Cardinal George on gay marriage

BY CHUCK COLBERT

BOSTON—The Catholic spiritual leader of Chicago visited Boston College recently, where a doctoral student pressed Cardinal Francis George about the Church’s recent opposition to civil-unions legislation recently passed by the Illinois General Assembly.

George told student John Falcone his “argument was not with Mother Church but with Mother Nature,” adding that anyone who advocates same-sex marriage or its equivalent “has lost touch with the common understanding of the human race.”

“No one has the right to change marriage,” George went on to say, neither “the Church” nor “the state.”

While it is one thing “creating laws so that people don’t feel persecuted,” the cardinal explained, “don’t create a law that says apples are oranges.” For a lawmaker to do so, George added, he “betrays his vocation to pass good law,” especially problematic for a “Catholic lawmaker.”

Like many Catholic families with LGBT family members, even his own, George acknowledged his oldest nephew is gay and a “fine man.”

The cardinal archbishop came to Boston College at the invitation of the university’s School of Theology and Ministry as well as the Church in the 21st Century Center. The school and the center co-sponsored George’s lecture Dec. 7.
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**NEWS**
- Prop 8 punted to lower court
- Suicide task force; Giffords’ intern
- Carol Moseley Braun interview
- Small protest at El event
- Cardinal; Black gay caucus
- Remembering Renee Hanover
- Gender situation at Jackhammer
- Gay in the Life: Matt McGrane
- Viewpoints on Garcia, DADT; letters

**ENTERTAINMENT/EVENTS**
- Winter theater preview
- Knight: Illusionist, Country Strong
- Woke Up Black; Nellie McKay
- Cowgirl Up; Driftwood
- Books: Morford, Almanac
- Billy Masters

**OUTLINES**
- Real estate; classifieds
- Calendar Q
- Sports: CMSA women’s party
- Sports: Triathlon announcement
- Sports: Moravec; Sky schedule

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The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in the federal Prop 8 case on Dec. 6. On Jan. 4, the court said it was confused by the case and suspended consideration of it until the California Supreme Court answers a question that the 9th Circuit sent to it. Pool photo by AP’s Eric Risberg

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in the federal Prop 8 case on Dec. 6. On Jan. 4, the court said it was confused by the case and suspended consideration of it until the California Supreme Court answers a question that the 9th Circuit sent to it. Pool photo by AP’s Eric Risberg

The bottom line of the documents was that the three-judge panel that heard arguments in an appeal of the case punctured a critical question regarding legal standing to the California Supreme Court.

The panel said it would not rule on the constitutionality of Prop 8 until it gets a ruling from the California Supreme Court as to whether Yes on 8 proponents of the initiative have an “authoritative” entitlement to represent the voters who passed the initiative in the appeal in federal court.

The announcement frustrated and disappointed many.

“It is frustrating that this will slow the case down, especially since there is nothing in California law that gives initiative proponents the power to force an appeal when the official representatives of the state have determined that doing so is not in the best interests of the state,” said Shannon Minter of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR).

The development struck some as odd. It appears the federal court is asking a state court whether Yes on 8 has standing to appeal a lower federal court ruling that struck down Prop 8.

“I don’t think it was necessary to ask the California Supreme Court to rule on that issue,” said Minter, “and I am disappointed the Ninth Circuit did so.” But Ted Olson, a lead attorney on the team challenging Prop 8, said it is not unreasonable.

And it was not really a surprise to learn the panel is struggling with the question of standing. During oral argument Dec. 6, 2010, all three judges seemed troubled by the issue that a state governor or attorney general could, in essence, acquire an ability to veto a measure passed by voters by simply refusing to defend a challenge to its constitutionality in court. The California constitution does not provide the governor or attorney general a right to veto voter-posed initiatives.

Both Judge Stephen Reinhardt, widely perceived to be the most liberal of the panel, and Judge Randy Smith, the most conservative, seemed concerned that the governor and attorney general’s refusal to appeal the district court decision “does not seem to be consistent” with the state’s initiative system. Judge Michael Hawkins expressed frustration during argument that the panel might be prevented from rendering a decision about the constitutionality of Prop 8 “so it’s clear, in California, who has the right to marry and who doesn’t.” The panel seemed prepared, on December 6, to ask the California Supreme Court to weigh in on the issue and it is a curiosity that it waited one month before actually doing so.

In its 21-page order to the California Supreme Court, the three-judge panel asked the state court to determine whether Yes on 8 proponents have “rights under California law … to defend the constitutionality of [Proposition 8] … when the state officials charged with the laws enforcement … refuse to provide such a defense.”

Olson, in a telephone conference call with reporters soon after the court released its order, said that, if the California Supreme Court determines that there is no authority under state law for Yes on 8 to have standing to represent voters in the appeal, the 9th Circuit would be bound to accept that determination. However, the ruling on standing could still be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, he said.

If the California Supreme Court determines Yes on 8 does not have standing and the 9th Circuit rules accordingly, then the decision of U.S. District Court Judge Vaughn Walker Aug. 4, 2010, will become the final word throughout California, making it impossible for same-sex couples to obtain marriage licenses.

Judge Walker ruled that Prop 8 violates the U.S. Constitutional guarantees to equal protection and due process. Although neither the attorney general nor the governor provided any defense for the initiative during the trial last January, Walker did allow Yes on 8 proponents to intervene in the trial as defenders of the measure. But the appeals panel indicated that standing in the district court does not necessarily mean Yes on 8 has standing to appeal.

If Yes on 8 does appeal a loss on the issue of standing to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the high court rules in its favor, it would then most likely send the case back to the 9th Circuit for a ruling on constitutionality.

Meanwhile, among its other documents Jan. 4, the 9th Circuit panel issued a 16-page opinion that Imperial County, Calif., does not have standing to appeal the district court decision in its own right. The panel said it was denying the county’s claim for standing on different grounds than did Judge Walker. The panel held that, because the county simply administers the state’s marriage law, it does not have any “interest of its own” to defend. The county has 14 days in which to appeal the panel’s ruling on standing.

The 21-page order released Jan. 4 said that having standing to defend Proposition 8 in federal district court does not necessarily guarantee that Yes on 8 proponents have standing in federal court. In one of several other documents released, the panel denied an effort by Imperial County to gain standing to make the appeal.

The panel’s formal question to the California Supreme Court is: “Whether under Article II, Section 8 of the California Constitution, or otherwise under California law, the official proponents of an initiative measure possess either a particularized interest in the initiative’s validity or the authority to assert the State’s interest in the initiative’s validity, which would enable them to defend the constitutionality of the initiative upon its adoption or appeal a judgment invalidating the initiative, when the public officials charged with that duty refuse to do so.”

“If California does grant the official proponents of an initiative the authority to represent the State’s interest in defending a voter-approved initiative when public officials have declined to do so or to appeal a judgment invalidating the initiative,” stated the order, “then Proponents would also have standing to appeal on behalf of the State.”

“This court is obligated to ensure that it has jurisdiction over this appeal before proceeding to the important constitutional questions it presents,” said the order, “and we must dismiss the appeal if we lack jurisdiction. The certified question therefore is disposing of our very ability to hear this case.”

“It is not sufficiently clear to us, however, whether California law does so,” the panel said.

“It is not within the power of the State to abdicate its responsibility to decide whether the highest court of California on these important questions of an initiative proponent’s rights and interests in the particular circumstances before us, we believe, it is compelling the initiative to seek such an authoritative statement of California law.”

The Jan. 4 development will, of course, delay the 9th Circuit panel’s decision on the merits of the case—whether voters can withhold marriage licenses from gay couples while granting them to straight couples.

“Further delay in restoring the freedom to marry in California is a lamentable hardship on couples,” said Evan Wolfson, head of the national Freedom to Marry group. “But I am confident that we will regain the freedom to marry in California soon.”

NELC’s Minter agreed.

“I am confident the California Supreme Court will hold that California law does not give initiative proponents any special power to override the decisions of the state’s elected representatives,” Minter said. “In the meantime, however, Proposition 8 remains on the books, and every day that goes by, LGBT people in California are passing up the freedom to marry their partners and express their love and commitment through marriage. This will delay,” he said, “but not deny, the day that Proposition 8 is gone for good.”

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Navy commander relieved of duty

Owen Honors, captain of the USS Enterprise, was relieved of duty Jan. 4 after several racy videos—some with anti-gay content—were released, according to Fox News.

In the videos, which was filmed in 2006 and 2007 (when Honors was the executive officer), sailors are in drag: use anti-gay slurs; and simulate a rectal exam and masturbation. The Virginian-Pilot newspaper broke the story Jan. 1.

Adm. John C. Harvey Jr., commander of United States Fleet Forces Command, said, “After personally reviewing the videos created while serving as executive officer, I have lost confidence in Capt. Honors’ ability to lead effectively, and he is being held accountable for poor judgment and the inappropriate actions demonstrated in the videos that were created while he served as executive officer on Enterprise.”

Aubrey Sarvis, Army veteran and executive director for Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, said in a statement that Honors “was acting more like the president of a frat house rather than the executive officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise.”
Task force focuses on preventing suicide
BY DANA RUDOLPH
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

The federally supported National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (NAASP) recently officially announced a task force dedicated to suicide prevention among LGBT youth.

Pamela Hyde, the openly gay head of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) revealed plans in November to form such a task force. And, on the same day as the Alliance officially announced the task force, SAMHSA separately announced the availability of up to $5.5 million for campus suicide prevention programs that meet the needs of youth the Alliance has identified as being at particular risk, including LGBT youth.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are from 1.5 to seven times more likely to report having attempted suicide than their non-LGBT peers, according to the Alliance. Transgender youth, although less well studied, are believed to have higher rates of suicidal behavior as well.

The task force will be led by Charles Robbins, head of The Trevor Project, which operates an LGBT youth suicide prevention program nationwide, and Kevin Jennings, the Department of Education’s Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Jennings, an openly gay appointee, founded the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLESN).

The Alliance, launched by Secretary of Health Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in September, is a public-private partnership supported by SAMHSA, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is designed to advance and update the 2001 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Robbins said in an interview that he believes the task force will be able to inform government agencies as well as private non-profits about “appropriate, evidence-based suicide prevention programming that works for this community.”

He noted that many different government agencies—including the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Defense—are involved in suicide prevention, and the task force will be able to “provide some linkages” among the efforts.

He also hopes the task force will be able to share and learn from the other Alliance task forces addressing high-risk populations, including American Indians/Alaska Natives and military service members and veterans.

He said he and Jennings are still in the process of naming members to the task force and would be convening in January to identify specific goals for the group.

A string of suicides by teens bullied for being gay or perceived to be gay captured nationwide media attention last fall and prompted calls for action from LGBT organizations, celebrities, and the U.S. Department of Education, among others. Robbins said, however, that these incidents “are a fraction of what occurs on a regular basis.”

In fact, the federal government has known about suicide as a health risk for gay and lesbian youth for over 20 years. The Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide, published by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 1989, noted the higher risk of suicides and suicide attempts among that population. Some questioned the report’s methodology, but subsequent studies have upheld the general conclusion that gay and lesbian youth are a group at high risk for suicide. But pressure from LGBT organizations, celebrities, and the Department of Education, among others, has been increasing American Indians/Alaska Natives and military service members and veterans.

The Arizona Republic wrote, “Hernandez was standing about 30 feet from Giffords during the ‘Congress on Your Corner’ event outside a Safeway store near Tucson. When the gunshots began, Hernandez ran toward them and began checking the pulses of people who’d been hit. When Hernandez got to Giffords, he used his hand to apply pressure to the entry wound on her forehead. He pulled her into his lap and held her upright so she wouldn’t choke on her blood.”

On Jan. 9, Gifford’s longtime campaign manager, Mike McNulty, told CNN that he was confident the congresswoman would pull through, although “[t]he doctors are pretty clear that we just have to wait and see.”

Lambda Legal Executive Director Kevin Cathcart said in a statement, “Gabrielle Giffords has been an effective leader and a steady friend to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. We wish her and the other injured victims a speedy and complete recovery.

“A healthy democracy does not have room for a culture of violence and intimidation. Political leaders and judges must be able to do their jobs without having to fear for their lives. Now more than ever, all we must work to ensure they’re able to do so.”

Authorities have charged Loughner with two counts of murder, two counts of attempted murder and one count of attempting to assassinate a member of Congress, according to the Wall Street Journal. Loughner shot 20 people— six fatally, including U.S. District Court Judge John Roll and a 9-year-old girl. In 2008, the Suicide Resource Prevention Center, created by HHS to help states and communities “implement and evaluate suicide prevention programs,” released a 63-page white paper, Suicide Risk and Prevention for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth.

“It would be difficult to overstate the impact of stigma and discrimination against LGBT individuals in the United States,” said the white paper. “Stigma and discrimination are directly tied to risk factors for suicide.”

Robbins said that work among government entities on suicide prevention among LGBT youth has been happening over a significant period of time.”

He has been a member of the Consumer Subcommittee of SAMHSA’s National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for three years, and said that SAMHSA has been “deeply committed” to addressing LGBT youth suicide prevention.

In government, however, “it takes a long time for things to happen,” he said. The task force was conceived before the media attention around the LGBT suicides last fall, he noted. The attention last fall, however, “helped align the government with ways they can address the problem,” and reaffirmed that “this is a public health issue.”

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Gay intern saved U.S. rep’s life

Daniel Hernandez, Jr., the intern who remained by the side of U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords—among the many shot by Jared Lee Loughner, 22, Jan. 8 in Tucson, Ariz.—is gay, according to the Dallas Voice.

The Arizona Republic wrote, “Hernandez was standing about 30 feet from Giffords during the ‘Congress on Your Corner’ event outside a Safeway store near Tucson. When the gunshots began, Hernandez ran toward them and began checking the pulses of people who’d been hit. When Hernandez got to Giffords, he used his hand to apply pressure to the entry wound on her forehead. He pulled her into his lap and held her upright so she wouldn’t choke on her blood.”

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Carol Moseley Braun on her mayoral run

BY ANDREW DAVIS

As more and more candidates drop out of the race to be Chicago’s next mayor, the spotlight becomes brighter for those remaining—and the glare has been particularly bright for Carol Moseley Braun.

She is used to being the center of attention, having been a U.S. senator as well as an ambassador. However, her 2011 run has been steeped in controversy regarding everything from her tax returns to a recent LGBT event she skipped, delivering words over the telephone. (See the sidebar on page 7.) In this interview (recorded in late December), Moseley Braun talked with Windy City Times about opponent Rahm Emanuel, her reasons for running and education.

Windy City Times: I’ve been talking with a few people about mayoral candidates. When I brought up your name, the response I got was “I’m not sure why she’s running.” So could you articulate why you are running and talk about what unique qualifications you feel you bring to the table?

Carol Moseley Braun: Well, to begin with, I’m the most qualified of all the candidates running—in terms of credentials and my experience in government. I’ve served on the local, county, state, national and international levels of government. And I’ve been both an administrator as well as a legislator. I also have been an entrepreneur, with a start-up organic beverage company. So I’ve had enough experiences where I’m the best-qualified candidate to run.

I’m doing it because I love Chicago and I love the people. I’ve lived my entire life here (although I traveled and moved abroad briefly), but I’m a third-generation Chicagoan and I care about what happens. I want it to be a city where we can be proud of our stewardship, where we can have public safety, where our children can get a quality education in the neighborhoods where they live and there are jobs created in those same neighborhoods so people can support themselves.

To me, all of those things are quality-of-life issues that are eminently doable with proper leadership.

WCT: One of your opponents, Rahm Emanuel, is still dealing with residency issues that might cost him a spot on the ballot. Where do you stand on the issue?

CMB: Well, the law is the law is the law, and he knows whether or not he is a resident and the board is going to decide if he is a resident. [Note: The election board backed Emanuel. A hearing was slated to start Jan. 11 in Cook County Circuit Court.] That’s not for me to have an opinion on, really, because I’m not on the board. But he should do the right thing in regards to it.

WCT: I asked because your campaign manager, Mike Noonan, issued a press release about Rahm Emanuel wanting “a special deal from the Board of Elections.” There’s also the implication that Rahm lied on his tax form. So that’s why I asked.

CMB: I gave you my position on it. I wasn’t aware of Mike’s... I guess I should’ve known. I wasn’t paying any attention to it, I guess.

WCT: OK. The whole “consensus Black candidate” situation is interesting. Were you surprised that Danny Davis was initially selected?

CMB: See—he wasn’t. I was selected, too, for that matter. Things kept changing. The process was so flawed that I don’t think it had any credibility at all.

WCT: I just thought the whole process was very curious...

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receptive city. There are still problems with bullying and violence that law-enforcement personnel have to be sensitized to dealing with, beyond that, I think the city has pretty much distinguished itself as to its receptivity to the LGBT community.

Let me tell a story that I feel is pertinent: I gave a speech recently to Hyde Park High School. When I finished, a little girl in the front row raised her hand and asked, “Dr. Martin Luther King: He was killed, right?” At first, I was shocked: This was a Black child in a Black school, and she was confused that Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. Then it dawned on me: He was killed so many years ago that, in her world view, it could’ve been Abraham Lincoln or Julius Caesar, for that matter. She didn’t have a point of reference.

I never cease to be amazed, in terms of the LGBT community. I have been a fighter for civil rights for the LGBT community from the beginning. I’ve taken the hard knocks with the Defense of Marriage Act in the Senate, on the state level with hate crimes. I’ve been there consistently over the years. Yet, I find myself having to revisit all of that and remind people of those fights and contributions, because a lot of people just don’t know.

We can all celebrate the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” but one of the candidates in this race, and I’m not trying to trash him—yeah, I am trash him publicly—was the architect of it in the Clinton administration. So the contributions as well as the betrayals, if you will, have been forgotten. As candidates, we start off redefining ourselves from scratch—and that makes the challenge of doing interviews that much more important.

WCT: What are your thoughts on a school specifically for LGBT students? Do you think it would segregate a segment of the population?

CMB: I was talking about something close to this today. I have some friends who founded a unionized charter school because they wanted to provide unisex education for girls at the high-school level. There was some research that showed that girls do better, particularly in math and science, when they are not intimidated by the presence of boys in the classroom.

So I guess my short answer is that, to the extent that teenagers who are questioning might need an environment where they’re not ridiculed or bullied, [such a school] might be a positive thing. The objective of the school is not just about creating community; it’s education. If a young person’s sexuality gets in the way of education because they don’t fit socially then, as educators and parents, we have a responsibility to alleviate those problems.

WCT: What do you feel is the biggest misconception about you?

CMB: Oh, that I did anything other than show up at the Senate when they didn’t want to have me there. [Laughter] When I got elected to the Senate, it broke open an institution that had been closed. I was one of two African Americans elected there in the entire 20th century and, instead of that being celebrated, it was met with smears, marginalization and scandalizing—none of which had any merit or truth to it. I came through those years—and I never had a sanction or censure. It was a lot of noise and heat around the fact that I was this unusual member of the Senate.

And, quite frankly, I think members of the LGBT community can relate better than most to being singled out and treated like the other. It was a very difficult time, but when it was all over I was still able to get the nation’s highest security clearance. [Laughter] Now I know how to handle being smeared; I’m a wiser person, a better person—and someone who’s more sophisticated in the ways of political hardball.


BRAUN phones it in at LGBT event

Carol Moseley Braun’s Jan. 4 LGBT meet-and-greet at Downtown Bar & Lounge featured plenty of people—except the mayoral candidate herself.

However, she did make an appearance, of sorts. After some patrons waited more than two hours, event organizer Marc Loveless let attendees know that Braun would be unable to personally make the event (apparently because of double-booking)—but that she had her on the phone. He then put the phone up to the mic; unfortunately, the volume output was so low that only those closest to Loveless could hear what she said.

Braun said, in part, that she wanted to make Chicago a city “where everyone would have equality and opportunity and a chance to participate.” She added that “Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, and we have to work together to promote and build and strengthen the neighborhoods.” She also said that “it really comes down to the people and the culture. [There should] be a city where the culture is one of inclusion in which the people are free to live in safety and to be who they are, and whose rights are protected by the city government.”

Two other Braun supporters—David Igasaki and Elizabeth Wakeland—spoke before the candidate did. Igasaki cited what he said was Braun’s “impeccably progressive voting record” when she was a legislator and added that she was “a steadfast supporter of the LGBT community.”

Reactions to Braun’s “appearance” ranged from Loveless’ optimism and spin to several attendees feeling discouraged. Loveless said that there will be a similar event with Braun in the future.

—Andrew Davis

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The Equality Illinois First Friday event is a monthly gathering designed to raise funds and bring members of the organization together in a social setting at the Boynton nightspot SideTrack.

Rick Garcia, the political policy director of Equality Illinois, was fired in late December, and the decision caused some in the community to call for a protest Jan. 7, the first such scheduled event of the year.

Two protestors with a sign stood outside in the frigid cold while approximately 50 members of Equality Illinois gathered inside. On the sign were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words, “No public policy director … unknown lobbyist on retainer; name background were the words.

The rev. Wilfredo de Jesus—who is known for his accomplishments in the LGBT community, and speaks at events throughout the city—joined the rally.

In addition to comments received at the meeting, written comments will be accepted until February 18, 2011. Comments may be submitted by mail, e-mail or fax, with attention to: Steve Hands, Strategic Planning & Policy, Chicago Transit Authority P.O. Box 7602, Chicago, IL 60680-7602 E-mail: RPM@chicagotrans.com  (312) 681-4915

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CARDINAL from cover
His talk drew upon themes from his recently published book, The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture. The Church in the 21st Century Center serves as “a catalyst and resource for renewal” for the U.S. Catholic Church. Originally established in 2002 as a two-year initiative at Boston College in the wake of the clerical sex-abuse scandal, the center is now permanent, with a mission to explore “neuralgic issues” facing the Church today.

George spoke for 35 minutes and then took several questions from the audience of more than 125 people. Tape recording was not permitted because, he said, “When I give lecture as a bishop, snippets are put together and taken out of context,” becoming “an exercise of manipulation, a game of gotcha.”

Falcone and another Boston College graduate student, Ryan Nocito, both wore rainbow sashes, widely regarded as visible indicators of solidarity with LGBT rights and full participation in the Catholic Church. Other students wore rainbow armbands and ribbons.

Falcone said that he attended the lecture after reading a Facebook posting about George’s lobbying against civil unions in Illinois. “I was upset about that,” Falcone said. “People should not be able to say things with impunity. I want to remind them that they are causing trouble, and they cannot get away with it.”

Falcone said that he wrote to the dean of the School of Theology and Ministry and Theology ahead of time, informing officials that he would be at the lecture. George appeared not to be taken by surprise with the question.

“What I heard in his response,” Falcone said, “is that most important aspect the Church’s lobbying against same-sex unions is that marriage is a body of knowledge,” he said. “We know more about human sexuality than we did 100 years ago. And the Church doesn’t acknowledge any of that. They keep coming back to Adam and Eve.”

There is yet another disconnection for the Church. As The New York Times reported Dec. 15, the Catholic Church has relented in France, the only arbitrator of morality in the country, to see if he would meet with her for a conversation.

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From left: John Falcone and Ryan Nocito. Photo by Chuck Colbert

"Conversations" attendees. Photo by Mason Harrison

Caucus hosts ‘Conversations’
BY MASON HARRISON
The Chicago Black Gay Men’s Caucus hosted the first in what will be a series of “conversations” in the new year about HIV/AIDS Jan. 8 at the DePaul Center in downtown Chicago. The event was different from past caucus events because organizers focused on reaching members of the area’s LGBT community who have not frequent ed past conferences and forums hosted by the group. “This time we weren’t preaching to the choir,” the caucus’ policy chief, Keith Green, said.

The conversation, attended by approximately 60 people, featured discussions about HIV prevention and testing, the stigma associated with HIV and linkages to care, reducing the number of new infections and HIV transmission among sex workers. Those in attendance floated a host of ideas to address the topics at hand, including decentralizing the gay connection to HIV/AIDS, presenting better depictions of people living with HIV/AIDS and improving ways to reach out to those most in need of testing.

David Dodd, chair of the caucus’s public relations arm, told Windy City Times that the group’s conversation was important in order to “get a real account of what the issues are that are plaguing Black men who have sex with men in order to create discussions around HIV/AIDS strategies” and to “get information from around the community to help address shifting the city of Chicago’s forthcoming HIV/AIDS plan.”

The next caucus conversation will take place in the coming months.

Man convicted of threatening gay Chicago juror
Roanoke, Va., neo-Nazi resident William White was convicted Jan. 5 of encouraging violence against Mark Hoffman, an ex-Northwestern University administrator who headed the jury that convicted white supremacist Matt Hale of ordering a hit on federal judge Joan Lefkow, according to the Chicago Tribune.

In a rare move, the jury asked that the courtroom be cleared of visitors and media before the verdict was read. In September 2008, four years after Hale’s trial, Hoffman started receiving text messages and phone calls, according to the Chicago Sun-Times. According to Hoffman, his own personal information appeared on a hate website; the data included his sexual orientation, his partner’s African-American background and even his cat’s name (Homeboy).

White’s online posting called Hoffman a “gay, Jewish anti-racist” and blamed Hoffman for what White felt was Hale’s wrongful conviction. The defense argued that White made no specific threats against Hoffman. However, prosecutors cited White’s calls for everyone linked with the Hale trial to be “assassinated,” the Tribune reported.

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Hanover receiving an award from Chicago’s National Organization for Women chapter in 1991. Photo by Tracy Baim

Hanover just prior to her arrest during a Supreme Court protest as part of the 1987 March on Washington weekend. Photo by Tracy Baim

Bruce Koff, Renee Hanover and Judith Johns receiving awards in 1992 from the Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Photo by Genypher Novak

Dillie Grunauer and Renee Hanover at a 1991 Horizons event. Photo by Tracy Baim

Rich Pfeiffer and Hanover circa 1980. Photo from the Gaylife archives

**HANOVER from cover**

her father was from Russia, her mother from England. What radicalized her on gender issues was an experience in Hebrew school, which she attended with her sister. Renee excelled, winning a first prize award that would mean she could lead a parade. But because she was a girl, she was initially refused the honor.

When she was in New York, Renee also was involved in labor organizing because she was an office worker. She joined the Communist Party in New York, and was still involved in the CP when she moved to Chicago in 1952. She became disillusioned with the CP when they did not support efforts on fighting racism. Renee married young (taking her husband's last name, Hanover), later divorced and then raised her three children while working her way through college and law school in the 1960s.

She was dismissed from law school in 1964, four months shy of her degree, for being a lesbian. She later returned to graduate. She opened what is believed to be the first law office in the U.S. focused on women's issues and was also believed to be the first "out" lesbian attorney in the county.

Hanover was inducted into Chicago’s Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 1991. Her tremendous contributions to Chicago’s LGBT and mainstream communities includes work on dozens of non-profits, defending gay men against police entrapment, fighting to desegregate beaches in Chicago, helping overturn the Chicago anti-cross-dressing law, representing African-American lesbians protesting heavy carding at white lesbian bars, representing the Black Panthers, and much more. She was a colleague of legendary Chicago lesbian Pearl Hart.

Hanover was one of Chicago’s most cherished lesbian activists. She worked inside and outside the system to save and change the lives of tens of thousands of people.

With her senior colleague, attorney Pearl M. Hart, she helped overturn the Chicago “zipper” law banning cross-dressing and worked on numerous cases of gay men arrested by police in public spaces.

Hanover, a powerful presence in any meeting, was a traditional anti-war leftist, always challenging the government. Starting in July 1961, she helped organize a “freedom made-in” at the South Shore’s Rainbow Beach to help desegregate Chicago’s beaches. It took three years, but eventually she and her allies won.

Fred Eggan, who died in 2007, wrote of Hanover in an essay titled “Dykes and Fags Want Everything: Dreaming of the Gay Liberation Front”: “I remember best a demonstration [in the early 1970s] against the beating and killing of a Black drag queen by the Chicago Police Department. ... We came to understand that our gay rights would be nothing but privileges for the well-to-do unless we acted for the most vulnerable, most easily victimized queens. Long-time lesbian lawyer Renee Hanover, who had struggled for years already as an advocate of union and leftist communities in Chicago, was one of the maybe 20 of us in the freezing sleet on Chicago Avenue that day.”

That was Hanover—you could count on her in the boardroom, in the courtroom, or on the streets with ACT UP protesters or draft-resisting revolutionaries.

She was the attorney for the first public gay dance in Chicago, in 1970 on Chicago’s South Side.

She also took on the gay establishment, fighting for African-American lesbians kept out of women’s bars. The April/May 1975 edition of Chicago’s Gay Crusader newspaper reported on the case against C.K.’s Lounge, where Hanover represented the complainants in their successful legal fight for unbiased access to the club.

The June 24, 1977 edition of GayLife newspaper reported on comments Hanover made at the huge and historic protest against anti-gay singer Anita Bryant’s appearance at Medinah Temple in Chicago. The June 14 protest brought together thousands of LGBTs. Hanover stated:

“... This would have to be the most moving event we have ever had.” She said the community is a part “of all the people who are covered by the Constitution.” Hanover told the crowd that she was asked to speak June 17 before the Texas Bar Association opposite Bryant.

During the 1987 March on Washington weekend in D.C., the 61-year-old Hanover was among those arrested at a protest in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. For more than 40 years, she was involved in a wide range of causes. As an out lesbian attorney as long ago as the 1960s, Hanover made history alongside very few out colleagues.

Her practice with Hart inspired Hanover’s own work. “Her legal career consisted in large part of defending underdogs—aliens, alleged subversives, homosexuals, prostitutes, among others,” Hanover said when Hart died. One could say the same about Hanover.

Hanover cared about senior gay issues and was part of a pioneering 1980s group working on those issues well before they became popular.

She was a director of Lesbian and Gay Seniors (LEGACY) for four years. She was a co-founder and steering committee member of Old Lesbian Organizing Committee.

Hanover’s work on women’s issues was also important to her and to Chicago. She helped anti-rape efforts, the Women in Crisis Can Act
hotline, Women Employed, Lesbians in the Law, Chicago Lesbian Liberation, Daughters of Bilitis, Lesbian Community Cancer (now Care) Project, the National Organization for Women, Chicago Women’s Liberation Front, and dozens more.

But she was also involved in numerous legal efforts, including the National Lawyers Guild (executive board), the Chicago Lawyers Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and the ACLU. She initiated the first gay and lesbian workshops at any national legal conference. She was also a charter member of the Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago (LAGBAC).

Hanover represented in court many feminists and feminist groups, including the underground abortion group Jane. She actively supported and participated in the annual Women and Law Conferences nationally, from the second through twenty-second year of the conference. She was part of a ground-breaking lesbian professional organization, and helped found a 1970s women’s brunch group that is still active today.

She also represented the “D.C. 12” gay male defendants against criminal charges stemming from the Black Panthers Constitutional Convention in Washington, D.C.

Hanover also provided testimony for important legal efforts. She testified before the Chicago City Council, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, the Federal Communications Commission, the Illinois Department of Insurance, the Illinois Department of Labor, the Illinois Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Illinois Fair Employment Practices Commission, the Texas Bar Association, and more.

In 1973 alone, she testified twice at the Chicago City Council, once at hearings on rape, and another time at the judiciary committee hearings on two gay rights resolutions.

She was very much a co-gender activist, working with Mattachine Midwest, Beckman House, Chicago Gay Alliance, Gay Liberation Front (she was a founding member in 1969), ACT UP and Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force campaigns. She was in mainstream groups, Jewish organizations (Havurat Achayot and Congregation Or Chadash), plus non-gay Jewish groups), progressive causes, and dozens more too numerous to list.

The Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame has a more detailed roster of her involvement (see www.glhalloffame.org), and many of her personal papers are maintained by the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York.

Her long-time friend William B. Kelley wrote in an obituary, “Renee Hanover was a force for change of both individuals and institutions. She was out and proud and unapologetic, even her law practice was often pro-bono. Her ability to motivate others and to size them up accurately has been of great aid to her own and others’ advocacy efforts.”

In June 1992, Hanover contributed a column to Outlines gay newspaper (which purchased and merged with Windy City Times in 2000), based on her remarks receiving one of her many honors, this from the Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force, May 16 of 1992. She stated in part: “I remember too many years ago when I represented the Black Panthers and the Blackstone rangers and was trying to start a bail fund.” Out of that, she realized the gay community could also use such a fund, which eventually lead to IGLIF’s formation.

He acceptance speech urged the community to come together across all divisions, including race and gender. “(We) cannot afford this infighting and trashing,” she said. “We’ve got serious work ahead of us and we need the contribution of each and every one of us. We’ve got to advance the interests of the entire gay and lesbian community. The best tribute you could give those we honor tonight is for each and every person here to make a commitment and actively join our struggle.”

In addition to IGLIF and induction in the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame, Hanover received many other honors during her career. The Chicago National Organization for Women gave her their Wonder Woman Award, LEGACY named an award for Hanover after honoring her, and she received the Joe Alonzi Award from IMPACT, a now-defunct gay political action committee.

What is most important to remember about Hanover is not just her work, but Hanover as a person. She was short and mighty, a mentor and friend to all generations of LGBTs, an amazing force for change of both individuals and institutions. She was out and proud and unapologetic, well before that became the norm. She was a role model for so many Chicagoans and others around the United States—lawyers, activists, politicians. Her retirement to Los Angeles was a sad blow to the Windy City; Chicago may never see the likes of Renee Hanover again.

Hanover was preceded in death, by a few months, by her former partner Dillie Grunauer, another Chicago activist legend.

Survivors: Her children Stan (Pam) Hanover, Paul (Nancy Katz) Hanover, Nancy (Gerardo) Reyes; grandchildren Michael Andrews, Sarah Solon-Hanover, Julie, Jonathan and Susan Hanover; great grandchildren Jasmine, Jelani and Khadja Andrews.

Memorials to: Congregation or Chadash, St. John of God Care Center in Los Angeles, The Herstory Archives in New York, or Gerber Hart Library.

(On her remarks receiving one of her many honors, this from the Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force)
Bar installs gender policy after complaint

BY KATE SOSIN

Jackhammer owner Jimmy Keup said that if there is one thing the bar prides itself on, it is inclusivity. The Rogers Park bar has long been advertised as a welcoming space for a variety of subcultures, including the LGBTQ community, which has its own basement party space in Jackhammer known as “The Hole.”

“The bar’s vision when we created the space was to have it all-inclusive,” Keup told Windy City Times. While many play spaces only allow men, Keup said, Jackhammer has marketed itself to everyone in the LGBTQ community and beyond.

But a recent complaint from a transgender patron has called that claim into question, and not just for transgender people, but for Keup himself.

Elias Krell went to Jackhammer Oct. 28, 2010, to party with three friends (two transgender-masculine, and one female). Krell identifies as a transgender FTM (female to male), and he had been into The Hole several times without incident. Krell and his friends were standing in a dark corridor known as “The Alley” when the bartender approached them and told them to leave the space.

“I hadn’t been in the hole 10 minutes when the bartender pointed in my face and said ‘you, you need to leave,’” Keup told Windy City Times. “He said ‘because you’re not a man’.”

Krell does not pass as male, and the bartender incorrectly assumed he and another friend were women.

According to Keup, Jackhammer does not enforce a gender policy in The Hole itself, but he said, staff will not allow women to be in the Alley due to safety concerns. The Alley is a hallway linked directly to a side-door exit. Staffers sometimes cannot see into it to make sure that patrons are safe. In August 2007, a gay man inappropriately touched a straight woman upstairs at the bar, and she called the police on him. Keup said the bar has been sensitive about women in the Hole ever since. Unless a woman is dressed in fetish wear, he said, bar staff will not allow her to be in the Alley.

Jay Lacey was the bartender working in the Hole Oct. 28. He said he saw Krell and his friends and thought there were “two lesbians, a female, and a male.”

“They assume that I am supposed to know they are transgender,” Lacey said. “When I see a woman go back there, it’s about the safety of women.”

Lacey confirmed that he asked Krell and his female-identified friend to leave the Alley. Lacey also told another transgender friend to leave the Alley, but when the friend spoke back with a deep voice, Lacey said he realized he probably made a mistake in asking Krell to leave.

“I went back to the bar and was like, ‘What just happened?’” Lacey said. “I just assume. It’s making an assumption.”

Jackhammer bought Krell and his friends a round of drinks to apologize, but Keup said the incident left him feeling shocked, “invisible” and “not understood.” He worried that other transgender people would kick them out for not passing.

Shortly after the incident, Keup’s boyfriend, Madsen Minax, e-mailed Keup a complaint letter. Minax, who is well-known in Chicago as the bassist of Actor Slash Model, knew Keup personally because the two had worked together on an activity training from the Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois. Keup said he intends to work with Minax’s e-mail encouraged Keup and staff to seek out “Transgender 101” (transgender sensitivity training) from the Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois.

“Keup said he intends to do that. ‘We need to do a better job,’ he said. ‘And, absolutely, we are willing to do that.’”

Krell said that he will accept Keup and Lacey’s apology and return to Jackhammer. But he said, the staff needs to clarify what its policies are and that women are vulnerable so they have to decide who they want to be there.

Minax said he had sent Keup a complaint letter, but Keup never responded. After Minax told Windy City Times that he sent the letter, Keup said, he intends to do that.

“We have to be consistent. As it stands now, we don’t know when we are safe and when we are not, and it shouldn’t depend on whose bartending team is tight with me now,” he said. “But then again, they do have really strict rules.”

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PASSAGES

Debra E. Lang

Debra E. Lang, a former OR and flight nurse at Cook County Hospital and also in New York and North Carolina, passed away unexpectedly at home Dec. 30, 2010. She was 55.

She courageously battled metastatic breast cancer for 13 years, and will be remembered for her fighting spirit, unflagging optimism, generous and compassionate heart, and her great sense of humor.

Last year, Lang was the West friend and former partner of Luanne Adams.

She leaves behind her faithful companion, Repo the German shepherd mix; her sister, Susan (Brad) Simon of New Jersey; her beloved niece and goddaughter, Samantha “Sam” Simon; and many friends in Chicago and all over the United States.

A celebration of her life is being planned. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in her name to Susan G. Komen For the Cure (http://www.komen.org), Orphans of the Storm (http://www.orphansofthestorm.org) or any animal shelter.

For information contact the Cremation Society of Illinois at 773-281-5058 or http://www.cremation-society.com.

Debra Lang.
The majority of entrants for the design competition to refurbish the Chicago Dramatists theatre lobby and entrances went with a standard red theme, including the second- and third-place finalists. But not Matt McGrane and Sarah Kuchar, who opted for a yellow theme—and it worked.

McGrane, a student at Harrington College of Design, and Harrington alumna Kuchar were named the winners Dec. 1. They won a cash prize of $750 and a plaque in the theatre lobby, along with the construction of their winning design.

The competition was made possible through a grant from Chicago Community Trust, as a part of the Arts Engagement Exchange.

The Chicago Dramatists theatre is located at 1105 W. Chicago, minutes from the Loop. The historical building where Chicago Dramatists resides was originally erected as Baer’s Hall in 1886 and designed by architect Fredrick W. Aschlager. The facility now includes a 77-seat theatre, a 1,000-square-foot lobby and box office, two dressing rooms, two classroom/rehearsal halls, a reception area and lounge for the playwrights, and administrative offices.

Each season, about 11,000 people visit the theatre and more than 500 writers participate in weekly programs.

Chicago Dramatists’ goal is that the tangible improvements from McGrane and Kuchar will enhance and contribute to its patrons’ experiences and impressions of the theatre. Plus, the transformation will create a more visible and identifiable exterior façade with an improved awning and signage, a lighted poster box, benches, planters, and street furniture.

“It’s really, really exciting,” being named the winners, McGrane said. “Some of the challenges [in the contest] led to a better design than it would have been if we didn’t have those designs. This is a collaborative effort, and it will impact so many people—the public, those who work here and the neighborhood.

“We were thrilled when we found out [that we won]. This is pretty big for both of us.”

The estimated date of the interior construction will be complete by the next Chicago Dramatists’ premiere production, BORDELLO, on Feb. 4, 2011, and the second phase of renovating the exterior should wrap up in time for the opening of the final 2010-2011 production of HICKORYDICKORY in May. The construction budget for both interior and exterior improvements is about $13,500.

McGrane and Kuchar’s design was selected by a panel of professionals made up by members of Chicago Dramatists, Harrington and others.

“I hope this is a launching pad for this type of work,” said McGrane, a designer at John Robert Wiltgen Design. “Sure, I love working for John, but there’s going to come a time when I want to branch out on my own.

“This is real exciting. It’s a great-looking project, but also a great functioning project. I’m really happy with the way it turned out.”

Each season Chicago Dramatists presents three world premiere productions and the signature Saturday Series, weekly staged readings of plays in progress. The theatre also conducts educational outreach to at-risk students at Chicago Public Schools.

“Everyone used red [in their design submissions], yet we went away from it,” McGrane said. “When people think of theatres, they just almost automatically think of red velvet curtains. But we wanted to go in a different route.”

Matt McGrane
Designer

The stats
Name
Matt McGrane
Age
34
Resides in:
Chicago’s East Village neighborhood, and has lived in Chicago for two years.
Dating:
David Maier, 43, an audit manager, for four years. The two met in Minneapolis.
Pets
His beagle, Charlie, 5, which he got from Last Hope Animal Rescue in Iowa
Hobbies
Gardening, cooking and baking

It’s a fact!
Enjoys retro dance styles, such as swing, Lindy Hop and the Charleston

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ghosts of Founding Fathers George Washington
Mr. President,
his capacity to move seamlessly between Spring-

we are outraged that Equality Illinois—an
in the General Assembly. There is no significant
civil-unions bill.
Mr. Garcia has always been outspoken. He is a
He is a visionary, a leader, and a statesman. He is
and he is quick to affirm our right to determine
In the course. He is an uncommon example of a
great man with great humility.
We are outraged that Mr. Garcia’s dismissal from
In the final years of the Revolutionary War. He was part
Mr. Garcia was part of Washington’s inner circle, and a major fac-
since Washington himself was the best this nation had, he looked to Europe for someone who could bring order to the troops. To that end, Washington wrote the colonels’ representative in Paris at the time, Franklin, to see what he could find.

Franklin was a French soldier of the highest rank. His very presence and sound counsel were expected to turn things around.

Washington’s war would have been brutal; it was a war of attrition, and the colonies would have lost. Since Washington himself was the best this nation had, he looked to Europe for someone who could bring order to the troops. To that end, Washington wrote the colonels’ representative in Paris at the time, Franklin, to see what he could find.

Franklin was a French soldier of the highest rank. His very presence and sound counsel were expected to turn things around.

Washington’s war would have been brutal; it was a war of attrition, and the colonies would have lost.
A winter for wearing our thinking caps

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

In the balmy summer months, prevailing wisdom dictates that players not be asked to exercise their brains overmuch—it’s just too hot for crying into our hankies, doncha know? Another school of thought prescribes likewise unstressful fare for winter’s dark days, when people need to be coaxed from their warm caves by optimistic reassurances. And what about spring? Oh, why spoil this happy season of renewal and rebirth with gloomy reminders of the troubles we’ll soon face once again?

The 12 weeks from Labor Day to Thanksgiving are too short a season for wearing our thinking caps, and so several theaters are opting to chase away the cold at the very start of 2011 with productions designed to open our minds to new ideas and fresh resolve.

Timeline takes us to a Sudanese refugee camp with Winter Miller’s In Darfur (opens Jan. 22, 773-281-8463), while Skokie’s Northlight Theatre introduces us to the courageous women of Liberia in Danai Gurira’s The Convert (which opens Jan. 12, 2011, the National Theatre of Liberia in Uptown once serving as a real-life armory to demand their full rights as U.S. citizens (opens Jan. 22 at the Greenhouse, 773-404-7336).

Let’s not forget those personal stories that nevertheless provide a microcosmic gateway to a culture: the bleak western coast of Ireland depicted in Martin McDonagh’s The Lonesome West (currently extended to Jan. 30 at Gift Theatre, 773-283-7071) or The Beauty Queen of Leenane, which inaugurates Shattered Globe’s post-restructure comeback (opens Jan. 16 at the Athenaeum, 773-935-6860). Simon Stephens’ Port, staged by Griffin Theatre (opens Jan. 16 at the Raven Complex, 800-838-3006), David Mamet’s Lakeboat at Steep Theatre (opens Jan. 20, 866-811-4111), Aline Lathrop’s Bordello at Chicago Dramatists (opens Feb. 4, 312-633-0630) and Laura Jacqmin’s Dead Pile, presented by XIII Pocket productions (opens Feb. 3 at Stage 773, 773-327-5252) offer glimpses of worlds far—for now, anyway—from our own.

If you anticipate your head bursting with all this enlightenment, you can take refuge under the provocatively dubbed heading of “sexual politics” and go to Steppenwolf for Laura Eason’s An Enemy of the People (which opens Jan. 24, 312-443-3800). Neighborhood audiences can ponder the conflict between progressive capitalism and historical preservation in Raven Theatre’s production—the first in Chicago since its premiere in our city—of August Wilson’s Radio Golf (opens Feb. 27, 773-338-2177) or empathize with the lone Black student attending a posh Wisconsin private school in MPACT’s Ghosts of Alwood (opens Jan. 25 at the Greenhouse, 773-404-7336).

Right next to politics and religion on the list of things we weren’t to talk about at holiday parties were social issues hearkening to lapses in our self-proclaimed moral high ground. Stage Left lifts that ban with Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People, as adapted by Arthur Miller during the McCarthy era, to expose the flaws of “popular opinion” (opens March 1 at Theater Wit, 773-975-8150). Another Ibsen play, this time sparkling memories of how far we have come, is Infamous Commonwealth’s A Doll’s House, updated to 1962 America—the year just before Betty Frieden’s Feminine Mystique re-inspired women to demand their full rights as U.S. citizens (opens Jan. 22 at the Greenhouse, 773-404-7336).

And if you really don’t care what’s on the quiz, you can take a chance on two plays that may—or maybe not—address your intellect: J.T. Rogers, who gave us history-as-pulp-fiction with Overwhelemed in 2009, returns to Next Theatre with his latest Eurothriller, Madagascar (opens Jan. 24 at the Noyes Arts Center in Evanston, 847-475-1875) and Route 66’s premiere of Cailtin Montanye Parrish’s A Twist of Water, whose premise brings together a gay father, his adopt- ed African-American daughter and an idealistic teacher (opens Feb. 17 at Theater Wit, 773-975-8150).
Something to sing about: Musicals and opera preview

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

There’s plenty of choices for any musical theater fan or opera buff to choose from this winter season in and around Chicago.

Harmonizing locally

Some of the biggest hits of the past decade are featured at Drury Lane Oakbrook Terrace, while the Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire produces classic musicals of a slightly older vintage. Also in the mix for locally produced musicals are new and revamped works in more intimate spaces.

—Spamalot, Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace, ongoing through March 6. This 2005 musical “lovingly ripped off from the motion picture Monty Python and the Holy Grail” makes a return to town in a splashy local staging (see review in this issue).

—Escape from the Haltsbury Boys Choir. The Ruckus Theater at The Side Project, ongoing through Jan. 30. Aaron Dean and Jason Rico write a world-premiere musical about choristers who make a break for it when they discover their choirmaster has castigation designs on them to preserve their heavenly boy soprano voices. (See the review in this issue.)

—Guys and Dolls, Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire, Jan. 25-March 27. Frank Loesser’s classic 1950 Broadway musical returns to make the rounds in the Marriott Theatre’s famed “in-the-round” space. Start placing your bets on the Manhattan gamblers, the religious missionar­

ies plotting against their male chauvinist boss. Too bad it all goes horribly wrong when a witch goes Elsa into asking the knight’s for­

bidden name. Lohengrin is presented in a pro­duction owned by London’s Royal Opera House Covent Garden. Sir Andrew Davis conducts.

—Moses in the Bulrushes, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Feb. 11-13. An opera by composer Carl Davis, this new production of the 2009 hit features a cast that includes a haughty Egyptian princess, her en­

ormous returning favorite to choose from this winter season in and around Chicago.

Halsted’s Hoover-Leppen Theatre, Feb. 11-23. The creative team behind the viral hit A Very Potter Musical have picked Chicago to be the launching ground for their fourth musical, which features puppets by Russ Walk of Swazzle and original music and lyrics by Darren Criss of Glee fame.

—Working, Broadway Playhouse at Water Tower Place, Feb. 15-May 5. Broadway in Chica­

goes gets in the producing game with a revamped version of this regionally popular 1978 Broad­

eway revue based upon the book by late Chicago critic Studs Terkel. This new Working fea­tures additional material by In the Heights Tony Award-winner Lin-Manuel Miranda in addition to many beloved older songs by songwriters like Mary Rodgers, Susan Birkenhead, Craig Carnelia and Stephen Schwartz (a certain someone famed for his work on shows like Godspell, Pippin and Wicked). See if this approach works for you when Les Mis­

erables marches into the Windy City during the day for Broadway in Chicago this winter, though there are a few new flourishes to be seen in the splashy touring companies wending their way through the Windy City. Visit http://www. 

bwayinchicago.com for more information.

—Wicked, Cadillac Palace Theatre, ongoing through Jan. 23. Time is running out on the Dragon Clock to catch this return touring en­gagement of this ever-so “popular” revisionist take on the American classic fairy tale of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Any musical theater fans who miss Wicked this time around (after some­how missing it during its previous three-and-a-half-year Chicago engagement), then there re­ally is something wrong with you.

—9 to 5: The Musical, Bank of America The­atre, Jan. 18-31. True, this 2009 screen-to-stage adapta­tion of the hit 1980 film about secretar­

dy’s plotting against their male chauvinist boss who didn’t last too long on Broadway. But composer/ 

lyricist Dolly Parton has reportedly done some 

tweaks for this new touring version which fea­tures two-time Tony Award nominee Dee Hoty (in the Lily Tomlin role) and American Idol final­ist Diana DeGarmo (in the Parton role). See if the show truly lives up to its tagline of “Ballroom Reinvented.”

—Les Misérables, Cadillac Palace Theatre, Feb. 2-27. You may think you know this classic British and French epic musical dealing with a Paris student uprising in the late 1840s, thanks in part to its many stops in directors Trevor Nunn and John Caird’s iconic 1986 turntable staging. Well, “Les Mis” is back again touring in a new 25th anniversary staging by London direc­tor Laurence Connor which uses digital projec­tions instead of the show’s trademark turntable. See if this approach works for you when Les Mis­

erables marches into the Windy City during the

month of February.

—RAIN: A Tribute to The Beatles, Ford Cen­
ter for the Performing Arts Oriental Theatre, Feb. 8-13. This highly polished impersonation con­cert returns to Chicago again as a Broadway in­
carnation also plays in New York. No doubt that Beatles fans will want to sing along with all the songs as they watch The Beatles in two different guises as they were seen initially on the Ed Sul­
din Show and in their psychedelic St. Pepper phase.

—Hair, Ford Center for the Performing Arts Oriental Theatre, March 8-20. This 1968 musi­
cal is the quintessential show that captured the anti-war hippie spirit of the late 1960s. Hair returns to Chicago via a tour of the 2009 Tony Award-winning musical revival directed by Di­ane Paulus (who has provided many memorable stagings through the years). Get ready to “Let the Sunshine In” in this age of “Aquarius” and gawk at all the naked bodies at the end of Act 1.

Operatic matters

Opera may have a snooty reputation compared to good ol’ American musicals. But when ev­

erything fires on all cylinders dramatically and musically, opera can also stake a claim to being a great musical theater.

—The Girl of the Golden West, Lyric Opera of Chica­go, nine performances between Jan. 22-Feb. 27. This is the centennial season for Puccini’s 1910 opera set in California during the Gold Rush, so it’s only natural that opera companies like the Lyric would use the anniversary timing to cash in. Officially known in Italian as La Fanciulla del West, the opera tells the fairly improb­able tale of a virginal saloon owner who falls head over heels for a bandit who goes under the double phallic alias of Dick Johnson. The Lyric dusts off Tony Award winner Harold Prince’s ac­claimed production (originally seen in 1989) with the Minnie of the moment, Chicago-area native Deborah Voigt, who recently triumphed in the role in San Francisco and at the Metropoli­tan Opera in New York. As Dick, we have Italian tenor Marcello Giordani. Sir Andrew Davis conducts.

—Lohengrin, Lyric Opera of Chicago, seven performances between Feb. 11-March 6. It’s been more than 30 years since the Lyric last staged Wagner’s Germanic fairy tale involving a mythical knight who arrives via swan to rescue Elsa from wrongful accusations of murdering her brother. Too bad it all goes horribly wrong when a witch goes Elsa into asking the knight’s for­

bidden name. Lohengrin is presented in a pro­duction owned by London’s Royal Opera House Covent Garden. Sir Andrew Davis conducts.

—Hercules, Lyric Opera of Chicago, seven performances between March 4-21. Handel’s op­era in English is bound to make a very controver­

sial Lyric debut since politically minded director Peter Sellars is probably going to update the mythological setting to modern-day America. This new production features Eric Owens as Her­

acles, Alice Coote as his jealous wife Dejanira and countertenor David Daniels as the servant Triton. Baroque music specialist Harry Bicket conducts.

—Carmen, Lyric Opera of Chicago, five perfor­

mances between March 12-27. The fiery gypsy returns, this time with Nadia Krasteva in the title role and tenor Jeronimo Savonitch as her obsessive lover, Don Jose.

—The Death and the Powers: A Robot Opera, Chicago Opera Theater at Millennium Park Harris Theatre for Music and Dance, six performances between April 2-10. A new opera by composer Tod Machover actually features a chorus of ro­bots and a musical chandelier to tell the story of an eccentric patriarch who tries to cheat death via technology. All will be seen initially at the MIT Media Lab in creative partnership with Chicago Opera Theater and Harvard’s American Repertory Theatre, Death and the Powers also marks the company return of director Diane Paulus.
Winter dance preview

BY ALICIA WILSON

The next few months of winter may not be what most people look forward to, but in the Chicago dance world this is some of the best of the season. With performances (sometimes overlapping ones) happening every weekend, there is so much dance to see in Chicago. Check out some of the highlights of the winter dance season, featuring collaborations in theater, puppetry, sound and visual stimuli. This is the time of year to see some great dance!

Collision Theory is a serious of improvised performances that pairs musicians and dancers. The twist is that the performers meet for the first time at the show, navigating what is described on the Links Hall site as “an unpredictable landscape of spontaneous collaboration.” This particular episode of Collision Theory will feature the sounds of Male, an abstract ambient trio featuring Benjamin Mjolsness, Jonathan Krohn and Todd Matteltith. This group, creating dark, effects-laden soundscapes, collaborates with many improvisers in Chicago’s jazz and creative music scene, and exists as an open-ended ensemble. Paired with this trio is dancer Adam Rose, artistic director of Antibody Dance, which specializes in movement arts and occult performance. Dan Mahoney and Links Hall present Collision Theory: Male vs. Adam Rose at Links Hall, 3435 N. Sheffield, Suite 207, 7:30 p.m., Jan. 17; tickets ($12, $10 students/seniors) and more information are available at http://www.links-shall.org or 773-281-0824.

New Trier High School in Winnetka, performing a piece entitled Maestram, choreographed by Cole, that a press release says is “an exploration of the balance between chaos and organization.” The Dance COLEctive will present Balancing Act on Friday nights, for a weekend engagement. The program includes the world-premiere suite of tangos by Argentinean dancers and choreographers Sabrina and Ruben Veliz, as well as Artistic Director Frank Chavez’s Duet’s, a compilation of his most celebrated and sensual duets, The Mourning, Fixe and At Last. The engagement is at The Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph, 8 p.m. on Feb 11-12, and 3 p.m. on Feb 13; tickets ($30-$65) or more information are available at http://www.colon.edu/dancecenter or 312-369-8330.

The Joe Goode Performance Group returns to Chicago with works that mix dance, theater, music and spoken word. On the program for its February concert is Wonderboy, a collaboration with master puppeteer Basil Twist that tells the tale of a strange superhero and his gift of super-sensitivity. Also being shown is 29 Effeminate Gestures, a solo providing an insightful exploration into the paradox of gender language. Joe Goode Performance Group will be presented at The Dance Center of Columbia College, 1306 S. Michigan, 8 p.m. Feb. 3-5; tickets ($26-$30) or more information are available at http://www.colon.edu/dancecenter or 312-369-8330.

The Dance COLEctive. Photo by William Frederking

River North Dance Company. Photo by Cheryl Mann

The Joe Goode Performance Group. Photo by William Frederking

The Joe Goode Performance Group. Photo by William Frederking
A queer year in theater
BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

Gay playwright Robert Patrick once wrote, “A gay play? Is that a play that sleeps with another play of the same sex?” Well, no. And it doesn’t matter if the playwright sleeps with other playwrights of the same sex. To qualify for our LGBT theater roster, a play must have a theme or story that speaks to LGBT issues. So doing The Women in drag, dearies, doesn’t make it a gay play. Actually, the LGBT theater quotient for the winter months is rather slim, so we’re gonna stretch our rule-of-thumb just about as far as one can stretch a thumb, and also look ahead as far as April.

Spamalot, Druid Lane Theatre Oakbrook Terrace, through March 6: This is the very first independent regional production of the fabulously successful Monty Python musical. That is, it’s not the national tour of the Broadway show. It’s LGBT; you’ll remember, because Sid Lancelot ends up saving a prince in distress wearing a girl’s dress, then Lance strips down to chain mail and leather and everyone does a disco number. I think it’s tasteful but Monty Python didn’t build its reputation on taste. Other than that, Spamalot is a funny show.

As You Like It, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, through March 6: Not really gay but Shakespeare and leather and everyone does a disco number. A queer musical that brought rock ’n’ roll to Broadway. No, that’s not the national tour of the Broadway show. It’s LGBT: you’ll remember, because Sir Lancelot ends up saving a prince in distress wearing a girl’s dress, then Lance strips down to chain mail and leather and everyone does a disco number. I think it’s tasteful but Monty Python didn’t build its reputation on taste. Other than that, Spamalot is a funny show.

Broadway cast of Hair. Photo by Joan Marcus

there were no women actors and pre-adolescent boys played the female roles). And then the main young hero falls for the girl in disguise-as-a-boy and everyone gets to guess at the Freudian implications. The Beats, 16th Street Theatre (Berwyn), through Feb. 5: Marilyn Campbell has adapted 1950s and 1960s writings of The Beat authors and assembled them into a play. Several of them were gay, notably Allen Ginsburg, and others just teased them along (notably Neal Cassidy). This version also includes Diane Di Prima and LeRoi Jones (long since Amiri Baraka), the latter an unexpected inclusion. Three Tall Women, Court Theatre, preview Jan. 13 and runs Jan. 22-Feb. 13: We include this play not because it’s by gay playwright Edward Albee (at least two other Albee plays are running locally at the same time), but because it’s his most autobiographical play and includes a fictionalized version of his coming-out to his mother when he was in late adolescence. It also happens to be a fine and often-funny play. The three women of the title are all his adoptive mother, seen at three different ages (as is her son, the Albee figure).

Sketchfest 2011, Stage 73 (former Theatre Building), through Jan. 16: The 10th annual edition of the world’s largest festival of sketch comedy is decidedly wistily this year with appearances by several LGBT artists and comedy troupes, among them Chicago’s very own GayCo Productions, Jan. 15. But also: The Puterbaugh Sisters (Jan. 13), Cell Camp (also Jan. 13) and Over Served: Putting the Rant in Restaurant (Jan. 16), this summer’s hit musical revue by Vampeero Productions.

Mary, Goodman Theatre, previews from Feb. 5, runs Feb. 24-March 6: This world premiere by Thomas Bradshaw is an honest-to-goodness, heavens-to-Betsy GAY play, the result of a commission from the Goodman. It’s set in 1983, at the very dawning of the Age of AIDS, and concerns a college student who invites his boyfrie

And, yes, there’s a gay character although it’s rather softly-touched-upon. Perhaps it will be less softly so in this new staging.

Dirty Blonde, BoHo Theatre at Theater Wit, April 1-May 1: Another post-Broadway tour Chicago debut production, Claudia Shear’s biografia

Digital,
THEATER REVIEW

Spamalot
Playwrights: Eric Idle and John Du Prez
At: Drury Lane Theatre, 10 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace
Phone: 630-530-0111; $31-$45
Runs through: March 6

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

On one hand, Drury Lane Theatre deserves nothing but critical hosannas for its regional premiere of the 2005 Broadway hit musical Spamalot. Director William Osetek constantly wows with his Spamalot staging that whips up the audience into gales of laughter.

On the other hand, Osetek could have shown more originality by not hewing so closely to director Mike Nichols’ original Spamalot direction. Sure, Osetek and set/project designer Christopher Ash provide a few new flourishes, but so much of Drury Lane Theatre’s Spamalot seems to ape the original production—even going so far to rent designer Tim Hatley’s original loopy costumes.

Though some might feel that Drury Lane passed up its chance to create a distinctly new approach to Spamalot, others will proudly point out how everything in this local production is so amazingly Broadway-caliber. These mixed feelings also spill over into my views about the show itself. Though authors Eric Idle and John Du Prez are upfront about Spamalot being a “musical lovingly ripped off from the motion picture Monty Python and the Holy Grail,” it still annoys me about how much pre-existing Python material gets regurgitated onstage.

Instead of moving the genre of musical theater forward, Spamalot is content to backslide reheating old comedy bits mixed with musical spoofs (targets include Fiddler on the Roof and Phantom of the Opera). Ultimately, Spamalot is a meta musical that is woefully lacking in bold new ideas.

But it’s hard to argue with success, especially since Spamalot achieves its goal of inducing audiences to nonstop laughter (even for people who can’t recite Python routines by heart).

Drury Lane’s comic chameleon cast for Spamalot is consistently strong and adept at their shape-shifting duties. John Sanders gets plenty of mileage out of his snoopy French Taunter and his sexuality-shifting Sir Lancelot (thanks in large part to Jackson Evans garishly gaily take on Prince Herbert).

Sean Allan Krill gets his Sean Connery accent just right for Prince Herbert’s Father, while Adam Peltz is amusing as the cowardly Sir Robin. Bradley Mott gets the squawking Python drag persona down pat as Dennis Galahad’s Mother, while Gina Milo makes for plenty of mirth via her overwrought vocal metanarratives as the Lady of the Lake.

The only weak link is David Kortemeier’s straight-man King Arthur, who would have been more effective on opening night if he didn’t break character by getting the giggles.

Kortemeier is supported by the touching lackey of Matthew Cowley’s Patsy, who provides the one genuine touch of friendship in this joke-filled show. All in all, Drury Lane has scored a palatable hit with Spamalot. It may not be fresh or innovative but, boy, can Spamalot make you laugh yourself silly.

Spamalot. Photo by Brett Beiner

Escape from the Haltsburg Boys Choir. Image by Lucas Gerard Photography

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Hamletmachine
By Heiner Müller (Trans. by Carl Weber)
At: Trap Door Theatre
Phone: 773.384.0494; $20 (2-for-1 Thursdays)
Jan. 12, 2011

By STEVEN CHAITMAN

One of the seminal works of postmodern theatre, Heiner Müller’s Hamletmachine has never been performed the same way twice. A robust nine pages (approximately) in length, the play—as with the postmodernist spirit—remains open to interpretation. It welcomes all forms of trans-sensory vehicles for delivering the poetic avantgarde text (and filling in the vacant minutes). Trap Door Theatre’s production, under the eye of Max Truax, reinterprets the play as an opera to help unlock its mysteries for the audience.

Written in 1977 in the time of divided Germany, Hamletmachine deconstructs some of Shakespeare’s characters, chiefly Hamlet and Ophelia, with particular attention to the socio-political tones of Shakespeare’s revered tragedy, those among the lines of “there’s something rotten in Denmark.” In this case, the six-actor ensemble sings, “there’s something rotten in this age of hope.” Although the Marxist and other then topical undertones that drove many of Müller’s works have little bearing on Trap Door’s interpretation, it welcomes all forms of trans-garde text (and filling in the vacant minutes). Having collaboratively created all the moods and consequently the cast have provided in Truax’s staging, but ironically, the production’s lone non-company member, Rich Logan (one of the Hamlets), is the only one who manages to do it consistently. Having collaborated twice before with Truax on similar works, he understands the very stream-of-emotions rhythm of this interpretation and maintains the most open line of communication to the audience in a play that’s scarcely frank or direct. Woven into a manageable 70 minutes, Trap Door’s Hamletmachine puts its heart in a good place, with the characters and their struggles on stage rather than the broad range of themes Müller leaves the interpreter to choose from. Although the operatic style makes the content slightly more accessible, this Hamletmachine is not the immersive or mindset-altering experience that postmodern theatre requires in order to succeed with a wider audience.

“Hamletmachine. Photo by Michal Janicki

Hamletmachine. Photo by Michal Janicki

THEATER REVIEW
Tearing Down the Walls
Playwright: Daniel Beaty
At: ETA Creative Arts Foundation, 7558 S. South Chicago
Tickets: 773-753-3955; http://www.etacreativearts.org; $10 (Thurs.)-$30
Jan. 18–30

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

Tearing Down the Walls presents a talented, energetic and ingratiating cast pumping blood into a predictable and improbable play that really could be any one of four plays. Author Daniel Beaty sketches his characters with quick and colorful but shallow strokes offering familiar types: three best-bud gal pals (one sexy, one bally and one wallflower), a pick-up artist guy, a sincere guy and a few miscella- neous characters (all portrayed by the versatile L’Oreal Jackson). Beaty’s characters are nearly as bare-bones as the staging, a completely empty stage (not even a chair) with a brick wall backdrop.

Reene is an intelligent, 30-year-old virgin who hangs with gal pals Jessica and Rhonda, attending Jessica’s weekly poetry slam for which Renee always writes but never performs.

Goaded by her pals, Renee decides to open up but apparently has no avenues for meeting men (what? the poetry slam is women only?). Instead, Renee selects a slick, handsome El stop pick-up artist (David Goodlow) to deflower her. OK: you just KNOW it’s gonna’ go bad for Renee and she’ll end up reciting her poetry.

One night of unprotected sex later (“I got caught up in the moment” being the only explanation offered) Renee is pregnant and HIV-positive. She’s bummed out (duh!) but her doctor turns preacher and re-ignites Renee’s faith. Renee prays, and finds equanimity in an unexplained and silent epiphany. Meanwhile, her sincere but bumbling boss, Dennis, cares about her while saving Bronzeville from gentri- fication. Now listen up: You can have a play about a 30-year-old virgin and her gal pals, you can have a play about HIV infection, you can have a play about saving Bronzeville and you could apply a gospel overlay to any of them. But you can’t have one play about all that stuff. You end up with a work so crammed with conse- quences and issues that there is no character development and absolutely no subtext: every line of dialogue is bald exposition of what someone is thinking or feeling, or an explana- tion of an issue. Program notes explain that Tearing Down the Walls originally was a screen play, which seems odd because everything is told to us and nothing is shown to us. Next play, Mr. Beaty, narrow your issues and ideas and deepen your characters.

The wonder is that Shanell Taylor (Renee), Pearl Ramsey (Jessica), Pamela Sawyer (Rhonda) and Shadow Carr (Dennis), along with Jack- son and Goodlow, manage to convey sincerity through all this, and hit the mark in all the comic moments which leave this mostly-serious work. While I think the empty stage is a big mistake by co-directors Anthony P. Brooks and Kemati J. Porter, they obviously deserve credit for guiding the cast into spirited perfor- mances.

‘Too Hot to Handel’ at Auditorium
Jan. 15–16

‘Too Hot to Handel: The Jazz-Gospel Mas- siah’ returns to Chicago’s National Historic Landmark Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress, for a special tribute to the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. There will be two public performances—on Saturday, Jan. 15, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 16, at 3 p.m. Tenor Rodrick Dixon and soprano Alfreda Burke will reprise their critically hailed performances for the sixth consecutive year, and they will once again be joined by alto Karen Marie Richardson, who last year replaced countertenor Victor Trent Cook. Tickets are $30-$69, and are available online at http://www.ticketmaster.com/audiotorium, by phone at 800-982-2787 or at the box office.

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The Illusionist; Another Year; Country Strong

Both the 2-D animated film *The Illusionist*, from Triplets of Belleville auteur Sylvain Chomet, and director Mike Leigh’s latest slice of British life, *Another Year*, arrive in theatres this week. To say that these two foreign imports are a welcome respite from the usual hard edged American fare is to understatement their Illusory power. Taken together, these two superb movies—delicate and thoughtful in their approach—offer a convincing argument for a gentle, artistic approach to life itself.

Chomet’s *The Illusionist* is an adaptation of a script left behind by French film icon Jacques Tati that he penned between 1956 and 1959. Tati’s leading character, the nameless magician, is a much more sober man than his iconic Mr. Hulot that had, by 1959, delighted audiences globally. So he shelved the project—perhaps finding it too close to his own life. Decades after his death, Tati’s daughter mentioned the unproduced script to Chomet while he was making *The Triplets of Belleville* and further suggested that 2-D animation would be the right approach to the material. After reading the script Chomet was entranced, and the resulting film is a delicate mash-up between his sensibilities and Tati’s.

As in Triplets, Chomet utilizes his preference for hand-drawn, 2-D animation very much in the angular, pen-inked, color-washed style of Disney—imperfect, human and utterly enchanting—is worth noting). The leading character, an anonymous middle-aged man, is an obvious doppelganger for Tati himself. (Chomet has given him Mr. Hulot’s propensity for too-tight trousers and bright socks, a humorous inside joke.)

The illusionist—headquartered in Edinburgh, Scotland (a beautiful city gorgeously detailed by Chomet and his animators)—roams from gig to gig, performing his sleight of hand, enduring his perpetually cranky rabbit who bites everyone who comes too close and doing his best to ignore the entertainment sea change that is about to engulf him. (The encroachment of rock ’n roll as live entertainment replacing last day vaudeville in the late ’50s is shown vividly with a Beatles-like band bringing down the house to squealing fans while the illusionist waits and waits and waits backstage in a new sequence Chomet has added to the script.)

Into his life comes Alice, a young girl from a tiny Welsh village who is so inspired by his act that she sneaks her way into his life. Back in Edinburgh, ensconced in the shabby though elegant hotel favored by a slew of other variety entertainers, a pseudo father-daughter relationship ensues. Slowly, Alice blossoms into a young woman, alive to the powerful spell of experiencing city life for the first time.

Although the characters speak from time to time in phrases we are meant to understand rather than hear (a lovely conceit), Chomet’s movie is mainly told in visual terms, along with pitch-perfect sound effects and a first-time, rather lilting score (one of the 2010’s best) that he composed. The score delightfully compliments the segments that link *The Illusionist*—an altogether convincing animated movie for adults that is not meant to be anything more than the charming, bittersweet trifle that it is.

It’s not much of a stretch to imagine that *The Illusionist* and the cinema of Tati would be adored by placid Tom and Gerri, the elderly, deeply contented married couple at the center of writer-director Shana Feste’s *Country Strong*. She’s given songs that show off her vocal chops and dazzling stage presence, monologues and scenes that are powerful and a character that Paltrow rides for all its worth. But the movie—a convoluted, torch ‘n twang amalgamation of *All About Eve*, *The Rose*, *Star Is Born* and Nashville, not to mention all those country-singer biopics—keeps bucking Paltrow’s character out of the picture like a mechanical bull at a country western bar. Instead, Feste favors subplots focusing on a hunky singer-songwriter, an innocent up and comer and a conniving husband (played by country superstar Tim McGraw, who, jaw droppingly, does not sing a lick)—none of which have a fifth of the authorship and interest that Paltrow brings to the proceedings. In the process, Feste’s movie leaves her frustrated audience in the dust as surely as it does Paltrow—an oversight that is more than a mite shameful.

Gwyneth Paltrow has her strongest part in years as the emotionally messed-up country superstar Kelly Canter in writer-director Shana Feste’s *Country Strong*. She’s given songs that show off her vocal chops and dazzling stage presence, monologues and scenes that are powerful and a character that Paltrow rides for all its worth. But the movie—a convoluted, torch ‘n twang amalgamation of *All About Eve*, *The Rose*, *Star Is Born* and Nashville, not to mention all those country-singer biopics—keeps bucking Paltrow’s character out of the picture like a mechanical bull at a country western bar. Instead, Feste favors subplots focusing on a hunky singer-songwriter, an innocent up and comer and a conniving husband (played by country superstar Tim McGraw, who, jaw droppingly, does not sing a lick)—none of which have a fifth of the authorship and interest that Paltrow brings to the proceedings. In the process, Feste’s movie leaves her frustrated audience in the dust as surely as it does Paltrow—an oversight that is more than a mite shameful.

Check out my archived reviews at http://www.windycitytimes.com or http://www.knightatthemovies.com. Readers can leave feedback at the latter website.

Gwyneth Paltrow in *Country Strong*. Photo by Scott Garfield
‘Woke Up Black’ to premiere Feb. 25

The documentary Woke Up Black—which focuses on five Black youths, along with their struggles and triumphs as they start their journey into adulthood—will premiere Friday, Feb. 25, at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State, at 8 p.m.

The movie will be broadcast on WTTW, Chicago’s public television station, in late spring. The film places at its center the voices of Black youth—their ideas, attitudes and opinions that many feel are often overlooked in today’s society.

For two years, producer/director Mary F. Morten and associate producers Keisha Farmer-Smith, Aprana Sharma and Marios Ybarra followed five youths from the Chicago area to explore their experiences when it comes to navigating the world they live in. As they move through their personal challenges this documentary also mirrors the complexities of this often-ignored group at the center of many sociopolitical issues, including discrimination, political participation, sex and relationships, music and the media portrayal of Black youth.

An interview-driven film with wide-ranging footage provides context for young people who are often criticized and frequently misunderstood. Small-group conversations punctuate the individual vignettes on each young person. The documentary subjects are:

—Rosalee, 18, a recent graduate of Lakeview High School. Rosalee is the oldest in a family of eight where she and her three brothers and sisters were adopted by her aunt and uncle. She is the first person in her family to attend college. Rosalee struggles with life away from her family and the college experience.

—Carter, 16, was adopted by two African American gay men when he was 10. As the oldest of eight children he was bounced around in foster care for several years. Carter is finishing up his last year of high school and is balancing his class studies, sports and family life while trying to figure out his future.

—Ace, 17, is a self-identified genderqueer youth who struggles to maintain relationships with members of her family who do not agree with her sexual orientation and are not supportive of the gender-identity issues she is dealing with.

—Morgan, 19, lives in an affluent western suburb of Chicago and is in her second year of college at a prestigious out of state university. While being raised to be a strong African-American woman by her parents, she has lived the majority of her life in situations where she is the only African American or one of a few.

—Sheldon, 20, is a new father and an organizer at a South Side community based organization that works with youth on issues of social justice. At the age of 17, he was incarcerated for six months for committing a felony crime. He is currently working to expunge his record.

Morten, an activist filmmaker and consultant, started work on Woke Up Black after reading a report by Dr. Cathy Cohen for the Black Youth Project. Cohen, a professor at the University of Chicago, was the principal investigator of this groundbreaking report. The report was a national research project launched in 2003 that examined the attitudes, resources, and culture of African-American youth exploring how these factors and others influence their decision-making, norms, and behavior.

“At the end of the day what we see on the news are these 20-second sound bites, almost without fail, always bad news and very much stereotypes of young folks being projected into the larger culture,” stated Morten. “We wanted to tell real-life stories that are indeed hopeful.”

Starting with interviews with youth in Chicago, San Francisco and New Orleans in 2008, Morten brought the focus onto five Chicago youths. She said that with the attention the city was receiving getting that year with Barack Obama being nominated for U.S. president and an Olympics bid in the works, the eyes of the world were focusing on Chicago. “The reality these stories are universal,” said Gordon Quinn, co-founder and executive producer of Karottenfilm, and creative consultants for the film. “The breadth of individual stories in the film is quite remarkable.”

Upcoming screenings are scheduled for Memphis, Raleigh, Tucson and New York. The film will be on the festival circuit and will also be offered to public television stations across the country. For more information, go to www.wokeupblack.com. Follow on Facebook at www.facebook.com/wokeupblack and @wokeupblackdoc at Twitter. Call 773-942-1268.

Pricing for the Feb. 25 gala is as follows:

—$1,000 Director’s Circle: Includes six tickets, program listing, preferred seating at the screening, opening-night party and a DVD of the documentary

—$500 Producer’s Circle: Includes four tickets, program listing, preferred seating, opening-night party admission and goodie bag of movie items

—$250 Patron: Includes two tickets, program listing, preferred seating, opening-night party and film poster

—$100 Supporter: Includes one general admission ticket and admission to the opening-night party

Windy City Times: Howa, Nellie! How are you?

Nellie McKay: Oh, good.

WCT: You are coming to Chicago....

NM: I can’t wait!

WCT: And different performances at two different venues.

NM: I didn’t even know that. That’s fabulous!

WCT: Two different crowds, I would imagine.

NM: Two very small crowds.

WCT: [Laughs] We will see. So tell me—who is Nellie McKay?

NM: I am like Kathy Griffin if she played piano.

WCT: Well, that will get the guys there and your crowd will get bigger! You started as a stand-up comedienne like Kathy, correct?

NM: Yeah, I ended as a comedienne too, real quick. That business is not for the weak of mind. You ever do comedy?

WCT: No, I think that would be tricky.

NM: I know one thing that is hard to do on demand is to be funny.

WCT: A lot of times when I talk to comedians for interviews they are not funny. Well, Kathy is always funny...

NM: She is always on! Think about how hard that would be. It’s so nice to be allowed to be boring.

WCT: Even from your first album you had a funny title: Get Away from Me, playing off of Norah Jones’ Come Away with Me.

NM: She wasn’t the only one with a title of norah Jones’ Come Away with Me.

WCT: What happened?

NM: He said I wouldn’t get a debut double album and I did. So he was foiled again at the awards! We made a movie together called P.S. I Love You and it was wonderful to upstage him in that as well.

WCT: I liked your song from that movie. How would you describe your eclectic new album?

NM: He is such a lovely man. I have no idea.

WCT: He just reached out to you?

NM: Yes. Perhaps it was my prison record.

WCT: [Laughs] You did The Threeepenny Opera with Alan Cumming and Cyndi Lauper.

NM: Yes, and to do Brecht in any space, not only a Broadway house, was incredible.

WCT: You won an award, so you did well.

NM: The Theatre World Award, that was lovely. I got to address my arch nemesis Harry Conick, Jr. who was in the audience.

WCT: What happened?

NM: He said I wouldn’t get a debut double album and I did. So he was foiled again at the awards! We made a movie together called P.S. I Love You and it was wonderful to upstage him in that as well.

WCT: I liked your song from that movie. How would you describe your eclectic new album?

NM: We traveled the world to bring you this album and hope you like it!

Now Nellie travels to Chicago at the Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, on Wed., Jan. 26 (http://www.lincolnhallchicago.com) and Evanston Space, 1245 Chicago, Evanston, on Thursday, Jan 27 (http://www.evanstonspace.com).

To purchase tickets visit their websites or McKay’s own at http://www.nelliemckay.com.

Nellie McKay, Photo by Rick Gonzalez

MUSIC

Nellie McKay’s ‘Home’ cooking

BY JERRY NUNN

Singer Nellie McKay drives her fifth album Home Sweet Mobile Home to Chicago this month. The quirky songstress chirped about animals, Kathy Griffin and Harry Connick, Jr., Nunn on One.

Windy City Times: Whoa, Nellie! How are you?

Nellie McKay: Oh, good.

WCT: You are coming to Chicago....

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WCT: And different performances at two different venues.

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To purchase tickets visit their websites or McKay’s own at http://www.nelliemckay.com.

Nellie McKay, Photo by Rick Gonzalez
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SOME OTHER VICTORIES INCLUDE:

- Worked closely with the Obama administration to extend hospital visitation rights for LGBT couples.
- Fought to bring marriage equality across the country. Led the effort to enact marriage equality in Washington, D.C., and organized the key religious voices in support of marriage.
- Launched a campaign to work to pass marriage equality legislation in New York and helped elect three new voices for marriage in the state Senate.
- Launched NOMExposed.org to hold the National Organization for Marriage accountable for the misinformation and hate spread in its effort to thwart equality.
- Developed the Countdown 2010 Grassroots Campaign calling for a fair and inclusive ENDA.
- Deployed 39 staff to 17 states to work for pro-equality candidates and recruited more than 4,500 volunteers to support these candidates.
- HRC’s Corporate Equality Index expanded with 337 employers reaching 100 percent scores, the most ever.
- Signed 50 adoption agencies across the country to implement LGBT-inclusive policies and practices.
- HRC is only LGBT national partner organization to join the national non-partisan citizenship and voter registration program Ya Es Hora. HRC mobilized more than 500 volunteers for 40 citizenship workshops in 20 communities.
- Led the campaign to oust bigoted Arkansas school board member Clint McCance.
- Launched an innovative program to empower transgender job seekers who are unemployed or underemployed by providing essential skills training to make the most of the job market.
- Led the call for Mormon leader Boyd Packer to renounce his discriminatory, homophobic remarks.
- Worked with the Joint Commission, which accredits most hospitals, to establish LGBT-specific accreditation standards to eliminate discriminatory policies in healthcare facilities.
- In response to high profile anti-LGBT bullying and youth suicides, launched a new website to help address bullying in elementary schools.
- Formalized a partnership with National Education Association (NEA) to extend the reach of HRC’s Welcoming Schools program.
- Successfully lobbied the Obama administration to issue guidance permitting employees to take federal family and medical leave to care for a same-sex partner’s child and extending federal domestic violence protections to include victims in same-sex relationships.

www.hrc.org/thanks
Cowgirl Up Executive Producer Christin Mell. Photo by Helen Adamopolous

New tello web series offers comedy, competition, cowgirls with new all-female Western Web series BY HELEN ADAMOPOULOS

The video shows women sporting cowboy hats, chaps and bandanas tied around their necks. They ride horses and face off against each other with shotguns and revolvers. There's kissing, kidnapping and competition. What's going on? It's all part of a teaser for Cowgirl Up, an upcoming series from the Chicago-based, Web-based video distribution company tello LLC.

Tellofilms.com—a site intended to deliver content for, by and about lesbians—describes Cowgirl Up as an all-girl Western comedy. It chronicles a weekend at the exclusively female Double D Ranch in the La Quinta desert in Southern California. Two teams of women visiting the ranch compete against each other at riding, shooting and tracking, each group hoping to win the silver belt buckle. Tello CEO and Cowgirl Up Executive Producer Christin Mell said the characters are "ordinary, everyday folks who just want to get out and have some cowgirl fun."

The series, which will premiere in late January (the specific date is yet to be determined), is also lesbian-focused. Mell said the two women who own the ranch are partners, and a couple of lesbian romances factor into the plot.

"It is a definitely a lesbian-driven project," Mell said. "It's not just a girl-power all female thing. We really tried to do our best to get some actors who are openly gay."

The series got its start last June when tello was looking for a big project, Mell said. Nancylee Myatt, Cowgirl Up writer and executive producer, came up with the idea. "I'm a gigantic Western fan in the true sense of fanatic," Myatt said. "The cowboy culture has always sort of been a part of who I am."

Myatt said she already had a screenplay on hand about women hanging out at a ranch. She revised it for the web series, cutting it by more than 450 pages and dividing it up into episodes.

"It really sits somewhere between Blazing Saddles and City Slickers," she said of the final product. "It was really us sending out e-mails to people we wanted to work with."

Mell said the filming took place over two consecutive weekends in October. The producers did encounter some scheduling snags. One actress missed her plane to L.A. and had to be replaced at the last minute, Mell said. That's how Maribeth Monroe—who used to act for the Chicago comedy theatre The Second City—ended up playing Meredith, an English businesswoman who gives up getting汉补ed at the spa to spend the weekend at the ranch.

Monroe said she thought the concept of the series was fantastic. She summed up Meredith as a "competitive, funny and flirty woman who isn't quite sure why she's at her ranch. Since Cowgirl Up is her first Western, Monroe said she had a lot of new, "really exciting" experiences. She fondly remembered riding horseback, shooting a gun for the first time and learning to lasso bundles of hay.

"I would do it again in a heartbeat," Monroe said.

Myatt also remembered Monroe and the others riding horseback as a highlight of the filming process, especially since some of them were experiencing it for the first time.

"They were all really funny, and they were really brave," she said.

Nicole Valentine, tello's chief marketing officer and Cowgirl Up executive producer, said she was similarly impressed with the actresses' bravery when they went to the shooting range and tried out their guns for the first time. She also mentioned a scene where two of the actresses do a Native American dance around a fire pit, complete with feathered head gear and a dressed-up Chihuahua.

"It was absolutely hilarious," Valentine said. "It ended up being a really wild scene to shoot."

The series is currently in the post-production stage, Mell said. After the premiere next month, Mell said viewers can expect one new eight-to-10-minute episode each week. It looks like there will be six or seven episodes.

"In order to view Cowgirl Up, tello's users will need to subscribe to the site's new premium content section for $3.99 a month. Doing so will also give viewers access to other web series, such as "Ray" and "Brunch with Bridge." In the meantime, tello will tie its audience over with snippets like the teaser already posted on the Web site. Mell said actress interviews and behind-the-scenes videos will also give viewers access to other web series, such as "3Way" and "Brunch with Bridget."

"That's not what it's called," Nate interjected.

Without a beat, Nick continued, "big gay pink-unicorn-gay tour."

"You can tell the two are brothers.

While at Clarkes, the brothers explained the project to Sara and I a little further. The idea came to Nate shortly before he was laid off from his job at a large advertising firm in New York City in 2008. Harvey Milk was on everyone's mind that year after the release of the hit film Milk. The movie made Nate think about a famous image of Milk holding a sign saying, "I'm From Woodmere, N.Y."

"I thought it was a little out of left field," Nate said. "All I knew of Harvey Milk was San Francisco, but he's not from San Francisco. I'm not from New York City. LGBT people are from everywhere."

Since its inception, Driftwood has collected hundreds of stories by gay people from all over the world. The idea to take "Driftwood" on the road was an extension of their work beyond just any normal "blog." Instead, they have created a growing archive of video stories from people in every state across the country, including Hawaii and Alaska—two trips which Nik says were a surprise seeing as two were brothers.

"I felt it was important to get a story from Wailla to show the LGBT youth there that someone is thinking about them in a positive light," Nate said, "and to let them represent Wailla the way they want it to be represent- ed.

The project has taken them to places like Helena, Mont., where the three guys were nearly recruited to play for a semi-professional football league (Helena Titans) by an inti- mated Mickey Rouke look-alike, jagged teeth and all.

"We all of course judged him immediately based on his appearance," Nate said of the Rouke look-alike who approached them in a diner, "this big bullking figure, drunk at 10:30 in the morning, in a small town in the back of Montana. What we were doing in town was never brought up...I wonder how he would have reacted. I also wonder how fast I could have run if he didn't react well..."

Aside from collecting stories, the Driftwood folk maintain another blog about the tour itself. Readers track Driftwood's own version of the classic traveling gnome: the pink boots. Various photos show the pink boots in different places throughout their travels, among them: the world's largest Radio Flyer wagon in Spokane, Wash., and Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Nate first got the idea for the pink boots while planning a fundraiser for the project in New York. He and the crew were trying to figure out what to collect money for.

More info is at http://www.imfrom- driftwood.com (official blog) and http://www.50statestourstory.com (story tour).


Cowgirl Up Executive Producer Christin Mell. Photo by Helen Adamopolous

Nancylee Myatt.

I'm From Driftwood: Gay true stories

By Tully Satre

On the evening of Nov. 21, three strangers rolled up on Dearborn in a 2001 red Ford E-150 they called "The Barn." The Barn had moved to nearly every state in the continental United States. Their mission is simple: collect true stories by gay people from all over. The I'm From Driftwood crew had traveled to 26 states before they arrived in Chicago, making Illinois their 27th.

A few weeks prior, I was sitting in my studio at the School of the Art Institute when I received a call from an unknown number in Brooklyn, New York.

"This is Troy," said an unfamiliar voice on the other end. Troy explained that he was a volunteer for Nathan Monroe, the 30-year-old creator and poster-child of the gay, true-stories blog I'm From Driftwood. Monroe and his crew needed a place to stay while in Chicago, and I said my first call was to meet them outside my apartment in Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood. (I am after all, a cougar divorcie.) I caught on to their quick/sarcastic sense of humor, which did not come as a surprise seeing as two were brothers.

When it came to casting the 12 cowgirls, Mell said she and the other producers already

One of the infamous pink boots at Chicago's Bean Pic from I'm With Driftwood

Marquise. When asked, Nick seemed upset and refused to speak further on the matter. I later learned that it was due to finances that Nick was unable to join them beyond the contiguous United States.

A couple months later when the mid-point of the trip and were very special points during the tour. "They weren't easy to get to," Nate remembered. "But that's why we thought it was so important for us to go." Nate reminisced that Hawaii seemed like a bit of a vacation, having been on the road for nearly two months. They hung out at Hula's (Honolulu's only gay bar) every day. While in Alaska, they were recognized by a guy at Mad Myna's in Anchorage. He turned out to be an excellent tour guide taking them up to Wasilla, a town notorious for one of its residents: Sarah Palin.

"I felt it was important to get a story from Wailla to show the LGBT youth there that someone is thinking about them in a positive light," Nate said, "and to let them represent Wailla the way they want it to be represent- ed."

Jan. 12, 2011

WINDY CITY TIMES
BOOK REVIEW
Collection of Mark Morford columns released

The Daring Spectacle: Adventures in Deviant Journalism, by Mark Morford, Rapture Machine, Inc., 352 pages, $20

REVIEW BY TRACY BAIM

Straight white male columnists usually don’t speak to me in a political sense. The two major exceptions are Frank Rich and Mark Morford. Think of them as the journalistic equivalent of the East Coast (Rich and The Notorious B.I.G.) and West Coast (Morford and 2Pac) rivalry, but they don’t use guns, just different writing styles. Rich is more of The New York Times media elite (in a good way), and Morford is a down-and-dirty leftie and modern hippie with a metrosexual flair. But they are both awesome writers and about as pro-gay as straight men can be; they may just be more pro-gay than some gay people I know. In my favorite columnists-of-all-time list, neither of them fill the Texas-size shoes of the late Molly Ivins, but they are fantastic in their own way.

Which is why I am beyond excited that Morford has collected 92 of his best columns (out of some 1,000 he has done for the San Francisco Chronicle and SFGate.com over the past decade) in The Daring Spectacle: Adventures in Deviant Journalism. He’s also thrown in some of the horrific hate mail he’s received over the years, and in 2002 he penned a column about the name calling. “You must be a fag.” He wrote: “Being called gay simply has zero negative effect, just makes me shrug and smile and wonder and in fact only makes me more grateful to live in a world where such an ‘accusation’ just means you are different. Safe. Healthy. Beautiful. Even, what nerve.”

For his gay support, Morford has been called a “fag” probably more times than he could count, and in 2002 he penned a column about the name calling. “You must be a fag.” He wrote: “Being called gay simply has zero negative effect, just makes me shrug and smile and wonder and in fact only makes me more grateful to live in a world where such an ‘accusation’ just means you are different. Safe. Healthy. Beautiful. Even, what nerve.”

While I am a big fan of his gay columns, Morford is on target and a fascinating read on pretty much any topic. In one of his non-political columns, he opines about what we don’t know we don’t know: “It’s not a lobster. It’s not a crab. It’s not anything anyone really understands—and why is it covered in shiny blond hair? They don’t know that, either. It just is. Just one of those things. Like why the whales sing. Like why some parrots can tell you who’s calling you when you pick up the phone. Like the existence of dark matter. We just don’t know. And what’s more, the sheer volume, the breathtaking amount of information we don’t know is so mind-boggling and perspective-humping that you take one look at the Kiva and only say, ‘Hi again, wicked gorgeous unimaginable vastness of the universe.’ Yes, he said “perspective-humping.” There are numerous examples of his creative style. I can’t recommend this book highly enough.

See http://www.markmorford.com for more details.

BOOKS

World Almanac: Got facts?

With the Internet providing a trillion-plus facts at your fingertips, why would anyone need a printed dictionary, encyclopedia or almanac? Well, for one thing, even Wikipedia has some limitations and errors. For another, it’s still very fun to flip through a printed book for random fascinating facts or targeted research needs.

The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2011 provides a very current look at events of 2010, as well as tens of thousands of facts and names from history. Want details about the Haiti earthquake or the Gulf oil spill? Gotcha. There are Lady Gaga and Tiger Woods; scandals of sports past and present; and some exciting four-color photos that I don’t remember in my well-worn 1970s almanacs. There are also details about the new health-care reform and plans for NASA shuttles in 2011. Want the average SAT scores by state? The world’s top tourist destinations? American cartoonists (missing: Alison Bechdel)? President Obama’s top appointments? It’s all there. In tiny type across more than 1,000 pages, this 2011 Almanac is a fun reference guide, giving you info you never even knew you needed.

There are some things of interest to LGBT readers, including hate-crimes stats based on sexual orientation, a brief mention of 1969’s Stonewall Riots, gay marriage, the Matthew Shepard murder, Bishop Gene Robinson’s history-making appointment in the Episcopal Church and basic stats on sexuality. These are topic areas my old almanacs pretty much ignored. It’s all brief, just like everything in the book, but it’s nice to have this inclusion. Sure, you have that laptop or desktop or even your mobile phone for quick reference online. But for just $12.99, this is a great deal—and these are facts you can believe.

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May 12, 2011

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“In a sexual way, I’m gay.”—Johnny Weir confirms the worst secret in the world.

It may be a new year, but some of the old stories are still floating around. Sure, Johnny Weir finally confirmed he’s gay. But others are not quite as forthcoming. And one of the people everyone’s still talking about is John Travolta. This time it’s not because of something he’s done; it’s because of something he might do. Online betting companies are taking wagers on when John will come out of the closet. Other popular celebrity bets include: when Charlie Sheen will go to jail, when Mel Gibson will be arrested, when Miley Cyrus will go to rehab and when Michael Jackson will return from the dead. I’d like to get a piece of that action.

Streisand is ready to return to musical theatre—at least on film. According to Arthur Laurents, Streisand is thisclose to taking on the towering role of Mama Rose in a big screen remake of Gypsy. But, contrary to published reports, she will not direct (said Laurents, “She once wanted to, but playing Rose is enough to make her happy”). The musical, which was written for Ethel Merman, first made it to the big screen in 1962 with Rosalind Russell (and Lisa Kirk, but that’s another story). It was later remade for television with Bette Midler in 1993. Other people have previously been attached to a remake—most notably Liza Minnelli, who almost did it a decade ago. Barbra first discussed the idea with lyricist Steven Sondheim, but waited to make a decision until she had Laurents’ blessing: “Barbra and I have been getting along very well now for some time. We’ve talked about it a lot, and she knows what she’s doing. She has my approval. She had a mother who she always thought was Mama Rose. I don’t want to get into the details, but the script is she knows. She’s got it in her. She’s going to be much more than people expect.” Laurents also has a sentimental reason for seeing Streisand in the role—he directed her first Broadway musical, I Can Get It For You Wholesale. “We’re talking about Gypsy being a boondoggle for us. She began with me, and this will be a grand farewell for us,” said the 92-year-old Laurents.

As I told you months ago, Kathy Griffin has indeed pulled the plug on her Bravo series My Life on the D-List. Griffin said, “Reality is great, but I really didn’t set out to be a reality star. So now it’s time to spread my wings and show that I’m a little different than Kate Gosselin, ... I’m not saying better, but maybe separate myself from the pack a little bit.” Towards that end, she signed a deal for four new stand-up comedy specials with Bravo in 2011. I don’t think it’s any secret that Prince William is losing his hair. But I doubt he’s interested in showing off all of his body hair—just like I don’t think the royal was all that interested in learning about this latest conjunction as if it means something. I know, not only does he have a famous sister, but he’s a “sister”—if you catch my drift.

In Cosmopolitan UK, Adam Levine wears a lot less clothing than you see here.

Obviously I’m not one of those people. You can see me for yourself at BillyMasters.com.

The topic of nude celebs brings us to the first “Ask Billy” question of the New Year. Reggie in North Dakota asks: “I heard that Steve Howey is in Shameless. Since it’s cable, will there be any nudity? He’s so hot, I figured you’d know.”

Not only do I know—I have the first shots of his naughty bits. As longtime readers of this column know, I have a history with Stevie—my presence at a taping of Reba ensured I’d be on the blooper reel after I made him laugh during the one good take of a scene. (He screwed up a dozen previous takes.) The Showtime series Shameless premiered Jan. 9 and included some full-frontal Howey—now that’s what I’m talking about! Since I’m sure many of you missed it, go directly to BillyMasters.com—the site that’s always on top of these things.

Could it be that a certainly siren is sucking up to a certain sexpot’s sibling? Let’s hear Liza try to say that three times fast! Everyone is gabbing about this latest conjunction as if it means something, Honey, not only does he have a famous sister, but he’s a “sister”—if you catch my drift.

When our blind item is something to cheer about, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. Well, I guess I couldn’t avoid it forever—it’s time to head back to Hollywood. After all, the Golden Globes kick off the awards season. But I have another reason to be on the west coast—the night before the GGs, I’ll be in Las Vegas at the Miss America Pageant. So if you hear of someone being beaten up because he mouthed off to the wrong contestant’s family and they backed over him in their motor home, you’ll know who it was! I’m sure there will be gossip galore from these two events, but you can feel like you’re a fly on the wall by checking out www.BillyMasters.com. If you have a question you’d like me to tackle (much like Miss Wyoming’s uncle will likely tackle me), drop a note to Billy@BillyMasters.com, and I promise to get back to you before I’m released on my own recognizance. Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
**AIDS initiative named official Chicago Triathlon program**

BY ROSS FORMAN

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) received a major worldwide endorsement Jan. 7 as did AFC’s endurance training program, Team To End AIDS, also known as T2.

T2 has been named the “Official Charitable Training Program” for the annual Chicago Triathlon, the world’s largest triathlon event, which is owned and produced by Life Time Fitness. Plus, AFC was named the “Official Charity” of the event, which means that the agency will be the only charity granted a page on the event website, associated with online event registration, and included in event e-newsletters and press releases.

About 8,500 participated in the 2010 Chicago Triathlon. This year’s event will be held Aug. 28.

“I am absolutely thrilled about this achievement for T2 and for AFC,” said Mike Dilbeck, of Chicago, who is the T2 national director. “It really is an honor to be selected for this coming off of our first year for T2. This is an honor for T2, for AFC and for the HIV/AIDS community.”

“I look at this like an award from our peers—from the triathlon and endurance-sports community—letting us know that they appreciate and respect what we have built and done with T2 last year.”

AFC launched T2 in 2010, training locals for a half marathon, full marathon, or triathlon.

This summer, T2 is expanding its offering of endurance sports with a bicycling event, the Wrigley Field Road Tour, on Aug. 27.

“When we asked the [Chicago] Triathlon staff why T2 was chosen, they said they chose us based on the enthusiasm of our staff and what we can bring to the Chicago Triathlon as a highly-respected and successful training program in the Chicagoland area,” Dilbeck said.

AFC and T2 have been signed for a two-year deal with the Chicago Triathlon.

“Our selection of T2 provides us with an opportunity to raise funds and drive awareness for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, while at the same time fulfilling Life Time’s mission to grow the sport of triathlon,” said Chicago Triathlon race director, Nick Lynch. “We’re honored to be among the six [T2] events in 2011 ready to make a difference.”

T2 also will train participants for the Steelhead 70.3 Triathlon (Aug. 14), the Chicago Half Marathon (Sept. 1), the Bank of America Chicago Marathon (Oct. 9) and the Honolulu Marathon (Dec. 1).

Dilbeck said the selection of T2 is absolutely huge “especially when you consider [all of the other] amazing, national endurance training programs around the country that the Chicago Triathlon had to choose from. While this is a two-year designation, we are committed that it will be a long-term relationship with the Chicago Triathlon, allowing the triathletes and T2 to make even bigger improvements for those living with HIV/AIDS.”

AFC launched T2 in 2010 to raise money for the fight against HIV/AIDS by training ordinary people to complete extraordinary events: a marathon, half marathon, triathlon or 100-mile bike ride. Register has begun for 2011 events; visit http://www.t2ea.com.

“T2 has experienced an amazing inaugural year, trained hundreds of people to complete an endurance event, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for HIV/AIDS, and finished year one with this feather in our cap as the ‘Official Charitable Training Program’ of the world’s largest triathlon,” Dilbeck said. “It will be fun and challenging to create an even more successful and amazing year in 2011.”

Added incoming AFC President/CEO David Erneste Munar: “The Chicago Triathlon has given T2 its highest seal of approval for our outstanding training program and charitable work in the community. I could not be more proud. People who train with T2 and complete the Chicago Tri or another endurance event are among our best ambassadors promoting the excellent coaching and our outstanding work fighting HIV/AIDS. With official recognition from the Chicago Triathlon, thousands of other triathlon enthusiasts will learn about us and receive a power endorsement from one of the largest growing events in the sport.”

Munar, 41, ran the Chicago Marathon in 2010, but this year will mark his first tri, the Chicago Triathlon, naturally.

“The exposure of this recognition is huge,” Munar said. “For anyone considering a training program, the Chicago Triathlon’s recognition is an important seal of approval and endorsement of the kind of excellent experience they can expect to receive.”

T2 partners with TriMonster to aide in training for triathletes.

We proved [last year] that we are serious about involving new people in triathlons and the worthy cause of fighting HIV/AIDS,” Munar said.

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**Windy City Times**

Feb. 27

“Hustle Up the Hancock,” sponsored by the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, will take place Sunday, Feb. 27.

The full climb is sold out. However, CSB2 Half Climb (52 Floors) and Lung Health Champion spots are still available. The total entry fee, due at the time of registration, is $100 for the half-climb and $110-$130 for the lung health spot. (The Lung Health Champion slot has a mandatory additional fundraising amount of $920.) See http://www.hustleupthehancock.org.

**Chicago MSA**

badminton doubles

Winter doubles will return Monday nights beginning Jan. 10 at the Broadway Armory, 5917 N. Broadway.

Dates are Jan. 24 and 31; Feb. 7, 14 and 28; March 7, 14, 21 and 28; and April 4, 11, 18 and 25. Team fees are $160, with an additional fee of $5 per player.

Team entry deadline is Jan. 17; see http://www.ChicagoMSA.org.

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**Models in LCCP/Howard Brown women’s athletic calendar**
Tribute for local athlete to be held Jan. 15

BY ROSS FORMAN

A few weeks before he unexpectedly died on Nov. 14, Jamie Moravec commented to his friends about Howard Brown Health Center and their financial crisis. He expressed interest in helping out because he recognized the importance of Howard Brown to Chicago’s LGBT community.

So three of Moravec’s best friends—Bradford Lelwah, Bobby Hull and Bob Zuber—are throwing a party in Moravec’s honor.

And half of the $20 entrance fee—which includes unlimited beer, well drinks and a light buffet—will be donated to Howard Brown Health Center.

The celebration is slated for Saturday, Jan. 15, 6-9 p.m., at Scarlet Bar, 3320 N. Halsted.

“We thought Jamie would love the idea of a fundraiser in conjunction with his party,” said Lelwah, 34, an attorney who lives in Rogers Park. “We conceived of the tribute as a way to celebrate the life of our best friend. Jamie was a wonderful person with whom we all share countless memories. The four of us talked every day, traveled together, celebrated our birthdays together and basically were inseparable. He changed each of our lives in his own unique way and this is our homage to him. It’s also a reminder of some of the things that Jamie stood for—love, laughter, a big life, and friendship. It’s also our way of saying, ‘We love you, we miss you, and we’ll never forget you.’”

Their goal for the event is simple: “To honor our best friend and share a little of him with all of his friends, family, co-workers and acquaintances,” Lelwah said.

Moravec, who played three sports in Chicago’s gay leagues, died from injuries sustained in a fall from his fifth-floor condominium in the Uptown neighborhood. He was 35.

Moravec played beach volleyball and flag football within the Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association (CMSA) umbrella and bowled in the Friday night Chicago Pride League.

Lelwah said Moravec would love the celebration they are planning, as long as it’s not a sad event.

The Moravec celebration, Lelwah said, will be a “reminder of the brevity of life and the importance of living it to the fullest, with no regrets, and with unpretentious passion and appreciation for all of your blessings.”

They will have a video montage of photos, including some of Moravec’s favorite clips from the TV shows Designing Women and Family Guy as well as the character Betty Butterfield, set to his favorite songs. Chris Wedig, a very close friend of Moravec, is preparing the 90-minute video tribute.

“Since his death, it has been up and down,” said Hull, 36, a CPA who lives in Lakeview. “I have been living my life, but each day feeling a little bit sad and even guilty that I am moving on and Jamie is not here to enjoy the simple things in life that he appreciated so much. I am so afraid to get caught up in everyday life that I forget his energetic personality, excitement for life and love for his family and friends. Part of me doesn’t want to let go of the sadness because I feel like I am letting go of him. That’s for me to deal with as I know life goes on. I just never would have wanted it to go on without Jamie. It’s difficult.”

Zuber, 37, an Edgewater architect, added: “It’s been hard on me not having Jamie around. I have learned that people that you love can be taken from you without a moment’s notice and although it may be a cliché to ‘live to the fullest each day,’ but no truer words have been said. You must always let the people you love know how much they mean to you. Thankfully, Jamie passed out of our lives with the knowledge that he was deeply loved by us, because we never missed an opportunity to tell each other how we felt.”

The celebration has been branded “Raise Your Glass: A Tribute to Jamie Moravec.”

“There has been a palpable emptiness in my life since Jamie died,” Lelwah said. “We have helped his mom and stepfather go through this, which has been very hard. Spending time with them has been very therapeutic, however—they are truly wonderful people. I still cannot believe he’s gone after having been such a constant presence in my life for the last nine years. I spoke to him nearly every single day. I’ve traveled the world with him. I look at his picture every day and wish he were still here. Since his death, I have tried to express my love for my best friends every chance I get. I have been so lucky to have been blessed with so many close friends—I want them to know how much they mean to me, always.”

Jamie Moravec. Photos from Bradford Lelwah

Sky season starts June 4

The Chicago Sky women’s basketball team will open its season in June 4 at Indiana, and will conclude Sept. 11 at Seattle—with plenty of action in between those dates as well.

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See http://www.wnba.com/sky for more information.

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