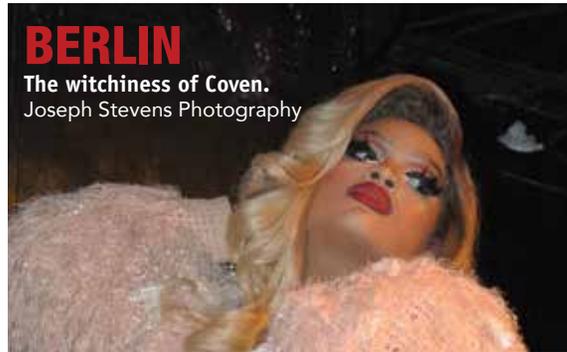
—**Sable Kitchen & Bar** has a kitschy Christmas pop-up bar, **Miracle**, that will take over its cocktail den with "Miracle at Sable Kitchen & Bar" on Nov. 23-Dec. 31. In collaboration with Cocktail Kingdom, **Miracle's** cocktail menu of 10 Christmas-inspired libations and two shots will be served in festively ornate glassware by Beverage Director Jenee Craver. A launch party will be held Friday, Nov. 23, 5-7 at 505 N. State St. and guests are urged to wear ugly holiday sweaters; visit [SableChicago.com](http://SableChicago.com).

—Launching on Black Friday and running through the holiday season, Lincoln Park spot **Gemini** will offer its ZooLights prix fixe special, including two courses and Santa's Cookies and a hot beverage to-go (\$36). Starters include the chef's seasonal soup of the day, and Gemini Salad or mini-chorizo empanadas, followed by a choice of lasagna bolognese, rainbow trout provencal or steak frites. See [GeminiChicago.com](http://GeminiChicago.com).

—Starting the week of Nov. 26, **Ina Mae Tavern & Packaged Goods**, 1415 N. Wood St., will offer daily specials. They include kids eating free on Mondays, Yakamein Tuesdays (yakamein being a Southern soup similar to ramen), All-You-Can-Eat Shrimp Wednesdays (the shrimp being \$35) and Fried Chicken, Beer and Bingo Thursdays. See <https://www.inamaetavern.com/>.



Travelle's barley risotto.  
Photo by Andrew Davis



**BERLIN**

The witchiness of Coven.  
Joseph Stevens Photography



**BIG CHICKS**

Saturday fun.  
Photos by Jerry Nunn

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# WINDY CITY TIMES COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., Nov. 21

**Thanksgiving is a Drag... All Building Event** Drag show and disco, quality time with your queer family. Get ready to dance and laugh it all away with: Bambi Banks, Dusty Bahls, Lucy Stooles, Nasty Bois, Tenderoni, Travis Fiero, Valentine Addams, Willy LaQueue and hosts Nico, Dominic Ferrera & Kristen Kaza. Doors 9 p.m. 10:00pm Metro Chicago 3730 N Clark Chicago

Friday, Nov. 23

**Trans/Gender Affirming Name Change Mobilization** Hosted by Transformative Justice Law Project. Volunteers will assist Cook County residents with filling out the documents required for a name change. Last Friday of every month in room 1202. 9:00am - 3:00am Daley Center Plaza 50 W Washington St Chicago <http://www.facebook.com/transformativjusticelawproject/>

**SexuWellness** For women and TGNC individuals, a wide variety of sexual and reproductive health-related services like chest/breast exams, mammogram referrals, pap tests including HPV screening and pelvic exams, STI testing, birth control prescription, IUD placements. Fourth Friday of every month. whs@howardbrown.org 5:00pm - 8:00pm Howard Brown, 6500 N. Clark, Chicago 773-572-8359 <http://howardbrown.org/womens-health/>



## 'NIGHT' MOVES Nov. 23-Dec. 30

**Vicki Quade is front and center as Christmas Bingo, It's a Ho-Ho-Holy Night returns to Chicago.**

Photo courtesy of Quade

**Christmas Bingo, It's a Ho-Ho-Holy Night** The comedy has been a fixture in Chicago since 2012. Through Dec. 30. \$30 8:00pm Royal George Theatre 1641 N Halsted St Chicago 312-988-9000

Saturday, Nov. 24

**Frontrunners/Frontwalkers Chicago** Weekly run/walk. Followed by brunch. 9:00am Kwagulth Totem Pole Addison & Lakeshore Dr. <http://frontrunnerschicago.com>

**Vienna Boys Choir** Annual Symphony Center appearance, a joyful program of traditional and contemporary vocal se-

lections entitled Christmas in Vienna. 2:00pm Chicago Symphony Center (Orchestra Hall) 220 S Michigan Ave Chicago <http://cso.org>

**Ravenswood Holiday Small Business Saturday** Hundreds of locally-owned businesses come together to show off their best products. Ravenswood Holly Jolly Trolleys will now be transporting shoppers free of charge. Complimentary gift guide and canvas tote at the Welcome Station 11:00pm - 5:00pm Welcome Station, 1813 W. Montrose Ave.

Tuesday, Nov. 27

**LGBTQ+ for Lori** LGBTQ+ community of Chicago raising resources necessary to spread Lori's message of an equitable and inclusive Chicago. 6:30pm - 8:00pm The Meeting House, 5025 N Clark St., Chicago [http://act.myngp.com/Forms/-6776591152294458368?fbclid=IwAR1zJcYufHWVCjB5Sf2QfJEu1cDkRD\\_7fA21Pxcd\\_ILf5A6QGkc0ch0Qb68](http://act.myngp.com/Forms/-6776591152294458368?fbclid=IwAR1zJcYufHWVCjB5Sf2QfJEu1cDkRD_7fA21Pxcd_ILf5A6QGkc0ch0Qb68)

Wed., Nov. 28

**TheT: Web Series Screening** Set in Chicago, the T follows a young trans woman and queer Black man as they learn how to be best friends in the wake of their romantic relationship, and Jo's transition. Hosted by Keeping it LITE. Free RSVP 5:30pm - 9:30pm Chicago Cultural Center 78 E. Washington St. Chicago <http://www.thetwebseries.com/Tickets>: [http://www.facebook.com/events/2571478436203560/?active\\_tab=about](http://www.facebook.com/events/2571478436203560/?active_tab=about)

**Working Women of Color: Three Films** Three films outline the history of women of color in trades, demonstrate the great progress they've achieved since the era of Rosie the Riveter during World War II but also the ground that remains to

be covered. Post screening discussion. 6:00pm pin Chicago Women in Trades, 2444 W. 16th St. Rear of the building, 3rd FL. <http://www.facebook.com/events/349748725773698/>

**The Buttcraacker: A Nutcracker Burlesque** Twist on the original ballet highlighting the world of burlesque, boylesque, drag, magic, fire spinning, sword balancing, ballet. \$20-\$40 plus all you can eat buffet for \$10 8:00pm Reggies Music Joint, 2105 S. State St. <http://www.thebuttcraackerburlesque.com>

Thursday, Nov. 29

**Stand Up For Red Indoor Street Fest** Sample signature bites from creative chefs. DIFFA has engaged the creative community to create site-specific music, performance and art responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. 5:30pm - 9:30pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://diffachicago.org/event/E625709206>

**Volledig: Emptied of Shame: Full of Life** The stories of the artists in this project - what they experienced living through the AIDS Crisis, memories of those lost 7:00pm Links Hall 3111 N. Western Ave Chicago <http://www.eventbrite.com>

Friday, Nov. 30

**HIV Lunch n' Learn** Gilead for World AIDS Day. Free Program 2:00pm - 3:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://community.centeronhalsted.org/pages/lunchnlearn?erid=8957853&trid=5c1cba5c-3646-4aa5-9dad-4f97dfdb4f60>

**World of Chocolate** Chicago's premier World AIDS Day event supporting the AIDS Foundation of Chicago's efforts. Signature creations of chocolatiers and chefs from over 23 of Chicago's hottest

restaurants, hotels and bakeries 6:00pm - 9:00pm Revel Fulton Market, 1215 W. Fulton <http://chocolate.aidschicago.org/ticketing/>

**Twelve Chicago-based LGBTQ+ performing arts organizations perform together** 35th Anniversary Holiday Hullabaloo with Chicago Gay Men's Chorus About Face Theatre, Allegrezza, Artemis Singers, Chicago Pride Guard, Chicago Spirit Brigade, Chicago Tap Theatre, GayCo, Lakeside Pride Music Ensembles, Lakeview Orchestra, Pride Films & Plays, and Windy City Gay Choru 8:00pm Harris Theater for Music and Dance 205 E Randolph Dr Chicago <http://cgmc.org/holiday>

**When Adonis Calls Chicago Premiere** Follows a correspondence between an accomplished author and a younger fan becomes an exploration of unbridled eroticism, demons, and secret longings. \$30 8:00pm Broadway Theater, Pride Arts Center, 4139 N Broadway <http://whenadoniscalls.brownpapertickets.com>

**Jane Lynch, A Swingin' Little Christmas** Golden Globe- and two-time Emmy-winning out lesbian actress Jane Lynch ("Glee") on stage with actress Kate Flannery ("The Office") First show 7:00. \$55/\$65/\$70/\$75 10:00pm City Winery Chicago 1200 W Randolph St Chicago <http://www.citywinery.com/>

**Anthology Reading: The Long Term, Resisting Life Sentences Working Toward Freedom** Contributors propose a range of far-reaching reforms and raise the even-more radical demand of abolition. Editors Erica Meiners and Jill Petty and contributors Tara Betts, Monica Cosby, Deana Lewis, and Maya Schenwar. 7:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>



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