By Matt Simonette

As April 4 general elections loom in suburban Cook and collar county municipalities, few local school board races will be watched more closely than that of Township High School District 211, in the Northwest suburbs including Palatine, where board members have long been grappling with public accommodations rules for its transgender students.

Some local parents formed a coalition with both Trans United Fund—a national advocacy political group centering on trans issues—and Equality Illinois to campaign for board candidates who support trans-affirming rules that were put into place when the federal government intervened on behalf of a transgender girl who had been denied access to the girls’ locker room.

Other parents and anti-LGBT advocates have since decried District 211’s vote in 2015 to accept the government’s deal. Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), an anti-LGBT legal organization, in 2016, filed a lawsuit on behalf of aggrieved families. A local organization called Parents4Privacy has meanwhile become especially active, recently throwing their support behind school board candidates who would like to see the rules rolled back.

Parents4Privacy’s role in local politics is what inspired Lindsay Christensen and two other mothers to form an opposing coalition in support of candidates Robert LeFevre Jr., Anna Klimkowicz and Edward Yung.

“Our efforts have been [focused on] canvassing on behalf of our candidates in District 211 and we’ve been phone-banking a little bit as well,” said Christensen. “We’ve been dealing with the Parents4Privacy in District 211 for about two years now. They’ve made quite a name for themselves, and people now know who they are.”

She added, “It’s been tough-going, because we don’t have a lot of volunteers and we definitely don’t have a lot of money.” About five to 10 canvassers have gone out on weekends, while five or six people have been working the phones.

“Initially we thought it was really our individual trans students that were going to
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LOCAL COLOR
The Chicago Flower & Garden Show (left) paid tribute to symbols of the Windy City.
Photo by Andrew Davis

EIGHTIES LADY
WCT talked with Gioia Bruno of the group Expose, which had multiple hits during the ’80s and ’90s.
Photo by Chris Ameruoso

THAT’S SHOW BIZ
Find out the latest about Patricia Arquette, Sir Ian McKellen and The Walking Dead.

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Above: WCT reviews The Scullery Maid.
Photo by Steven Townshend

When A Great Deal Matters, Shop Rob Paddor’s...
McAleer-Forte readies for Berwyn election

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Julia McAleer-Forte said she is running for a spot on the Berwyn South School District D100 School Board to “be at the table to help plan a vision and a path to better success.”

When McAleer-Forte and her partner Kerry moved to Berwyn with their two children 12 years ago, school scores were higher than in neighboring Oak Park.

“That’s no longer the case,” she said. “We’ve had significant issues with the state, as has nearly every school community in Illinois.”

McAleer-Forte is one of several LGBT candidates who will be on the ballot on the April 4 elections. Some of the contests were already decided in February primaries, among them the city clerk post, which was won by Ald. Marge Paul, who is a lesbian. Three members of the eight city council members will be LGBT as well. A gay man, Brian Brock, will also be running for a park district post April 4.

“We moved to Berwyn because we loved it,” McAleer-Forte recalled. “We felt great about the community. We have roots here. I think [running for office] is one way to make it better.”

Berwyn has a sizable LGBT population “and a lot of us have kids,” she added. “My kids are older than those of many of the newer families coming in, but I would like that supportive groundwork to be consistent and represented on the school board. This is another part of diversity. This current school board is more diverse than it’s been in a long time and if I’m elected, that’s just another reflection of the community that we live in.”

Some of the races were contentious in the primaries, and McAleer-Forte worked closely to help the winning campaigns for Paul and Jeanine Reardon, who will replace Paul on the city council. But McAleer-Forte said she and her opponent, Darlene Yoder, committed to running nonpartisan campaigns focused on the issues at hand and funded their runs themselves.

“Darlene and I are both very proud to say, ‘If we’re elected, we represent everybody,’” McAleer-Forte said.
Biss announces campaign to unseat Rauner

BY MATT SIMONETTE

State Sen. Daniel Biss, on March 20, announced that he is launching a campaign to unseat Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner in the 2018 gubernatorial election.

Biss made the announcement via Facebook Live, where he said the campaign would be a more direct, grassroots effort to fix a stalemate between Rauner and Illinois Machine politicians, adding, “This is a campaign for the rest of us.”

Biss acknowledged that fixing that stalemate would be a monumental task, adding, “My responsibility is to work with everybody … But we have to acknowledge what has gotten us to this political moment.”

Illinois’ lack of a budget is “an abomination,” according to Biss. “No state has been in this situation before … It is a failure and it is wrong. People are hurting in every corner of this state.”

He further noted, “I’m not the millionaire or billionaire in this race,” characterizing the upcoming run as a citizens’ movement that could potentially mobilize the power that he said had been usurped by both entrenched politicians and wealthy Illinoisans. “I’m running for governor to be part of that movement.”

Biss, a mathematician, has represented the 9th District in the state senate since 2013. His district includes Evanston, Glencoe, Glenview, Morton Grove, Northbrook, Northfield, Skokie, Wilmette and Winnetka. He also served as a state representative from 2011-2013. In 2016, he announced a run for State Comptroller, but eventually dropped out of that race.

He has a strong record on supporting rights for LGBT Illinoisans. Biss is currently chief sponsor of a bill that prohibits gay panic as a legal defense, for example, and was also chief sponsor in the Senate of the bill that led to the prohibition against anti-gay conversion therapy for LGBT minors.

Among those who’ve also announced runs against Rauner on the Democratic ticket are Chicago Ald. Ameya Pawar (47th Ward) and businessman Christopher Kennedy. Businessman J.B. Pritzker and state Sen. Andy Manar are also exploring the possibilities of running, according to reports.
Advocates discuss aging issues, feds’ ‘erasure’ threat

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Even as awareness of issues surrounding LGBT aging becomes more prevalent, numerous challenges remain for seniors in the LGBT community.

One of the newest challenges, according to many presenters at the National Forum on LGBT Aging, held March 22 in conjunction with the Aging in America ASA (American Society on Aging) Conference at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, emerged this month from the Trump administration.

Two national surveys released by the Administration omitted a question about the LGBT seniors, the only omission made from previous editions of the surveys, according to Serena Worthington, director of Field Initiatives for SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders) USA.

“One survey was about people with disabilities, the other has to do with older adults,” said Worthington. “The LGBT question has only been in the surveys since 2014, so it’s incredibly important that it stay in there. The one that refers to older adults is extremely important because so much money flows from the federal government, almost $2 billion, and they decide how to apportion it based on those answers. If LGBT people are not in there, it’s very easy to say, ‘You’re not there. You don’t count’.”

Panelist Barbara Satin, of the National LGBTQ Task Force, said that she and her age cohorts were in danger of “being erased,” adding, “If they don’t count me, I don’t count. I’m invisible.”

Satin, a trans woman who sat on President Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said she’s confident the community can rise above any challenges the new administration might bring. She noted activism had been somewhat “moved aside” following the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage, so she hopes the work ahead will recharge the community.

“I’m hopeful—but I’m also being erased, so do your part in responding to our challenges,” she said.

Moderator Karen Fredriksen-Goldson of the University of Washington, who was principal investigator on the first national project to study health among LGBT older adults, said, “We and our elders have stood up to be counted. … Data is used to allocate resources. Data is used for facts.”

Panelist Brian de Vries of San Francisco State University presented a timeline of LGBT history that a 75-year-old LGBT person would have experienced, beginning with Christine Jorgensen’s 1952 transition and ending with the passage of HB 2 in North Carolina.

“Literally dripping from this timeline is stigma,” he said. “I don’t ever want to lose sight of that.”

de Vries further noted that many older LGBT adults felt as if they’d suffered figurative, if not outright literal, assaults from the rest of society, adding, “If you think of such assaults as weight, you can imagine that, by the end of a life, how much weight a person would carry. But that has the possibility of strengthening a person as much as it does of weighing them down.”

Fredriksen-Goldson noted more work still required in the field, reminding the audience that various disciplines were disproportionately focused on disparities facing gay male seniors, and that little data existed on bisexual seniors, for example. But Satin remarked that in Minnesota, where she has done much of her work, and where strong protections have long been in place, LGBT seniors are becoming more cognizant of their needs and rights.

“They have very different views [from previous generations] about what they expect from their aging services,” she added.

An audience member asked whether a measured response to the survey was worth the community’s time and efforts.

“It’s not going to change if we don’t do this,” Satin answered. “This is supposed to be the administration of the candidate who said, ‘I’m going to be the best friend the LGBT community ever had,’ and we have to hold him to that.”

Paula Basta, regional director of the Northeast Senior Center, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, introduced the March 22 forum. SAGE and other organizations are urging everyone to register a public comment on the survey. Comments close on May 12. For more information, see http://bit.ly/2mHZNKi.

Art AIDS exhibition hosts panel on aging

BY DAVID THILL

Greg Sanchez has taken HIV medications since the 1980s. But each time his body becomes resistant to one, he must switch to another. Now, with no new medications available, his only option is to take part in a clinical trial—a prospect he finds scary and, even more so, isolating. “I just wish I had somebody to relate to,” he said.

The lack of support services for older adults living with HIV/AIDS was a prominent topic during a March 22 panel discussion on HIV and aging, held at the Alphawood Gallery in conjunction with the Art AIDS America Chicago exhibition. The panel—which Jacqueline Boyd, founder of Chicago-based health-services agency The Care Plan, moderated—featured Sanchez and five other members of Chicago’s HIV/AIDS, LGBT and healthcare communities. (In addition, the Chicago Gay Men’s Chorus performed.)

“There’s a lot of non-visibility around the HIV/AIDS issue,” said Sanchez. He said he knows of only two local support groups for long-term survivors, one of which he leads. “It feels like there’s this … disconnect now.” He senses that disconnect particularly from members of younger generations, many of whom he feels do not understand the experiences of those who lived through the height of the AIDS epidemic.

Panel members said this intergenerational divide needs to be addressed. “I … think there are a lot of spaces that provide opportunity for older generations and younger generations to … engage one another,” said Brenniki R. Floyd, Ph.D., MPH, a research specialist at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She believes opportunities for this engagement exist in service settings that already serve both older and younger individuals.

Several panel members said many younger individuals lack seriousness in dealing with HIV/AIDS. “You have to take this [diagnosis] seriously,” said Brenda Simmons, an outreach specialist at Chicago Women’s AIDS Project. Whereas in the past an HIV diagnosis was a major concern for patients, Simmons said she sees many newly diagnosed patients who miss doctor appointments or fall behind on their medications.

She acknowledged that today’s youth face other challenges, including finding housing and obtaining sufficient income—challenges that have become more pronounced as funding for those resources disappears. Still, she believes that “health care should be taken a little bit more seriously” by younger individuals.

Intergenerational conversations—and health education, generally—are important for maintaining HIV/AIDS awareness, especially as the virus becomes resistant to new medications, said panel members. Panelist Thomas Hunter, LCSW, a medical case-management supervisor and senior-care specialist at Chicago House, said he has overseen cases of young HIV-positive patients who fail to take their medications and then become resistant to them, sometimes leading to avoidable deaths.

By the same token, patients who adhere to their treatment regimens—including taking medications regularly—can reap the benefits. Hunter has been HIV-positive for over 15 years. He said his doctor told him, “You’re probably going to end up dying of something else, not HIV!” Indeed, several panel members observed that for many older HIV-positive adults, HIV is less of a concern than other chronic diseases, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, that often accompany aging.

Still, they said, the possibility of living longer is accompanied by stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, and older patients need adequate social support services to live happily. One way to obtain these services, the panelists agreed, is to advocate for them, including voting and calling on legislators.

“The long and short of it is … we’re going to have to do things for ourselves,” said HIV activist Roy Ferguson. “We have to hear our voices.”
Shore running for re-election

Debra Shore—a two-term member of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD)—announced her intention to run for re-election in the 2018 elections.

In announcing her intention to run again, Shore said, “March 22 is World Water Day, a fitting time to announce that I intend to run for another term on the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD). The primary election is on March 20, 2018 and I am embarking on my re-election campaign. Will you row on with me?”

A press release cited her reason for running as “water matters,” with Shore discussing everything from the situation involving the residents of Flint, Michigan, to her own experience with several initiatives in the Chicago area that have improved water quality.

Shore lives in Skokie with her wife, Kathleen Gillespie.

MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore.
Photo courtesy of campaign team

Attorney general wants stronger hate-crimes measure

Attorney General Lisa Madigan recently urged members of the Illinois House to pass legislation to strengthen Illinois’ hate-crimes law.

According to a press release, “House Bill 3711 better protects Illinois residents from escalating incidents of hatred and bias.”

The bill, which state Rep. Litesa Wallace and Sen. Omar Aquino sponsored, passed out of committee, and the full chamber will now consider the measure. The legislation expands the reach of protection from hate crimes to address those who use technology to attack victims; provides the attorney general with civil-enforcement authority; ensures that all victims of hate crimes are afforded a civil remedy; and allows judges to impose a civil penalty of up to $25,000 for each violation.

Madigan, on Feb. 23, convened a summit at the James L. Thompson Center with nearly two dozen representatives from advocacy groups to discuss how the state will address hate crimes and discrimination in the years ahead.

Chicago House offering free career counseling

Chicago House & Social Services Agency has announced that it is offering free career counseling to all LGBTQ adults.

The organization’s employment-services program recently broadened its reach; previously, it served only individuals who are HIV-positive and people with documented disabilities. Now, the program offers free and confidential services to any person identifying as LGBTQ who is 18 years of age or older.

Chicago House offers two weekly drop-ins for people who are interested in receiving job search help, but haven’t yet enrolled in a program. Employment Services hosts an LGBTQ drop-in on Thursdays at 12-4 p.m. at Chicago House’s main office, 1925 N. Clybourn Ave., Suite 402. Also, TransWorks hosts a weekly drop-in on Mondays at 12-4 p.m. at the Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St.

See ChicagoHouse.org.
PRCC hosts panel discussion featuring queer Cuban leaders

By Carrie Maxwell

Trans Cuba National Coordinator Malu Cano and Cuban National Center for Sex Education Department of Community Relations Director Andy Aquino were the featured speakers at a panel discussion that the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) hosted March 25.

The discussion zeroed in on the work their organizations do to elevate LGBTQ people and issues, especially those that affect the transgender community and/or people with HIV/AIDS.

Following an introduction by PRCC Chief Operating Officer Juan Calderon and words of welcome by Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, Aquino and Cano explained (via a translator) the focus of each of their organizations.

Cano (who also founded Trans Cuba in 2001) said the organization is a social network sponsored by the United Nations that is recognized by and works with the Cuban National Center for Sex Education (similar to the Centers for Disease Control). She noted that her role is to assist the coordinators in each state, helping the more than 4,000 members nationwide; in turn, those coordinators report to her.

In talking about the work Trans Cuba does, Cano said the organization focuses on those who are HIV-positive; educates family members and the public about transgender people and issues as well as comprehensive sex education; and empowers its members.

She explained that one of things they do is work with the government to separate the data for those with HIV so MSM (men who have sex with men) and transgender people are in their own category. Cano noted that because both populations are combined, government statistics show 15 percent are HIV-positive; however, her research shows a 90-percent rate of infection among transgender people, mostly due to that population engaging in sex work.

Cano also noted that—although there is a wider acceptance of the LGBTQ community—pockets of society still discriminate against transgender people, including some schools, some of which force transgender women to dress in men's clothes and vice versa.

When asked if any transgender people have been killed in Cuba, Cano said no, although they still face other kinds of hate crimes by the wider population.

Cano spoke about the upcoming month-long Cuban Campaign Against Homophobia and Transphobia (May) sponsored by the Cuban National Center for Sex Education. The campaign’s focus is to educate the public about LGBTQ people and issues so more people accept them as a part of the fabric of Cuban society.

Aquino explained that the Cuban National Center for Sex Education is tasked with informing the government about sex education as it relates to the LGBTQ community, contraception and HIV/AIDS prevention, and is made up of academics from a variety of disciplines, including sociology and psychology.

He said that they also pushed for a law that would provide free gender-confirmation surgeries for transgender people. This law was passed in June 2008; so far, the government has paid for more than 30 surgeries, he added.

Aquino said more and more Cubans are accepting of the LGBTQ community than ever before due to the efforts of the Cuban National Center for Sex Education and Trans Cuba. He also said they focus on the well-being of the individual over the larger group and avoid using labels because those labels add stigma and discrimination on LGBTQ individuals.

He noted that they are working toward legislation that would make LGBTQ people equal in Cuba, with a focus on providing the legislators with best practices to make this happen.

They praised Mariela Castro’s role in elevating LGBTQ people and issues into the national discourse. Castro is the director of the Cuban National Center for Sex Education.

Aquino and Cano’s remarks about how transgender people are treated in Cuba sparked a conversation among the attendees about the differences between Cuba and the U.S. A number of attendees praised Cuba’s efforts in integrating their LGBTQ population into the larger society.

A delegation of Chicago LGBTQ Latinx community leaders will travel to Cuba in May to build on the transnational partnership that began with this event and continue the conversation on issues of wellness among LGBTQ people.

A welcoming reception was also held for Cano and Aquino March 24 at Calderon’s home. See PRCC-chgo.org for more information.
Under the rubric, “Resist. Reimagine. Rebuild,” a new Chicago coalition will host a citywide teach-in Tuesday, April 4 at the headquarters of the Chicago Teachers Union, 1901 W. Carroll, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

April 4 is the anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The event marks a new level of unity forming among labor, Black Lives Matter and immigrant rights groups in Chicago. It will include speeches by local activists, a tribute to Dr. King’s commitment to racial and economic justice, information on organizing in other cities and music by the hip hop duo, Rebel Diaz.

More than 30 Chicago-area labor and progressive organizations have been meeting on the South Side since November to map a new plan of action to resist the current climate of xenophobia, racism and anti-immigrant sentiments. These include Arab and Muslim organizations, LGBTQIA groups, immigrant rights groups, workers centers, low-wage worker organizers, youth groups, grassroots and cultural workers from various communities, labor unions, women’s groups and Black Lives Matter organizations.

The call is for: "No deportations, No Muslim ban, No racist police violence, Yes to workers rights, living wage jobs, unionization and the Fight for 15. Yes to all rights for women and LGBTQIA people in our communities."

This event will build for planned actions on May Day, in coordination with others, and as a part of a nationwide united front project called “Beyond the Moment,” initiated by the Movement for Black Lives and partner groups, which marks the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s historic “Beyond Vietnam” speech where he condemned militarism and materialism and called for a “radical revolution of our values” as a nation. The Resist group will join the rally and march beginning in Union Park in Chicago on May 1 at 1 p.m.

All are welcome to the April 4 teach-in, but registration is recommended: https://citywideteachin.eventbrite.com.

Also see: https://www.facebook.com/Resist-Reimagine-Rebuild-Chicago-717202298452091

—From a press release
An analysis of the state foster-care system

ACLU is advocating for better outcomes for LGBT youth
By David Thill

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services has had an official policy on caring for LGBT youth in foster care since 2001, according to DCFS sources. But it seems that many of the people responsible for enforcing that policy are unaware of its existence.

While it does require caregivers to respect LGBT youth, including aspects of gender identity such as preferred name and gender pronoun and clothing choices, the policy is located about 100 pages into the appendix to another DCFS document. Because of its inconspicuous location, many caregivers don’t realize that at some point they may serve LGBT youth—and, furthermore, that they have to affirm those LGBT youth, Ghirlandi Guidetti, a graduate of Loyola University’s law school and public policy program, and the 2016-2017 Tom Steel fellow, told Windy City Times.

The Tom Steel fellowship, awarded by San Francisco-based Pride Law Fund, funds one project per year “for a new lawyer to work in the United States on an innovative, public interest law project” that serves the LGBT community, according to the fellowship website.

The Illinois branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, where Guidetti has worked since 2015, is sponsoring his fellowship project, which focuses on LGBT youth in Illinois’ foster-care system. This population interests him because he feels that early intervention in a child’s life “has a lifelong impact,” he said.

Guidetti’s work is facilitated in part by a consent decree reached through B.H. v. Sheldon, a 1988 lawsuit that the ACLU brought against DCFS. This decree establishes DCFS youth in out-of-home placements—including DCFS youth living in arrangements outside their birth families—as clients of the ACLU, thereby granting Guidetti access to the youths’ records. The consent decree also permits him to speak with the youth directly, an important component of the project.

Updating DCFS policy

DCFS is in the process of updating its policy, and Guidetti and the ACLU have offered input to the department throughout this process. The final version is yet to be implemented, but when it is, he said, “We really want to make sure that this isn’t just something that goes out in an email never to be seen again.

“It needs to be accompanied with training and oversight so that everyone is aware of the policy and following it, and knows of the resources that are available to them if they have questions or doubts or concerns about how to care for LGBTQ youth.”

As it stands, training is often voluntary, and in some cases, it is also outdated, said Guidetti. For example, prospective foster parents can complete the department’s PRIDE foster parent training—

the name of which is unrelated to LGBT “pride”—“and walk out of it... and still have no idea what it is to be LGBT,” he said.

Department representatives have told Guidetti’s team that they are working to update the training, and he and his colleagues will follow up to make sure changes are made “in a timely manner,” he said. Additionally, the ACLU will ensure that the department adopts mandatory training requirements for caregivers, and that those requirements “meet an appropriate standard,” said Guidetti.

From policy to practice

Guidetti believes that Illinois DCFS’s heavy reliance on private contractors for services makes it challenging to ensure LGBT foster youth receive adequate care. Facilities such as group homes and treatment centers are typically licensed by Illinois, but managed by private entities.

Additionally, he pointed out that DCFS oversees the entire state’s foster services. By contrast, programs elsewhere oversee smaller areas. For example, New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services covers New York City, and Los Angeles’ Department of Children and Family Services covers Los Angeles County.

Because of these issues, said Guidetti, the ACLU has found that “it’s pretty easy to change the policies on paper, but it’s hard to... change what happens on the ground.”

Guidetti said that lawyers and advocates working in other states’ systems have told him that “one of the keys to success is having a champion on the inside—having someone within the department who’s passionate about these issues, who wants to help accomplish the same goals.

“There are some very serious problems within DCFS and the way that they’re caring for LGBT youth. But I am at least encouraged by the fact that there are ... some individuals on the inside who seem to share our desire to fix the problems, and we hope to have them as partners as we advocate for these changes.”

Guidetti will continue his fellowship work through August. While the project so far has primarily centered on policy research, the next phase will rely more on interviews with caregivers, DCFS employees, and youth. Connecting with youth can be especially challenging because it can be difficult for them to reach out and share their stories, he said. “It’s going to be an ongoing effort to build trust.”

To that end, Guidetti said he would “absolutely welcome” anyone involved with DCFS—current and former employees, individuals who have encountered the system, and youth currently or formerly in DCFS care—to reach out to his team to tell their story, in order to assist in the investigation. Readers can learn more and contact Guidetti at the following link: http://www.aclu-il.org/are-you-lgbtq/.

Psychotherapist George Weinberg dies at 87

Dr. George Henry Weinberg—a famed psychotherapist who coined the term “homophobia”—has died of cancer at age 87.

Weinberg started using the term in the mid-1960s, saying in 1998, “It was a fear of homosexuals which seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for—home and family. It was a religious fear, and it had led to great brutality, as fear always does,” The New York Times reported.

Weinberg was born in Manhattan. In college, he initially studied math but eventually switched to psychology. He wrote several general books, but was best known for Society and the Healthy Homosexual, one of the first books that disagreed with the then-prevailing idea that homosexuality was a psychological illness.

He also appeared on national TV in the 1970s and 1980s, speaking in support of LGBT rights.

Weinberg is survived by his wife, Dianne Rowe.


LGBT groups criticize Trump appointee

While most of the country was seemingly focused on President Trump’s healthcare proposal, the chief executive quietly appointed Roger Severino to lead the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/OCR)—a move many pro-LGBT organizations criticized.

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), the Center for American Progress (CAP), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the National Health Law Program, the National LGTBQ Task Force, the National Partnership for Women and Families and Out & Equal Enroll released a joint statement letting their feelings known about the appointee.

“By appointing Mr. Severino to enforce the life-saving protections that he has made his personal mission to dismantle, the Trump administration has once again put the fox in charge of the hen house,” said Mara Keisling, executive director of NCTE. “He has made attacking women’s and LGBT people’s access to health care one of the centerpiece of his career, while his baseless claims about protec-

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National Center for Transgender Equality
Executive Director Mara Keisling.
Photo by Kate Sosin

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While most of the country was seemingly focused on President Trump’s healthcare proposal, the chief executive quietly appointed Roger Severino to lead the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/OCR)—a move many pro-LGBT organizations criticized.

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), the Center for American Progress (CAP), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the National Health Law Program, the National LGTBQ Task Force, the National Partnership for Women and Families and Out & Equal Enroll released a joint statement letting their feelings known about the appointee.

“By appointing Mr. Severino to enforce the life-saving protections that he has made his personal mission to dismantle, the Trump administration has once again put the fox in charge of the hen house,” said Mara Keisling, executive director of NCTE. “He has made attacking women’s and LGBT people’s access to health care one of the centerpiece of his career, while his baseless claims about protec-

National Center for Transgender Equality
Executive Director Mara Keisling.
Photo by Kate Sosin

Internment exhibition to run in June

Alphawood Gallery, 2401 N. Halsted St., will show “Then They Came for Me: Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII and the De-mise of Civil Liberties” in June.

Then They Came for Me will be unveiled in multiple phases in 2017. It will open with a major installation of photographs by several noted U.S. photographers, including Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange. Subsequent exhibitions and programming will be announced in coming weeks.

This exhibition follows “Art AIDS America,” currently on display at Alphawood Gallery through April 2.
Nominations sought for 30 Under 30 Awards

Windy City Times is seeking to recognize 30 more outstanding LGBT individuals (and allies) for its annual 30 Under 30 Awards.

The ceremony will take place Wed., June 21. Like last year, the event will take place at Polo Cafe and Catering, 3322 S. Morgan St. There will be a 5:30 p.m. reception, with the program being 6-7:30 p.m.

Nominees should be 30 years or under as of June 30, and should have made some substantial contributions to the Chicagoland LGBT community, whether in the fields of entertainment, politics, health, activism, academics, sports or other areas.

The deadline to nominate individuals is Friday, April 14.

Windy City Times Managing Editor Andrew Davis coordinates the awards program for the paper. Hundreds of people have been honored by the paper in the more than 10 years since the awards were established. Most honorees have gone on to great success in their careers and educations, including working for the Obama presidential campaign and administration, plus individual successes in music, legal, professional and academic careers and much more.

Individuals, organizations, co-workers, etc. can nominate a person by emailing Andrew@WindyCityMediaGroup.com or faxed to Andrew Davis’ attention at 773-871-7609. Self-nominations are welcome.

The nomination should be 100 words or fewer, and should state what achievements or contributions the nominee has made. Nominators should include their own names and contact information as well as the contact information and the age of the nominee.

Note: Following the policy instituted in 2005, individuals can only win once. Those who have won the award since that year are ineligible for this year’s awards.

This year’s sponsors include AIDS Foundation Chicago, Center on Halsted, and Howard Brown Health.

Honorees will be notified in May.

Nominations wanted for Hall of Fame

Nominations are now being taken for the 2017 class of the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame. Inductees to the Hall of Fame are recognized for their contributions to Chicago’s LGBT community. Names can be submitted in one of three categories: Individual, Organization, or Friend of the Community.

Through the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame, residents of Chicago and the world are made aware of the contributions of Chicago’s LGBT communities and the communities’ efforts to eradicate homophobic bias and discrimination.

Since the Hall of Fame’s inception in 1991, the mission has continued to expand. In addition to the selection of each year’s new inductees, a large portion of time is devoted to being custodian of records for the exemplary inductees the group has honored and of the history that is remembered through their stories.

Please note that this year there will be a firm nomination deadline of Wed., May 31.

Submission details and guidelines can be found at the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame website, chicagolgbthalloffame.org/nominate/.

Howard Brown Health unveils strategic plan

Howard Brown Health unveiled its three-year strategic plan entitled Pursuing Excellence.

Developed with community and patient input, the plan lays out organizational goals through 2020 in all areas of Howard Brown’s work, including initiatives to expand care access, patient engagement and available services.

In late 2016, Howard Brown Health conducted focus groups and asked community supporters and patients to fill out anonymous surveys to inform the strategic plan. Some of the goals and areas of focus include increasing patient access to high-quality care; expanding patient education and engagement; increasing service offerings in response to the needs of patients; and diversifying revenue to expand reach.


Crossroads Fund’s awards March 31

Crossroads Fund’s annual Seeds of Change awards event is Friday, March 31, 5:30-9:30 p.m., at the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St.

Awards will be given to Mariame Kaba and Project NIA (the Ron Sable Award for Activism), the Arab American Action Network (the Donald F. Erickson Synapses Award) and Organized Communities Against Deportations (the Lynda J. Tipton Memorial Award for Social Justice). The Ron Sable Award is named after the late openly gay candidate and AIDS pioneer.

There will be music, a silent auction, a buffet dinner and the award ceremony at the event.

See CrossroadsFund.org/AnnualBenefit.

LGBTQ business expo on March 31

An LGBTQ business expo and a nighttime event called an “Executive Realness Ball” will take place Friday, March 31, 10 a.m.-8 p.m., at the Martin Luther King Center, 4314 S. Cottage Grove Ave.

Father George Clements and U.S. Congressman Danny Davis will kick off the event. Business attire is required at this event.

Event details are at bit.ly/BusinessBall.

Activism meet-ups, personal book recommendations, weekly events, Kids Storytime, and more! There are so many reasons to support Chicago’s only feminist bookstore.

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Robert Garofalo, MD, is well known to Windy City Times readers as one of the nation’s foremost physicians specializing in adolescent medicine and treatment related to gender identity, sexual- ity, and HIV/AIDS.

With his base of patient care at the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, Garofalo treats hundreds of transgender patients, putting his extensive knowledge of the medical, scientific and social aspects of transgenderism to practical application in the clinical setting. Garo- falo has been seeing young patients at his clinic since 2013, guiding them through the difficult steps of transitioning from one sex to the other.

Beginning treatment during adolescence may seem like the ideal option for transgender people, so Garofalo encounters such patients at an extremely crucial point in their lives. Drugs can be given to suppress their natural biological puberty development—thereby allowing them to avoid some of the body-versus-mind conflict with which older transgender people have to contend. And hormones can be provided at an early age, allowing the individuals’ bodies to develop sexu- ally in ways that better match their gender iden- tity. By contrast, older transgender patients who undergo gender transitioning through hormones and surgery must confront numerous physical and psychological challenges as well as social dilem- mas stemming from the upheavals involved with moving from a male to a female life (or vice ver- sa). Speaking from a purely personal perspective, this freelance writer has observed that friends and acquaintances of mine who transitioned in their teens appear to be much better adjusted, happier, and more confident and at peace with themselves than those who decided to transition later in life (that is, past age 30 or 40).

However, what exactly does the available evid- ence and research indicate regarding the relation- ship between the timing of transitioning and the outcomes in patients (in terms of physical, psychological, and social factors)? Garofalo recently discussed these and other issues.

Windy City Times: What are the age ranges of the patients you treat for gender identity? And what are the main ages that you work with?

Dr. Robert Garofalo: Our program sees patients who range in age from approximately 4 to 24 years. However, medical interventions or treat- ments, such as “pubertal blockers” and/or cross- gender hormones, are not used or even contempl- ated until young people are at least of pubertal age. As opposed to sexual orientation, which is considered an adolescent construct, gender-identity formation is considered more of a pediatric development process. Our program is available for all gender-nonconforming children or adolescents and their families.

WCT: What is the rough proportion of male- to-female versus female-to-male patients whom you have treated?

RG: In our program, we are currently seeing more transgender males (whose sex assigned at birth was female), with an approximately 60-per- cent-to-40-percent split. I think it is important to note, however, that many young people and children who are gender-nonconforming do not identify with a binary notion of gender (male or female). Rather, they tend to be more expansive in their gender identities.

WCT: According to your clinical experience, as well as published research, what are the ad- vantages of beginning transitioning prior to or during puberty?

RG: First, it is important to note, again, that medical interventions aimed at transitioning are not initiated until after puberty has started. However, social gender transition is something that many families and children do initiate prior to puberty. Obviously, the main goal of transition- ing is allowing a child to grow up and be nurtured, loved, and accepted as their authentic selves, rather than living as a gender or in a body that feels foreign or inauthentic.

There is a small but growing body of literature suggesting that family acceptance or support is a critically important component to helping these young people lead happy and successful lives. Our hope is that by initiating transitioning at earlier ages, many of the medical and psychosocial morbidities known to occur with increased frequency among transgender populations (such as home- lessness, HIV, depression, suicidal thoughts, and substance use) might be ameliorated or—in an ideal world—eliminated as these young people lead authentic lives in their affirmed gender.

WCT: What are the cautions that young pa- tients need to be especially aware of regarding transitioning (such as adverse effects from hormone therapy or special social challenges)?

RG: There are many aspects of transitioning, particularly with such medications as pubertal blockers or cross-gender hormones, that require careful thought for patients and parents and that should be part of any consent process from qualifi- ced healthcare providers. The list of potential adverse effects from medications is not particularly well-studied, but they are too numerous to simply list as part of this interview. Neverthe- less, with consistent and competent healthcare, the overwhelming majority of young people do exceptionally well and can tolerate the medical regimens without significant adverse effects.

WCT: Is there any age that may be too young to begin transitioning for certain individu- als? For example, what if a 14-year-old ge- netic male thinks he might be transgender and wants to begin the transitioning process, but he is actually not transgender and is just tem- porarily confused about his sexuality—some- thing he may not realize until after he passes through sexual maturity?

RG: This is a difficult question to answer. I am not sure there is an age that one would con- sider too young to begin transitioning, at least in terms of the aspects that are social in nature. Often, these decisions are faced by family mem- bers who simply want their child or children to be happy, to grow up in an affirming environment, and to be comfortable in their own skin and in their own bodies. The decision to socially transi- tion a child is a family decision—not one that should be made by a medical provider. Our team is here to educate parents about what we know and, more often, do not know about the impact of social transition—and then to be there to sup- port the families in making decisions that they feel will best support and nurture their child.

With regard to the initiation of medical inter- ventions, part of the healthcare or medical treat- ment plan is to perform a careful assessment of readiness of each individual, whether it be for pubertal blockers or cross-gender hormones. There is debate within the medical community about the role of mental health providers in that process, but it is generally well-accepted that the only person who can determine a young person’s gender identity is the young person themselves. I think, in general, the younger the patient, the more concern there may be about initiating medi- cal therapies that may produce irreversible bodily changes.

Pubertal blockers can be used effectively in patients who may need additional time to con- sider whether cross-gender hormones are the right decision for them. Pubertal blockers, to some extent, act like “hitting a pause button” to prevent further pubertal development, which may be undesired but whose effects are generally considered reversible. Cross-gender hormones, which produce some irreversible effects, are not considered until a young person is at least 13 or 14 years of age, but, in most cases, they are initi- ated a bit later in adolescence.

WCT: According to published research, what is the approximate percentage of individuals who eventually regret transitioning? Is there any association between such regret and the age of transitioning?

RG: I do not think anyone knows the answer to such questions, as the research conducted in this area is scant. Anecdotally, very few of our pa- tients express regret with regard to transitioning.

WCT: Do you find that each of your transgen- der patients has unique needs and concerns? Or do they tend to share many commonalities?

RG: While some transgender patients do share some commonalities, largely related to the chal- lenges of growing up gender-nonconforming in a culture that is not always perceived as accepting, each patient must obviously be seen and cared for as an individual with unique needs and con- cerns. It is important to note that transgender adolescents are adolescents first and foremost. So while we as providers may want to focus at- tention on issues related to gender, the patients may prefer to focus on issues germane to any adolescent, such as acne, school problems, ques- tions about dating or relationships, or seeking help navigating their autonomy from parents and family.

WCT: If you could say just one important thing to a child or teen who thinks he or she might be transgender, what would that be?

RG: I think it would be to stay true to them- selves and to never stop being authentic. Trans- gender young people are among the most re- markably strong and resilient patients in medical practice and experience. We can learn a lot from these young people in so many aspects of our lives.

WCT: What is the status of your proposal with the NIH to conduct a study on the long- term effects of cross-sex hormone therapy on young people? Are you planning any other specific type of research?

RG: Our NIH grant is coming along very nicely. Each of the four sites [see below] is actively recruiting patients, and our hope is to be following these young people throughout their lives to help answer many of the questions you posed. There is still so much to learn about the safety and efficacy of our medical interventions and models of care. It is such an honor to be working with these children and families and to be doing this research at this moment in history. Our research will be among the first studies to be conducted in the United States looking at the medical, mental health, and social outcomes of initiating pubertal blockers and cross-gender hormones in children and adolescents.

In terms of other studies that we may be planning, there are quite a few. At Lurie Children’s Hospital—again in collaboration with the other sites that form our Trans Youth Research Network (University of California–San Francisco, Los Angeles Children’s Hospital, Boston Children’s Hospital)—we hope to begin to study a younger cohort of gender-nonconforming children to look at a number of outcomes, including the impact that social gender transition may have on the long-term health and well-being of these chil- dren. There are also questions that need to be answered about the future reproductive fertility options these young people may or may not have after medical interventions have been initiated. In general, medical outcome research for trans- gender populations is a nascent field in need of more work within a broad range of areas and disci- plines.

Note: This is part of a series of articles sum- marizing scientific topics related to LGBT issues.
Mendoza honors trans advocate of color

Illinois State Comptroller Susana Mendoza honored several individuals for women’s history month, including Chicago-based trans advocate LaSaia Wade.

The ceremony took place March 24 at the James R. Thompson Center in downtown Chicago. Wade is pictured here (second from right) with Mendoza (middle) and other honorees. Photo courtesy of Wade.

TransCare holding vigil April 4

On Tuesday, April 4, Heartland Health Outreach’s TransCare Committee will host a vigil that will aim to honor the lives of transgender women who have been killed in 2017.

At 4:30 p.m., attendees will gather at the viaduct at Lawrence Avenue and Marine Drive, with vigils starting at 5 p.m. At 6 p.m., there will be a community meet-up at 1207 W. Leland Ave. in the Derrick J. Davis Community Room on the first floor.

Anyone who is interested in volunteering for this event or getting involved with the TransCare committee should contact Kelsey Miller at KEMiller@HeartlandAlliance.org.

Social worker to be honored as leader

Sarah Buino is being honored as the 2017 Emerging Leader awardee by the National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter (NASW-IL).

She is one of three social workers being honored by this chapter.

Buino (MSW, Loyola University Chicago; LCSW, CADC, CDWF) is founder of Head/Heart Therapy, Inc. She is a licensed clinical social worker, certified addictions counselor, Certified Daring Way facilitator and adjunct faculty member at Loyola University.

Her latest endeavor in clinical social work leadership is a project she has been collaborating on with Robert Hilliker, LCSW, of Houston. Together, they will be opening a new location of The Lovett Center in Chicago.

An award ceremony will be held later this fall to honor this year’s statewide winners.

Bending Genders

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Spring is coming soon—isn’t it?

Okay, I give in, it’s depression. I might as well face it. And I know I’m not alone.

You can guess when it started: Nov. 8, 2016. I tried to overcome it by resisting, ignoring, laughing at the fools on the hill. Like the amazing Elizabeth Warren, I persisted—but so did this depression.

I’ve buried myself in books, my favorites: British police procedurals like Cynthia Harrod-Eagles, Graham Hurley, Elizabeth George. Right now, they’re less gloomy than what has become of the land that I love. The local library has seen a lot of me lately. My sweetheart has done extra duty with cuddling, encouraging, listening. It’s crazy, my life has never been better: I’m married to a spectacular woman, we have shelter, food, friends, yet I can’t shake the depression.

I had a twelve-step sponsor who warned me against the word depression. “Call it being down in the dumps, feeling blue.” Sorry, Mary, I’m beyond that now. The only substitution I can make is “low-spirited.” I have no creative energy, no enthusiasm or passion, even some of the time no interest in reading. I nap, I find cheer in the activity of the birds outside our car. I am grateful, because those treasures in themselves make for a good life.

Yet the depression started in deep winter. We don’t have blizzards here, but the wind and rain have been unrelenting. Walking has always been a helpful tool in downward spirals, and I always have loved walking, even while the atmospheric river called the Pineapple Express barrels through as it has this year. Now that my arthritis has gotten worse, though, walking in the damp and cold have become painful enough to be unwise. Finding the motivation and spunk to get on the exercise cycle is another battle.

Then I heard from my oldest friend. She’s been diagnosed with liver cancer that spread to the pancreas. We’ve known each other since seventh grade, fell in love, and came out together. She was always going to be around. She has a loving daughter and granddaughter and partner and just turned seventy-one.

Mortality is a sharp, ice-cold slap in the face. I can’t fix her, save her or even soothe her. She’s a nurse and says she’d rather live a good four months than eight months of torture.

Immediately thereafter, I started winnowing out my books. I’ve been hauling some of them around almost as long as I’ve known my friend. My office is too cluttered; I can’t find things. In the process, I’ve tossed out other worn out, once beloved objects. I know what this sounds like, this divesting of possessions, but I suspect it’s more about my friend than me. It’s a letting go.

Two days after I heard my friend’s news, I came down with the Coastal Crud, a term used by an RN at the local hospital to describe a flu-ish cold that drags on for weeks, guaranteeing an annoying cough and lower energy than an empty gas tank. My sweetheart said it’s like the Trump election—in sidious, always at the back of my throat, inducing a gagging threat of nausea and perpetuating the gloom of an everlasting winter. There were times when, resting prone, it took all my energy to keep breathing.

Once back at my laptop, I discovered that my ability to focus had called in sick. What’s a writer without focus? I did a lot of research for my next book, and very little actual writing, while sitting in front of a S.A.D. light (for Seasonal Affective Disorder), a handy tool in this climate.

But the birds are coming back. V’s of geese have been honking overhead. Rust-colored rufous hummingbirds are making year-round hummers share their feeders. Clouds of robins regularly descend on the berry bushes outside our kitchen window. Crocuses, hyacinths, daffodils are showing their colors. Shoots of mystery are poking out of the ground and pots where we planted who knows what.

It’s also the season for award finalists to be announced. While I don’t write for awards or money, every writer knows how encouraging it is to be recognized. The Goldies are one reason I’m grateful to The Golden Crown Literary Society, Saints and Sinners, and The Alice B. Readers Awards. To paraphrase my sweetheart, other organizations seem to bypass books written by actual lesbians, published by lesbians, edited by lesbians, bought and read by lesbians.

A couple of days ago, a break in the weather gave us spring for about twenty-four hours. Neighbors were everywhere in the streets greeting one another. The next day we were driven back inside by the blowing rain. Driven inside to the computer, radio, and TV news. The what-has-he-done-now news, the end of health insurance news, the destroy civil rights news.

Spring is in the air, though, and I’m finding breaths of it on Twitter. Here’s (@leahnce1rath) she persisted on Twitter: “When you feel despair creep in... Take a moment to look around at the mobilization of resistance. It’s a beautiful thing.”

Then a sweet reminder from poet James Schwartz (@queerapoesy) tweeting my own “It Gets Better” message (@LeeLynchWriter @ItGetsBetter youtu.be/DUzBYHciUr4) back to me when I most need it.

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March 2017

Letters to the editor

A bad budget

On March 16, President Trump released the administration’s initial budget request, which severely cuts funding to agencies responsible for protecting the public health and responding to infectious diseases, including HIV. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) faces an 18-percent cut to funding. Congress must support HIV and STD programs by rejecting this topline budget and ensuring that funding for non-defense discretionary programs is maintained.

“We appreciate that the Administration recognizes the importance of the Ryan White providers, other safety-net providers, and global health, including PEPFAR, however the cuts to the National Institutes of Health, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other parts of HHS will reverse our progress on ending the HIV epidemic.

If enacted, the budget would be devastating to our nation’s public health infrastructure and harm people living with and/or at risk for HIV and STDs. HIV and STD programs are critical to the public health of our nation and must not be cut,” commented Michael Ruppell, executive director of The AIDS Institute.

Congress and the Administration must ensure that there is continued progress in reducing new HIV and STD infections and providing access to affordable, high-quality, and life-saving care and treatment for people living with HIV and to ensure further research, care and treatment in making progress in ending other STDs. We urge Congress to reject this top line budget and the Trump Administration to revise these spending levels as they develop a more detailed budget request. Congress must appropriate adequate funding to HIV and STD programs to end the HIV epidemic.

The president’s budget would also eliminate parity between defense and non-defense spending cap increases and proposes significant increases to defense spending at the expense of cuts to non-defense discretionary funding. “To end the HIV epidemic and maintain progress on HIV and STD prevention, treatment, care, and support, defense spending and non-defense discretionary spending must be funded in a balanced approach. We expect Congress to take action and ensure balance for these cap increases,” stated Paul Kawata, executive director of NMAC.

David C. Harvey, Executive Director of the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD) added, “CDC data show the highest combined rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis in the U.S. in 20 years. With further budget cuts, we can expect these rates to continue to rise, which is quite alarming.”

AIDS United (AU), NASTAD: The National Association of State and Territorial Apprenticeship Directors, the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD), NMAC (formerly known as the National Minority AIDS Council) and The AIDS Institute (TIA)
**SCOTTISH PLAY SCOTT**

**Questioning ‘gender fraud’**

**BY SCOTT C. MORGAN**

“I’ve never been more proud to have my ass on a poster.”

Los Angeles-based actor/playwright Erica Flor laughed when she confirmed that it was her posterior in publicity shots to promote Proboscis Theatre Company’s STRAP-ON, a 2016 two-person play with movement she co-created with fellow performer Madelyn Robinson and director Jeff Mills. All three are making their Chicago debuts at Links Hall with STRAP-ON, which previously played in California at the Hollywood Fringe Festival and at Center Stage Theater in Santa Barbara.

Despite its potentially playful title, STRAP-ON is not a comedy about a wayward adult novelty. Flor and her collaborators created the theater piece after she was shocked to learn about a controversy “gender fraud” trial in the United Kingdom.

In 2015, a 25-year-old British woman named Gayle Newland was convicted of three counts of sexual assault after pretending to be a man over a two-year period and repeatedly using a prothetic penis to be intimate with a blindfolded female friend, also in her 20s. Newland faced an eight-year prison sentence, which caused much outrage in the LGBTQ community (especially since the judge had been far more lenient in another case when sentencing a convicted heterosexual pedophile).

Newland is currently out on bail after a retrial was ordered last year. But Flor first found out about Newland’s predicament by reading news stories on the Internet during the trial. Not only did Flor ponder the practicalities of Newland presenting as male for so long, but also the high-stakes implications of the intimacy and betrayal from both women being aired so publicly.

“Having this huge court case come about really did kind of shake me,” said Flor, who openly identifies as bisexual. “And as soon as I read it, I sent it to my director and said, ‘This has to be a play.’”

Jeff Mills, the founder and artistic director of Proboscis Theatre Company, likes to focus on original movement/spoken word devised pieces often with historical characters and a documentary approach to research. So for the creation of STRAP-ON, Mills pressed Flor and Robinson to obtain court transcripts from the ongoing trial. He also steered the two actors to try out a number of improvisational exercises based upon their documents and shared life experiences.

“There’s a sort of ‘Jerry Springer’ sensationalized aspect to this story that is definitely there, and I guess we try to use that to get butts into seats,” said Mills, who recently moved from the L.A. area to Chicago when he was hired for an assistant professorship at The Theatre School at DePaul University. “But really what we’re after—from the testimony and the real stories these women were telling—they were really lonely people who fell in love.”

In STRAP-ON, Flor and Robinson play heightened versions of their actor selves looking over official court documents and media stories. Then the two imagine and dramatize situations based upon their own conjecture. Flor takes on the role of Newland, while Robinson plays “V” (the accuser was only named as “victim” in the transcripts, but everyone agreed that she was too much of a loaded label to give her much more sympathy).

“We came to the mutual decision that this has to be two women telling this story,” Flor said. “Showing each side and as many scenarios for each person’s point of view was absolutely crucial to the case and their relationship.”

Since the two actors also portray other characters like the judge and lawyers, Flor added, “We are wearing a lot of hats—not literally but figuratively.”

Both Flor and Mills regret that STRAP-ON is having such a short Chicago run due to availability issues. But Mills hopes the production will be a calling card to display an example of his directing and play creation work. Flor is excited to be making her Chicago debut as both a writer and performer in a piece exploring the fraught boundaries of desire and wildly differing truths.

“We’re just trying to explore what could have happened, but also find the essence,” said Flor about the relationship between Newland and “V.”

“Because at the heart of it, there is love that was tragically broken apart—whether it was by someone’s deception or someone’s fear.”

Proboscis Theatre Company’s Chicago premiere of STRAP-ON plays three 7 p.m. performances only from Thursday, March 30, through Saturday, April 1, at Links Hall, 3111 N. Western Ave. Tickets are $20 and $10 for students and seniors. Call 773-281-0824 or visit Linkshall.ticketfly.com or JMProboscis.com.

**Also playing:**

The Right Brain Project is currently producing the Midwest premiere of Electra Garrigo, by the late gay Cuban playwright Virgilio Pinera. The 1948 play is a Cuban take on Sophocles’ Greek tragedy Electra, and was seen at the time as a harsh critique of the country’s totalitarian regime. Electra Garrigo continues through Saturday, April 15, in a tiny fourth-floor studio space at 4001 N. Ravenswood Ave. Performances are at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays. Tickets are $20 and $15 for students; visit TherBP.org.

**Photo by Michael Brosilow**

Madelyn Robinson (in mask) and Erica Flor (from behind) in STRAP-ON.
What is TRUVADA for PrEP (Pre-exposure Prophylaxis)?

TRUVADA is a prescription medicine that can be used for PrEP to help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 infection when used together with safer sex practices. This use is only for adults who are at high risk of getting HIV-1 through sex. This includes HIV-negative men who have sex with men and who are at high risk of getting infected with HIV-1 through sex, and male-female sex partners when one partner has HIV-1 infection and the other does not. Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions about how to prevent getting HIV-1. Always practice safer sex and use condoms to lower the chance of sexual contact with body fluids. Never reuse or share needles or other items that have body fluids on them.

**IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION**

**What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA for PrEP?**

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- **Many HIV-1 tests can miss HIV-1 infection in a person who has recently become infected.** If you have flu-like symptoms, you could have recently become infected with HIV-1. Tell your healthcare provider if you had a flu-like illness within the last month before starting TRUVADA for PrEP or at any time while taking TRUVADA for PrEP. Symptoms of new HIV-1 infection include tiredness, fever, joint or muscle aches, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, night sweats, and/or enlarged lymph nodes in the neck or groin.

While taking TRUVADA for PrEP to reduce your risk of getting HIV-1 infection:

- **You must continue using safer sex practices.** Just taking TRUVADA for PrEP may not keep you from getting HIV-1.
- **You must stay HIV-negative to keep taking TRUVADA for PrEP.**
- **To further help reduce your risk of getting HIV-1:**
  - Know your HIV-1 status and the HIV-1 status of your partners.
  - Get tested for HIV-1 at least every 3 months or when your healthcare provider tells you.
  - Get tested for other sexually transmitted infections. Other infections make it easier for HIV-1 to infect you.
  - Get information and support to help reduce risky sexual behavior.
  - Have fewer sex partners.
  - Do not miss any doses of TRUVADA. Missing doses may increase your risk of getting HIV-1 infection.
  - If you think you were exposed to HIV-1, tell your healthcare provider right away.
- **If you do become HIV-1 positive, you need more medicine than TRUVADA alone to treat HIV-1.** TRUVADA by itself is not a complete treatment for HIV-1. If you have HIV-1 and take only TRUVADA, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat over time.

TRUVADA can cause serious side effects:

- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis),** which is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms of lactic acidosis include weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, nausea, vomiting, stomach-area pain, cold or blue hands and feet, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, and/or fast or abnormal heartbeats.
- **Serious liver problems.** Your liver may become large and tender, and you may develop fat in your liver. Symptoms of liver problems include your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, and/or stomach-area pain.
- **You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or serious liver problems if you are female, very overweight (obese), or have been taking TRUVADA for a long time.** In some cases, these serious conditions have led to death. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any symptoms of these conditions.

- **Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection.** If you also have HBV and take TRUVADA, your hepatitis may become worse if you stop taking TRUVADA. Do not stop taking TRUVADA without first talking to your healthcare provider. If your healthcare provider tells you to stop taking TRUVADA, they will need to watch you closely for several months to monitor your health. TRUVADA is not approved for the treatment of HBV.

- **Who should not take TRUVADA for PrEP?**
  - Do not take TRUVADA for PrEP if you already have HIV-1 infection or if you do not know your HIV-1 status. If you are HIV-1 positive, you need to take other medicines with TRUVADA to treat HIV-1. TRUVADA by itself is not a complete treatment for HIV-1. If you have HIV-1 and take only TRUVADA, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat over time.
  - Do not take TRUVADA for PrEP if you also take lamivudine (Epivir-HBV) or adefovir (HEPSERA).

- **What are the other possible side effects of TRUVADA for PrEP?**
  - **Serious side effects of TRUVADA may also include:**
    - **Kidney problems, including kidney failure.** Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your kidneys before and during treatment with TRUVADA for PrEP. If you develop kidney problems, your healthcare provider may tell you to stop taking TRUVADA for PrEP.
    - **Bone problems,** including bone pain or bones getting soft or thin, may lead to fractures. Your healthcare provider may do tests to check your bones.
    - **Changes in body fat,** which can happen in people taking TRUVADA or medicines like TRUVADA.
  - **Common side effects** in people taking TRUVADA for PrEP are stomach-area (abdomen) pain, headache, and decreased weight. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effects that bother you or do not go away.

- **What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking TRUVADA for PrEP?**
  - **All your health problems.** Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if you have or have had any kidney, bone, or liver problems, including hepatitis virus infection.
  - **If you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.** It is not known if TRUVADA can harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant while taking TRUVADA for PrEP, talk to your healthcare provider to decide if you should keep taking TRUVADA for PrEP.
  - **Pregnancy Registry:** A pregnancy registry collects information about your health and the health of your baby. There is a pregnancy registry for women who take medicines to prevent HIV-1 during pregnancy. For more information about the registry and how it works, talk to your healthcare provider.
  - **If you are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed.** Do not breastfeed. The medicines in TRUVADA can pass to your baby in breast milk. If you become HIV-1 positive, HIV-1 can be passed to the baby in breast milk.
  - **All the medicines you take,** including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. TRUVADA may interact with other medicines. Keep a list of all your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.
  - **If you take certain other medicines** with TRUVADA for PrEP your healthcare provider may need to check you more often or change your dose. These medicines include ledipasvir with sofosbuvir (HARVONI).

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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Please see Important Facts about TRUVADA for PrEP including important warnings on the following page.
Have you heard about TRUVADA for PrEP™?

The once-daily prescription medicine that can help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 when used with safer sex practices.

- TRUVADA for PrEP is only for adults who are at high risk of getting HIV through sex.
- You must be HIV-negative before you start taking TRUVADA for PrEP.

Ask your doctor about your risk of getting HIV-1 infection and if TRUVADA for PrEP may be right for you.

visit start.truvada.com
**IMPORTANT FACTS**

This is only a brief summary of important information about taking TRUVADA for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) to help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 infection. This does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your medicine.

**MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT TRUVADA FOR PrEP**

Before starting TRUVADA for PrEP to help reduce your risk of getting HIV-1 infection:
- **You must be HIV-1 negative.** You must get tested to make sure that you do not already have HIV-1 infection. Do not take TRUVADA for PrEP to reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 unless you are confirmed to be HIV-1 negative.
- **Many HIV-1 tests can miss HIV-1 infection in a person who has recently become infected.** Symptoms of new HIV-1 infection include flu-like symptoms, tiredness, fever, joint or muscle aches, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, night sweats, and/or enlarged lymph nodes in the neck or groin. Tell your healthcare provider if you have had a flu-like illness within the last month before starting TRUVADA for PrEP.

While taking TRUVADA for PrEP to help reduce your risk of getting HIV-1 infection:
- **You must continue using safer sex practices.** Just taking TRUVADA for PrEP may not keep you from getting HIV-1.
- **You must stay HIV-1 negative to keep taking TRUVADA for PrEP.**
- **Tell your healthcare provider if you have a flu-like illness while taking TRUVADA for PrEP.**
- **If you think you were exposed to HIV-1, tell your healthcare provider right away.**
- **If you do become HIV-1 positive, you need more medicine than TRUVADA alone to treat HIV-1.** If you have HIV-1 and take only TRUVADA, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat over time.
- **See the "How to Further Reduce Your Risk" section for more information.**

**TRUVADA may cause serious side effects, including:**

- **Buildup of lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis),** which is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, nausea, vomiting, stomach-area pain, cold or blue hands and feet, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, and/or fast or abnormal heartbeats.
- **Severe liver problems,** which in some cases can lead to death. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these symptoms: your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, and/or stomach-area pain.
- **Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection.** If you have HBV and take TRUVADA, your hepatitis may become worse if you stop taking TRUVADA. Do not stop taking TRUVADA without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check your health regularly for several months. You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or severe liver problems if you are female, very overweight, or have been taking TRUVADA for a long time.

**ABOUT TRUVADA FOR PrEP (PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS)**

TRUVADA is a prescription medicine used with safer sex practices for PrEP to help reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 infection in adults at high risk:

- HIV-1 negative men who have sex with men and who are at high risk of getting infected with HIV-1 through sex.
- Male-female sex partners when one partner has HIV-1 infection and the other does not.
- To help determine your risk, talk openly with your doctor about your sexual health.

Do NOT take TRUVADA for PrEP if you:
- **Already have HIV-1 infection or if you do not know your HIV-1 status.**
- **Take lamivudine (Epivir-HBV) or adefovir (HEPSERA).**

**POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF TRUVADA FOR PrEP**

TRUVADA can cause serious side effects, including:
- **Those in the "Most Important Information About TRUVADA for PrEP" section.**
- **New or worse kidney problems, including kidney failure.**
- **Bone problems.**
- **Changes in body fat.**

Common side effects in people taking TRUVADA for PrEP include stomach-area (abdomen) pain, headache, and decreased weight. These are not all the possible side effects of TRUVADA. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking TRUVADA for PrEP.

Your healthcare provider will need to do tests to monitor your health before and during treatment with TRUVADA for PrEP.

**BEFORE TAKING TRUVADA FOR PrEP**

Tell your healthcare provider if you:
- Have or have had any kidney, bone, or liver problems, including hepatitis infection.
- Have any other medical conditions.
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed if you become HIV-1 positive because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:
- Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
- Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines that should not be taken with TRUVADA for PrEP.

**HOW TO TAKE TRUVADA FOR PrEP**

- **Take 1 tablet once a day, every day,** not just when you think you have been exposed to HIV-1.
- **Do not miss any doses.** Missing doses may increase your risk of getting HIV-1 infection.
- **You must** practice safer sex by using condoms and you must stay HIV-1 negative.

**HOW TO FURTHER REDUCE YOUR RISK**

- **Know your HIV-1 status and the HIV-1 status of your partners.**
- **Get tested for HIV-1 at least every 3 months or when your healthcare provider tells you.**
- **Get tested for other sexually transmitted infections.** Other infections make it easier for HIV-1 to infect you.
- **Get information and support to help reduce risky sexual behavior.**
- **Have fewer sex partners.**
- **Do not share needles or personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them.**

**GET MORE INFORMATION**

- This is only a brief summary of important information about TRUVADA for PrEP to reduce the risk of getting HIV-1 infection. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more, including how to prevent HIV-1 infection.
- Go to start.truvada.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
- If you need help paying for your medicine, visit start.truvada.com for program information.
THEATER REVIEW

Destiny of Desire
Playwright: Karen Zacarias
At: Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn St.
Tickets: $50-$75
Runs through: April 16

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Karen Zacarias’ homage to the world of telenovelas delivers more fun than anyone has a right to expect from the Latinx author of solemn feminist dramas. Audience members not yet counted among the genre’s two billion devotees, but who have encountered the fiction of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and Bronte sisters, Georgette Heyer and John Fowler will have no problem acclimating to the intricate narrative arc of this internationally popular entertainment. Also helpful is a passing familiarity with PBS miniseries, prime-time soap operas, serial comic strips or Disney fairy tales.

Our story begins on a rainy Mexican night 20 years ago, when two girls were born at Bellarica Municipal Hospital—one, the sickly child of wealthy casino-owner Armando Castillo and gold-digger wife Fabiola; and the other, the hearty daughter of poor farmers Ernesto and Hortencia del Rio. Fearing the wrath of her husband, Fabiola bribes Dr. Mendoza to switch the infants.

From this unlikely premise, the action then jumps to the present, when we meet wholesome bluestocking Pilar Castillo and delicate idealistic Victoria del Rio, as they are now called, as well as the sons—one estranged, one devoted—of the corrupt fathers Castillo and Mendoza. Guided by all-seeing hospital director Sor Sonia, we watch as their adventures take them through multiple mistaken identities, at-first-sight romances, near-homicides, emotionally fraught treks through the shock of purple hair on top, Brennan conveys Hal’s desperation and rootless existence.

But it is Michael Tartentine as the self-described “old-maid schoolteacher” Rosemary who steals the show. Tartentines effeminate demeanour and camp dialogue delivery are hilariously performed. But it is Michael Tartentine as the self-described “old-maid schoolteacher” Rosemary who steals the show. Tartentines effeminate demeanour and camp dialogue delivery are hilariously performed.

The other performances by Jose Nateras, Alexia Jasmene and Malic White are fine, although there are times when it feels like they could dig deeper into probing their characters’ anger and lingering insecurities.

There is also some room for stage improvements in Davis’ intermission-less Picnic. Some scenes change lacks motivation (the bucket-brigade basket removal), or simply go on too long (the final tableau should be completed before the music runs out).

But these visible joys to what should be a seamless staging aren’t too problematic. Davis’ bravery in deconstructing a classic like Picnic is noble and reveals plenty of underlying and unexpected insights into the lives of those who do and don’t follow their hearts.

THEATER REVIEW

Picnic
Playwright: William Inge
At: American Theater Company, 1909 W. Byron St.
Tickets: 773-609-4125 or ATCweb.org: $20-$38
Runs through: April 23

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

If American Theater Company wanted to draft a descriptive subtitle for its production of Picnic, it could easily be “A post-modern, queer and racially inclusive interpretation by transgender artistic director Will Davis.”

Not that there’s anything wrong with that. In staging this 1953 Pulitzer Prize-winning classic by late gay playwright William Inge, Davis shows he isn’t interested in serving up the same old 20th-century realism.

But as the musical Hamilton has proven, audiences can accept non-traditional casting—especially when it heightens the theatricality. Davis takes similar risks with selective gender swapping and colorblind casting for his artfully symbol-laden Picnic.

Davis’ efforts largely succeed for Inge’s drama of repression and romantic longing in a small Kansas town. Many strong performances come shining through with the color-saturated lighting designed by Rachel Levy atop set designer Joe Schermoly’s carpeted platform.

With a manly swagger and adept dance moves, Molly Brennan made an engaging Hal—the hunky drifter who upends the lives of two households filled with women. Sporting a buzz cut with aHttp://www.gofundme.com/725e

THEATER REVIEW

The Scullery Maid
Playwright: Joseph Zettelmaier
At: Idle Muse Theatre Company at the Edge, 5451 N. Broadway
Tickets: $20
Runs through: April 9

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

No one disputes the practicality of eliminating options as a means of expediting decisions—the fewer possibilities, the easier the choice. Right? That’s not how our big sloppy world works, however, and therein lies the lesson illustrated in Joseph Zettelmaier’s speculations on a fragment of historical minutiae.

The aforementioned fragment recounts how a Jewish servant of King Edward III was tortured and subsequently executed by Italian partisans the fewer possibilities, the easier the choice. Right? That’s not how our big sloppy world works, however, and therein lies the lesson illustrated in Joseph Zettelmaier’s speculations on a fragment of historical minutiae.

Audiences in countries whose leaders practice the transparency that ours do may find this type of conversational drama a bit on the dry side, but under the direction of Evan Jackson, Lydia Hiller and David Skvarla articulate their personae’s manifesti with dignity befitting the solemnity of the topic and their physical confrontations with appropriately visceral vigor.

Leslie Hull, George Ellison and Ann Marie Lewis Likewise display an unpreserved candor as commoners for whom idealism is costly, but pragmatism all too affordable.

CRITICS’ PICKS

Bootycandy, Windy City Playhouse, through April 15. Author/director Robert O’Hara effectively disguises a serious, satirical play—about sex, Black culture and race relations among other things—with lots of laughs, exaggerated acting and comic strip style. It works, but it ain’t for prudes or the faint-of-heart. Sissies, yes! JA

Phantom Pain, Organic Theater Company at Greenhouse Theater Center, through April 2. Nobody does peel-the-onion procedurals like Barbara Lhota, with her latest mystery revolving around childhood friends recalling racially tense times in Detroit. MSB

Spamilton, Royal George Theatre, through May 28. Gerard Alessandrini, the mandrill behind all the hilarious editions of the revue Forbidden Broadway, takes an unflinchingly funny aim at the pop cultural phenomenon of Hamilton. Hold onto your sides for laughing so hard. SCM

The Wiz, Kokandy Productions at Theater Wit, through April 16. The level of excitement generated by this urban adaptation of Frank Baum’s classic American fantasy makes you wonder why ALL musicals aren’t staged as close-up and intimate as this. MSB

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Morgan
How much will a young woman surrender in order to make her dreams come true? That’s the question explored by Gina Femia in her all-female drama, set primarily at a New York roller rink, where the Brooklyn Scallywags regularly practice. New team member Joy Ride (feisty, agile Alex Dauphin) has found her niche by joining the best women’s roller derby squad in the Tri-State area. Reluctantly, she moved from her Brooklyn stomping grounds to New Jersey to set up housekeeping with her partner, Michelle, (a sparkling Kenzie Seibert). As the couple’s breadwinner, Michelle works long hours in interior design, while Joy spends her evenings at the rink. Rarely seeing each other, their relationship grows strained.

Predictably, Joy and Michelle’s domestic stress begins to outweigh their happiness. As troubles mount at home, Joy increasingly seeks the solace of the rink, along with more attention and companionship with Lizzie. It’s no surprise when the two athletes evolve into their own, somewhat strained relationship. When Joy expresses a desire to move back to Brooklyn, to be closer to the rink and possibly to Lizzie, Michelle counters her own proposal to relocate the couple to Oregon, where a new, better-paying job awaits her. That’s when complications begin.

Femia’s not a brand-new playwright, but her current offering is a little disappointing. There are very few surprises and the story is as predictable as it is melodramatic. That doesn’t mean it’s not an entertaining two hours, but savvy audiences will see the plot twists coming a mile away.

Amidst Elyse Balogh’s simple but effective set design, Rachel Edwards Harvith directs her talented ensemble with compassion and confidence. Standout performances come from supporting players Amanda Raquel Martinez, Savannah Cannistraro, Emily Marso, Tricia Rogers and, especially, Deanna Reed-Foster. Christopher Young’s robust, athletic choreography provides the look and feel of roller derby skating with nary a wheel in sight.
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SPRING MOVIE PREVIEW

Spring has sprung at the movie theater

BY JERRY NUNN

Movies this spring started early in 2017. New films like Get Out, Beauty and the Beast and Kong: Skull Island have people back in the theater right after award season.

Superhero films are going to big this year, and Fox's Logan shredded the competition at the beginning of March.

Sequels are usually a Hollywood staple and this year is no different, so look for T2: Trainspotting and Transformers: The Last Night. (Fifty Shades Darker was already spanked, and sank at the box office.)

More sequels are planned to wrangle in the kiddies so we have Cars 3, Despicable Me 3 and Smurfs: The Lost Village. A mixture of talking cars, minions and Demi Lovato, who voices Smurfette, begins in April and continues through Pride. We even have a cartoon aimed at adults with Alec Baldwin's The Boss Baby.

Television adaptations take over with Saban's Power Rangers and Chips. Dax Shepard and Michael Pena attempt to fill the boots of Baker and Poncherello, with a lot of crude jokes in the process. Baywatch is on the horizon so look for shirtless hunks Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and Zac Efron at the end of May.

Original movies that look promising and could be early Oscar frontrunners include The Zookeeper's Wife, Wilson and Gifted. Oscar winner Brie Larson, just seen on Skull Island, shoots 'em up in Free Fire. Larson is not the only one releasing two films this year, Emma Watson wants to continue her cinema take over with The Circle with Tom Hanks at the end of April.

Will Scarlett Johansson's Ghost in the Shell be too robotic to triumph? Will Sleight possibly be the next genre-bending Get Out? Stay tuned, true believers. The Shack tanked, Before I Fall failed and let's just say one sci-fi film didn't give me life.

Morgan Freeman's Going in Style is like Grumpy Old Men robbing a bank, and we even get a star from that geriatric franchise, Ann-Margret, in it. Elsewhere, why do we need another Furious franchise flick? (However, they're likely to run as long as they make money.) The Fate of the Furious crashes into cineplexes in April.

Indie movies this spring include Anna Kendrick's Table 19, about quirky wedding guests; Kristen Stewart's snore of a film titled Personal Shopper, during which she texts for more than 30 minutes of screen time; and the low-budget French flick Raw. Raw is an uncomfortable movie to watch, with a gay, college roommate (who resembles Nick Jonas) living with a cannibal; it was a big hit on the festival circuit. Speaking of film festivals, the 33rd Annual Latino Film Festival plays April 20-May 4, with information at ChicagoLatinoFilmFestival.org. Look for several LGBT-themed films to go see.

Want to see a movie star up close and personal? Spot two-time Academy Award winner Kevin Spacey, to be honored at the Chicago Four Seasons on May 13 with the annual Gene Siskel Film Center Renaissance Award.

Feeling like a couch potato? Many movies can be viewed at home, thanks to Netflix. Also, don't miss the Logo documentary Strike a Pose, about Madonna's seven Blonde Ambition dancers; it debuts on Logo on Thursday, April 6, at 8 p.m.

On home video this spring, check out critically acclaimed and award-winning films like Moonlight, La La Land, Lion, Captain Fantastic and 20th Century Women.

Head back into the theater with superhero films bringing spring into summer. Watch out for punches from Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2, Spider-Man: The Homecoming and Wonder Woman, with Thor: Ragnarok and Justice League finishing out the year. Need more comics in your life? Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie, from Dreamworks Animation, is aiming to fly into your heart—make that Hart, as in Kevin Hart.

Special ‘Serial Mom’ Blu-ray out May 9

On May 9, Scream Factory will present the Serial Mom Collector's Edition Blu-ray for a standard retail price of $34.93.

It includes bonus content such as new interviews with John Waters, Kathleen Turner and Mink Stole, special featurettes and much more. Available for the first time on Blu-ray in North America, this definitive collector's edition contains a collectible cover art featuring newly rendered artwork approved by John Waters and a reversible cover wrap featuring original theatrical key art.

Those who order the Blu-ray directly from ShoutFactory.com and get it shipped two weeks early will receive a limited-edition 18"x24" poster featuring newly commissioned artwork (available while supplies last).
Obejas releasing ‘Antilles’

Author Achy Obejas is releasing the book The Tower of the Antilles in July, courtesy of Akashic Books.

The book is a collection of tales written in the last 10 years that explores the many stages of the writer’s relationship to Cuba.

Obejas is the author of the novels Ruins, Days of Awe and three other books of fiction. She edited and translated (into English) the anthology Havana Noir, and has since translated Junot Diaz, Rita Indiana, Wendy Guerra and many others. In 2014, she was awarded a USA Ford Fellowship for her writing and translation work.

She currently serves as the Distinguished Visiting Writer at Mills College in Oakland, California. Also, Obejas was a journalist in Chicago for more than 20 years.

‘Hamilton’ cast, others hosting ACLU benefit

Members of the cast of Hamilton and other artists are hosting “RiseUP,” a night of music and entertainment at Moonlight Studios, on Monday, April 3, 7-8:30 p.m., at Moonlight Studios, 1446 W. Kinzie St.

Proceeds will go to support the work of the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois. The ACLU is the largest and oldest civil-liberties organization in Illinois.

The concert will feature headlining artists from the cast of Hamilton, including Ari Afsar, Wayne Brady, Miguel Cervantes and others. Rafael Casal and Samora Pinderhughes will also perform at the event.

Visit TheNumberProject.co/riseup.

Andersonville Honors on April 5

Andersonville businesses, residents and visitors have nominated 35 unique, local businesses in the neighborhood for 2017 Andersonville Honors awards highlighting the neighborhood’s best food, drinks, shopping, and more.

On Wed., April 5, the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce will present the 6th annual Andersonville Honors awards celebration and party at Mary’s Attic, 5400 N. Clark St., 6:30-9 p.m. The pH Comedy Theater will host the evening’s entertainment.

Categories include Welcome Addition, Best Place to Eat and Hidden Gem, among others.

Tickets to the April 5 event are $25 each; see BrownPaperTickets.com/event/2895022.

Volkoff to step down from About Face

The board of directors of About Face Theatre (AFT) announced that Artistic Director Andrew Volkoff will step down at the conclusion of the company’s 2016-17 season.

Volkoff joined About Face as artistic director in June 2013. Under his leadership, AFT produced plays such as the world premiere of Artistic Associate Philip Dawkins’ Jeff Award-nominated romantic comedy, Le Switch; a re-imagining of I Am My Own Wife, by Doug Wright—a play that originated at About Face Theatre in 2003; and a hit production of The Temperamentals, by Jon Marans.

AFT’s board has formed a committee to conduct a national search for Volkoff’s successor and to oversee the leadership transition. A detailed job description and instructions to apply will be posted at AboutFaceTheatre.com in April.

The company’s works have been recognized with numerous awards and honors, including a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Tony Award for Best Play, 13 Joseph Jefferson Awards and 14 After Dark Awards.

CULTURE CLUB
Terence Davies on his latest ‘Passion’

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

British director Terence Davies has long been praised for his poetic, lyrical films, including 1992’s autobiographical The Long Day Closes, 2000’s Edith Wharton novel adaptation The House of Mirth and last year’s Sunset Song, based on Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s Scottish novel. Perhaps, then, it’s no surprise that the openly gay Davies has crafted another masterpiece with A Quiet Passion, his biopic on poet Emily Dickinson.

The New Yorker’s Richard Brody proclaimed Passion “an absolute drop-dead masterwork” after seeing it at February’s Berlin Film Festival, and Cynthia Nixon proves to be a revelation as Dickinson. It’s not exactly a spoiler, but her final scene is one of the most visceral, heart-wrenching passages committed to modern cinema.

“What we don’t understand these days, because we have so many drugs to kill pain, is they had nothing,” a perky Davies explained. “With the exception of laudanum, a kind of opiate to which you could become addicted, if you had a serious illness you were in pain all the time and had to endure it. Emily had Bright’s disease, which is a disease of the kidneys, although she actually died of congenital heart failure. It was a painful death, and there was no palliative medicine at the end of life, you just had to endure it until you died—and that was a constant throughout the 19th century.”

A Quiet Passion begins during the mid-1800s, when the teenaged Dickinson (Emma Bell), a student at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, decides to take up poetry. Obtaining the permission of her father, Edward (Keith Carradine), to write during evenings, she later gets published—but is told that women cannot reach the same literary heights as men. Once Nixon steps in as the adult Dickinson, we trace her relationships with best friend Vryling Buffum (Catherine Bailey), younger sister Lavinia (Jennifer Ehle) and brother Austin (Duncan Duff); romantic longing for a married, emotionally unavailable Reverend (Eric Loren); spiritual crises; and, eventually, illness.

Dickinson only became known to the world after her death and, in fact, almost 2,000 poems, bound in some 40 volumes, were discovered after she passed. Only a handful or two were published while she lived. Today, she is a household name. Only a handful or two were published while she lived. Today, she is a household name.

Despite the bleak aspects of Dickinson’s life, Davies mines humor from the patriarchal stuffiness and formality of the era. Edward, a comparative progressive for the time and one-term Congressman, balks at the shocking spectacle of a woman who dares to sing during a night at the theater. “A gift is no excuse for a female to exhibit herself in that way,” he clucks. Davies also keeps things light with zingly, aphorism-rich dialogue that falls somewhere between Oscar Wilde and Whit Stillman.

“I didn’t want it all to be solemn,” Davies said. “I want it to be fun as well.”

Davies adds that shooting the film in Antwerp, Belgium (standing in for 19th-century Massachusetts) proved a personal joy. Despite a professed distaste for Sex and the City, he envisioned Nixon as his dream Dickinson from the get-go. “I just disagree with its subtext,” he confessed about the HBO show and movie series, “that all you do is go to bed with people and buy things and then eat. I find that rather bleak. I have only watched it once. I just wanted to see Cynthia’s reaction shots, which were always the truest. But I do disapprove of it!”

The actress had previously been attached to another film Davies hoped to mount some years back; however, financing never materialized. Her likeness to Dickinson and a mutual fondness for the poet’s work (Davies incorporated some of Dickinson’s poetry into his 2008 cinematic ode to Liverpool, Of Time And The City) sealed the deal, and he wrote the script during 2012 with her specifically in mind.

In whittling down the events and people from Dickinson’s life to form a two-hour movie that nonetheless covers a lot of ground and years, Davies’ script ended up with hefty autobiographical elements from his own life. (His agent told him it’s his most autobiographical work yet, and Davies agrees.) Like Dickinson, he was extremely close to his family members: As a youth was sent away to a school and suffered a deep homesickness, and they both struggled with spirituality.

“She was fierce in protecting her soul, but what comes across in the poetry is, what if you have a soul and there is no God?” Davies said. “What do you do? I was a very devout Catholic and, from age 15 to 22, I had my doubts. In those days you were told it was the work of the devil, and I fought with that for seven years. At 22, I didn’t need it anymore.”

However, Davies said the film is ultimately “a fictional version of her life through my subjective prism, so you may not necessarily agree with it. You could only respond to those things in someone’s life that have echoes of you. She had a correspondence with someone named the Master and nobody knows who it was. She improvised on the piano. All those things you cannot keep, because we are contractually obliged to bring in a movie of less than two hours.”

The same rules apply to another biopic about British poet Siegfried Sassoon—who was also gay and a WWI hero—and Davies just completed a draft of it. “Anybody who was anybody in the 20th century, he met!” Davies said with a laugh.

“He knew everybody! So that’s going to be played down; otherwise, it becomes name-dropping.”

Like countryman Ridley Scott (The Martian, Alien: Covenant), Davies is proving quite prolific as a septuagenarian (he’s 71), with an adaptation of Richard McCann’s 2005 autobiography, Mother of Sorrows, also in the works (and which may feature Paul Dano). However, the dryly self-deprecating Davies noted that, while international acclaim is coming his way these days, he’s not holding out hopes for a boyfriend, even despite a wave of popularity for “daddies” and websites and apps designed to connect them.

“Sex with a 71-year-old is too close to necrophilia for my taste,” he said, laughing. “I’ve been celibate since 1980. But I’m not physically attractive, I never was. Young, good-looking and very stupid—that’s a combination nobody else will beat!”

A Quiet Passion will be shown Monday, April 3, at 7 p.m. at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State St.; visit https://www.poetryfoundation.org/programs/events/detail/92566. It will be released in select theaters on Friday, April 14.
Hundreds attend ‘Art for Life’

More than 350 people attended the inaugural Art for Life Chicago, a juried art exhibition and live and silent auction that benefited those living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The auction includes work from both famous and established professionals to new and emerging artists, and selected by a jury of renowned art experts, including New York Magazine’s Senior Art Critic Jerry Saltz and members of the Smithsonian’s Art Team.

More than $75,000 were raised to benefit local organizations such as AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Howard Brown Health, Pediatric AIDS Chicago Prevention Initiative and Legal Council for Health Justice, and others.

The auction featured 110 pieces of art (104 silent-auction and six live-auction items) from artists all around the country.

In its inaugural year, this event joined pre-existing Art For Life benefits around the United States and United Kingdom who use art to improve the lives of individuals affected by serious illness (with Russell Simmons’s Art For Life New York among the most notable). Art For Life Chicago provides an opportunity to invest in culture while also raising vital funds to help those most impacted by HIV.

An extension of DIFFA (Design Industry Foundation Fighting AIDS), Art For Life Chicago is poised to be one of the organization’s marquee programs, with the next event already scheduled for 2018.

For more information and to get involved, visit ArtForLifeChicago.org.

'HUMP!' film fest
April 14-15

Dan Savage’s HUMP! Film Festival returns to the Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport Ave., on April 14-15, with screenings at 7 and 9:30 p.m.

The festival started in 2005, when Savage asked people to send him homemade dirty movies. In a press release, Savage said, “We bill HUMP! as an amateur porn festival. But it’s more than that. It’s rare for people to watch porn that takes them outside their comfort zones— it’s rare for people to watch porn that, if they were home alone in front of the computer, they wouldn’t choose to click on and watch. ... The whole festival is a celebration of sexual diversity.”

See HumpFilmFest.com.

‘Christian Nation’ through April 29

Our Christian Nation—a satirical two-act play written by Emmy-winning writer/Second City instructor Joe Janes, with Andrea J. Dymond directing—will run at The Cornservatory, 4210 N. Lincoln Ave., on Fridays and Saturdays through April 29.

Tickets are $20 each; visit Eventbrite.com or purchase them at the door.

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Art AIDS America was organized by Tacoma Art Museum in partnership with The Bronx Museum of the Arts. In Chicago, this exhibition is made possible by the Alphawood Foundation, a Chicago-based, grant-making private foundation working for an equitable, just and humane society.
Olivia Newton-John: ‘Hopelessly Devoted’ to performing, fans

BY JERRY NUNN

Singer Olivia Newton-John is one of the best-selling artists of all time. Her hits began on her debut album Let Me Be There, earning her a Grammy as best country vocalist. The musical movie Grease put her in the spotlight with a best selling album Let Me Be There, earning her a Grammy nomination.

Olivia Newton-John: Yeah, if it’s not too big a thing. In the last two weeks I have been to Chile then these shows in Florida. I’m enjoying my time off right now, I must say! [Laughs]

I do enjoy it when it is not too extensive.

WCT: How do you decide on a set list, with such a large history of work?

ON-J: I go by the biggest hits and what gets a good response from the audience. I always throw in a few songs that you are not expecting to hear off an album. Generally, I do the ones they expect to hear.

I remember as a young woman I went to see a famous artist sing, and she didn’t do her hits. I filed away in my brain that if I ever get to be a success that I would sing the songs people are expecting to hear.

WCT: Has a fan ever been too much?

ON-J: One time a fan handed me an autograph book under a toilet door. They had me sign something under a stall in a bathroom. That was an embarrassing moment.

WCT: That happened to Whoopie Goldberg and she wrote a book about it!

ON-J: She did?

WCT: Yes. Was there a certain time when you noticed a gay following?

ON-J: Gay fans are very loyal. They often stay with you for a very long time, which I think is wonderful. Gay fans are the same as other fans. I don’t distinguish between them. I do notice at every show there will be a few lovely ones that will come up and they have been to a number of shows. They are loyal, lovely, and very sweet.

WCT: Well, this gay fan used to sing to your Xanadu record! I swear before my voice changed that I could hit your notes.

ON-J: [Laughs] Oh, that is cute.

WCT: Are you in the new Sordid Lives sequel A Very Sordid Wedding?

ON-J: No, I am not. Del Shores extended the invite but it just didn’t work out for me.

WCT: Did you record the new album, Liv On, in Nashville?

ON-J: We did it in Vegas, since I was there for three years. The girls came to me and we did the recording there. They would meet me after work or in the morning before work. We used my wonderful band that was there. The girls took the backing tracks back to Nashville and Toronto.

When I had breast cancer, I wrote an album called Gaia and another album with Amy called Grace and Gratitude. I asked Amy if she would help me with this album. We were talking about how there wasn’t music for people grieving. She had just lost her mother a year before I lost my sister, so we had a lot to talk about.

I thought of Beth because she had written a song called “Sand and Water” when she lost her husband 14 years ago. It was a classic song of grief. We asked Beth to join us on this venture. We got together on three different occasions to make these songs. It has been a wonderful journey of healing for all of us.

WCT: Was a stage mom encouraging your daughter, Chloe, to sing?

ON-J: I didn’t discourage her, but told her to follow her passion. She loved to sing. She was in a couple of movies with me when she was a little girl. She has a beautiful, interesting voice. I did encourage her but only if that is what she wanted to do.

WCT: You must be very proud…

ON-J: I am very proud of her. She is a wonderful singer and songwriter. She just released her album No Pain. She recorded it over ten years ago and didn’t feel it was ready to put out at the time. I bought a copy to her and we listened to it. She finally decided to put it out, and I feel it is a nice record.

WCT: How have you protected your voice all these years?

ON-J: I keep my throat warm. I wear scarves a lot. I don’t smoke. I will have a glass of wine, but I am not a big drinker.

I warm up and do exercises two hours before the show. That really helps. It is a muscle you know so you have to keep it in shape. It is probably the one muscle in my body that is still in shape! [Laughs]

It is something that you have to protect. I feel lucky that I can still hit the same notes and do my songs in the same key.

WCT: How about beauty tips. Do you have a secret Australian serum?

ON-J: I have a spa in Australia called Gaia. We have our own line of skincare called Retreat & Spa. It is fantastic and all natural. I particularly love the oil and the eye cream that we have there. I use our products and they are really good. I am always conscious of removing my makeup at night and moisturizing. I learned that from my mom.

WCT: Can people order that online?

ON-J: Yes, if you go to the GaiaRetreat.com.au website they can get it on there.

WCT: What did you think of the Grease Live remake?

ON-J: I thought it was really good. They did a good job.

WCT: Did they ask you to make an appearance on it?

ON-J: They did, but I thought, “This is a new one and not about me.”

WCT: What was your song “The Rumour” about?

ON-J: I didn’t write it. Bernie Taupin wrote that, but I think it could be about anybody in show business, particularly now. It is all about rumors and gossip press. It is saying once you start a rumor the truth is a thing of the past because someone has made something up and no one knows what to believe.

WCT: Have you ever sang your song “I’ll Bet You a Kangaroo” live?

ON-J: [Laughs] No. You are really going into the past now. I think it’s a funny song. I should do it in Australia sometime.

WCT: Do you have a song that you won’t perform any longer?

ON-J: There was a song in England when I represented the Eurovision song contest called “Long Live Love” and is probably the only song of mine that I really didn’t like. I have grown to like it because it was a part of my life, but at the time I didn’t like it.

Also, I didn’t like “If Not For You” at the time. Strangely enough, it is my husband’s favorite song! That changed my whole opinion. It is a Bob Dylan song. Back when we recorded it I wanted to change that i could hit your notes.

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LGBTQ partner violence presents unique challenges

Many LGBTQ people experience some form of violence from their partners at some point, but this often goes unreported and even unnoticed.

In fact, more than 43 percent of lesbian women and 26 percent of gay men in the U.S. have experienced some type of physical intimate partner violence, or IPV, according to sources cited in Dr. Adam Messinger’s new book, LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence: Lessons for Policy, Practice, and Research, published by the University of California Press.

The prevalence rate for physical IPV among bisexual women and men is upwards of 60 percent and 37 percent, respectively, while trans* people reported up to 46 percent, writes Messinger, a professor at Northeastern Illinois University.

In all instances, physical IPV rates were higher for LGBTQ people than for heterosexual cisgender couples, according to the book. The same is true for other types of violence, including psychological violence.

Messinger reviewed more than 600 research publications from various disciplines spanning six continents and four decades of research, in what he says is a comprehensive approach to LGBTQ IPV research.

“Every article I’d read on LGBTQ IPV would begin with the statement, ‘there’s not a lot of research on this.’ And after writing the book I can say, ‘that’s not entirely true.’ There’s quite a bit,” Messinger told Windy City Times.

Rather, LGBTQ IPV research exists but it is segmented by sexual minority and academic discipline, dispersed among scores of hard-to-access databases, Messinger found.

“My hope is that the book raises the national public profile of LGBTQ IPV. It’s a real, serious problem,” he said.

Myths and barriers

Several myths surround LGBTQ IPV: that it is rare or less severe than violence in heterosexual relationships. There is an assumption that LG- BTQ people are inherently nonviolent, especially sexual minority women, according to Messinger.

But this stereotype can prevent “lesbian female victims’ ability to recognize that a partner’s behavior is in fact abusive rather than normal,” Messinger writes.

Similarly, in male same-gender relationships, men are stereotypically viewed to be of similar physical strength and able to “hold their own.”

“Men often times report feeling particularly worried about seeking help because no one would believe them and they’ll feel like somehow they’re less of a man or someone else will say that,” Messinger said.

But IPV is not only physical—it also includes psychological, emotional and even “identity” violence, Messinger said.

“For instance, a substantial amount of research has shown that people who are not yet out of the closet about their sexual orientation or their trans* identity to everyone in their lives—and frankly most people aren’t out to everyone—leaves them vulnerable to abusers who might use that as leverage to say, ‘if you tell anyone about what I’m doing to you or if you leave me, I can out you to your parents, your siblings, to your employer, your friends,’” Messinger said.

Conversely, abusers sometimes pressure victims to remain closeted, especially if the abuser is not out to everyone in their life.

Furthermore, many U.S. states lack anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQ people in housing, employment and public accommodation. And barriers for transgender people being able to change their names and gender listed on formal identification “has a ripple effect throughout their lives,” Messinger said.

In some states, if one were to pursue a protective order or engage in a civil suit under domestic violence statues, “it’s quite possible that that state might require your name and identity to become public.”

“That really creates a lot of barriers to being able to ask for help and not have to out yourself at the same time,” Messinger said.

“The law is not on the side of LGBTQ people who experience intimate partner violence,” making it more difficult for victims to receive help.

Messinger pointed to other myths that make LGBTQ IPV unique: that it should not be discussed out of fear of undermining LGBTQ struggles for equality and that LGBTQ IPV abusers are masculine.

Messinger said he hopes his book draws attention to the issue of LGBTQ IPV “when there is so little in terms of resources and policy being oriented towards this issue.” And with all the challenges and unique traits of LGBTQ IPV, customized resources and support are necessary, he said.

He wrote the book as a sort of how-to guide with practical tips and a broad audience in mind—law enforcement, mental and medical health providers, social workers, domestic violence hotline operators, domestic violence shelter staff, policymakers, victims, allies and advocates.

What’s next

Messinger reviewed scores of literature published in English, but he said he’d like to see further research in other languages, at a time when same-gender marriage is fully legal in about 22 nations and 15 countries permit joint adoption by same-gender couples.

There is also a lack of research on how LGBTQ IPV intersects with the criminal justice system, he said.

Police are 10 to 30 times more likely to arrest both partners in cases of violence between same-gender partners than different-gender partners, Messinger writes.

“It sends the wrong message to the victim that somehow if they seek help, they’re the ones who are going to suffer for it,” Messinger said.

“Often times that makes it harder for victims to receive services because they’re labeled an abuser, making it difficult to get into a shelter,” he said.

Messinger is also part of a research team conducting longitudinal research of IPV among youths to see how patterns of abuse change over time.

LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence: Lessons for Policy, Practice, and Research is published by the University of California Press, and is available in hardcover and e-book through Amazon and Barnes and Noble.
Savor

The Florentine; ‘Bootycandy’ beverages

BY ANDREW DAVIS

The lovely Italian restaurant The Florentine (inside the J.W. Marriott Hotel at 151 W. Adams St.; The-Florentine.net) has a chef, Zachary Walrath, who rarely brings back dishes once a new season’s in play.

The bad news regarding that approach is that you’re unlikely to see a dish you’ve really savored the following year. The good news (at least in this case, thanks to Walrath’s work) is that pasta dishes like caramelli—with the somewhat unlikely combo of celery root, red grapes, pecorino, rosemary and aged balsamic. Oh—and be sure to conclude with a light gingerbread panna cotta or apple-pie crostata.

However, The Florentine also has a (not-so-secret) weapon: sommelier Alexandria Sarovich. She’s cool, sophisticated and extremely knowledgeable—and even contributes to the creation of dishes, such as the caramelli.

By the way (speaking of alcohol), don’t skip the cocktails. The Ginger Earth is a wonderfully refreshing and relatively simple mix of Grey Goose vodka, ginger, pear, lemon and soda.

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‘Bootycandy’ beverages
Bootycandy (at Windy City Playhouse at 3014 W. Irving Park Rd.; http://WindyCityPlayhouse.com/Bootycandy/) is a sexually graphic—and very funny—production about a gay African-American boy.

However, the reason it’s being mentioned here is because of the associated drink specials. Among the offerings are the tasty Freaky and Twisted (basically, an espresso martini) and, of course, The Bootycandy (Jolly Rancher-infused vodka, lemon juice and simple syrup, with a lollipop garnish). Add in the fact that you can take in the drinks while sitting in very comfortable chairs in the venue, and it’s fun for all. However, get there quickly: The production ends Saturday, April 15.

Note: Restaurant profiles/events are based on invitations arranged from restaurants and/or firms.
“So excited for you @NancyAKerrigan! Can’t wait to see you grace that ballroom floor, break a leg!”—Kristi Yamaguchi

Who says you can’t go home again? Actor Trevor Donovan recreated his iconic nude photo shoot from 2004. How does the 38-year-old stack up against his 25-year-old self? Well, his ass looks better. So does his hair. As to the rest of him, I’ll post the pics on BillyMasters.com and you can decide for yourself.

You all know about Russia’s plan to ban Disney’s live-action version of Beauty and the Beast because it shows LeFou (played by Josh Gad) dancing with another male character. Well, Russia backed down. Instead, the film was slapped with an “adults-only” rating—like it was Last Tango in Paris! I never thought I’d see the day when an NC-17 rating was given to any Disney film—other than Song of the South!

Hong Kong and Singapore had similar concerns. But it was the Malaysian censors who demanded the scene be cut because in Malaysia, it’s illegal to engage in any homosexual activity—including dancing, apparently. “The film has not been and will not be cut for Malaysia,” said Disney. The Mouse prevailed and the film will debut on March 30—with a PG-13 rating. Since the announcement, various non-government organizations have filed complaints with the Malaysian government. The first came from Abdul Rani Kulup Abdullah, the president of the Pertubuhan Martabat Jalanim Muhibbah. I’m not exactly sure what he said—I’m not exactly sure I typed his (or the group’s) name right! But, as I always say, you’re not a success until someone is protesting you.

Several outlets reported that a new Sex and the City film was happening. False. I recently spoke with someone very close to the project, and found out nothing is definite. The only thing everyone agrees on is the plot. All four ladies like the outline. A script was ordered. Sarah Jessica allegedly did not like the first draft, feeling it departed from the tone of the original too much. And that’s where it stands. Once SJP sees the script she likes, the other girls have to approve it. Then all the logistics of scheduling need to be worked out. So, it’ll be a while.

Lindsay Lohan is angling to star as the live-action Little Mermaid, and composer Alan Menken has his eye on an ideal villainess: “I’ve wanted Harvey Fierstein to play Ursula. I would kill for that!” He’s not alone. Fans have deluged Harvey with artist’s renderings of Fierstein in fish regalia. “Oh, Menken, what have you started? Ha!!”

It’s been a while since we heard any news about Bradley Cooper’s remake of A Star Is Born. So we made a few calls, greeted a few ... well, grease was involved—and here’s what I discovered. Pre-production is done, and filming will begin in about three weeks. The script is closer in tone to the Judy Garland version than the Barbra Streisand vehicle. Lady Gaga is still the star. Bradley will play her long-suffering hubby. Sam Elliott will play Gaga’s manager. And, believe it or not, Andrew Dice Clay will play Gaga’s father! I don’t think he gets a song.

Previews for Hello, Dolly! began on Broadway, and everyone is saying that Bette Midler is beyond divine. So it’s with great sadness I share the following news. Despite promises, original “Dolly” Carol Channing will not be able to attend the opening. I’m told the 96-year-old is simply not up to the cross-country trip. To compound Bette’s disappointment, composer Jerry Herman will also miss the festivities for a similar reason.

Between concerts, Broadway shows, and recurring on Quantico, Jay Armstrong Johnson is kinda busy. But not so busy that he didn’t notice a suspicious charge on his credit card bill. After a bit of investigation, he discovered that $450 was billed by OKCupid—a site JAJ has never visited. “I’ve been in a relationship for almost 5 years. I’ve never done a dating site,” he has said.

RuPaul recently announced that he married longtime companion Georges LeBar in January. It was the 23rd anniversary of when they met—on the dance floor at Limelight in New York in 1994 (ah, Limelight). Why did they finally tie the knot? Ru said, “We were looking into it really for tax breaks and financial reasons.” How romantic! If you didn’t know Ru had a partner, you’re not alone. “He doesn’t care about show business—he couldn’t care less. Most of the time, he’s on the ranch in Wyoming,” RuPaul has said. “But he doesn’t want to come there. God bless you, Wyoming, but it’s very boring, and it’s the most isolated place on Earth.” With the RuPaul renaissance, there’s another project in the works. J.J. Abrams is producing a half-hour dramedy based on Ru’s early years in NYC. The show will focus on the tyke’s rise from club kid to global icon.

When RuPaul could become the next Disney princess, it’s time to end yet another column. I must say happy birthday to the great Bob Mackie. I ran into the legendary designer (and my occasional vacation friend) while he was celebrating in a little cafe in our Beverly Hills neighborhood. It’s as if he’s turned back time—he looks AMAZING! See who else looks great on www.BillyMasters.com—the site that can’t be censored. If you’ve got a question, send it to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I’m banned in Malaysia! So, until next time, remember: One man’s filth is another man’s bible.

Bradley Cooper’s shooting “Star” soon, Billy says.

Cooper in American Sniper, courtesy of Warner Bros.

I have another thought, maybe I could have been a mounted policewoman, then I could ride horses and get paid for it!

At the time they didn’t have mounted policewomen, only men, when I was young. Luckily, I could sing.

WCT: Do you ride horses now?
ON-J: I used to. I had seven horses at one point. Now I have two gorgeous miniature horses.

WCT: What are their names?
ON-J: Harry and Winston. I didn’t name them, but isn’t that perfect? They are just adorable.

WCT: Have they ever thought about making a musical about your life?
ON-J: They are doing my life story for television in Australia, not a musical per se but you never know. I’ve thought of a one woman show, but I guess I am doing that already!

Hopelessly devote Thursday, May 11, to your concert calendar as Newton-John plays at Julie’s Rialto Square Theatre, 15 E. Van Buren St., at 7:30 p.m. Visit OliviaNewton-John.com for tickets and information.
We're a house cleaning service. 7:30pm Rialto Square Theatre, 102 N. Chicago St., Joliet 815-726-7171 Ext. 204. Tickets: http://www.rialtosquare.com

"CHAIR APPARENT" Through April 2
'Two-Part Chair" is part of Art AIDS America Chicago, which concludes this weekend. Photo by Andrew Davis

- 8:00pm Reunion Chicago, 2557 W. North Ave., Chicago http://www.eventbrite.com/e/talkshoutwork-it-out-tickets-3302794677 .

Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371 Book launch featuring Czerwiec will be hosted by Art AIDS America 6:30pm DePaul Art Museum, 935 W Fullerton Ave, Chicago ArtAID-SAmericaChicago.org/event/taking-turns-stories-hiv-aids-unit-371

Friday, March 31
Theological Seminary anti-racism seminar for white people A six-session anti-racism seminar for white people will be held through May 20 led by Aaron Wilson-Ahilstrom & Lois McCullen Parr. $485. Registration online limited to 18. Questions to melaniemorrison@alliesforchange.org. 9:00am - 5:00am Chicago Theological Seminary, 1407 E. 60th St. http://www.alliesforchange.org/ dowow-chicago

Seeds of Change annual benefit Join grantees, board members, and friends of Crossroads Fund to celebrate. $135 5:30pm - 9:30pm Chicago Cultural Center, GAR Hall, tickets: http://crossroadsfund.org/events/current

Transgender Day of Visibility, first Trans Artist Showcase Unique and eclectic celebration of the transgender community, a wide range of artistic talent from all over the Chicagoland transgender community. Free but pre-registration is strongly encouraged for a seat in the Hoover-Leppen Theater, 6:00pm - 9:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N. Halsted Chicago http://communitycenteronhalsted.org/TransVisibility

Bernadette Peters Joins Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra for a mixed program, tribute to George Gershwin and medley of Broadway hits and classics.

Saturday, April 1
Art AIDS America closing weekend The groundbreaking traveling exhibition must close at the new Alphawood Gallery. Final public tour to be led by Alphawood Gallery Director of Exhibitions Tony Hirschel 1:00pm Alphawood Gallery, 2401 N. Halsted St. http://ArtAID-SAmericaChicago.org

Riot Grrrls Celebrates brash and adventurous paintings by female artists and responds to sexism that pervades the art world, from male artists garnering the highest prices to disproportionate representation in exhibitions. Through June 4, 2017. 7:00pm Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago http://MCACHIAGO.ORG/MEDIA

Sunday, April 2
aChurch4Me Sunday Worship Service Find inclusiveness, peace, comfort and prayer 11:00am aChurch4Me, 7366 N. Clark St., Chicago 773-373-9916 http://www.achurch4me.org

The Twink on the Fire Escape The new walking tour/show during which Chicago comedian and writer Zach Zimmerman tells how a twink wound up on his fire escape in three parts and three locations; a Swedish breakfast restaurant (enjoy a cinnamon roll and a mimosa), a hot dog restaurant/bar (enjoy a shot) and the fire escape where the story reaches its climax. Sundays through April 16. No show April 9. 2:00pm Begins at corner of Clark Street and Belmont Avenue Tickets: http://TwinkOnFire.com

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WINDY CITY TIMES WINDY CITY TIMES COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., March 29
LGBT Chamber of Commerce of IL Quarterly Soiree Spring networking event. Free drink and hors doeuvres with your paid registration. 6:00pm - 8:30pm Carnivale restaurant, 702 W Fulton St., Chicago Tickets: http://lgbtcc.com

Cirque D’or Acrobat, contortionists and aerial artists. 7:30pm Rialto Square Theatre, 102 N. Chicago St., Joliet 815-726-7171 Ext. 204. Tickets: http://www.rialtosquare.com

Thursday, March 30

Talk/Shout/Work It Out Evening of drinks, snacks, sweets, conversation and cool people sharing problems, offering advice, seeking solutions, and meeting new people who can unite in defeating gender bias. Part of a weeklong series of conversations to spark discussions, ideas to end gender bias. Free with suggested donation 6:00pm

March 29, 2017
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