MAKING ‘SENSE’
Actor Miguel Angel Silvestro (right) talks about Netflix series, Sense8.
Photo by Murray Close

IMMIGRANT PRIDE
Russian violinist, Anti-ICE activist tell their stories

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MELISSA ETHERIDGE
Singer talks about soulful new album.
PR photo

ADAM RIPPIN
Figure skater on coming out, signature move.

WORKERS’ DAY MARCH
Event calls out racism, calls for community-building.
Photo by Gretchen Rachel Hammond

GARDEN OF EVE
Howard Brown Health holds annual event.
Photo of Kristen Kaza (left) and Bethany Minor by Kat Fitzgerald (www.MysticImagesPhotography.com)

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WCT reviews the book On Christopher Street: Transgender Stories.

HoRSinG aRoUnD
Dining News looks at upcoming Cinco de Mayo and Kentucky Derby events at restaurants.

THaT’S SHoW BIZ
Find out the latest about Oprah Winfrey, Katy Perry and Sam Smith.

plus
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MAKE SOME ‘noISE’
Illinois Safe Schools Alliance held ‘Bring in ‘Da Funk, Bring in ‘Da Noise.”

Photo by Roderick Hawkins (left) by Vern Hester

‘STREET’ LIFE
WCT reviews the book On Christopher Street: Transgender Stories.
NU conference looks at LGBT health

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Ilan H. Meyer—the Williams Distinguished Senior Scholar for Public Policy at the Williams Institute for Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy at UCLA’s School of Law—said April 29 that responses to his talks on LGBT-focused research and public policy have changed since the November elections.

Wherein, prior to November, Meyer would have to convince audiences that advancing LGBT rights still required vigilance and work, he now has to convince them that the community’s circumstances aren’t completely bleak.

Meyer spoke when Northwestern University’s Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing and Center on Halsted hosted the National LGBTQ Health Conference at the Hyatt Centric Hotel in downtown Chicago April 28-29.

He primarily addressed models of minority health and wellbeing and emphasized that individuals some- times don’t even see themselves as the targets of discrimination; sometimes, he noted, perpetrators might not use slurs but still harass members of minority groups.

Meyer urged the audience to think about the idea of resilience, which targeted individuals need to stand up for themselves. He noted that American culture’s linking of resilience with stoicism and internal fortitude offers little helpful to those impacted by prejudice.

“Resilience doesn’t happen in a vacuum,” he said. “Resilience happens when you have re- sources.”

A number of speakers in the program addressed the scope of current research on LGBT health as well as its funding from the federal government.

According to Karen Parker, director of National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office, in 2015, the government spent about $162 million funding about 301 research projects relating to LGBT health.

She further noted that about 73 percent of the money goes to issues related to HIV/AIDS.

Within our office we are very concerned about this other 27 percent that are very often lumped into this other smaller piece of the pie,” she said, noting that other realms, such as mental-health issues are thus woefully underfunded. “It’s certainly not enough, and I have no excuse for NIH about that.”

Audience members expressed concern about how the funding structure will change with Republicans in both the White House and in control of Congress. But Parker and her colleagues emphasized that many career-officials worked at NIH and that the most important task for researchers was to continue to apply for funding and demonstrate that there is a need for and interest in this kind of work.

NIH officials, Parker said, had “incredibly well-calibrated moral compasses.”

Others speaking at the Northwestern-Center on Halsted conference included Laura Kann of the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Bianca Wilson of the Williams Institute.

Breakout sessions addressed topics such as PrEP, LGBT intimate-partner violence and mental health, among other topics.

Jay Michaelson to lecture May 4

Rabbi Dr. Jay Michaelson, J.D., an affiliated assistant professor of religious studies at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), will deliver CTS’ Annual Gilberto Castañeda Lecture.

The event will take place Thursday, May 4, at 1407 E. 60th St. The reception will be at 5:15 p.m., with the lecture at 6:30 p.m.

Michaelson is a non-denominational rabbi and a teacher of meditation in a Theravadin Buddhist lineage, and, in his other career, the legal affairs columnist for The Daily Beast, a frequent commentator on NPR and a longtime LGBT activist.

Admission is free, but attendees need to register: visit https://donate.ctschicago.edu/chicago/events/cts-annual-gilberto-castaeda-lecture/e126124.

Capitalism with a heart?!

BY NICK PATRICCA

In 1983, in the midst of the Contra War against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua that had overthrown the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, a Franciscan nun from Milwaukee introduced me to the concept of co-operative economics. I was in Nicaragua participating in a program in which Catholics and Marxists were working together to find common ground for constructing an economic plan that would be good for Nicaragua.

We were all trying to avoid the extremes of unrestrained laissez-faire capitalism and totalitarian communism.

We wanted a system of economics that would work—that would organically fit the culture of Nicaragua and function well in the realities of global economics. Ronald Reagan had been elected president of the U.S. in 1981 and was arming the Contras against the Sandinistas under whose protection we were conducting our investigations and dialogues.

We were all acutely aware of what had happened to the popularly elected Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 when Richard Nixon was president. Some of us had lost friends in that extremely violent military coup d’état that led to the vicious dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. We wanted the story of Nicaragua to be different.

Of course, no one in power cared what we idealistic dialoguers thought. When the Soviet Union collapsed and China converted to communist party-sponsored capitalism, the triumph of capitalism all over the world—in one or another of its forms—seemed foreordained. It became dogmatic that capitalism is the only form of economics that works, protects individual liberty and creativity, promotes progress, ensures religious freedom. Capitalism, in essence, became its own kind of religion or ideology claiming jurisdiction over all elements of our post-modern societies.

Capitalism, however, is not an article of faith. It needs to be treated as a system of economics subject to the testing of empirical and scientific methods.

“The primary flaw in theoretical capitalism is the assumption that the basic unit of an economy is an independent adult person who freely and rationally pursues her/his self-interest—let alone the issue of an enlightened self-interest. The work of behavioral economists such as Kahneman and Tversky demonstrates how statistically exceptional that assumption is in the real world.

Co-operative economics argues that the enormous productivity of individualistic capitalism can be creatively harnessed to meet the profound social needs of the community: in a healthy society, the good of the individual can be dynamically integrated into the common good of the community.

The successful fusion of ‘socialistic’ justice and capitalism in Scandinavian countries is usually dismissed—by liberals and conservatives alike—as unworkable in the U.S. because of our extreme sense of individualism and because of our heterogeneous population.

In her March 23, 2017 New York Times Op-Ed ‘Why Social Justice and Capitalism Don’t Mix,’ Miya Tokumitsu argues that it is not realistically possible for the profit motive and the social justice motive to co-exist in start-ups in a capitalistic framework. She quotes the work of Nicole Aschoff—The New Prophets of Capital (2015)—to highlight the contradictions in our society between profit motive and the worker’s desire for security and justice.

I am reminded, however, of G. K. Chesterton’s quip “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.”

The populism that put Donald J. Trump in the White House is, among other things, a protest against dogmatic capitalism. This protest presents an opportunity for us to rethink our own brand of capitalism.

In Viking Economics: How the Scandinavians Got It Right—and How We Can, Too (2016), George Lakoff shows us alternative economic models that hold the promise that we can all prosper in a just society, that we can make our own form of capitalism with a heart—if we really wanted to.

© nickolas.patricca@gmail.com

Nick Patricca is professor emeritus at Loyola University Chicago, president of Chicago Network and playwright emeritus at Victory Gardens Theater.
The National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants is used to determine what services will be provided to older Americans in need.

Trump wants the survey to stop gathering information about LGBT elders. If they aren’t represented their needs won’t be met. It’s a first step in erasing the LGBT community from the American map.

We will not be erased. We will not be eliminated. We will not go quietly. We refuse to be invisible.

We have until May 12th to make our voices heard. Sign the petition now at SAGEUSA.ORG.
Looking at Trump’s first 100 days

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

The idea of reflecting upon a president’s “first 100 days in office” started with President Franklin Roosevelt. According to The Washington Post, Roosevelt touted his own accomplishments in trying to pull the country out of the economic Great Depression.

Today’s Great Depression is more of a political one. It erupted out of a presidential election that was won by a candidate who had neither the majority of votes from the general electorate or the full support of his adopted political party. And his legitimate victory through the electoral college is still shrouded by the widely accepted belief that his campaign was aided and abetted long-standing nemesis Russia.

Nonetheless, April 30 marked President Donald Trump’s 100th day in office. Perhaps in anticipation that the intense media scrutiny at this first mile-marker won’t flatter him, Trump tweeted April 21 that it’s a “ridiculous standard” by which to judge him. And given that 100 days represents less than 6 percent of his elected 1,461-day term of office, he may be entitled to some sympathy.

But it does seem reasonable to compare what Trump has done concerning LGBT people to what his predecessors did in any period of time, whether it be their first 100 days or their last year.

Like his Republican predecessors, Trump came into the White House showing at least some semblance of personal respect for gays and lesbians. Ronald Reagan had put his name on an op-ed piece opposing an anti-gay initiative in California that would have barred gay teachers. George W. Bush held a meeting with gays, said it made him a “better person,” and welcomed their support in his campaign. And Trump, on several occasions during his campaign, urged the nation to “stand together in solidarity with” the LGBT community.

But like Reagan, Trump’s public comments in support of LGBT people have virtually disappeared since entering the White House. (The one exception was suggesting that his proposed ban on immigrants from some Muslim countries was, in part, to protect LGBT Americans—a suggestion that LGBT Americans did not embrace.)

Like George W. Bush, Trump chose a U.S. attorney general who is hostile to the rights of LGBT people. And like Reagan and George W. Bush, Trump’s choices for U.S. Supreme Court and other high positions have completely altered the political landscape nationally. Where once that landscape was vibrant with the reality and potential for LGBT civil rights gains, it is now more like an inhospitable faraway moon.

Trump’s newly installed Supreme Court justice, Neil Gorsuch, has voiced reasoning that appears ready to map a path for overturning landmark Supreme Court victories for same-sex marriage and against hate-based laws.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has withdrawn the federal government’s efforts to defeat an anti-LGBT law in North Carolina and retracted the Obama administration’s advice urging protection of transgender students under Title IX.

The Department of Health and Human Services has removed from at least two federal health surveys questions that would identify data specific to LGBT people.

In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has canceled a survey to understand the prevalence of homelessness among LGBT people.

The Census Bureau has removed from a report appendix on the upcoming 2020 Census any mention that it has been in discussion about the possibility of someday asking a question to determine how many LGBT people there are in the United States.

And in March, Trump himself revoked an executive order issued by President Obama that had required federal contractors to demonstrate they were in compliance with 14 federal laws, some of which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“Make no mistake about it: The Trump Administration is systematically dismantling the progress that we made over the last eight years,” said Sharon McGowan, director of strategy in Lambda Legal’s Washington D.C. office. “Some of these actions have been more direct and obvious, such as the withdrawal of Department of Education’s guidance regarding transgender students.

“But there have been a series of other actions that may not have made as big of a splash, but which, taken as a whole, will cause lasting harm to our community. At every turn, we are being ignored, erased and marginalized. On top of this, the Trump Administration continues to fill its community, with the Trump administration continuing to fill its ranks with the most virulent anti-LGBT people this country has ever known. It is going to be a very long four years.”

A glass half-full or just empty?

Even Log Cabin Republicans President Gregory Angelo assesses Trump’s record thus far on LGBT matters as “mixed.”

“Trump’s first 100 days in office have been something of a mixed bag in regard to LGBT issues,” said Angelo, “but that was to be expected considering his concurrent outreach to evangelicals and the LGBT voters during his campaign.”

Angelo says there has been too much attention paid to “non-troversies” during these first 100 days. For instance, Angelo said the claim by some LGBT activists that the Census Bureau edit was an attempt to “erase” gays from the Census amounted to “fake news.” To him, these reports “were nothing more than fundraising ploys to rile up dejected LGBT liberals still reeling from Hillary Clinton’s loss.”

And former Log Cabin National President Rich Tafel said the community and media have overlooked some positive LGBT developments in the Trump administration. Example? Trump’s notoriously anti-gay vice president, Mike Pence, told ABC News Feb. 5 that, with Trump, “there’s no room for prejudice.”

“I think throughout the campaign, Trump made it clear that discrimination would have no place in our administration,” said Pence. “He was the very first Republican nominee to mention the LGBT community at our Republican National Convention and was applauded for it. And I was there applauding with him.”

Tafel said these “gay supportive comments by Vice President Mike Pence were historic and pretty amazing.”

“I realize it doesn’t fit the narrative, but it marked a remarkable milestone for the gay community,” said Tafel.

Pence was responding to a question about how unhappy evangelical supporters were with Trump’s announcement January 31 that he would not revoke an executive order by President Obama that prohibited discrimination by federal contractors against LGBT employees. Many LGBT activists were uneasy with that announcement, too. They expressed concern that Trump’s reassuring “words” weren’t matching up with his troubling “actions” of nominating people who are hostile to LGBT people to key federal positions in health care, civil rights, and education. And most continued to fear Trump would act on his campaign promise that religious liberty will be “cherished, protected, defended, like you have never seen before.”

Two months later, Trump signed another executive order that said federal contractors were no longer required to demonstrate that they comply with 14 federal laws, several of which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender stereotyping, or gender identity.

Trump did not revoke Obama’s executive order; he gutted it.

Count the things he hasn’t done?

There are other ways to assess Trump’s first 100 days with regards to LGBT concerns.

One could look at the list of actions anti-gay organizations had hoped Trump would take as president but hasn’t, at least not yet.

The Family Research Council had a list of 20 things it wanted Trump to accomplish in his first 100 days. He’s done three: withdrawing the Obama administration letter concerning transgender students and Title IX, taking down a Department of Education webpage that included a list of schools seeking waivers to Title IX, and issuing an executive order making it easier for federal contractors to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Here are the FRC agenda items Trump did not act on in his first 100 days:

— that the Trump administration begin enforcing a law that would enable federally funded entities to deny services to others based on religious beliefs and conscience;

— that he rescind a regulation that requires federally funded health institutions not discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity;

— that he rescind regulations at all agencies which interpret non-discrimination policies based on sex to include sexual orientation and gender identity;”

— that he undo military regulations drafted in preparation for allowing transgender persons to serve openly; and

— that he “pressure the [military] service chiefs” to issue “memoranda” reaffirming the robust religious freedom and free speech rights of chaplains.

The fact that some of these agenda items have not materialized is a “good thing,” said Tafel.

Trump has also taken some actions that right-wing religious conservatives don’t like. He has retained a State Department Senior Foreign Service Officer (Randy Berry) to serve as the department’s Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBT Persons. He nominated an openly lesbian Air Force colonel (Kristin Goodwin) to be among 36 officers promoted to rank of brigadier general. And Trump appointee Nikki Haley, as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, spoke out in April against reports of abuse and murder of gay men in the Russian republic of Chechnya.

Haley issued a statement April 17, saying that the reports “cannot be ignored” and that “Chechen authorities must immediately investigate these allegations, hold anyone involved accountable, and take steps to prevent future abuses.”

“We are against all forms of discrimination, including against people based on sexual orientation,” she added.

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Note: The entire article is online at www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com.
Chicago May Day rally and march draws unprecedented numbers

BY GRETCHEN RACHEL HAMMOND

“Are you ready for a revolution?”

It was the battle cry for the thousands of people who gathered in Union Park on Chicago’s Near West Side for a May Day rally and march that was unprecedented in size and scale.

Beneath the festive atmosphere simmered a rage at what representatives from the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) called “the politics of economic segregation and salaries that are not enough for a dignified life. They are closing our schools and, for people to have health care, they have to decide if they can pay for treatment not to die or pay for rent and food.”

“This is a very special May Day because of the disastrous 100 day policies of Donald Trump,” R3 (Resist Reimagine Rebuild) Coalition member, activist and historian Professor Barbara Ransby noted. “But it’s also a hopeful May Day because we are in the process of building a fierce, united coalition in this city. We need to bring folks from all communities in Chicago together, we need to transcend our differences. We understand that we are a political family, not the kind that gets you elected or a job, but shows up when you are under attack.”

Both the CTU and R3 Coalition joined the May Day rally and march from demonstrations earlier in the day, the latter standing with members from the BYP (Black Youth Project) 100, Mijente and Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD) in a united front outside Chicago’s Juvenile Detention Center and FBI headquarters to make their voices heard concerning “the school to prison pipeline, to the traffic stops that initiate deportation proceedings, to Muslim registries that lasted for over a decade.”

Chicago’s immigrant community was out in force.

Among them, was Celene Adame, the wife of Wilmer Catalan-Ramirez who was arrested and brutally injured by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents during a raid on his home in late March this year after he was mistakenly placed on Chicago’s “gang database.”

Adame is suing ICE and the City of Chicago.

“They are systems that target us and treat us like garbage,” Adame said. “We will remain united.”

Sen. Dick Durbin joined the rally and speaking with the demonstrators and representatives from organizations such as the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and labor organizations and unions from across the city and state including the CTU, United Food

Turn to page 11
Undocumented and unafraid:
Chicago man speaks out against ICE raids

BY GRETCHEN RACHEL HAMMOND

On April 19, the Chicago City Council overwhelm-
ingly passed a measure that would allow the city’s undocumented community the opportunity to obtain municipal IDs.

Chicago has followed New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., in a measure that, Chi-
cago Commission on Human Relations Commis-
sioner Mona Noriega noted, keeps the city “at the forefront of creating solutions, in this case recognizing that the undocumented immigrant, the formerly-
incarcerated, the homeless and the transgender communities have in securing identification that allows for them to participate in the many services that are available with proper identification.”

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions threatened to punish Chicago and other sanctuary cities by removing federal grant dollars unless they assist the posses of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents presently on a nationwide hunt for undocumented individuals. [Editor’s note: A judge subsequently blocked President Trump’s effort to withhold those funds.]

For the members of Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD)—“an undocumented-led organization that fights against the deportation and criminalization of Black and brown immigrant communities”—the unilateral power given to immigration agents has further terrorized the families and individuals who were placed on notice that their civil and human rights were to be rendered meaningless once they heard presi-
dential candidate Donald Trump call immigrants “rapists” and “criminals.”

On March 27 in Chicago, ICE agents charged into the home of Wilmar Catalan Ramirez and his family, breaking his arm during the course of his arrest and then denying him adequate medical attention while in ICE custody.

One day later, Felix Torres was shot by ICE agents during a raid on his Northwest Side Chi-
cago home. According to OCAD, he remains hos-
pitalized in critical condition.

“The Chicago ICE Field office and its direc-
tor, Ricardo Wong, have repeatedly planned and executed violent raids in homes, work places, churches, and locations where our communities are supposed to feel safe,” OCAD wrote. “These raids have involved firearms, physical force, threats, manipulation, biometric fingerprinting machines, and ruses with the intent to force their way into people’s homes.”

OCAD member and community organizer An-
tonio Gutierrez is one of the people on ICE’s hit list.

In 2011, Gutierrez was convicted of driving under the influence (DUI). According to Gutier-
rez, a single mistake for which Gutierrez has since paid society’s debts and sought rehabilitation, has made him ineligible to remain in the United States under Deferred Action for Childhood Ar-
rivals (DACA) and “affected my life constantly.”

“The criminalization of my body has been traumatic and dehumanizing,” Gutierrez wrote. “For

the state, I am no longer human.”

No amount of municipal IDs will change that. Indeed, as an openly queer, gender noncon-
forming individual, if Gutierrez is seized by ICE agents, Gutierrez’s time in one of their detention facilities could be made infinitely more wretched as Windy City Times discovered during its 2015 investigation of the horrific treatment and both physical and sexual abuses of LGBTQ individuals who are held in ICE prisons often for months at a time with barely any contact with the outside world or any recourse under the Prison Rape Elim-
nation Act (PREA).

Yet, rather than remaining in the shadows, Gutierrez is speaking out.

Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Gutierrez arrived in the United States in 2000 along with Gutier-
rez’s family.

At the time, he was only 11. Gutierrez remem-
bers the day 15 years later when Trump labeled Gutierrez a rapist and a criminal.

“It made me feel really bad,” Gutierrez told Windy City Times. “My community and the rea-
sons why we come to the United States was de-
monized. My family was very poor in Mexico. We just came here for an opportunity to get an edu-
cation and for a better future.”

Gutierrez recalled the process of assimilating to the culture and language of their new home “very

hard” for Gutierrez’s entire family.

After ceaseless, often unrewarding labor, they prevailed and had settled into their new home and lives when Trump made it clear they had better start packing their bags

“I felt like a lot of the sacrifices that many of the undocumented and immigrant families made to come to the United States and be hard workers and try to be a productive part of society was, all of a sudden, completely disregarded based on generalizations made about our community that we’re all criminals and that we’re all here to take advantage of the United States,” Gutierrez said.

“But we know that undocumented immigrants are being exploited as workers. We’re not taking advantage. If anything, we’re being taken advantage of.”

Indeed, for Trump, undocumented communities were useful tools around which he built a plat-
form designed to appeal to the basest instincts of hatred and fear.

“It’s easy to blame specific groups without trying to have an actual conversation,” Gutier-
rez said. “We saw the mass deportation machine being constructed and taking place during the Obama administration. We are seeing that the [Trump] administration is using this machine to target all undocumented immigrants.”

Even before Trump received the electoral col-
lege majority in November 2016, Gutierrez said Gutierrez and Gutierrez’s fellow community mem-
bers felt terrorized.

“People like me who are queer and have a criminal record now find ourselves being targeted even more,” Gutierrez asserted. “The reality is all undocumented immigrants feel less safe but that does not mean that we cannot organize and take action ourselves.”

“Throughout this election, there’s only ever been one choice: us. We are the only ones that can defend ourselves,” OCAD wrote in November.

“We cannot allow fear to overcome us. We stand together. We must resist and organize together.”

That has meant working with the City of Chi-
cago to add an amendment to the Welcoming City Ordinance.

“Currently, [there are] existing carve-outs where the police and ICE agents can cooperate with each other in the criminalization of the undocumented,” Gutierrez said. “The ordinance created a distinction between good and bad. In cases where an individual has a criminal record, it allows for police and ICE collaboration regardless of the crime.”

OCAD has partnered with organizations such as the Black Youth Project 100 to press for changes to the ordinance.

Meanwhile, Gutierrez and the undocumented community now spend their daily lives under the omnipresent threat of ICE to turn what was once a dream of America into a violent, isolated nightmare.

Gutierrez asserted that ICE agents have even carried out raids in homes wearing police identi-
fication in order to fool the families inside.

“It’s hard for me and immigrants overall,” he said. “Because we know racial profiling is a tac-
tic that the police and ICE agents use in order to stop and detain individuals. ICE agents self-
identifying as the police clearly sends the wrong message and confuses our community when all they want is to be good citizens and cooperate with the police when they come to the door. Now, they don’t know if it’s actually the police who need their support or if it’s ICE to detain family members.”

Gutierrez added that the undocumented com-
munity now does not know who to trust.

“I know that if I’m detained today or tomorrow by ICE and put in a detention center, I will end up in solitary confinement because I’m LGBTQ,” Gutierrez said. “But the fear is lessened knowing I have a community behind me, that I am part of community organizations that I know will work for me and that I know my rights.”

Gutierrez urged both the undocumented com-
munity and those who wish to support them to join organizations like OCAD and others in solidarity at events such as the May 1 rallies in downtown Chicago and across the country.

“Whether you are an undocumented person coming out to say, ‘I’m unafraid, I exist and I will resist,’ or whether you’re an ally who wants to help in any way you can, we need your voice,” Gutierrez said. “We don’t believe in the Trump administration’s attempts to separate our com-
munities. Regardless of the criminalization, we are still human.”

For more information about OCAD, visit OrganizedCommunities.org.
Russian-born violinist makes waves after coming out

By Andrew Davis

Russian-born violinist Artem Kolesov has been making news globally for doing something that people of all ages do every year: The 23-year-old officially came out of the closet as gay.

However, it is Kolesov’s background that makes his story incredible.

In a YouTube video that he made as part of his the “Children-404” project (based in his country of origin), Kolesov not only dared to show his face, but he also officially came out and detailed horrors he endured along the way—including being physically and sexually abused by a brother (who now currently resides in the United States) and the difficulties he had to deal with growing up as the son of two ministers. The video is likely to take the viewer on an emotional journey as well.

Kolesov is currently a Chicago resident and plays with the Yas Quartet, which is in residence at Roosevelt University. Prior to moving here, Kolesov was in Canada (Halifax, Nova Scotia, to be specific), getting a full scholarship at 16. “Here I was, unable to speak English,” Kolesov told Windy City Times. “So, I learned how to speak English, how to do business, how to do math. I took three years of courses in nine months. It was hell,” he said with a laugh.

However, before making it to North America, Kolesov endured a different kind of personal hell in Russia—so much so that he said that still would not feel safe if he returned to that country right now. “It was never good [regarding being gay]; homosexual is seen as a major sin,” Kolesov said.

Kolesov also said one of his brothers even said things to their mother, such as the teen allegedly being a drug addict and engaging in orgies. “I told my mom that the only orgy I was involved in was the orchestra and that the strongest drug I had taken was ibuprofen,” Kolesov said, laughing.

Asked when he first encountered a positive gay role model, Kolesov responded that it was in Canada in 2010. “There was a lesbian couple, and it was even more complicated because one was transgender,” he said. “I later discovered that Halifax is very gay; I compare it to San Francisco.”

Kolesov connected with Children-404 via VK, “which is like a Russian Facebook,” he said. “I had to use a fake account because [Children-404] had a rainbow flag. This is how bad it was with my family and friends in Russia: One time, after we became a quartet, I liked [an openly gay friend’s] Instagram pics. All of my friends started messaging me, saying, ‘How can you like a picture of a gay person?’

“It’s very rare when someone shows his face when coming out. The idea behind Children-404 is cool because 404 is a mistake [when surfing on the internet]. I thought about it for a long time. Yes, it’s coming-out video; I wanted to share my story and someday I hope my mom is coming around—although my hope is dying slowly. Right now, we’re not talking.”

Contrary to what some outlets have said, Kolesov’s video was not spurred by the alleged goings-on in Chechnya involving gay men being tortured, killed and even kept in concentration camps, although he added that he’s “shocked, but not surprised” by the reports. (“It’s not that we don’t have LGBT people—it’s just that we’re not allowed to talk about it,” Kolesov added.)

“Those things happened after I posted the video [on March 29],” Kolesov said. “It was just timing.

“I had been planning on the video for about a year, so mental preparedness was very important. However, several things that happened this past year—including watching the movie Arrival, which taught me about choices we can make in the present even if we know the future—[affected] my thinking.

“I also wrote a letter to my mom that I read to her [before posting the video]. I told her, ‘I’m not reading you this because I want you to find a cure; I’m telling you this because I want you to be in my life. I want you in my life 100 percent.’ This is something my mom doesn’t understand: She thinks I’m broken—and maybe I am, but not that way.”

As for the future, Kolesov is moving to California in the fall—and is getting married very soon to a man he’s dated for two and a half years. “He’s the first guy I kissed,” Kolesov said with a smile. “I don’t need to look for anyone else; he’s perfect for me.”

For those on their own journey, Kolesov does have a message. “The problem with saying things to people on their journey [involves religion],” he said. “What about someone who’s a conservative versus someone who’s not? I used to be a Christian but I consider myself a humanist now. What if there’s nothing after you die? I’ve lived 23 years without happiness. That changed my thinking a lot.

“Life is so precious. This combination of our physicality will never happen again. I don’t want to live in the closet anymore; we only have one life. Start living now—make the most of what you have.”

Kolesov’s coming-out video (which has English subtitles) is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJY3o3tVgic.

Read my story at onthetable.com

Nathan Mason

Join me on May 16, 2017 #OnTheTable2017

Photo by Andrew Davis
Catholic LGBT confab comes to Chicago

BY GRETCHEN RACHEL HAMMOND

For 40 years, New Ways Ministry has advocated and fought not only for acceptance of LGBT individuals in the Catholic church but to ensure justice and an equal place in society for a worldwide community of people who do not want to be ostracized from a spiritual life simply because of who they are.

When the organization hosted its eighth national symposium, “Justice and Mercy Shall Kiss,” in Chicago over the weekend of April 28, a capacity of 300 attendees from across the country arrived at the Hilton Rosemont with an energetic sense of hope.

The symposium is held every five years and a lot has changed since attendees last convened in Baltimore in 2012.

“One of the important messages this year from the speakers and the participants is that we’re in a new age with Pope Francis and the Catholic Church,” New Ways Ministry Executive Director Francis DeBernardo said. “Pope Francis has created a space. It’s now up to us, the lay people of the Church, to work in that space to move LGBT equality forward in Catholicism.”

For DeBernardo, that space is found in a message of accompaniment from the Vatican.

“Meaning that the Church needs to accompany people who are alienated,” he explained. “It needs to dialogue with them which Catholic leaders have not done for the past 40 years. Pope Francis has encouraged leaders to meet with those who feel alienated and marginalized by the Church and I think only good things can happen from those kinds of encounters.”

However, the transgender community, far from receiving the Pope’s encouragement, found itself a target of harsh rhetoric in August 2016 when, at a conference of Bishops in Poland, he called the acceptance of the gender spectrum in schools “an annihilation of man as the image of God.”

The pope would later soften that message—as long as no one quoted him as blessing transgender people.

“Pope Francis on gender issues has not been very good at all,” DeBernardo said. “We know that’s a place where he still has to grow and learn from people. He has met with a transgender man and spoken positively about that meeting. I think if he would do more along those lines, we would see different messages from him.”

The consequences of negative messaging were brought home in dramatic fashion on April 30 by the symposium’s closing speaker, Frank Mugisha, the executive director of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG).

Mugisha’s life in his home country changed along with every other LGBT Ugandan after U.S. evangelical Scott Lively stopped by in 2009 to encourage President Yoweri Museveni, his legislators and the nation at large to reject, spurn, imprison, torture, execute and systematically eradicate its population of people.

Since then, Mugisha has spent his days under the shadow of imprisonment and death as he has fought an outspoken, daily battle for on behalf of a community who faced some of the most draconian anti-LGBT laws in the world.

“We see what is happening in Russia and Chechnya and also in Africa in places like Tanzania,” Mugisha said. “Uganda has been seen in the news as the worst place [for LGBT people] but there are worse places. When Uganda introduced the anti-gay law in 2009 it mandated the death penalty for serial offenders which means I would be on death row right now.”

He noted that, although the provision was removed before the law was signed, “the law also carried a provision that mandated that any person who knows an LGBT person report them to authorities within a period of 24 hours or being arrested.”

Mugisha described it as a “time of crisis” even after a 2014 Constitutional Court decision striking down the law based on a technicality.

The fact that it hasn’t been reintroduced is something Mugisha credited with the work of activists in his own country who risked their lives to speak out against the legislation along with political leaders, celebrities and advocates worldwide “for standing with us.”

Yet, Mugisha’s work and its inherent risks are far from over.

“Last year, I was thrown in jail,” he said. “We still have politicians making anti-gay statements. We still have hatred going on. We still have church leaders organizing in order to influence another legislation. We have had challenges with the media in Uganda naming and outing people. I was published on the front page of my newspaper. My partner had to move from Uganda to the U.S. His family and friends disowned him. He was thrown into jail and he couldn’t take any more. Your whole world goes down.”

He added that the trouble his country’s media, politicians and churches have caused the Ugandan LGBT community is still being felt every day.

“Lesbian girls are being forced into sexual intercourse with their own relatives who are trying to teach them not to be gay,” Mugisha said. “It’s not just lesbians who are out. Just if you are perceived to be a lesbian.”

All of this because homophobia was introduced to a continent by people like Scott Lively.

“Homophobia is not an African problem and homophobia is not Africa,” Mugisha stated. “It has been peddled by American evangelicals who have come to my country and confused Ugandans with a language that is not Ugandan. When we talked about recruitment in my country it was not about gays but about the army and police forces. Scott Lively spent three days meeting with politicians, government officials, scholars and he said ‘homosexuals have taken over the United Nations and Uganda is a chosen country of God.’ He encouraged the anti-gay law to be created in my country.”

Other speakers at the symposium included NETWORK Executive Director Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, as well as Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, Fordham University Professor of Theology Rev. Bryan Massingale, Berkeley’s Jesuit School of Theology Associate Professor Lisa Fullam and Bishop John Stowe, OFM, Conv.

For more information about New Ways Ministry, visit NewWaysMinistry.org.

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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Dignity/Chicago to mark 45 years

Dignity/Chicago—the advocacy organization for LGBTQ Catholics and their allies—will celebrate its 45th anniversary Saturday, May 20, with a dinner at Francesca’s on Taylor, 1400 W. Taylor St. DignityUSA Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke will be the guest speaker.

The anniversary dinner will be followed on Sunday, May 21, by a celebration Mass in Dignity/Chicago’s host church at 3338 N. Broadway (Broadway United Methodist Church).

Regarding the May 20 event, a VIP reception will be held at 5:30-6:30 p.m., with a general reception and the dinner at 6:30-9 p.m. Dinner tickets are $40 and $75 and can be purchased by visiting Dignity-chicago.com or by mailing a check to Dignity/Chicago, 3023 N Clark St., Box 237, Chicago, IL 60657-5200. For more info, call 312-458-9438 or email DignityChicago@gmail.com.
Council on Global Affairs holds LGBT-rights conversation

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs hosted a conversation-based event titled “The Global LGBTQ Rights Movement” on April 27.

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight on global issues and is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues beyond borders and transform how people, business and governments engage the world.

The event was a conversation between Frank Mugisha, executive director of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG); and Jane M. Saks, founding president and artistic director of Project8. Topics included Mugisha’s start in activism, his strategies and developing reliable networks around the world, religion and culture’s role in LGBTQ rights, particularly in Uganda and his thoughts on SMUG’s crimes against humanity lawsuit, among other issues.

According to Saks, this event, part of the Women and Global Development Forum, was the first LGBTQ-focused program that the Council has ever done. While, same-sex marriage has been legalized in the United States, countries like Uganda, are facing the opposite in which laws that criminalize homosexuality are passed. The evening's discussion provided some insights in the experience of the backlash sexual minorities face.

“I think events like this remind people what it is to be human and what it is to be the same,” said Mugisha. “We could be different, but we all want the same thing.”

A Q&A portion where attendees could engage followed Mugisha and Saks’ discussion. The event was also livestreamed and allowed for at-home viewers to ask questions.

“The LGBTQ communities in Chicago are incredibly active and really fierce and I’m really proud to be a member,” said Saks. “I think that this is an important city to go to. It’s very diverse and it’s also very segregated and we’ve had some real tragedies happen here—a lot of murders and hate crimes and then we’ve also had great successes and strides and so I think that that’s an important way to start conversations is to really think about ‘ok, where are we, where have we been and where are we going.’ It’s what I call living in all tenses of the verb as an activist; past, present and future and you can’t stay in one or the other.”

Saks’ Project8 is a Chicago nonprofit organization that supports art with social impact.

SMUG is an LGBTI, non-government network, formed in March 2004, that addresses Human Rights issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. The network’s mission is “to monitor, coordinate, and support member organizations to achieve their objectives aimed at the liberation of LGBTI people.”

“I have to show people that homophobia isn’t a Ugandan or an African problem, it’s a global program,” said Mugisha. “So, people coming to listen to me is not about Uganda, it’s about their friends here, it’s about their relatives and family here and also any other LGBT person around the world. That’s why sometimes in most of my talks, you’ll hear that it’s not only about politics, but it’s about me as a person and my lived realities or experiences because then those tough people to think, help and engage.”

Mugisha shared that, by chance, his work in activism found him. While he was appointed to his role with SMUG, he explained when one experiences vulnerability and discrimination, it pushes for the need to work hard to change people’s minds. In tune with that concept, he said he believes he is saving LGBT people every time he speaks out, holds a meeting, or even does a workshop.

Frank Mugisha.
Photo by Melissa Wasserman

“It’s very challenging for activists to work, especially when it’s very hostile,” said Mugisha in the conversation with Saks. “The only thing that we relied on as protection was international pressure. International organizations talking about what is going on all the time, which is happening now. And I think most importantly being in touch with the activists on the ground and listening to them and asking them what exactly should we do, how should we respond. I think political pressure is very good if it is done in a very strategic way.”

Mugisha commented that some people don’t see the progress being made, but if it is you who is doing the work, you see the progress. He adding there are many ways one can support the LGBT movement.

“You have to make very specific choices to do the work that Frank does,” said Saks, who developed a friendship with Mugisha some time before the event. “You can’t get too high up and you also can’t just be on the ground and he has to balance the two staying very close to his community and what the struggle is and also developing a large visionary perspective and that’s a very hard way to live while your life is being threatened.”

“I believe you still have to have really fierce activism, you have to fight like hell, you have to be willing to take risks, you have to really be courageous, you have to honor everybody that’s come before you, who has made it possible, so these kind of personal connections, are not in lieu of really fierce advocacy and activism, but the fact is, there are these kinds of quiet moments and sometimes it’s its social moments, where people don’t say things,” said Saks. “They don’t say things about race, they don’t say things about poverty, they don’t say things about gender, they don’t say things about being queer and at that moment, you could actually could really crack something open, as well as through the real strategic activism and policy shifts.”

For more information and to watch the conversation, visit https://www.thecouncil.org/event/global-lgbtq-rights-movement.

and Commercial Workers, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

“We may not all agree with one another but we do agree on this; America can be a better, stronger, more just nation and we are determined to see that happen,” Durbin said. “We are demanding economic justice to make sure people are paid a living wage. If you work in America, you should not be in poverty.”

“We also believe in immigration justice,” Durbin added. “When I introduced the Dream Act 16-years-ago, I never imagined that I would be standing here today still begging that the Dream Act become the law of the land in America. The election of Donald Trump is a challenge to all of us. We will stand and speak up for our values. We’ve seen people coming together. The question is whether we will take this energy and emotion and translate it into political action to elect men and women who will stand up for the values of America.”

The thousands who marched in solidarity with those values took their message along Washington Street to Daley Plaza.

“I am undocumented. My entire family’s undocumented,” Tania Unzueta declared. “The question most people ask us is ‘how are we protecting ourselves and why are we not scared?’ Today’s march is part of the answer to that question.”
‘Garden of Eve’ raises funds for LGBTQ women’s health

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

It was a women’s world at Howard Brown Health Center’s Garden of Eve: Forward fundraiser event on April 28 at Venue SIX10.

Garden of Eve is an annual fundraiser that has been running with its current name since 2009. The purpose of the event is to bring together Chicago’s LGBT women and allies to celebrate queer and lesbian women’s sexual and reproductive health, and this year’s party welcomed more than 350 guests.

Kristin Keglovitz-Baker, PA-C, AAHIVS—Howard Brown’s chief operating officer and certified physician assistant—commented that the event helps the patients who are unable to access affordable health insurance as well as the community whose health insurance may not be covering the services that are needed, such as alternative insemination, hormone replacement or hormone-affirmative care. She said the event also embraces bringing the community together.

“We certainly have a diverse community who support women’s and trans health that have come tonight,” said Keglovitz-Baker. “I think it’s just been a fun event. I think a lot of people have had light heartedness, and it’s just been a time for celebration with all the exciting things we have to come. Part of our strategic plan for Howard Brown in the coming three years is we’re going to be doing a needs assessment for LGBTQ women. We’re going to be really looking at the needs of our community and sort of expanding services and I think this event tonight is the start of that reinvigoration around women’s healthcare.”

In celebrating queer and lesbian women’s sexual and reproductive health, the funds raised allow Howard Brown Health to continue providing clinical, behavioral health and community health services, including gynecological care, alternative insemination, breast and cervical cancer screening, HIV and STI testing and prevention and wellness education for the LGBTQ community.

Attendees enjoyed food, cocktails, a raffle and a silent auction. AndyB aka O.Snap!, Darling Shear and Switch the Boi Wonder performed for the crowd and Audio Jack of Slo‘Mo Party spun the tunes for all to dance. The party also had an Early to Bed interactive pop-up shop, Kelaine-photo’s photobooth and Gigi Nails manicures. No Small Productions and Slo‘Mo Party’s Kristen Kaza was the evening’s emcee.

Keglovitz-Baker said it was a priority that the event was women-centered and so women-run businesses were present, which included the DJ, various vendors and catering, as well as women’s services supporters of, including lab services and pharmaceutical companies who support Howard Brown with patient education and pharmaceutical support.

“It’s always been an event where when it comes to reproductive rights and women’s health rights, they’ve always been important, but I don’t think they’ve ever been more important than this year,” said Dr. Nabeela Rasheed, co-chair of Garden of Eve: Forward. “I’ve been very politically engaged throughout my whole life and right now I think that our rights as women, regardless of whether we are straight, queer or trans, those are the first rights that are going to get given up and that are going to get attacked and unless we come out as a community to uphold them, there’s going to be a lot of trouble for the country because where women’s rights go, that’s where human rights go.”

“It’s a really beautiful display of the queer women community,” said Liz Weck, director of social services at Howard Brown Health. “I mean trans women, I mean cis women, but I mean women. We don’t celebrate women’s space, we don’t make room for women, and in this political climate, women are threatened. Their livelihoods, their bodies are threatened and we need to make a stronger claim about our commitment to addressing those issues.”

For more information about Garden of Eve: Forward and Howard Brown Health, visit http://howardbrown.org/wp/event/goe17/.
City committee meets about hate crimes
BY MATT SIMONETTE

The Chicago City Council Committee on Human Relations, on April 26, held a public meeting and listening session addressing the prevalence of hate crimes in the city.

The session was convened in response to the increase of hate-crimes as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), said Commission of Human Relations Commissioner Mona Noriega. She was one of a number of advocates, law enforcement officials and other stakeholders who spoke at the session.

“In regards to community, the first order of education is knowing what a hate crime is,” Noriega added. She and law enforcement officials answered queries from committee members about hate-crimes investigations and adjudication in the community.

Ald. Milly Santiago (31st Ward) noted that students have been identifying and presenting as transgender at younger ages, further noting that other students learn intolerant behavior from adults. She suggested that “a new layer of education” was needed in schools.

Noriega explained that the Commission therefore offers school teachings targeting not just students, but teachers, staff and parents as well, she added, noting that adults needed spaces in which to hold conversations about issues that troubled or concerned them.

Ald. Milly Santiago.
Photo by Matt Simonette

Howard Brown expands program for assault survivors

Howard Brown Health has launched a sexual-harm response project called in.power* to better assist survivors of sexual assault in gaining access to needed medical, behavioral health, legal, and support services.

The program is designed to serve all people who experience sexual harm, including LGBTQ people.

It is believed to be the first LGBTQ-specific sexual-assault support program of its kind, and the only resource in Illinois designed specifically for sexual and gender minorities.

Through in.power*, patients are eligible to receive free STI testing and treatment along with supportive services including case management, support groups, acupuncture, legal support, linkage to community resources and survivor support.

Additionally, in.power* seeks to bring about community-level change by working to amend laws that discourage LGBTQ survivors from seeking care; through partnerships with established community stakeholders, in.power* implements professional trainings to improve system responses to LGBTQ survivors. Also, in.power* offers bystander trainings to staff at bars, restaurants and universities in order to educate community members on how to proactively and reactively respond to sexual violence.

For more information, email in.power@howardbrown.org.

Findings released about ‘doubled-up’ homeless families

CHICAGO—A new analysis by Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) shows that 82 percent of homeless people in Chicago in 2015 were “doubled up”—that is, they sought shelter with relatives and friends.

CCH’s report was released April 20, as its HomeWorks campaign joined the City of Chicago in announcing the city’s new school-based housing initiative. The Housing Homeless Families program will offer permanent housing to 100 homeless families attending six Chicago Public Schools located in high-crime communities.

The report shows that 82,212 people were homeless in Chicago in 2015, an unduplicated count. Eighty-seven percent of homeless families (8,634 families) with children were in the doubled-up category.

CCH also found that 44 percent of homeless families served by the emergency shelter system had lived doubled-up with friends or family, either prior to or after entering the shelter system within that year. This shows that many families experience both types of homelessness, cycling in and out of shelters and the homes of others.

Home Works partners include AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Beacon Therapeutic, Catholic Charities, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, CSH, Facing Forward to End Homelessness, Heartland Alliance, Primo Center for Women and Children, and Unity Parenting & Counseling Inc.
Letters to the editor:

Vigilance

Editor:

In June 2015, the United States Supreme Court made same-sex marriage the law of the land in its ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges, and the backlash began immediately. The most recent backlash example has come in North Carolina, and we must remain vigilant.

On April 11, 2017, House Bill 780 was introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly to amend its constitution that same-sex marriage is not valid, declaring the Obergefell decision “null and void in the State of North Carolina.” While this legislation is considered dead and the courts have never upheld nullification, it is the latest example of the vigilance necessary for the backlash that continues since the Supreme Court decision in Obergefell.

Additionally, in February, Senate Bill 64 was introduced in the Illinois Senate: this measure allows a person with a religious belief or moral conviction that same-sex marriage is wrong to discriminate and to allow that person to assert that conviction as a claim or defense. Dozens of similar bills have been introduced in states across the country and, while the Illinois legislation may go nowhere, these bills can be threats in highly conservative states. Same-sex marriage is now the law of the land and is also legal in 22 countries.

While we have religious freedom as a constitutionally protected right, the backlash—as seen in this flurry of religious refusal laws—has religion being twisted to discriminate and to impose one’s personal religious beliefs on others, which is not its proper intention. Using religion to refuse to obey laws one does not like but that everyone else must follow is not “religious liberty.” We are all equal under the law.

The backlash in Alabama, where 11 counties refused to issue any marriage licenses at all since Obergefell while relying on a 1961 state law that was created to preserve racial segregation and made it optional for county clerks to issue marriage licenses. Additionally, in Irion County, Texas, the clerk refuses to issue same-sex marriage licenses.

And then there was the short-lived fame of Kim Davis—the Rowan County, Kentucky clerk who, with other clerks, refused to issue marriage licenses after the Supreme Court decision. After being in jail for not doing her job, she received supportive visits by anti-gay politicians, but eventually relented when a majority of U.S. residents in the polls said Davis was in the wrong on her crusade.

As the progressive gains have been made, the backlash is not just in the use of religion to propagate discrimination, but also just recently with the concentration camps in Chechnya and with the 30 sodomy arrests in Iran. Our vigilance is essential now more than ever.

After the Civil War, the United States Constitution was amended with the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. These amendments prohibited slavery; addressed citizenship rights and equal protection of the laws; and prohibited denying the right to vote based on race, color or prior servitude. The
Refugee drama

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

As a native Chicagoan, out actor Daniel Kyri grew up seeing shows at the city’s major regional theaters. So now that Kyri is making his Goodman Theatre debut in the drama Objects in the Mirror, he’s very humbled and excited.

“Every day when I walk in and see the towing Goodman sign, I have the realization that I’m here for work,” Kyri said. “It feels a little bit like a dream.”

Objects in the Mirror is a world-premiere refugee drama by Charles Smith, a former member of the Victory Gardens Theater Playwrights Ensemble. Known for plays like Knock Me a Kiss and Denmark, Smith was inspired to write Objects in the Mirror after traveling in 2009 to Adelaide, Australia, to see a production of his Jeff Award-winning drama A Free Man of Color.

That production’s star was Liberian actor Shedrick Yarkpai, who ended up in Australia after escaping from being recruited as a child soldier in his civil war-torn homeland and enduring a number of West African refugee camps. Smith was so compelled by Yarkpai that he befriended him and got permission to dramatize his life story in Objects in the Mirror.

Smith had a chance to workshop Objects in the Mirror as part of the Goodman Theatre’s 2015 New Stages festival. Though Kyri wasn’t previously involved in that version, he is enjoying the whole process of working with so many determined artists to get Objects in the Mirror on its feet.

Kyri portrays Yarkpai, and he feels the weight of embodying another person’s real-life story. Though Kyri hasn’t had a chance to meet with Yarkpai yet, he is drawing from Smith’s many stories about his relationship to develop his character.

“There is the pressure to tell the story correctly,” Kyri said. “His story was entrusted to another artist, so there is the heightened experience of respect and I think that in our approach to him, a lot of that comes through.”

Kyri likes the fact that Objects in the Mirror not only depicts the harrowing events that Yarkpai faced in Africa, but also about his difficulties of integrating into Australian society.

“The struggles of a refugee doesn’t stop once they find asylum elsewhere,” Kyri said. “That struggle continues because essentially you’re feeling like a visitor in another country and space. The things that you leave behind in order to fit into this new home gets brought up a lot in terms of the sacrifices the characters have to make in their journey to find their idea of home or freedom or safety.”

Part of Yarkpai’s adjustment to Australia was encountering openly gay people like the character of Rob Mosher (Ryan Kitley), who tries to help him.

“This traditional West African man having this conversation with an Australian queer-identifying gay man—the scene between them is so dynamic,” Yarkpai said. “They butt heads with their different belief systems—and watching them sort of navigate that conversation and dialogue is interesting because it’s so real.”

And given how in recent months how so much hateful rhetoric has been directed toward refugees and immigrants, the Goodman’s programming of Objects in the Mirror has proven to be especially prescient.

“We see so much in the media, especially under the new administration, I feel like there is a distancing that is happening between us and them,” Kyri said. “And there’s a lot of division happening in the world and the only way to break down those divides and divisions is to see the humanity in each other.”

Kyri especially likes works that push against separate categories and where issues like race, class and sexuality intersect and overlap. Kyri said some of his future works include planned collaborations with Samantha Bailey (the web series Brown Girls which focuses on queer women of color) and an online series about LGBTQ African-American life in Chicago called The T.

But for now, Kyri is relishing the chance to collaborate with director Chuck Smith and playwright Charles Smith in Objects in the Mirror. It’s a project that is very dear to Kyri’s heart, and he recognizes its significance.

“It’s so appropriate that a story like this is also allowed to take up space on the mainstage of the Goodman Theatre. Representation matters,” Kyri said. “As a Black queer man myself living in the city of Chicago who grew up on the South Side, these are the stories that I want to see and these are the stories that I want to have a hand in telling.”

The world premiere of Charles Smith’s Objects in the Mirror continues through Sunday, June 4, at the Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn St. Previews run through May 7 with an official press opening May 8. Tickets are $20-$75. Call 312-443-3800 or visit GoodmanTheatre.org.
**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?**

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

- **You must be HIV-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-negative.
- **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.

**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 (HEPSERVA).**

**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](http://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 taking 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

3C
Playwright: David Adjmi
At: A Red Orchid Theatre, 1531 N. Wells St.
Tickets: 312-943-8722 or ARedOrchidTheatre.org $30-$53
Runs through: June 4

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

Is there is such a thing as bait-and-switch whip-lash? If so, audiences catching A Red Orchid Theatre’s Chicago premiere of 3C might want to brace themselves in advance.

David Adjmi’s play is a comically critical deconstruction of the hit TV sitcom Three’s Company, which ran on ABC from 1977 to 1984. 3C starts off like any campy pop-cultural spoof you’d expect from a scrappy theater company. (Hell in Handbag Productions comes to mind, though minus the drag.) But midway through, 3C takes several dark and serious turns as it depicts frank instances of alcoholism, drug use, homophobia and unwanted sexual assaults. It’s as if Adjmi wants audiences to seriously rethink their laughter at 1970s attitudes and sitcom situations that cause his characters so much physical and emotional trauma.

Understandably, the rights holders to Three’s Company wanted to put the kibosh on 3C after its 2012 off-Broadway debut. But Adjmi successfully sued in a court on free-speech grounds to show that 3C is a critical parody.

Currently free from litigation, 3C is likely to divide Chicago audiences—especially if they don’t want to be overly analytical about what is typically written off as sitcom fluff. But director Shade Murray and his top-flight acting ensemble deliver the goods at being hilariously zany while also delivering all the fraught drama of 3C.

Sigrid Sutter is wonderful as the ditzy blonde Connie. Her beauty and success at attracting men pushes several body-image and self-confidence buttons of her more responsible cash-strapped roommate, Linda (a heartbreaking Christina Gorman).

The accident-prone Brad (an excellent Nick Mikula) is passed off as gay so he can be the girls’ new roommate, but this ploy puts him into very uncomfortable situations. Both upstairs ladies—man neighbor Terry (a louche Steve Haggard) and landlord Mr. Wicker (a menacing Lawrence Grimm) say some really confusing and threatening things.

But the most memorable comic work comes from Jennifer Engstrom, as Ms. Wicker. With her scratchy voice and oversize personality, Engstrom masterfully straddles both the duality of being a sitcom eccentric and an unstable woman who truly needs pharmaceutical help.

On top of the masterful performances, A Red Orchid’s 3C is also a visual winner at creating a very beige 1970s sitcom world. Both the sturdy stucoed walls of set designer Sarah JHP Watkins and the gloriously tacky outfits by costume designer Myron Elliott capture the era perfectly.

The tonal shifts of 3C can be upsetting and extreme. However, 3C does powerfully suggest that there can be palpable pain behind all those sitcom laughs.

THEATER REVIEW

Firebirds Take the Field
Playwright: Lynn Rosen
At: Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, 5779 N. Ridge Ave.
Tickets: $38
Runs through: May 27

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Centuries of empirical evidence attest to the phenomenon of psychological stress manifesting itself in physical symptoms, as well as the quasi-infectious nature of this mind-body connection—particularly in groups of adolescent females, though all ages are susceptible. Famous cases of such mass delusion in our own country include the 1692 witch scare in Salem, Massachusetts, and the 1944 “Mad Gasser” scare in our neighboring city of Mattoon, Illinois.

With so much documentation, the 2012 outbreak in upstate New York of teenagers falling prey to inexplicable seizures of involuntary vocal and muscular twitches should have immediately launched inquiries into the social problems associated with an economically devastated community—domestic tensions fueled by marital discord and absentee parenting, reductions in medical services, children burdened with family responsibilities beyond their years. When chaos is encroaching on your own environment, however, affecting the people you know, deliverance is often difficult to implement.

Lynn Rosen’s play explores the dynamic of what is properly called “conversion disorder” through the microcosmic narrative of former townie-turned-Big-Pharma doctor Avery responding to a plea from divorced ex-BFF Helen for an investigation into the mysterious malady whose adverse publicity threatens the recovery of their abandoned municipality. As identification of the contagion’s source grows ever more elusive, even Avery succumbs to the crippling malaise before an epiphany enables our physician to heal herself and the others around her.

Rosen’s text includes discussion of how this is accomplished, but concerns itself less with clinical caveats than with the aggravating factors leading to gender-linked levels of emotional suppression engendering epidemics of erratic behavior (significantly, the annoying “villains” who vent their obstructive opinions frequently, loudly and abrasively remain immune to the debilitating spasms). Lest we dismiss the affliction dubbed by news media the “cheerleader disease” as a purely feminine aberration—a misconception refuted by observation of war veterans, male and female—Jessica Fisch’s direction of an adroit cast led by Meghan Gerachis and Rebecca Spence (with a brief, but important, appearance by the always-commanding Margaret Kusterman) affirms its status as an equal-opportunity infirmity.

THEATER REVIEW

Threesome
Playwright: Yussef El Guindi
At: The Other Theatre Company at the Greenhouse, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave.
Tickets: $30
Runs through: May 21

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

If you’re going to write a play discussing gender issues in the Middle East, it certainly doesn’t hurt to introduce with three attractive young people—a man and woman wearing PJs and a third man wearing nothing but an eager smile—occupying a king-sized bed.

We are in the apartment of author Leila and photographer Rashid. Leila’s book recounting her fact-finding trip to Egypt during the 2011 Cairo Uprising is to be published soon and Rashid anticipates his appointment as its graphic designer. Tonight, however, Leila has invited co-worker Doug to join them in their conjugal frolics—a whim that Rashid reluctantly agrees to indulge—but whenever the would-be whoopee shows hints of commencing, it stalls out under the hostess’ real agenda, which is to observe and analyze the men’s response to her audacious proposal. As the carnal prospects grow ever more remote, Leila’s need to exorcise lingering memories of injuries sustained on her recent travels becomes increasingly apparent, as does the ineptitude of privileged males—even those of benign intent—at assisting in her recovery.

Yussef El Guindi is no stranger to the inequities promulgated by patriarchal imperatives in volatile societies throughout the world, and thus, is not content with reducing complex sexual dynamics and social contracts based thereon to facile “men-as-wolves, women-as-lambs” dichotomies. To be sure, Rashid and Doug both struggle mightily to establish dominance of a dynamic rendered even more discomforting by Leila’s repeated obstruction of their efforts to do so. This is not merely shrewishness on her part, though. After more than an hour of discourse—during which Doug’s visions of debauchery are denied, Rashid discovers the extent of his ignorance as regards his lover’s ex-corollation of government-sanctioned abuse and Leila is told that her book cover is to depict her in full colonialist-fantasy veiled-to-the-eye-brows Arabian Nights drag—the source of her anger becomes manifest.

Under Jason Gerace’s deft direction, Suzan Fawcett, Demetrios Troy and Mike Tepeli display uniform expertise at imposing conversational rhythms on potentially didactic dialogue (especially Tepeli, who must carry out his duties while engaging in buck-naked dumb-white-boy antics bordering on tasteless vulgarity). Their unswerving aplomb ensures that our bewilderment at arriving with expectations of slap-and-tickle farce only to be cockblocked by “a seminar with no clothes” does not eclipse our powers of comprehension. Intellectual potency counts, too.

CRITICS’ PICKS

Aladdin, Cadillac Palace Theatre, through Sept. 10. This national tour is a corporate Disney product, no doubt. But most audiences nostalgic for the blockbuster 1992 animated feature probably won’t care since Aladdin delivers as a wowing, big-budget stage spectacle. SCM

Beyond Caring, Lookingglass Theatre Company, through May 7. The company that usually transports us skyward to the realms of fantasy this time plunges us to the depths of minimum-wage squalor for a bleak 90 minutes and dares us to remain detached. MSB

Into the Beautiful North, 16th Street Theatre, Berwyn, through June 3. A young woman travels north seeking heroes to protect her dusty Mexican village of Tres Camarones (“three shrimp”). Karen Zacarias’ adaptation of Luis Albert Urrea’s comic picareesque novel blends fancy and contemporary truth, colorfully staged with vigor and charm. JA

Linda Vista, Steppenwolf Theatre, extended through May 28. If you’re fond of Steely Dan songs—or maybe your life resembles one—your empathy with the flawed hero of this latest dispatch from the eclectic Tracy Letts is assured. MSB

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Morgan
Remembering theater legend Martha Lavey

VIEWPOINT BY JONATHAN AARBANEL

Martha Lavey was one of those rare artists—one of those rare people—who actually made a difference. She was The Real Deal: perceptive, persuasive, passionate, challenging, edgy, encompassing and generous. She encouraged and empowered her artistic colleagues to be bigger and better than they were. Because her colleagues were (and are) the Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble, much to the surprise of almost everyone.

Why surprise? Because Steppenwolf—founded in 1976 by Terry Kinney, Jeff Perry and Gary Sinise—was considered a male-centric company and one which had little use for theatrical academics. The famous catch phrase of Steppenwolf rehearsals was “Let’s get stupid, let’s just get stupid.” Also, Steppenwolf never had had a truly strong artistic head. Instead, the members of the Ensemble would rotate the artistic director post among themselves every few years.

Company, her remarkable gifts made a huge difference. Her death at 60 on April 25, days after suffering her second massive stroke in two years, leaves a void not only locally, but in all of American theatre.

Lavey began her theater career as an actor, and continued to act periodically until her first stroke. I first saw her work over 30 years ago when she still was in her 20s. A graduate of Northwestern University, she returned to earn a higher degree in Performance Studies and might have chosen an academic career for herself. Instead, she accepted an invitation in the early 1990s to become a member of the Steppenwolf Ensemble. In 1995 she was named the troupe’s artistic director, however, times had changed by 1995. The troupe had moved into an expensive and impressive permanent home (their current theater) even as their art and craft slipped into mediocrity. In the years immediately after the move, Steppenwolf lost half its subscribers. I said then that no one as savvy as Lavey would have taken the job without a promise of definitive artistic authority. What she did truly was astonishing, starting with taming the male-centric beast.

But she did far, far more than that. She took command of a company that never really was as good as its reputation, at least not with any consistency. She took a company lauded for doing edgy new work that, in fact, did almost no work that actually was new. In 20 years as artistic director, Lavey pushed, prodded and cajoled Steppenwolf into actually being as good as it was reputed to be, as edgy as its image and fully committed to creating new work. She did this by greatly expanding the size, depth and diversity of the Ensemble; by extending the range and style of plays presented; by expanding the producing programs to three stages (now there are four); by embracing and hosting smaller, younger theater companies; and by encouraging her Ensemble to multi-task as actors, directors, designers and writers. Lavey and her valiant partner, Executive Director David Hawkanson, together took Steppenwolf—and individual Ensemble members such as Tracy Letts, Amy Morton, Bruce Norris and Rondi Reed—to Broadway and London, to Tony Awards and Pulitzer Prizes and to the Bill Clinton White House to accept the Presidential Medal for the Arts.

Joffrey ends season with ‘Visionaries’

For its annual spring engagement, The Joffrey Ballet will present “Global Visionaries,” a program of three contemporary works that will run through May 7 at he Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University, 50 E. Congress Pkwy.

The programs will include the world premiere of Episode 47, by Swedish choreographer Alexander Ekman; the Chicago premiere of The Miraculous Mandarin, by San Francisco Ballet Resident Choreographer Yuri Possokhov, created specifically for The Joffrey Ballet and The Cleveland Orchestra; and the return of Mamma tus, by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa.

Single tickets are $34-$159; visit Joffrey.org, call 312-386-8905 or stop by Joffrey’s or the Auditorium Theatre’s box office.
THEATER REVIEW

Shakespeare in Love

Playwright: Lee Hall, adapted from Marc Norman & Tom Stoppard
At: Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Navy Pier
Tickets: 312-595-5600; ChicagoShakes.com; $58-$88
Runs through: June 11

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

As we always said about my late Aunt Anne, the world’s sweetest woman, “So what’s not to like?” If you loved the original 1998 movie of Shakespeare in Love, you’ll love this stage adaptation. If you never saw the movie, you’ll love this lavishly designed live version. If you hated the movie ... wait, that’s impossible. It’s hard to believe the vivid and thoroughly enjoyable film original is 20 years old.

For those unfamiliar with it, Shakespeare in Love concerns a young playwright-on-the-make in the competitive world of London theater in 1593. Suffering writer’s block and short on cash, Will Shakespeare (Nick Rehberger) finds inspiration in the arms of a beautiful, strong-willed, intelligent, wealthy young woman (Kate McGonigle) who is destined to marry Lord Wessex (deliciously supercilious Dennis Grimes). Shakespeare himself has a wife and kids back in Stratford, so the relationship never can be more than a blazing meteor that burns out, but out of it comes Shakespeare’s early romantic hit Romeo and Juliet. An aging Queen Elizabeth I (imperious Linda Reiter) is present, as well as sexually ambiguous Christopher Marlowe (charming Michael Perez), Will’s friend and fellow dramatist.

Author Lee Hall has adapted Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard’s screenplay for the stage, retaining all the wit and fancy of the original as well as cinematic fluidity and speed. The revolving scenic design by Scott Davis and lighting by Robert Wierzel provide an ever-changing landscape for a seamless scene-to-scene flow. Director Rachel Rockwell quite smartly treats the whole thing as if it were a musical, perhaps in part because she’s best known as a musical director and choreographer. The group scenes are carefully choreographed to the incidental music of composer Neil Bartram, and there is a lot of music as if it were underscoring a film. Matt Hawkins provides swashbuckling and skillful fight choreography. (Did I mention there are several sword fights?) Susan E. Mickey’s beautiful Elizabethan-era costumes run the gamut from fairly plain and practical for Will to colorful peacock outfits for the likes of Wessex and Queen Elizabeth.

The cast is top-notch across the board and ever so slightly tongue-in-cheek which absolutely is the correct tone for this show, with Rehberger and McGonigle being a handsome and passionate pair as the star-crossed lovers. The supporting players are colorful masters of (mostly) comedy, among them Larry Yando (a study in droll scene-stealing) as theater impresario Henslowe.

Shakespeare in Love is a wonderful film romp and it works just as well live on stage, maybe even better. I can’t explain why—it’s a mystery.

Following his previous world-premiere play Chewing on Beckett for Artemisia, playwright Ed Proudfoot reteams with the same theater company for the world premiere of Visiting. This time Proudfoot explores the effect of Bipolar Disorder on four generations of women. Visiting finishes out its run on Sunday, May 7, at The Edge Theater, 5451 N. Broadway. Tickets are $25; call 312-725-3780 or visit ArtemisiaTheatre.org.

Artemisia’s Visiting plays The Edge Theater in Chicago. Photo of Sarah Wisterman and Julie Proudfoot by Kat Tushim

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TELEVISION

Lito’s way: Miguel Angel Silvestro talks ‘Sense8’

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

Netflix’s soapy sci-fi series from Lana and Lilly Wachowski, Sense8, revolves around a telepathically connected group of strangers called Sensates.

Located all over the world, these diverse individuals can see and even teleport via their fellow Sensates’ minds to help each other, especially when avoiding the dangerous enemy Whispers, who is determined to track the Sensates down.

Handsome Spanish actor Miguel Angel Silvestre plays one of the Sensates, Lito, a gay actor in Mexico City who went from hiding his relationship with boyfriend Hernando (Alfonso Herrera) during the first season to being publicly outed in December’s Sense8 Christmas special. May 5 sees the global debut (and, surely, binge-watching sessions) of Sense8’s second season.

By phone, Silvestre, who previously co-starred in Pedro Almodovar’s I’m So Excited, discussed the upcoming second season, which will see the Sensates—including Nomi, a San Francisco-based lesbian transgender blogger/hacker played by Jamie Clayton—come together for plenty of action, thrills and perhaps even another one of those famous polysexual orgies...

Windy City Times: How do you connect most with Lito as a character, Miguel?

Migues Angel Silvestre: When I first started working as an actor, I did a role and the character was very cool. It was my breakthrough in Spain, and when I was doing interviews I was scared to not be as interesting as the character was! Now I’m becoming comfortable with who I am, and the result in the end is better. So I can understand Lito in that sense - to be perceived onscreen as the perfect man, masculine, heterosexual. That’s why his performances were all very false. Lito’s facing a new era of his life, and he’s accepting his darkness, his light, and it will make him more real and have more meaningful relationships and performances as an actor.

WCT: Lito’s career seemed to be in jeopardy by end of the Christmas special since he refuses to pretend to be straight anymore. How will that play out?

MAS: Lana wanted to be very real about what would happen to someone like Lito, so we’ll see he’s being more authentic with himself and live great moments, and at the same time a lot of things in his life will go to hell. The best of Lito and worst of Lito.

WCT: And how will things go with Hernando now that they don’t have to hide their relationship?

MAS: “With the relationship, beautiful things will happen, but at the same time when you face Lito not having work, that makes a huge change in how you behave. When your dream goes away. There will be many surprises.

WCT: Episode six will feature a highlight when Lito and Hernando go to gay pride in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Photos and videos leaked of the entire Sense8 cast there, actually, with lots of making out and you kissing Brian J. Smith as well! Can you talk about shooting that?

MAS: Lana wanted to mix reality with fiction, and the show is very famous in Brazil. So she hid some cameras in public in the actual LGBT parade, and she made me do a speech. Some people didn’t know whether it was Lito or Miguel saying the speech, but it was so beautiful the way they reacted. Everything was happening like written in the script. I’ll always remember it. Brazilian people are very generous and passionate. It was impossible to keep cool!

WCT: During season one, Lilly Wachowski was still male-identified and went by the name Andy. Were you surprised when she came out as transgender last March?

MAS: I was surprised—if surprise would be that I didn’t know. I always have a lot of admiration for people who follow what they really believe and feel, regardless of the system. I see it as a very positive thing when somebody can connect their hearts and desires with their minds. There’s no contradiction. You get the most authentic, loving person when somebody is not in conflict. For me, [Lilly’s announcement] was something to celebrate, it was a beautiful thing, but I didn’t know anything when we were shooting season one.

WCT: On this season, Lilly took a break leaving Lana in charge. How were things different with just one of the siblings in control?

MAS: We missed Lilly a lot. It was so beautiful to see how two geniuses work together. They say that just one of the siblings in control?

WCT: And how will things go with Hernando now that they don’t have to hide their relationship?

MAS: Lana wanted to be very real about what would happen to someone like Lito, so we’ll see he’s being more authentic with himself and live great moments, and at the same time a lot of things in his life will go to hell. The best of Lito and worst of Lito.

WCT: Have you ever felt as connected to someone as the Sensates do to each other?

MAS: Lana wanted to be very real about what would happen to someone like Lito, so we’ll see he’s being more authentic with himself and live great moments, and at the same time a lot of things in his life will go to hell. The best of Lito and worst of Lito.

WCT: What I know so far....
Harlem Renaissance comes to Center on Halsted

BY ED NEGRON

Live music, Bloody Marys, mimosas, great food, amazing art up for auction and LGBTQ history—these were hallmarks of a recent Legacy Project event.

On April 24, The Legacy Project hosted an event at the Center on Halsted that took its attendees back to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The brunch celebrated the first urban queer subculture in the United States (1919-1929) and the first bronze memorial under contract for an autumn induction into Chicago’s Legacy Walk, entitled “A Tribute to the Harlem Renaissance.”

While enjoying their meal, which J&L Catering provided, attendees were treated to live performances by event emcee Lucy Stoole, Honey Brown and Tovi Kahli. Guest speaker Dr. Kevin Mumford, professor of history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an award-winning author, gave a presentation on the many historical contributions of LGBTQ African-Americans during the Harlem Renaissance.

In addition, there was the debut of The Wilson Legacy Museum Collection, of which a small portion was displayed. Among the display were 66 rare artifacts of the period that included newspaper clipping, vinyl records, photos and publications.

The Wilson Legacy Museum Collection is a collaboration between Rich Wilson and Victor Salvo, the Legacy Project creator, co-founder and executive director. The collaboration between Wilson and Savlo, dubbed “The Wilson-Legacy Project,” has laid the foundation to create what will eventually be an LGBT History museum and education center in the Boystown part of North Halsted Street.

To learn more about The Legacy Project, visit LegacyProjectChicago.org.
Melissa Etheridge pours heart and ‘Soul’ into new CD

BY SARAH TOCE

Cementing herself once again in music-industry history, rock legend Melissa Etheridge is back with her spirited new release, Memphis Rock and Soul, out now via Stax Records. Memphis Rock And Soul pays tribute to the music of Stax, a significant source of influence and inspiration for the star. Etheridge, 55, kept the recording as authentic as possible by making the pilgrimage to Memphis to work with the star.

Etheridge has long been a pioneer in the LGBT-rights movement. She publicly came out in 1993 and went on to become the recipient of three GLAAD Media Awards. In addition, she’s received two Academy Award nominations winning two in 1993 and 1995, respectively. In 2007, she won the coveted Academy Award for Best Original Song (Al Gore’s I Need to Wake Up documentary film).

Etheridge is currently on tour in support of Memphis Rock And Soul. Asked if there was one song that she most looked forward to performing this time around, she said: “It’s a combination of iconic Stax samples during production. The result is a masterful slice of Americana. The album list includes “Memphis Train,” “Respect Yourself (People Stand Up),” “Who’s Making Love,” “I Forgot to Be Your Lover,” “Born Under a Bad Sign” and “I’ve Got Dreams to Remember.”

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Ever the inspired songwriter, Etheridge penned new lyrics for the album and incorporated an assortment of iconic Stax samples during production. The result is a masterful slice of Americana. The album list includes “Memphis Train,” “Respect Yourself (People Stand Up),” “Who’s Making Love,” “I Forgot to Be Your Lover,” “Born Under a Bad Sign” and “I’ve Got Dreams to Remember.”

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For a full list of Memphis Rock and Soul tour dates, visit https://www.melissaetheridge.com/events.

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Children’s museum to mark equality day

Chicago Children’s Museum (CCM) kicks off two months of playful programming dedicated to celebrating Chicago’s LGBTQ community with International Family Equality Day (IFED) on Sunday, May 7.

Now in its sixth year, International Family Equality Day is an official event of the Family Equality Council that recognizes all family structures while providing visibility and support to LGBTQ families.

Programs include:
—Rainbow Staircase: Going on through the end of June, people can transform the central staircase into a giant rainbow by adding colorful ribbons.
—“What Makes a Family?” chalk wall: Also available through the end of June, people can write ideas about family on a huge chalkboard.
—Hospitality Suite: Taking place 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. on May 7, people can enjoy snacks, music, LGBTQ family-focused resources and information, and storytimes for LGBTQ families and allies.
—Family storybook necklaces: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. People can make and take storybook necklaces representing thoughts about family on May 7.

—Visiting Artist Drop-in Studio: During 12-4 p.m. on May 7, people can join Chicago artists Rick Proper and Leah Ball in the art studio to learn about their work and make a big collaborative piece together.

Visit ChicagoChildrensMuseum.org/index.php/about/lgbtq-pride-events.

W. Kamau Bell in Oak Park on May 4

W. Kamau Bell will stop at Oak Park’s The Book Table, 200 N. Oak Park Ave., on Thursday, May 4, at 7 p.m. to promote his new book, The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell: Tales of A 6’ 4”, African American, Heterosexual, Cisgender, Left-Leaning, Asthmatic, Black and Proud Blerd, Mama’s Boy, Dad, and Stand-up Comedian.

The book was due out from Dutton on May 2. Bell is a sociopolitical comedian and host of the Emmy-nominated CNN docuseries United Shades of America. The second season premieres this month.

He is also a graduate of University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where he delivered the 2016 commencement address.

Tickets are $33 each; visit awkwardkamau.brownpapertickets.com.
BOOKS

Emily Hobson talks ‘Gay and Lesbian Left’ at Newberry

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Author Emily Hobson joined the University of Illinois at Chicago’s (UIC’s) Gender and Women’s Studies Director Jennie Brier in conversation at the Newberry Library April 28.

Hobson is the author of Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left, and is an assistant professor of history and gender, race and identity at the University of Nevada-Reno.

In addition to Brier’s role as director, she is also an associate professor of history and gender and women’s studies at UIC.

“My book tracks the history of the gay and lesbian left in the San Francisco Bay Area from the height of the late 1960s to the early 1990s, when the AIDS epidemic hit crisis stage,” said Hobson.

Ahead of the conversation, Kathleen Belew (assistant professor in the department of history at the University of Chicago) introduced Hobson and Brier.

In Hobson’s opening remarks, she spoke about the three facets that gave the gay and lesbian left their power.

“They crossed supposedly fixed lines of sexuality, race and nation, starting with the cross-pollination between Black power, the anti-war movement, feminism and gay liberation in the late 1960s,” she said. “Secondly, geography, including border-crossing and internationalism, fueled links between sexual liberation and radical solidarity. … Thirdly, they built power by keeping radical histories alive but lost momentum when their sense of political genealogies faded.”

When asked what brought her to this specific topic for her book, Hobson said it started during her first year of graduate school, when she was reading a lot of primary source materials and looking at images from the early days of the gay and lesbian liberation movement. She found that there were more exchanges across gender lines and with other left-leaning movements than standard histories of the 1960s had described.

Hobson explained that she also found strong connections between the Central American solidarity movements and the gay and lesbian movement in the 1980s.

Brier inquired where Hobson found her materials for the book and Hobson remarked that in addition to oral histories she relied on the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at USC, and personal collections more so than traditional research entities.

For example, Hobson said she was surprised by the lack of gay and lesbian materials at Stanford’s Hoover Institute, since conservative and state surveillance also affected gay liberation and lesbian feminism. Hobson noted how glad she was that very few people refused her requests for oral interviews.

They also discussed whether California is a representation of the world and/or the United States, with Hobson stating that California is unique—but that every place has its own internationalist connections. She also noted that it is important to think beyond the nation-state when it comes to social movements.

A Q&A session with the attendees followed the discussion.
Most fitness professionals agree that nutrition constitutes 60-80 percent of good health, with exercise composing the remainder. I kept this stat in mind while visiting the newest branch of Muscle Maker Grill (920 W. Belmont Ave., https://musclemakergrill.com/). The location of this particular stop—in health-conscious Lake View—wasn’t lost on this particular writer.

As one might guess, there are plenty of salads on the menu, including Muscle Maker Caesar (with zero-carb dressing), Asian Sesame Ginger and Lean & Mean Cheeseburger. However, there’s a plethora of other items available, including sandwiches, wraps, pasta dishes, bowls and skinny flatbreads. There are even customizable smoothies and shakes with “add-ins” (like banana and spinach) and “boosters” (such as fat burners and antioxidants).

Brand Ambassador Ellen Dern and District Manager Charlie McAuliff said that among Muscle Maker’s most popular items include the Signature Wrap and the Arizona Bowl. (The tasty turkey taco salad should certainly be in that list as well.)

And to make things even easier, Muscle Maker offers meal plans—so there are no excuses for not getting healthier. After all, summer (the time for those skin-baring clothes) is right around the corner.

Fogo de Chao’s new offerings

On April 27, the Chicago location of Fogo de Chao (661 N. LaSalle St.; https://fogodechao.com/location/chicago) held a media preview to unveil its newest offerings. The Brazilian steakhouse revealed its largest bar-menu innovation in its 20-year history, including all-new Brazilian-inspired cocktails (including the wonderful mango-ginger martini), Brazilian bites (including chicken sliders) and South American wines. (By the way, per law, calorie amounts are included with drinks—so you’ve been warned.)

Of course, the seasonal table and full-scale churrasco dinner (with enough meat to satisfy any carnivore, served by smiling gauchos) are firmly in place. And, somehow, if you have room for dessert, try the tres leches cake.

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

It was recently the 20th anniversary of Ellen’s coming out—both as a person and as a character on her sitcom. As I watched the retrospectives, a thought came to me—why did Ellen come out? I don’t believe the character was conceived as gay. It wasn’t a storyline that was planned. Back then, I remember people saying, “Well, it’s obvious Ellen Morgan is gay—look how she dresses.” Or, “Ellen DeGeneres can only play gay—did you see Mr. Wrong?” Aside from the many good things that came from DeGeneres’ coming out, I wonder if part of that legacy is also perpetuating the stereotype that gay actors can only play gay roles.

A documentary about Whitney Houston just opened at the Tribeca Film Festival and asks a poignant question—Whitney: Can I Be Me? (It airs on Showtime this summer.) According to reports, the doc implies that Whitney “had a secret love affair with best friend and assistant, Robyn Crawford.” Not true—it was never a secret! One of Whitney’s stylists says, “I don’t think she was gay. I think she was bisexual.” Bobby Brown agrees. He said in his autobiography that he believes Whitney was bisexual and that her family kept her from living with “the woman.” Bobby added, “I really feel that if Robyn was accepted into Whitney’s life, Whitney would still be alive today.” When asked if Whitney and Robyn’s relationship was sexual, he said, “I know.” On the other side, there’s Whitney’s mom, Cissy Houston, telling Oprah it absolutely would have bothered her if her daughter were gay. So what do you do if you’re Whitney? She married Bobby, and Robyn wasn’t happy. Allegedly, Houston bought Robyn a new Porsche that was delivered on the day of the wedding—that kept her quiet through the ceremony! For a few years, all three co-existed somewhat peacefully. Eventually, Robyn completely backed off. People say that’s when Whitney’s life went to hell in a handbasket—which sounds mighty uncomfortable.

Whitney’s funeral really pissed off Aretha Franklin. Aretha was asked to sing at the ceremony, but she skipped it because she was “suffering from swollen feet” and had to rest for a concert at Radio City Music Hall that night. What we don’t know is if anyone told Dionne Warwick? Maybe Aretha thought one of Warwick’s Psychic Friends would mention it. But at the funeral, Warwick announced, “One that loves her dearly, that we happen to also love dearly. She is as much family to us as anyone could ever be. Please, Miss Aretha Franklin.” People started applauding, and Warwick sat down. Then she bounced back up. “Ree’s not here. But she IS here. Always. She loved Whitney as if she were born to her. She is her godmother and…” She was then interrupted—probably by someone who knew that Darlene Love was actually Whitney’s godmother.

Why am I rehashing a story that was pretty well hashed when it happened in 2012? Because Aretha believes that Dionne knew she wasn’t at the funeral and purposely tried to make her look bad. How do we know this? Because Aretha sent a three-page fax to the Associated Press. Yes, a FAX. Just picture Auntie Ree sitting there, feeding paper into a fax machine with one hand, and hot wings into her mouth with the other! The first thing she wanted to clear up with the AP was this godmother crap. “Franklin said she first met Houston when Houston was a child—and she was far too busy to be anyone’s godmother.” Look, she was BUSY! As to Dionne, Franklin said, “She blatantly lied on me … fully well knowing what she was doing.” What stirred this up was when the ladies both found themselves on the red carpet at a screening of Clive Davis: The Soundtrack of Our Lives, also at the Tribeca Film Festival. According to Franklin, Dionne said, “Give me a hug.” Franklin replied, “Oh, hell no. You couldn’t be serious.” When the AP asked if she wanted an apology, Aretha said, “I don’t care about her apology. At this point it isn’t about an apology— it’s about libel. We’ve never been friends and I don’t think that Dionne has ever liked me.” In other words, walk on by, bitch.

In our “Ask Billy” question this week, Roger in Delaware asked: “What do you know about that hot gay bobsled guy? Saw his nude photo and love him. Is he single?”

I am sure Olympian Simon Dunn really wants to be referred to as “that hot gay bobsled guy.” But I suppose there are worse things to be called. Dunn is Australian, retired at the ripe old age of 29, and has a penchant for posing in various stages of undress, to the delight of his social-media followers. Apparently, this is a practice he follows in his private life as well, judging from the photo that leaked. He addressed the controversy online, expressing embarrassment (although he certainly has nothing to be embarrassed about), and apologizing to his family and friends. Part of his statement implies he’s single: “I guess the silver lining is I can just link people to Tumblr next time they ask for such pictures. And remember boys no matter how hot he is don’t send nudes.” What? If hot guys didn’t send nudes, I’d have nothing to share with you on BillyMasters.com.

When “Simon Says” not to send nudes, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. Riddle me this, Bobsled Boy: If someone online wanted to hook up and DIDN’T send you nude photos, would you meet them? Ponder that while checking out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that’s not shy. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I get a complaint from Aretha—by fax! Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
By Carrie Maxwell

Adam Rippon is a U.S. figure-skating champion who plans on competing in the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. Rippon (who came out publicly as gay in October 2015) is also an emerging LGBTQ activist.

Rippon has spent the past six months at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and recently did an NBC Olympic promotional shoot with other 2018 Winter Olympic hopefuls.

In addition to these endeavors, Rippon is also a style icon and choreographer. He is the oldest of six children and was born (1989) and raised in the Scranton, Pennsylvania area.

Rippon will be performing with other figure skaters in the Stars on Ice tour in a variety of locations, including the Allstate Arena on May 6.

Windy City Times: Tell me your journey into the figure-skating world. I understand your mom played a role.

Adam Rippon: I live in Los Angeles now but where I’m from, there are bitterly cold winters. Every winter my mom would bring me to our local skating rink and, at first, I wanted nothing to do with skating; I just wanted to have a giant soft pretzel and a hot chocolate.

Then one year, I asked my mom to go skating and after that I asked her to take me again and again and that’s when I got the figure-skating bug. For my 10th birthday, my mom signed me up for the local group classes. That’s when my interest completely peaked, and it’s been that way ever since.

WCT: What are some of the highlights of your skating career thus far as well as your plans for the future?

AR: Early in my career, it was becoming a two-time junior world champion; however, the career-defining moment was winning my first national title in 2016. In that moment, I felt like my Olympic journey could continue because I was at a make-or-break-it, do-or-die moment. I’d been eyeing that national title for so many years, and winning it was a real breakthrough for me.

WCT: Explain your signature move—3lz, the Rippon Lutz—in a way that non-skaters would understand.

AR: The typical jumping position is where your arms are close and pulled into your chest because that’s the fastest way for you to gain rotation speed. In 1988, Olympic champion Brian Boitano famously would do a triple lutz with one arm over his head and, because it’s so difficult, not a lot of people have done it. I thought I could do it with both of my arms above my head and tried it for the first time almost 10 years ago and, now, people call it the Rippon arm variation in the air.

WCT: What was the catalyst for you coming out publicly? How did your family and friends react when you told them prior to coming out?

AR: After I’d read articles and watched YouTube videos of people telling their coming-out stories, I decided to come out to my friends and family in my early 20s. My mom told me she knew I was gay from an early age and I asked her why she didn’t tell me but she said I had to come to terms with it on my own schedule, not hers. My favorite story is when I told my then-15-year-old brother, who was playing video games at the time and he asked if that’s all I wanted to tell him because he wanted to finish playing his video game.

Then I saw Michael Sam and Tyler Oakley come out publicly—and that’s when I knew it was possible to tell the world. The more people that come out and share their story the better because everyone’s coming out story is different. It’s important if you have some sort of platform that you speak about your circumstances and how you dealt with them because what you say might help others like Michael and Tyler’s coming out stories helped me.

WCT: In terms of advocacy, what do you hope to do within the LGBTQ community? What about [organizations] You Can Play and/or Athlete Ally?

AR: I was inspired by the resistance that sprung up after last year’s presidential election. I think if you’re LGBTQ, a woman or a minority of some sort you shouldn’t feel less than and if you feel that something isn’t right you should let your voice be heard. If you’re quiet you’re being complicit.

I’m blessed because I have a great group of friends and family who love me for who I am but I know there are people who aren’t as lucky as I am—especially transgender Americans, who just want to go to the bathroom without being harassed. Being an ally to the transgender community is a priority for me. This [LGBTQ equality] isn’t a political issue, it’s a human rights issue.

I never thought I’d be someone who went to rallies or protests but I’m doing that now including attending the LA’s Women’s March with my mom.

I’ve reached out to You Can Play and I’m in the preliminary stages of getting involved with that organization and I’ll be reaching out to Athlete Ally in the coming weeks.

WCT: Who do you look up to, and why?

AR: My mom because she had to deal with me as a child. When I told her I was coming out publicly, she got really worried for me because she saw her gay friends not being given the same opportunities she was given but she also told me she had my back in every way possible.

To purchase tickets, visit StarsOnIce.com/get-tickets.html.


Read the entire interview online at www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com.
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CLARK HILL
**COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

**Wed., May 3**

**HIV testing and sexual health resources**
Center on Halsted provides free confidential services here first and third Wednesdays. 1:00pm - 5:00pm Affinity Community Services, 2850 S. Wabash Ave. #100 http://www.centeronhalsted.org/the-net-itl/

Financial and Tax Planning in the Trump Era MB Financial Bank’s LGBTQ Business Resource Group panel discussion on financial and tax planning for businesses and individuals in the Trump Era. RSVP by April 24. 5:00pm - 7:30pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago Tickets: http://www.pages01.net/mbfinancialbank/LGBTQTrumpEraRSVPs517/Form?spMailingID=16400174&spUserID=Ns2DNQgODc2DDUS1&spJobId=43944913&spReportId=0TZQx0TO10E50

**Thursday, May 4**

**Violence survivors’ group** Reserve a spot in the group by emailing avp@centeronhalsted.org or by phone. 5:30pm - 7:30pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago 773-472-6469, ext. 438 http://www.centeronhalsted.org Classic Kink (Part I) Tour of the Smart Museum’s special exhibition Classicisms, including a set of nineteenth-century photographs of suggestively posed young men amid Roman ruins. Led by Benjamin Morgan, Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, the conversation will focus on the public and private dissemination of LGBTQ culture through the clandestine trading of images in the Victorian era, followed by a figure drawing session. 6:00pm - 8:00pm Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Ave. W. Kamau Bell The Book Table Presents the author of The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell: Tales of A 6’4”, African American, Heterosexual, Cisgender, Left-leaning, Asthmatic, Black and Proud Blerd, Mama’s Boy, Dad, and Stand-up Comedian. Host of the Emmy Award-nominated hit CNN docu-series United Shades of America. $3. Ticket holders get free copy of the book. 7:00pm The Arts Center of Oak Park, 200 N. Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park Tickets: http://awkwardkamau.brownpapertickets.com

**Friday, May 5**

**Asians and Friends Chicago Cinco de Mayo Dancing Club RSVP by Wed. May 3 by phone. 6:00pm Mi Tierra en la Vil-lita, 2528 S. Kedzie Ave. 312-409-1573 Tickets: http://www.achtsino.org**

The Chicago Zine Fest Annual celebration of independent self-publishing, free workshops, discussions, readings, One of the largest exhibition markets of zines in the country. Panel with librarian/zinester JC, manga artist Rinko Endo and Chicago comics artist Kevin Budnik, with School of Life Design co-founder Kelly Cre moderating. Exhibitor reading 8 p.m. Through May 6. 6:30pm Co-Prosperity Sphere, 3219 S. Morgan St. http://www.ChicagoZineFest.org

Leann Rimes Grammy-winning vocalist and songwriter in acoustic concert.

**Saturday, May 6**

**EqualityCon 2017** One-day conference in Springfield bringing together LGBTQ community with allies, progressive advocates, civic leaders and community groups. Speakers and panel discussions will cover a wide range of topics including adoption by LGBTQ parents, updating legal documents for transgender Illinoisans, LGBTQ rights in the schools, and more. Hosted by the Equality Illinois Institute, with lead sponsors Lamb-da Legal Midwest Region, Illinois State AFL-CIO, Local 881 UFCW. 9:00am State House Inn, 101 Adams, Springfield, IL Tickets: https://act.myngp.com/Forms/-21510076502094361?mid=359003361841520640

**Sunday, May 7**

**International Family Equality Day Celebration** There will be playful activities that celebrate and show our support for LGBTQ families. Connect with other LGBTQ families in the Hospitality Room, decorate a storybook necklace representing your family and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: Paul Petrungero, 6420 N. Leno-gh, Chicago, IL 60646, USA

**Monday, May 8**

**Gender Revolution** Family fun with Center on Halsted and the Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, picnicking and exploring the documentary film Gender Revolution.”Picnic 5:00 pm, movie 6:30 pm. $10 suggested donation, children under 12 free. 5:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted St. http://www.centeronhalsted.org/events-details.cfm?ID=14187 Tickets: https://communitycenteronhalsted.org/Picnic


**Tuesday, May 9**

**Chicago Gender Society** Social, and educational organization for members of the transgender community, supporters and the public. Meets every month on the second Tuesday. Doors open at 7pm. 8:00pm Stardust Banquet Hall, 5688 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago http://chicagogender.com/about-us/faq/
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