

WINDY CITY TIMES

THE VOICE OF CHICAGO'S GAY, LESBIAN, BI, TRANS AND QUEER COMMUNITY SINCE 1985

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CHANGE IS GOOD

Values+Vision+Mission=Change launches.
Photo of Owen Daniel-McCarter (left) and Alexia Rice-Henry
by Marvalace Garrett

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LET THEM EAT CAKE

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Left to right: Tuckie White, Tara Mallen and Krystal McNeil in *The Cake*.
Photo by Nathanael Filbert

LGBTs vs. the bakers in new play



BETTY SMITH

South Side Help Center founder dies.
Photo from Smith family

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KATE KENDELL

NCLR leader leaving post.
Photo from Kendall

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SHEARS' GENIUS

Jake Shears talks new book.
Photo by Ivan Bideac

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'CALL' WORLD

The Gentleman Caller looks at art, sexuality.

Photo of Curtis Edward Jackson (left) and Rudy Galvan by Michael Brosilow

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In adults with HIV on ART who have diarrhea not caused by an infection



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Mytesi (crofelemer):

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- Comes from a tree sustainably harvested in the Amazon Rainforest

What is Mytesi?

Mytesi is a prescription medicine that helps relieve symptoms of diarrhea not caused by an infection (noninfectious) in adults living with HIV/AIDS on antiretroviral therapy (ART).

Important Safety Information

Mytesi is not approved to treat infectious diarrhea (diarrhea caused by bacteria, a virus, or a parasite). Before starting you on Mytesi, your healthcare provider will first be sure that you do not have infectious diarrhea. Otherwise, there is a risk you would not receive the right medicine and your infection could get worse. In clinical studies, the most common side effects that occurred more often than with placebo were upper respiratory tract (sinus, nose, and throat) infection (5.7%), bronchitis (3.9%), cough (3.5%), flatulence (3.1%), and increased bilirubin (3.1%).

For Copay Savings Card and Patient Assistance, see Mytesi.com

Please see complete Prescribing Information at Mytesi.com.

NP-390-23

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RELIEF, PURE AND SIMPLE

IMPORTANT PATIENT INFORMATION

This is only a summary. See complete Prescribing Information at Mytesi.com or by calling 1-844-722-8256. This does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment.

What Is Mytesi?

Mytesi is a prescription medicine used to improve symptoms of noninfectious diarrhea (diarrhea not caused by a bacterial, viral, or parasitic infection) in adults living with HIV/AIDS on ART.

Do Not Take Mytesi if you have diarrhea caused by an infection. Before you start Mytesi, your doctor and you should make sure your diarrhea is not caused by an infection (such as bacteria, virus, or parasite).

Possible Side Effects of Mytesi Include:

- Upper respiratory tract infection (sinus, nose, and throat infection)
- Bronchitis (swelling in the tubes that carry air to and from your lungs)
- Cough
- Flatulence (gas)
- Increased bilirubin (a waste product when red blood cells break down)

For a full list of side effects, please talk to your doctor. Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or does not go away.

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

Should I Take Mytesi If I Am:

Pregnant or Planning to Become Pregnant?

- Studies in animals show that Mytesi could harm an unborn baby or affect the ability to become pregnant
- There are no studies in pregnant women taking Mytesi
- This drug should only be used during pregnancy if clearly needed

A Nursing Mother?

- It is not known whether Mytesi is passed through human breast milk
- If you are nursing, you should tell your doctor before starting Mytesi
- Your doctor will help you to decide whether to stop nursing or to stop taking Mytesi

Under 18 or Over 65 Years of Age?

- Mytesi has not been studied in children under 18 years of age
- Mytesi studies did not include many people over the age of 65. So it is not clear if this age group will respond differently. Talk to your doctor to find out if Mytesi is right for you

What Should I Know About Taking Mytesi

With Other Medicines?

If you are taking any prescription or over-the-counter medicine, herbal supplements, or vitamins, tell your doctor before starting Mytesi.

What If I Have More Questions About Mytesi?

For more information, please see the full Prescribing Information at Mytesi.com or speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

To report side effects or make a product complaint or for additional information, call 1-844-722-8256.



Rx Only

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Mytesi comes from the *Croton lechleri* tree harvested in South America.

WINDY CITY TIMES

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Above: WCT reviews The Beauty Queen of Leenane.
Photo by Michael Brosilow

online exclusives at
www.WindyCityTimes.com



JUSTIN TIME

Windy City Times reviews Justin Timberlake's Chicago concert.
Photo (left) by Jerry Nunn

LONDON CALLING



See online for a review of LondonHouse, a Chicago hotel for staycationers.
PR photo

SWEET CHARLOTTE

Bill Malcolm's value-travel column looks at Charlotte, North Carolina.

THAT'S SHOW BIZ

Find out the latest about Janice Dickinson, Sam Smith and Keiynan Lonsdale.

plus
DAILY BREAKING NEWS

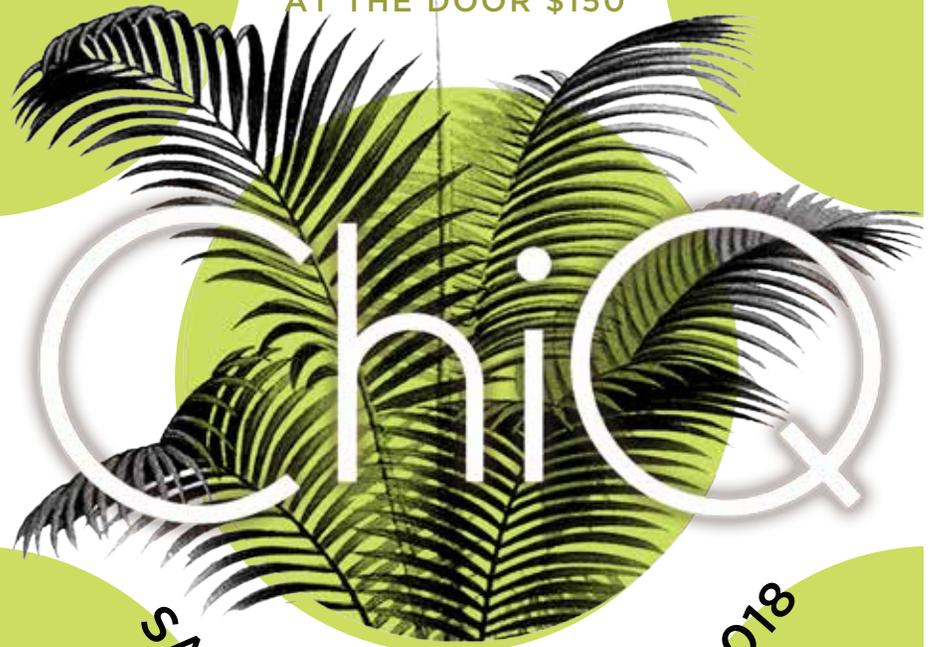


TICKETS

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SATURDAY, APRIL 28, 2018
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ENTERTAINMENT:



HOWARDBROWN.ORG/CHIQ2018

HIV study analyzes social media-based prevention strategies

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Researchers from Cook County Health & Hospitals System (CCHHS) are investigating how social media can be used as a tool to prevent new HIV transmissions.

The study, titled "Keeping it Lite: Exploring HIV Risk in Vulnerable Youth With Limited Interaction," implements ads and other modes of outreach on apps and websites such as Grindr, Tinder and Facebook to enroll both young men who have sex with men as well as transgender women, two demographics especially at risk for HIV infection. Transgender men are being sought as well.

According to CCHHS officials, participants will be offered access to HIV testing and prevention information as will take part in optional data-gathering about their health behaviors, sociodemographic characteristics and socioecological influences.

The purpose is "to make a cohort so we understand what it is about where they are finding their partners—their venues, their personal behaviors and their social networking"—and where they are living, and learning and understanding HIV transmission," said researcher and infectious disease specialist Audrey French.

She added, "Traditional cohort studies have people come in and give a lot of personal time. They require a lot of money and time to understand what's going on with them. The people who wrote this are interested ... in establishing a cohort with very limited face-to-face interaction, so you can understand behavior without it costing a lot. The purpose is not only to understand behaviors but the milieu of risk for these people, to design interventions that would also be cost-effective and use technology."

Funders of "Keeping It Lite" include the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. Other researchers include Sybil Hosek, a clinical psychologist and HIV researcher at CCHS, and Pedro Serrano from the CORE Center's Adolescent and Young Adult Research Group.

Researchers will attempt to recruit subjects via dating apps such as Grindr or Tinder as well as apps such as Instagram, Facebook or Snapchat for younger subjects, French added.

Potential subjects "click on a link, get to a consent form, click through a survey of their behaviors, and then, if they complete the survey, we send them an HIV testing kit and they send it back. We'll keep sending the kits over time. We're not really intervening a lot, except for the test



Researcher Audrey French.
Photo courtesy of French

kits and information about PrEP and where they can get it," she said.

French noted that the project was not intended as "an intense prevention" but, rather, "it's more of a study, although I do believe we will be doing some good for the participants, with the testing and access to information."

Participants will be sent surveys first quarterly, then every six months. Those who might seroconvert during their participation will be linked to care and will be asked to take part in both an analysis of their online social networks and a phylogenetic analysis. Researchers are seeking about 3,000 subjects, French said.

"Our current entry criteria are one of three things," she noted. "Those are having anal intercourse with a man who is HIV-infected; having had an STI in the last six months; or having a sexual partner who has HIV. For younger people, we are going to change the criteria, so that if they had had oral sex with a man, they would also qualify. One of our main goals is to understand the evolution of behavior for very young people—young people who are experimenting but haven't quite gotten to riskier sex."

According to French, the incentive for the enrollment survey, which is slightly longer, and the initial HIV test is \$50. For later surveys and testing, the incentive is \$30.

Information on the study is available at 708-683-9095, lite@cookcountyhhs.org or ayaresearch.org/lite.

GUEST COLUMN

BY BEAR BELLINGER



Casting matters

I want you to think back for me ...

Think back to first time you felt yourself reflected in pop culture ...

Remember that joy ...

Remember that feeling of being seen ...

Remember the freedom it embodied ...

Hold on to that feeling for me.

I am asked, constantly, "why do you care so much about casting? Is your demand for a diverse stage just born out of a selfish desire for more roles? Aren't we all just acting?"

My answer: Yes. Yes, it is, partially, selfish. We are all just acting. There is an inherent inauthenticity to our profession. We are a fun-house mirror rather than a high-definition picture. A stage that does not reflect the diversity of our city, is, in some ways, a truer reflection of the strife of our times.

When I demand more roles for people who

Black girl standing in front of a portrait of Michelle Obama. I see her self-worth reflected and illuminated through this piece of art. I see a new generation seeking representation to remind them that marginalized people are valued.

There's that feeling.

Representation matters, as our very existence is seen as an assault on the sovereignty of some in our society. As laws pass that say that we can't marry, or that your body is not your own, or that they need to go back to "their" country, the very act of standing up and being seen is a revelation.

When we are given the power to represent ourselves and present our stories in our way, we remind the world that we deserve to be here. We remind our country that a plurality of voices and a multiplicity of perspectives is the bedrock of democracy. We remind the next generation that—in spite of what the hate permeating our government may tell them—they are seen and they are loved.

Theater, art, acting, performance—these are spaces of radical empathy. We embody other people; we tell their stories in order to better understand them. We make ourselves, and in turn our audiences, step into shoes that are not their own in order to promote a world where we are all valued. If those shoes are all the same and the players never change, we find ourselves shunning empathy, progress and understanding under the guise of entertainment.

The most entertaining stories, the ones we carry with us the longest, are the ones that challenge us. They are the stories that fundamentally shift our perspectives.

If we can push our stages to reflect a more equitable society, if we can present a Browner, Queerer, more Femme, less homogeneously able-bodied world, maybe we can promote a future where we are all accepted, where we are all seen, where we are all valued. A world where we say to that little girl, "You are smart. You are beautiful. You are everything."

And her only response? "I know."

"But then I see a picture of a beautiful little Black girl standing in front of a portrait of Michelle Obama. I see her self-worth reflected and illuminated through this piece of art. I see a new generation seeking representation to remind them that marginalized people are valued."

look like me, or behave like me, I am asking to place a superficial bandage on the inequalities present in our daily lives. I wonder: What does equity on stage truly mean in the face of a reemerging White nationalist movement other than a selfish desire to do what I love?

But then I see a picture of a beautiful little

Bear Bellinger has been an actor in Chicago since 2008, and has written about race and art for Vox and Medium.



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PASSAGES

South Side Help Center founder Betty L. Smith

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

South Side Help Center (SSHC) founder Betty L. Smith, 76, died March 6 at home from Alzheimer's disease complications and a long illness.

Smith was born Feb. 5, 1942, in Sandhill, Mississippi and at her parent's urging attended the renowned all-Black boarding school Piney Wood's Junior College. Upon graduation, Smith moved to Chicago, where she got a respiratory technician/therapist certification and later a non-profit management certification from Roosevelt University. Smith worked at various hospitals including Rush University Medical Center (Presbyterian-St. Luke Hospital) and Ingalls Memorial Hospital.

It was while working at Ingalls Memorial Hospital in 1987 that Smith encountered many Black men were dying of AIDS. These men were shunned by family, friends and clergy, so Smith founded the non-profit SSHC—the oldest African American-led community based organization addressing HIV/AIDS in the Black community in Chicago and Illinois—to educate the African-American religious community on HIV/AIDS.

Her goal was to help negate the stigma around the disease as well as the spread of the virus. Since then, the mission has expanded to include HIV/AIDS outreach and direct care services for not only adults, but also especially young people of color as well. SSHC focuses on prevention in part by addressing mental, physical and social ills so its clients can live productive lives. When Smith retired in 2008, she passed the executive director torch to her daughter Vanessa Smith, who still holds that post.

Throughout her 21-year career running SSHC, Smith received many accolades and awards and was featured in the Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Tribune, Chicago Defender, Washington Post and Essence Magazine as well as in both local and national TV interviews.

After Smith retired, she continued to provide mentoring and consulting services to Chicago's LGBT leaders from many organizations.

Another way Smith gave back was establishing the Valerie Smith-Reid Scholarship Fund, named after her other daughter, to assist high school seniors across Chicago with their first year college expenses. The fund distributed more than \$60,000 during its 12 year run (1998-2010). Additionally, Smith volunteered at the Greater Chicago Food Depository/Food Bank program at her home church—Chatham Avalon Church of Christ—for many years.

Her last major public appearance was at SSHC's 30th-anniversary celebration last September at the historic Parkway Ballroom.

In 1963, Smith met and married Vannish E. Smith; together, they raised their two daughters Vanessa and Valerie in Chicago's Roseland neighborhood. Vannish died 10 months after the couple celebrated their 47th-wedding anniversary in



Betty L. Smith.

Photo courtesy of the Smith family

2010.

Smith is survived by daughter Vanessa, grandson Aaron, two great-grandchildren—Aaron Jr. and Ariss; siblings, Elex (Lileann), Willie Stewart, Pearl Stewart, Margie (Charles) Ross, Brenda Campbell (Walter) Jenkins, Hattie McGinty, Linda (Lloyd) Robinson and Maryland Thompson as well as a many nieces, nephews, cousins and other family members and friends. She was preceded in death by her husband Vannish and daughter Valerie as well as parents Dolly Mae Turnage and Sam Stewart.

"Betty's determination, paired with her compassion to empower people with the tools to be physically, mentally and spiritually healthy beings, has and will continue to be my inspiration to serve," said SSHC Director of Operations Peaches Fondern. "She did not view people based on their circumstance, but instead saw their individual needs and then did what she could to help them. She would say, 'You have to meet people where they are.' I know it was not a easy task but she did it with such grace and strength. I saw her as a warrior. She always made sure we understood the necessity of being prepared before going into battle. She will be sorely missed by me and everyone else at South Side Help Center."

"We will always remember Betty as the 'onion lady' because she would bag the onions for the food pantry's clients on Saturdays," said Chatham



Betty L. (right) and daughter Vanessa Smith.

Photo courtesy of the Smith family

Avalon Food Pantry Coordinator Mattie Curtis. "She was a loyal supporter of the food pantry for many years and will be sadly missed by our organization."

"I met Betty when I was 15 and she quickly became like a grandmother to me," said former SSHC youth services recipient and staff member Louis Spraggins. "She provided me with financial, emotional and spiritual support when my family was going through hard times and I was unable to get the support I needed from them. I learned so much from her and that has guided me through all of my professional endeavors to this day. These skills have served me well as I have worked in community health at a variety of service agencies and other workplaces over the past 25 years. Her passing leaves a hole in my heart but her work will live on in the many people, including myself, who learned from her."

"Betty was a pioneer," said Thresholds CEO and past President/CEO of AIDS Foundation of Chicago Mark Ishaug. "She fought with love and power to prevent HIV as well as care for those living with HIV/AIDS. Her big brain, huge heart, passion, commitment and vision put her in a class all to herself. And her legacy lives on in Vanessa, in everyone at South Side Help Center, and in AIDS warriors everywhere. We will do her proud by never giving up until we end AIDS—everywhere and for all."

Funeral services were held March 17 at Chatham-Avalon Church of Christ, 8601 S. State St., where Smith and her family spent many years as parishioners.

During the services, Ald. Carrie Austin gave

a copy of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's resolution to the family and instead spoke about Smith as her friend. Austin noted that it was Smith who encouraged her to accept then Mayor Richard M. Daley's appointment to her late husband Lemuel's city council seat in 1994.

Other community leaders also provided words of remembrance at the funeral.

The family has asked that people donate to SSHC in lieu of flowers.

Addie Wyatt to mark 50th anniv. of MLK assassination

The Addie Wyatt Center for Nonviolence Training (AWC) will host "Songs of the Chicago Freedom Movement: A Concert Remix" on Wed., April 4, at 7 p.m. at The Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. West.

The event will mark 50 years since the passing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and be a call to action. In the tradition of the civil-rights movement, it will highlight songs that fueled change in Chicago.

Ticketare at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/songs-of-the-chicago-freedom-movement-a-concert-remix-the-promontory-tickets-42172306504> or PromontoryChicago.com.

SWAT teams respond to suicide threat

BY MATT SIMONETTE

SWAT teams and other police personnel responded the late evening of March 30 and early morning of March 31 after a Lake View man threatened to harm himself in his apartment, according to multiple reports.

Much of the area around the Halsted Street Boystown strip, from Roscoe to Cornelia, was shut down, according to CWB Chicago. Police arrived at about 11:40 p.m. after the man threat-

ened suicide by firearm in his home in the 800 block of Newport Avenue. The incident was ultimately resolved at about 2:40 a.m. and the man was taken to Illinois Masonic Hospital for evaluation. No injuries were reported.

At one point, a brawl broke out amongst 20 persons in the area but police dispersed the crowd.

CWB Chicago's report is at <https://bit.ly/2uFBbBQ>. Chicago Sun-Times has video at <https://bit.ly/2E8A4KK>.

Illinois hospitals excel in HRC's healthcare index

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC) released the 11th edition of its annual Healthcare Equality Index (HEI), which scores healthcare facilities on policies and practices dedicated to the equitable treatment and inclusion of their LGBTQ patients, visitors and employees.

A record 626 healthcare facilities actively participated in this year's survey, committing to

LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. Of facilities surveyed, 418 earned a top score of 100, and received HRC's coveted "Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality" designation. In addition, the HRC Foundation proactively researched key policies at more than 900 non-participating hospitals across the nation.

The following Illinois hospitals received an HEI score of 100: Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, Howard Brown Health, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Rush University Medical Center, University of Chicago Medical Center, University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences Sys-

tem, VA Illiana Health Care System in Danville, VA Edward Hines Jr. Hospital Hines and Rush Oak Park Hospital Oak Park. Other Illinois hospitals listed scored under 100.

The release of the 2018 HEI coincided with the deadline for public comments on the proposed Trump-Pence so-called "conscience" regulation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

See [HRC.org/hej](https://www.hrc.org/hej).

Gay NEIU president to head N.J. university

An openly gay scholar with a strong background in theater was appointed as the new president of New Jersey's William Paterson University, NorthJersey.com reported.

Richard J. Helldobler, 56—currently the interim president of Chicago's Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)—will be the eighth chief administrator in the college's 163-year history when his appointment takes effect on July 1. He had previously been provost and vice president for academic affairs at NEIU.

Frederick Gruel, chairman of the board, said Helldobler will be paid \$330,000 per year, adding that he believes Helldobler is the first openly gay president the university has ever had.

The NorthJersey.com article is at <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/passaic/>

[wayne/2018/03/09/william-paterson-university-hires-openly-gay-president-richard-helldobler/407287002/](https://www.wynews.com/story/news/politics/equality/2018/03/09/william-paterson-university-hires-openly-gay-president-richard-helldobler/407287002/).

LGBTQ Advocacy Day on April 11

Equality Illinois' LGBTQ Advocacy Day will take place all day on Wed., April 11, at the State Capitol, 401 S. 2nd St., Springfield.

According to the event's webpage, "One of [Equality Illinois'] priority issues will be the Inclusive Curriculum Bill, SB 3249, an initiative of Equality Illinois and the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance to teach students the historical events and contributions by LGBTQ people. An LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum can also have a positive affect on students' self-image and make their peers more accepting."

The bus will depart from Equality Illinois, 16 N. Wabash Ave., at 6 a.m., and from Affinity Community Services, 2850 S. Wabash Ave., to travel to Springfield. Once in Springfield, there will be lunch/advocacy training, meetings with legislators and public officials, and a closing event/reception at Springfield's Red Roof State House Inn. The bus will depart Springfield at 5 p.m.

See <https://www.equalityillinois.us/events/2018-advocacy-day/> and email Equality Illinois Director of Civic Engagement Anthony Galloway at agalloway@eqil.org.

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NCLR's Kate Kendell: Tempered for transition

BY SARAH TOCE

Kate Kendell, 57, has spent the past 24 years—nearly two-thirds of her life—at National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR). This December she'll depart her esteemed post as executive director to balance some new opportunities—and pass the torch.

The decision to switch gears is both a personal decision, as well as a professional one for Kendell.

"It feels right that a month away from turning 58, I make a move to something else and make way for a new leader at NCLR," Kendell said.

The juxtaposition of positive and negative in the news during a time of terrific turmoil in the nation also factored into the timing.

"We are in such a time of peril and opportunity. I do not have the corner on how to navigate this moment and I think an undoubtedly younger person, perhaps a leader of color with a different lived experience can be just what is called for at this time," Kendell admitted. "NCLR is positioned to be at the forefront of the coming fights and I think a new leader will only enhance our strategy and vision."

That's not to say she won't miss her post or the organization to which she gave her heart, her

youth, her fight, and drive to for so many years.

"This job has been the honor and privilege of my life," Kendell shared. "I, myself, have been inspired every day by our staff and the clients and community we work with. When I first came to NCLR, in 1994, I was shocked at the harm and damage being done to far too many LGBTQ people in this country. Coming from Utah, where I grew up Mormon, I believed I had seen the worst. Not even close. From losing jobs, custody of kids, family acceptance, self-worth, religious community, hope, we heard from dozens of queer people every day who struggled against what felt like a tidal wave of homophobia and stigma."

The LGBTQ landscape is far different than when Kendell began her career with NCLR.

"Now, within the lifetime of a college graduate, we have witnessed a sea change," she said. "From out celebrities, openly LGBTQ elected officials, fierce and unbowed allies, legal and policy wins. The place of LGBTQ individuals and families is cemented in our culture. We still see the lethality of anti-LGBTQ bigotry, but the ethos in our nation is that such bigotry is wrong and unacceptable. More importantly, we know it is wrong and unacceptable. There is nothing wrong with us. We do not need to be fixed. We are beautiful, gifted and worthy. All this. In 24 years. It is



Kate Kendell.

Photo courtesy of Kendell

brehtaking. I know we have much more to do. But damn, there is no way to not feel good about our odds."

And odds are Kendell will be actively involved in the LGBTQ community even after her high-profile departure from NCLR.

"I expect to be doing a mix of consulting, teaching, speaking, board service, and writing," Kendell said. "I plan to take a sabbatical in July and August to drill down on exactly what this looks like. I'll still go at 100% and will hope to help other leaders and organizations be at their best...I'm hoping my future work will include a good amount of time in the LGBTQ space. These are my people. This is my home."

The incoming executive director has not been announced yet, but Kendell is ready for wise insight when the time is right.

"Your staff is brilliant, your donors are generous and open-hearted, your community is vibrant, resilient, and will hold you up," Kendell said. "This will be the greatest job of your life. Give it your all."

Kendell has committed to being involved in NCLR—from a different perspective.

"Much will stay the same - cutting edge legal and policy work on behalf of the most vulnerable in our community," she said. "To the extent there are new program areas or initiatives, that will be the lucky work of my successor with me as a huge fan, supporter and donor."

As for a favorite memory of her tenure with the organization, Kendell recalled: "This is like choosing my favorite child. But when we won marriage in California in May 2008, it seemed like a door opening to so much more. The entire city was electric, it was a true, full-on community celebration everywhere you went. I don't think I ever stopped smiling. Even our kids were so into it. We had worked so hard on that, Shannon, our Legal Director, had brilliantly argued the case before the California State Supreme Court. It was

the sort of day every lawyer dreams of."

Asked what she would miss most about her family at NCLR, she quipped: "The ridiculously witty e-mails, the random food people bring in, the often hilarious conversations in our staff meetings, the screaming in the halls when we win big, the evident passion and heart they bring to all they do...basically...everything."

Personally, Kendell has another family as well. Her partner Sandy have three children and have been together 25 years.

The lesson she hopes to pass on to newcomers is straightforward, much like Kendell: "Humility, humility, humility."

Praise is often offered when you're up, but what happens when you fall down? Like, flat on your face down?

"I'm pretty passionate and profane," Kendell said. "People who know me know that. After the win at the U.S. Supreme Court striking down Prop 8, [Olson/Boies team legal win], I was asked to moderate the press conference. It was at City Hall; the decision had just been announced. The place was packed. A million cameras that apparently, I thought were props, because I opened the press conference by saying 'Fuck You Prop 8.' On national television. Stations cut away, Matt Lauer and other morning anchors were issuing flustered apologies. I had no idea until much later that we were live. So stupid of me. A chance to speak to millions and I just blurted that out. Obviously a lot of pent of rage over the passage of Prop 8, which eliminated our right to marry just six months after we won in California. Lesson: it's fine to be passionate and profane - but time and place is everything."

For Kendell at this point in her trajectory, timing is indeed—everything.

Keep in touch with Kate Kendell by visiting <https://twitter.com/KateKendell>. National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) updates can be followed here: <http://www.nclrights.org>.



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Author discusses historical novel at Center event

BY VERNON HESTER

As part of Women's History Month, award-winning author and scholar Dr. LaShonda Barnett hosted a book reading at Center on Halsted March 23. Barnett read from her debut novel, *Jam on the Vine* (Grove Publishing), after speaking about the formation of the book's heroine and the story's time frame, and later fielded questions during a lively Q&A.

Jam on the Vine tells the story of Ivo Williams, an out African-American woman with the dream of becoming a journalist in post-Reconstruction Texas at the start of the 20th century. The story deals with the intricacies of gender, race and sexuality during and after the Jim Crow era. Barnett earned the Emerging Writers Award at the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival, and was also given the Stonewall Honor Award by the American Library Association in 2015. *Jam on the Vine* received the Editor's Choice Award from The Chicago Tribune, as well as the Belle Letters 2015 Reader's Prize, and was shortlisted by the Crook's Corner Book Prize.

Before she started the reading, Barnett said, "I wanted to read a highbrow love story that I'd never heard before. I also wanted to touch on the reality of Black consciousness. ... So many stories speak about Blacks being downtrodden and poor and I wanted a different narrative. Many people have one idea of being Black ... a monolithic view when the reality is much different. At the time, the early 1900s, there were 94 Black colleges and universities in the South, while in the North there weren't any. Why not tell a story with uplift instead of tragedy?"

Barnett also spoke about her heroine, who she said was inspired by Ida B. Wells, the celebrated outspoken activist, crusader and newspaper publisher of the 1900s. Said Barnett, "With Ivo, there is love and there is joy. In stories about Black women during the period of the book, a Black woman always gets raped. ... Well, not in mine."

After the reading, Barnett fielded questions from the audience with the topics ranging from gender and sexual intersectionality, the need to see new images and hear new narratives of the Black and queer experience, and the question of why those images aren't reflected in the media.

On March 24, Barnett also hosted a writing workshop at the Center.

Barnett's short stories have appeared in Gemini Magazine, SN Review, The New Orleans Review, Juked and Chicago Tribune's Guernica Magazine. Barnett has also written numerous interviews and served as editor for such anthologies as *I Got Thunder: Black Woman Songwriters on their Craft* and *Off the Record: Conversations with African American and Brazilian Woman Musicians*. She currently teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago.



Dr. LaShonda Barnett.
Photo by Vern Hester

Local hotel exec on IGLTA board

Sandi Robinson, director of sales at The Godfrey Hotel Chicago, is one of four new appointments to the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association's (IGLTA's) board of directors.

Other new appointees include Apoorva Gandhi, vice president of multicultural affairs at Marriott International; Oriol Pamies, co-founder of Moovz—The Global LGBT Social Network; and Maria Tuttocuore, senior executive of sales and marketing for the Monaco government tourist office.

According to a press release, the group "includes LGBTQ and ally business leaders representing tourism social media/marketing, corporate accommodations, destination promotion and boutique hotels."

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From left: Laurie Grauer, David Sinski, Victor Salvo, Arnon Allouche, Gabriel Gomez, Kelly Suzanne Saulsberry, Adi Sadaka and Tamale Sepp. Photo by Carrie Maxwell

Legacy LIVE event focuses on Haifa's LGBTQs, met with protest

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

The Legacy Project and the Center on Halsted (the Center) kicked off the 2018 season of their joint Legacy LIVE series with “When They Go Low, We Go Haifa,” an exploration of Haifa Communities’ House (HCH) Muslim, Christian and Jewish LGBTQ History Project, March 26 at the Center.

A Wider Bridge (AWB), the presenting partner, assisted in the planning and execution of this event.

Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) Policy and Outreach Director Kelly Suzanne Saulsberry welcomed the approximately 50 people in attendance and explained the codes of conduct, including no photography or video or audio recordings as well as the procedure for submitting audience questions via a QR code that was provided to every attendee.

Legacy Project Co-Founder/Executive Director Victor Salvo spoke about the international scope of the Legacy Project and how important it is for LGBTQ people, especially young people, to see themselves in history. Salvo said the need to understand LGBTQ history globally, combined with the interfaith nature of the Haifa LGBTQ History Project, was the reason he wanted to bring HCH’s leaders to Chicago.

AWB Programs and Development National Director Shana Gee-Cohen expressed her gratitude to everyone attending the event as well as her hope that this would “hit the reset button” so important conversations could resume—a reference to the controversy stemming from protests against AWB’s participation in last year’s Chicago Dyke March.

Heartland Human Care Services Executive Director David Sinski spoke about his organization’s international arm and that they consider themselves human rights workers first and foremost. Sinski also spoke about his experience touring

Israel last year through a program AWB sponsors. This tour gave him the opportunity to meet a diverse range of LGBTQ Jewish and Arab people.

Legacy Project Education Initiative Co-Director and Chicago State University Information Studies Professor Dr. Gabriel Gomez facilitated a conversation with HCH CEO Arnon Allouche.

They began by discussing that Haifa is Israel’s third largest city and Allouche noted that HCH for Pride and Tolerance—which opened its doors in Jan. 2017—serves as a focus for local Jewish and Arab communities and LGBTQ culture by offering youth safe spaces, education and counseling on healthy lifestyles, families and relationships.

Gomez asked Allouche about the intention of the house’s name, which includes the word “communities.” Allouche said HCH is the only place in Israel where five religions coexist in one space and where the name is written in Hebrew, Arabic and English. He said, at the moment, it is hard for them to partner with LGBTQ Arab groups in

the city due to religious tensions. Allouche also noted that instead of tolerance he would like to change that part of the name to “inclusiveness.” He said he would like to see the multicultural model of HCH help Haifa to rise in prominence for LGBTQ people so they do not leave for Tel Aviv.

As far as the day-to-day operations are concerned, Allouche said HCH is fully funded by the city although they get impact grants to expand their programming beyond could be done with government funding. An AWB impact grant is being used to help transgender women who gather at the monthly empowerment lunches among other initiatives. Allouche explained that, like other places in the world, transgender people struggle the most in Haifa so HCH helps them with a variety of resources. His whole goal is to create positive change for all LGBTQ people in Haifa.

Allouche added that Haifa is the birthplace of Israel’s feminist movement and he became a feminist after becoming HCH’s CEO. He noted that he still has a lot to learn about feminism. Allouche explained that most of the LGBTQ activists in Haifa are women and that he is a minority as a man within HCH’s leadership ranks. Allouche explained that most of what they do at the house is feminist-oriented because women have been very vocal in helping to suggest HCH programming and services needs.

During the conversation with Gomez, Allouche also noted HCH Program Manager Adi Sadaka’s

work documenting and researching Haifa’s LGBTQ history from Muslim, Christian and Jewish perspectives as the founder of Haifa’s LGBTQ History Project.

Following Gomez and Allouche’s conversation, Saulsberry moderated the Q&A session.

One person asked Allouche about “pinkwashing.” He said he is not a political person so he could not fully address the larger issues suggested by the question. He explained that within Israel many local LGBTQ groups fought back against the government’s ads promoting tourism during Tel Aviv’s Pride Parade two years ago because the money would be better spent to help LGBTQ people in Israel. They won that fight.

Other questions touched on the Palestinian peace movement in Israel, programs that HCH offers that encompass all faiths, religious inclusiveness among HCH leadership ranks and his one and five year visions for the future.

Allouche said it is hard for him to get involved with the peace movement with all the other work he does. He noted that all of the HCH programs are open to anyone and do not really focus on religion. Allouche explained that so far, Arab LGBTQ people are reluctant to engage with HCH out of fear of backlash but they are working on changing that by having their Facebook page translated into Arabic. They hope this will help bridge the divide in the coming years by making it easier for Arab LGBTQ people to see the breadth of programming HCH offers.

Anticipating potential protestors, the Center employed a specialized check-in process on the first floor in front of the elevators, allowing only registered attendees up to the third floor. This included protestors who registered for the event. They, like the rest of the attendees, were expected to use the standardized submission process for questions to express their concerns. Several protestors stood during the Center’s Community and Cultural Events Director Tamale Sepp’s closing remarks to read scripted statements. These statements were inaudible to most of the attendees since they were not mic’d and they were talking over each other. The protestors were not asked to leave and the event ended peacefully.

See LegacyProjectChicago.org and <http://awiderbridge.org/> for more information.

Note: Carrie Maxwell is also a volunteer with the Legacy Project.

Civil-rights figure Linda Brown dies at 76

Linda Brown—whose name became known because of the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court* case that abolished school segregation—has died at age 76.

Because of segregation in her Topeka, Kansas, school district, Brown had to travel by foot and by bus to a school far from home. After her father and other Black families unsuccessfully tried to enroll their children in all-white schools, the NAACP (led by future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall) filed suit.

The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled

that the segregation violated the equal protection clause in the 14th Amendment.

Also, in 1979, Brown reopened another school-segregation case that led to the desegregation of Topeka Unified School District 501 in 1993.

Belmont Rocks lecture at Columbia April 19

Local scholar/historian Owen Keehnen will join Carmelo Esterrich, an associate professor at Columbia College, to discuss LGBTQ life at the Belmont Rocks.

The lecture will take place at Columbia Col-

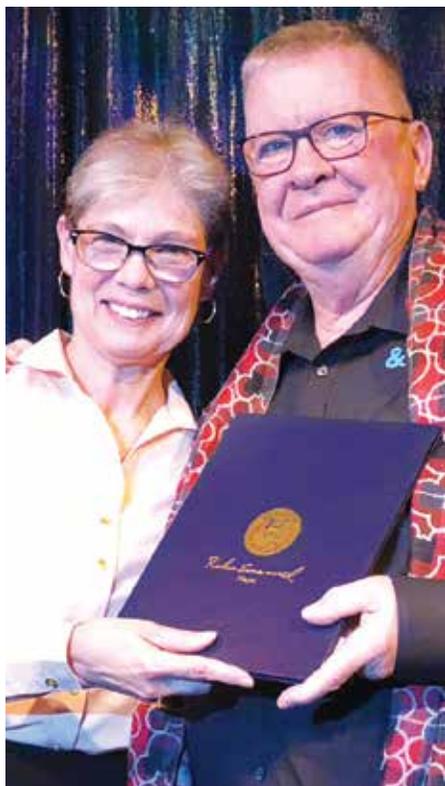
lege, 624 S. Michigan Ave., room 301, on Thursday, April 19, 5:30-7 p.m.

The Rocks is the famed stretch of land along Chicago’s lakefront that was once the only safe place for LGBTQ people to gather in the daylight.

“Preserving Us: Documenting Life at the Belmont Rocks” will probe the history of this now-erased feature of Chicago’s queer life, followed by a Q&A with the audience. The talk will center upon Keehnen’s efforts to preserve and disseminate the legacy of the Belmont Rocks. This event is free and open to the public.

See https://events.colum.edu/event/preserving_us_documenting_life_at_the_belmont_rocks#.WsEqzJPwaCc. For more info, contact Brett King at bking@colum.edu.

Gary Chichester receives Damski Award



Mona Noriega giving Gary Chichester the mayor's proclamation.

Photo by Tracy Baim

Fatal crash involves lesbian moms, several kids

In California, a fatal crash left several members of a family headed by lesbian mothers dead when the family SUV veered off a cliff on the Pacific Coast Highway.

At least five members died, with authorities searching for three others. Among one of those three is 15-year-old Devonte Hart, whose photo crying into the arms of a police officer during a Portland, Oregon, protest of the police shooting of Michael Brown went viral.

Among those who died in the crash are the mothers of the family, Jennifer Jean Hart and Sarah Margaret Hart, both 38, and their foster children—Martin, 19, Abigail, 14, and Jeremiah, 14. Devonte, Hannah, 16, and Sierra, 12, were still missing as of March 30.

However, there are questions surrounding the circumstances surrounding the crash. Dana and Bruce DeKalb, neighbors of the Harts, recently called Child Protective Services complained that he was not being fed. The DeKalbs added that the Harts refused to open the door for CPS and left in the SUV the next morning.

The 21st annual Jon-Henri Damski Award was presented to longtime gay activist Gary Chichester March 31 at Lake View spot Sidetrack, on what would have been Damski's 81st birthday.

Damski was a longtime columnist in gay newspapers, including Windy City Times and Outlines. Wearing his signature Cubs baseball cap, Damski was a regular at many Lake View and Boystown bars and events, and a co-founder of Town Meeting, a group widely credited with putting Chicago's gay-rights ordinance over the top in the late 1980s.

Speakers first at the event were Dean Ogren, Lori Cannon, Bill Greaves and Mona Noriega, who presented Chichester with a mayor's proclamation for his work. Chichester began his activism in the early 1970s, and during his speech he showed his treasured early gay-pride flag.

From left: Dean Ogren, Lori Cannon and Gary Chichester.
Photo by Tracy Baim



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Youth Outlook leader reflects on career, current challenges

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

When Nancy Mullen was hired as Youth Outlook's (then known as QYC) first and only executive director in Oct. 1998—the week Matthew Shepard was murdered in Wyoming—LGBTQ+ youth had almost no place to turn to in the Chicago suburbs for resources or support.

Since then, Youth Outlook, under Mullen's leadership, has given suburban LGBTQ+ youth not only a place to find resources, but also tools so they can speak out on the issues that directly affect them.

"I oversee the operations of the agency," said Mullen. "We are a small team, so some days I am very involved in programmatic issues, some days I am more involved with administrative issues like fundraising and board development. I do not have a set routine, which is one of the things I like most about the job."

When Mullen first started, Youth Outlook was very isolated in the suburbs, so she spent two years focused on making connections with

schools. She said, at first, there was a level of fear around the topic of LGBTQ+ youth and at times she encountered open hostility and accusations that Youth Outlook was "recruiting" young people.

"School reps who were themselves LGBT were often the most reluctant to engage with me because they worried about their jobs being at risk if they came out," said Mullen. "It took about three years to identify a core group of allies in the western suburbs who were willing to have conversations about the risks LGBT young people faced. Now that core group of allies is the backbone of the DuPage County Network for Professionals Supporting LGBT Youth and not only do we talk about those risks, we train mental health providers and school personnel how to better respond to them. Those networks have also come online in Kane, DeKalb and suburban Cook counties over the last couple of years, and may launch in Whiteside and LaSalle as well. So many more professionals are learning about LGBT youth issues and carrying messages back to their places



Nancy Mullen, of Youth Outlook.
Photo cby Doug Hanson

of employment.

"Another huge change I have seen is in the number of trans youth that are using our programs. In the early 2000s, if we met one trans youth in our Naperville site, and then a second one in the Aurora site, and maybe a third youth in the DeKalb site, I would have said we had a lot of trans youth. Now, our Transcend drop in center

for trans and non-binary youth and their allies is our biggest and busiest drop-in center and has been for the last two years."

Mullen recently wrote a letter to the youth of Youth Outlook outlining the challenges LGBTQ+ people are facing in today's political climate, including the barrage of negative messages coming from the GOP.

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"We have a group of young people who are going through this cognitive growth stage while they are regularly hearing negative messages about who they are, from people in power," said Mullen. "They are exposed to messages about it being okay to discriminate against them on all fronts, as well as political and even spiritual leaders calling for their imprisonment, quarantining and even execution. We have seen an uptick in anti-LGBT hate crimes and school bullying across the country.

"Where are the messages that they are okay and are good, kind, decent people who have a right to be respected and treated well? I wanted to tell them that I know hearing these things is hard and nothing about what is going on around them right now is normal or okay. We see them. We care about them. We are still out here fighting for them and we will not stop."

A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mullen grew up in the '70s in South Philadelphia, where she attended Catholic schools, including an all-girls facility.

"There were a few interesting things that happened along my path in South Philly," said Mullen. "This prompted me to write a memoir called 'Urban Tidepool' a couple of years ago that I am considering self-publishing."

Mullen got her bachelor's degree in social work from Mansfield University of Pennsylvania, masters in social work from Syracuse University and is working on an associate of science in pastry arts degree from Elgin Community College.

During 2007-2011, Mullen was the chef-owner of Ovation Catering, Inc.

"Catering work was so much fun," said Mullen. "I decided to do something unrelated to being a social worker, so I started taking culinary classes at Elgin Community College and am now ten credits short of my pastry chef degree."

When Mullen was living in Syracuse she worked for Liberty Resources—which ultimately led her to Youth Outlook—and prior to that, the Salvation Army. Before that, everything she did was clinical.

"I ran a homeless shelter for women living with chronic mental illness," said Mullen. "On my first day, I arrived at this beautifully renovated house and was greeted by the house manager with, 'Someone threw a brick through the bay window last night.' I said, 'Oh, okay. Who do you normally call when this happens?', meaning which window company should I contact for repair. The answer I got was, 'You,' and then she started to laugh. I knew immediately this was going to be a great job."

Currently, Mullen spends most of her free time with her two dogs. She also likes to cook and garden. Mullen said if the opportunity presented itself she would volunteer with one of the women-build Habitat for Humanity projects.

"The social pendulum will always move a bit," said Mullen. "As a community, we moved forward for several years with the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, with ENDA rulings and with marriage equality. Now there is backlash against that forward movement. As difficult as it is to live with the backlash, it is part of the process. The backlash disrupts but it never stops the change. Some days it feels like it is a bit of a struggle in this current patch of dark. If we all lead with our light, we

can illuminate the path for ourselves and for each other. Let's do that. Let's lead with our light."

See [youth-outlook.org/](https://www.facebook.com/notes/nancy-mullen-msw/an-open-letter-to-the-youth-outlook-youth/1756523601039250/). Mullen's letter is at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/nancy-mullen-msw/an-open-letter-to-the-youth-outlook-youth/1756523601039250/>.

Nominations sought for 30 Under 30 Awards

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

The ceremony will take place Wed, June 20. There will be a 5:30 p.m. reception, with the program being 6-7:30 p.m.

Co-hosts this year will be Windy City Times Art Director Kirk Williamkson and 2017 Windy City Times 30 Under 30 honoree Jessie Fuentes.

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

The deadline to nominate individuals is Friday, April 13.

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

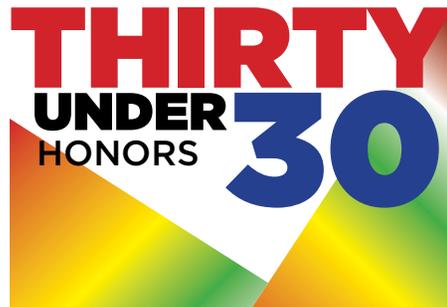
Individuals, organizations, co-workers, etc. can nominate a person by emailing Andrew@WindyCityMediaGroup.com or faxed to Andrew Davis' attention to 773-871-7609. Self-nominations are welcome.

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

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

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

Honorees will be notified in May.



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COMPASS

Values+Vision+Mission=Change announces launch

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

The brainchild of former Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (The Alliance) Executive Director and Transformative Justice Law Project Illinois (TJLP) Co-Founder Owen Daniel-McCarter, Esq. and former The Alliance Associate Director Alexia Rice-Henry, Values+Vision+Mission=Change has launched with a mission to create systemic change and transformation for its clients through services and nationwide college lectures.

For both Daniel-McCarter and Rice-Henry, this endeavor is the culmination of 20 years of combined experience helping people through their work and volunteer endeavors.

Daniel-McCarter's legal experience includes PreK-12 LGBTQ+ affirming policies and legislation, criminal defense and prisoner legal advocacy, identification documents for transgender people and civil rights law. While attending City University of New York School of Law, Daniel-McCarter worked with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Families for Freedom, the AIDS Center of Queens County and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Through his work at TJLP, Daniel-McCarter and his team provided free legal services and additional support to transgender people across Illinois. Prior to co-founding TJLP, Daniel-McCarter worked as the legal director of the TransLife Center where he successfully implemented a program that gave people of all gender identities access to gender-affirming healthcare regardless of their income status.

While at The Alliance, Daniel-McCarter wrote the transgender student inclusion policies that many schools have adopted. These guidelines were cited by the Obama Administration's Departments of Education and Justice in 2016 as best practices for schools to comply with federal anti-discrimination laws.

Rice-Henry has worked in social-justice non-profit administration for almost a decade including a stint as development director at Affinity Community Services and at The Alliance. In these roles she was responsible for managing budgets, human resource issues, grant reports and the overall fiscal health of both organizations.

Among the many grants Rice-Henry obtained for Affinity and The Alliance were from large private donors and state and federal grants (AmeriCorps and the Illinois Department of Human Services). She is also a board member of the Crossroads Fund and does independent consulting work on a myriad of issues.

Rice-Henry honed her skills at North Park University as both an undergrad and graduate student and as an AmeriCorps VISTA member with Illinois Campus Compact at DePaul University; she was also involved with DePaul University's University Ministries Department.

"Our whale tail logo explains/symbolizes some of our values including nourishment to others, balance between people and nature, depth and understanding of the meaningfulness of issues and freedom/resistance to captivity," said Rice-Henry.

Rice-Henry said that everything they do will



Owen Daniel-McCarter (left) and Alexia Rice-Henry.
Photo by Marvalace Garrett

come from a grassroots and values-based perspective. The entities they will support include small organizations and businesses, community organizers, dreamers and schemers in successful financial management, grant writing and values-driven fundraising and event planning. They will also help people across the U.S. change their name and gender markers on their identity documents and educate others on the intersection of the law and gender regulation.

Daniel-McCarter noted that they will help others create community-led legal clinics and teach people how to apply transformative justice models that eschew the prison industrial complex.

"I could not be happier to be partnering with

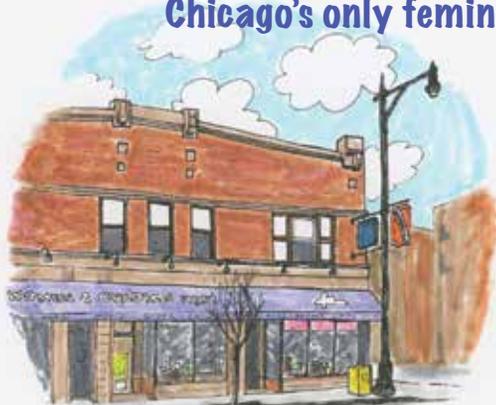
Alexia," said Daniel-McCarter. "She brings a wealth of knowledge in financial management, event planning and organizational operations. Together, we will support dreamers and schemers changing the world in this critical moment in our political history."

"I am really excited about this new venture and the opportunity to provide these services to folks who share our same values," said Rice-Henry.

Addendum: Since the launch of this new endeavor, Daniel-McCarter has moved to Vermont. However, Daniel-McCarter will continue to be involved with the new organization.

See <https://www.valuestochange.com/> for more information.

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AARP survey unveils 'alarming' statistics

"Maintaining Dignity: Understanding and Responding to the Challenges Facing Older LGBT Americans," a new AARP survey, has statistics that are called "alarming" in a press release from SAGE, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of older LGBT people.

Among the findings are that:

—More than half (52 percent) of LGBT adults said they fear discrimination in healthcare as they age.

—Eighty-eight percent of LGBT older people want providers in long-term care (LTC) facilities who are specifically trained to meet LGBT patient needs.

—One-third of LGBT elder Americans were somewhat worried about having to hide their LGBT identity in order to have access to suitable housing. Black and Latino LGBT adults report the greatest concerns about future family support, social support and discrimination within LTC facilities.

The findings in AARP's survey echo SAGE's earlier research on the experiences of the older LGBT community, such as "Out and Visible: The Experiences and Attitudes of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and

Transgender (LGBT) Older Adults, Ages, 45-75."

The report is at <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/life/info-2018/maintaining-dignity-lgbt.html?CMP=RDRCT-PRI-OTHER-LIFE-030618>.

Mayoral wager included LGBT group

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel made a friendly wager with Ann Arbor, Michigan, Mayor Christopher Taylor on the outcome of the March 31 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament Final Four matchup between Chicago's Loyola University and the University of Michigan in San Antonio, Texas.

The mayors wagered local delicacies on the outcome of the game, and the losing mayor also had to make a donation to a charity of the winning counterpart's choice: Chicago's Becoming a Man (BAM) youth mentoring program or the Jim Toy Community Center, an Ann Arbor LGBTQ resource for advocacy, education and community.

Since the Michigan Wolverines won (beating Loyola 69-57 on March 31), Emanuel will have to follow up on his promise to send corned beef and pastrami from Chicago's Manny's Deli. If the Loyola Ramblers had been victorious, Taylor would have had to send Michigan's Zingerman's Georgia Reuben sandwich, his favorite.

The center is named after Jim Toy, who, according to the organization's website, was "the first publicly 'out' man in Michigan (1970). [He] established the first campus center in history devoted to the support of sexual minority group members."

Men Having Babies confab April 14-15

The international nonprofit Men Having Babies (MHB) is once again teaming with Chicago's Center on Halsted to hold a conference at the facility at 3656 N. Halsted St. on April 14-15.

The event will take place on April 14 at 3:30-8 p.m., and April 15 at 9 a.m.-6:30 p.m. at the Center. In addition, MHB is offering a post-conference happy-hour party at Chicago's Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted St., on Saturday, April 14, 8:30-10:30 p.m. The event is offered in cooperating with local and national LGBT organizations, and is open to the Chicago LGBT community at large.

The conference brings together medical and legal experts, current and future parents, and surrogate mothers. Prospective parents will benefit from practical and personal peer advice, and have opportunities to meet a wide range of lead providers from at the Gay Parenting Expo, in

breakout sessions and in private consultations.

The Chicago event is one of six annual conferences that Men Having Babies holds worldwide, with other conferences taking place in Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Brussels, New York, Dallas and San Francisco.

Visit MenHavingBabies.org/chicago.

Pulse gunman's widow found not guilty

In Florida, a jury found the widow of the gunman in the 2016 Pulse nightclub massacre not guilty of helping her husband plan the mass shooting in Orlando that killed 49 people in the LGBT-inclusive spot.

The verdict was returned March 30 in the case of Noor Salman after the jury deliberated for two days.

Prosecutors claimed Salman knew about her husband's guns, his penchant for watching violent Muslim extremist videos and his plan to attack a location—but did nothing to stop him.

Salman—who faked life in prison if convicted—was charged with providing material support to the Islamic State and with obstructing justice.



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**Dana
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MOMBIAN

Two new books show ways to include LGBTQ characters

Two new books—one for middle grades and one for young adults—show two different ways of incorporating LGBTQ characters and themes into a story.

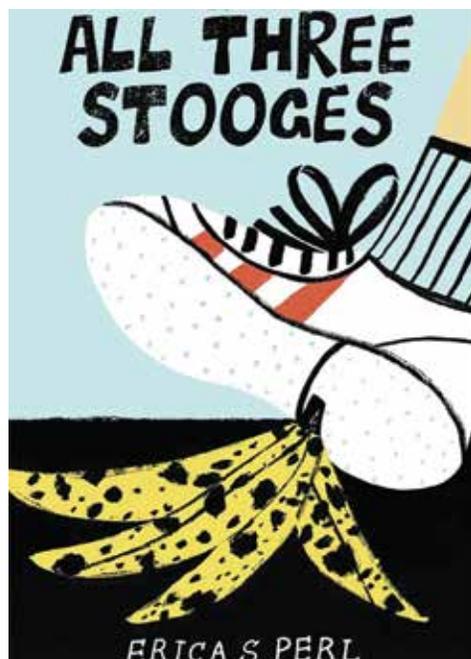
In Erica Perl's middle-grade novel *All Three Stooges* (Alfred A. Knopf), seventh-graders Noah and his friend Dash share a love of comedy and a somewhat reluctant commitment to their bar mitzvah preparations. Noah has a sister and two moms, and the latter are introduced without fanfare—this isn't a book "about" having two moms.

When Dash's father Gil dies unexpectedly, however, Dash withdraws from Noah and finds comfort with others, leaving Noah wondering why he was abandoned, how to help his friend, and how to deal with his own grief at losing a significant adult in his life. He and Dash had spent many a sleepover at Dash's house horsing around with his single dad, who cooked them breakfast in the mornings.

While Perl makes no big deal of Noah's two moms, she is nevertheless sensitive to how having two moms might affect Noah in certain situations. Noah explains, "I love my moms. They are the awesomest. With them, I have exactly no need for a dad. But want is different. I always felt like, if I had a dad, I'd want him to be like Gil."

As the lesbian mom of a teen son, I thought hard about that passage before realizing that Dash is expressing something I've heard other sons of queer moms say, and which is often hard for us moms to hear. It's natural for them to wonder what it's like to have a dad, I believe, in the same way they might wonder what it's like to have anything a friend has that they don't. Gil had helped satisfy that curiosity for Noah, even as Noah was perfectly happy with his moms. That's a lesson we single or same-sex parents should keep in mind if our children ever express a similar interest in having a parent of another gender. It doesn't mean they love us any less, that they really want to get rid of one or both of us, or that they are less well-adjusted than peers with different-sex parents.

To dwell on that here, however, is to emphasize it more than Perl does. It is part of Noah's story, but far from the bulk of it, which centers on broader



themes of friendship, growth, living through grief, and the awkward social interactions of middle school. Despite dealing with somber issues like suicide and mental illness, though, the tale has copious doses of humor, conveyed through Noah's love of comedy, that keep it from gloom. Jewish families in particular will appreciate how Noah's bar mitzvah preparations and his relationship with the rabbi are woven into the narrative—but this is a coming-of-age tale with wide appeal.

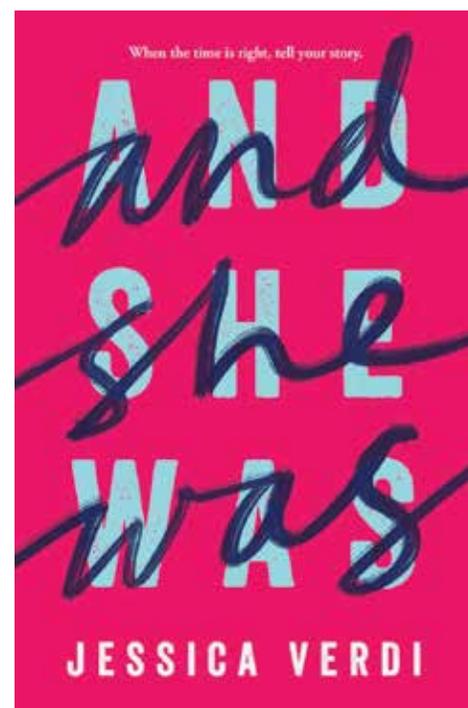
In contrast, Jessica Verdi's *And She Was* (Scholastic) is a young adult novel that makes one character's LGBTQ identity and another character's response to it the center of the tale. Dara Baker is 18, just out of high school and still living with her single mom, Mellie, with whom she has a close relationship. She is considering a career in professional tennis, but struggling to pay for lessons and tournament fees. When she needs a passport to go to an international tournament and searches for her birth certificate, she discovers that Mellie was assigned male at birth. Dara's birth mother, Mellie's wife, died in an accident shortly after Dara was born, and Dara has no memory of her or that side of the family.

Dara is upset with Mellie not because she is trans per se, but because, as Dara sees it, Mellie's desire not to disclose that she is trans has led to Dara growing up without knowing her relatives and to unnecessary financial insecurity—the relatives are rich. Dara, who is White, sets off on a journey to discover the rest of her birth family, accompanied by her Indian American best friend Sam. What she discovers, however (which I won't spoil here), forces

her to rethink many of her assumptions and goals.

The story is told mostly from Dara's first-person perspective—but includes an ongoing e-mail correspondence between Dara and Mellie. Mellie's messages enable her to tell her own story and explain to Dara why she made the choices she did, which were not always for the reasons Dara guessed. The emails show Mellie's strength and resiliency, while also conveying the harms of anti-LGBTQ bias, not only on LGBTQ people, but also on their children.

Dara's discovery of Mellie being trans may in some ways echo the trope of trans identity being a big plot surprise, with the trans person painted as a deceiver. But Verdi clearly shows that Mellie hid her identity only out of fear imposed by others, and from her desire to protect her child, not because of



anything inherent about trans people. In the end, Mellie comes across as the most stable, understanding (though not perfect) character in the book, and we question more of Dara's choices and behaviors than hers.

Verdi has written a book that should be welcomed by teens with trans parents and by anyone seeking a tale about the relationships between parents and children and the sometimes difficult choices we make for love.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (Mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.

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WCT reviews the production *A Taste of Things to Come*.

Photo by Brett Beiner Photography

THEATER

'This Is Us' writer's drama covers intolerance, same-sex marriage

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

The Supreme Court is expected to rule this summer on whether a Colorado baker can legally refuse a gay couple's request for a wedding cake. Playwright Bekah Brunstetter wondered how the conflict would play out if the opposing parties had been lifelong friends who genuinely loved each other.

That's the dilemma at the root of her new work *The Cake*, opening in previews April 8 at Edgewater's Rivendell Theatre. We caught up with Brunstetter while she was on hiatus from her day job as a producer and writer for the NBC monster-hit *This Is Us*. The playwright and TV writer (*American Gods*, *Switched at Birth*) talked about weddings, family and the healing powers of a tasty dessert.

Windy City Times: You started workshopping this play in 2015, right before [same-sex] marriage became legalized. Did you worry that it would lose relevance?

Bekah Brunstetter: I actually did question whether it would still be relevant. After the marriage ruling, I was like, 'do people even care about this that much anymore? Trump was just this guy that everyone seemed to be laughing at. When he became president, it became painfully clear that all the progress we thought we'd made was in many respects for naught. At that point, the play became incredibly necessary to me.

WCT: The wedding cake case before the Supreme Court deals with people who are strangers to each other. Why did you make Della, the

baker in the play, so close with Jen, one of the women getting married?

BB: It made it more personal to me. The people I know who have beliefs like Della's—they're not these evil, awful people. They aren't idiots. Some of them are my family members. They are deeply connected to me. I felt like we'd heard the story of how this would play out between strangers—that's the Colorado case. I wanted to tell the story of two people who loved each other, and couldn't just dismiss each other.

I knew I wanted to write something that put a person with these deeply held religious beliefs at the center of her life.

WCT: You've set *The Cake* in Winston-Salem, which is also the city you're from. Is it autobiographical?

BB: I come from a conservative family. And although I don't consider myself conservative by any means, I have an empathy for my family, for people like Della, that I cannot shake. I challenged myself to bring a liberal audience to empathize with Della. That started out as a very personal quest—to humanize people like her.

I'm straight, but I was planning my wedding while I was writing this. And I started wondering, what would my parents do if I brought home a woman? How would I tell them? How would they react? I have a loving family, but it's not the kind of family where you want to rock the boat.

My plays are always talking to somebody. I'll write something and it's like 'this is what I'd say to this person if I had more balls.' I definitely have conversations in plays that I wish I could

have in real life.

WCT: Did the piece change at all after the 2016 election? It seems like the new administration in Washington [D.C.] put things in a different context.

BB: The things that come up in 'The Cake' became incredibly important to me after the election. I saw so much anger and fear. I wanted to put something into the world that showed people engaging.

I think there are truly evil in power in some places now. But I didn't want to write about them. This isn't about politicians. It's about a woman who owns a small bakery and a young woman who has been her daughter in some respects and who is terrified because her entire world view is being challenged. I didn't want to demonize anyone. I think plays can get people

talking about issues in a way that movies or articles or new reports can't.

WCT: Your stage directions state that there should be cake served to everybody after every show. Why is that important?

BB: Cake brings people together. Everybody loves cake. People gather over cake—for birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, for all sorts of things. I mean, I can't insist that theaters must serve cake every night. But I hope they do. If people talk about the play, great. If they just eat cake, great. I feel like there's so much shit right now. Cake is just one thing that's totally good.

Rivendell Theatre's production of *The Cake* opens in previews April 8 at Rivendell Theatre, 5779 Ridge Ave. Tickets are \$28-\$38; visit RivendellTheatre.org or call 773-334-7728.



Tuckie White (red shirt), Tara Mallen (behind counter) and Krystal McNeil (yellow shirt) of *The Cake*

Photo by Nathanael Filbert

THEATER REVIEW

The Luckiest People

By Kerry Reid

Playwright: Meridith Friedman

At: Athenaeum Theatre,

2936 N. Southport Ave.

Tickets: 773-935-6875;

AthenaeumTheatre.org; \$22-\$32.

Runs through: April 29

BY KERRY REID

The graying of American audiences comes in for a lot of handwringing in thought pieces about the future of American theater. Yet plays that deal in some way with aging or ill parents pop up frequently. (Clare Barron's "You Got Older" at Steppenwolf earlier this year being just one example.) Like the people in the front of the house, the older characters onstage aren't ready to leave the theater of life just yet.

In Meridith Friedman's *The Luckiest People*, now in a "rolling world premiere" with Stage Left



Sandy Elias (left) and Nelson Rodriguez in *The Luckiest People*.
Photo by Tyler Core

through the National New Play Network, the senior character is Oscar Hoffman (Sandy Elias), a New York native transplanted a few years earlier to a senior-living facility in Northern California by his physician son, Richard (Nelson Rodriguez). His wife, Dorothy, has just died from Parkinson's, his own vision and mobility are on the wane, and he wants to move in with Richard and his partner, David (Christopher W. Jones). But the two men are planning to adopt a six-year-old boy—and with Oscar's daughter, Laura (Lisa Herceg), on her

way back to her husband and son in Shanghai, Oscar feels like the odd man out in his own family.

Friedman's play, directed by Jason A. Fleece, doesn't rely on big reveals of family secrets or epic battles, a la August: Osage County, to make points about how hard it can be to accept the caregiver role. Instead, it unpeels the conflicts through a series of small moments that add up to an honest evaluation of what our responsibilities

are to each other.

Rodriguez is especially good as Richard, whose self-protective tendencies make it hard for him to really open up to others. He's well-matched by Herceg's acerbic but self-excoriating Laura, and the dialogue between the two provide some of the biggest laughs in the show. Jones' warm-hearted David, whose shared love with Oscar of musical theater (including *Funny Girl*) provides the play's title, provides a calming balance to the sniping Hoffmans. Unfortunately, we don't learn nearly as much about David's background—a fact that Friedman turns into a joke when it's clear that Laura can't remember where he's from or what he does for a living.

This isn't a show packed with emotional histrionics, and there are moments where Fleece's staging pulls its punches when it could afford to raise the stakes. The ambiguity of the ending doesn't entirely land. But on its own modest terms, *The Luckiest People* succeeds at providing an honest portrait of how grief changes our perceptions of family roles. People who need people ... well, you know the rest.

THEATER REVIEW

The Beauty Queen of Leenane

Written by Martin McDonagh

At: Northlight Theatre

9501 Skokie Blvd, Skokie

Tickets: \$30-\$76

Runs through: April 22

BY KAREN TOPHAM

Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is somewhat difficult to "like." It takes place in a rundown house in a rundown county of Ireland,

and is populated by (mostly) unlikable people, centered on a bitter woman and her 70-year-old, equally embittered, selfish mother. One of the other two characters is a self-centered, impatient and truculent young man who dreams of the same escape to England that has already failed for his brother (as well as the central character). However, Northlight Theatre artistic director BJ Jones has directed this with an eye toward milking this dark comedy for all of the humor it contains, and it does contain a lot.

Even in the most disquieting of scenes, he is not averse to creating a comic pause. The play revolves around the turbulent relationship between Maureen Folan (Kate Fry) and her mother Mag (Wendy Robie). It's clear from the beginning

that these women have little love remaining for each other, if indeed they ever had any. Mag is so difficult to handle that Maureen's two sisters have washed their hands of her.

The script affords Maureen a love interest in the guise of Pato Dooley (Nathan Hosner), who sends a message through his younger brother Ray (Casey Morris) that invites Maureen to come to a going-away party he's throwing for a group of "Yanks." To both of their surprise, the two people hit it off almost immediately and end up back in Maureen's room. Whether anything can last with Mag around, though, is problematic.

The acting is particularly strong, especially the two leads. Fry's Maureen is a severely put-upon daughter, responding spitefully to each

one of her mother's demands and ignoring her as much as possible ... which isn't much with an old woman who, out of her own spite, dumps her chamberpot into the kitchen sink each morning without even rinsing it out. Robie is equally abrasive as Mag, turning egotistical nastiness into an art form. And it would be easy to root for her failure except that Maureen is not any better as a human being.

Nonetheless, for all of this, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, in Northlight's latest production, is a remarkable and surprising experience. With top-notch acting, very funny direction and a provocative script by McDonagh (recently nominated for an Oscar for *Three Billboards Outside of Ebbing, MO*), it is a dynamite way to spend an evening.

THEATER REVIEW

A Taste of Things to Come

Written by: Composers/Lyricists Debra Barsha and Hollye Levin

At: Broadway Playhouse at Water Tower Place, 175 E. Chestnut St. Tickets: \$30-\$75

No Exit Cafe, 6970 N. Glenwood Ave. Tickets: \$30-\$69. BroadwayinChicago.com

Runs through: April 29

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

In the second act of *A Taste of Things to Come*, a Latina character—previously played as an ethnically non-specific woman—demands to be called "Maria Magenta" and reveals hitherto unknown "Hispanic" roots. She sings this:

"Maria likes it spicy/With her hot sauce on the side/Maria loves it spicy/she likes her beans refried/She needs the whole enchilada/to keep her satisfied." Sweet Cheez-Whiz on a Triscuit. Even if you buy into the nominal context the song comes with, referring to Latinas as "spicy" and Latinos as "enchiladas is #problematic. At

best. Ditto putting a glistening blonde onstage and having her be a WASP in act one and speaking in a generic Caribbean accent in act two.

Here's the thing. I want to whole-heartedly support this show. It was written by women and features an all-female cast, an all-female band and a female director/choreographer. Composers/lyricists Debra Barsha and Hollye Levin have fought to make a place for themselves in a field that is overwhelmingly male.

A Taste of Things to Come is, however, pretty unsupportable. Talking about Latinx in terms of spicy food and isn't the only issue here. The characters are cliched. The staging is troubled. The music is pleasant but as forgettable as a K-Tel ad. Could director/choreographer Lorin Lataro have saved this show? It's hard to imagine this script working under any circumstances.

Taste unfolds in a kitchen as four best friends talk and (nominally) cook. The first act is set in 1957. The second act is in 1967. The first act has the women trying to win a recipe sweepstakes by creating a meal with "international flair" (think Lime Pretzel Jell-O salad, canned crab canapés and shrimp dijon). The second act jumps to 1967, when the women smoke "Mary Jane," talk about bra burning and use a lot of

words like "groovy" and "you dig" and "far out."

The characters are not characters but types: There's the daffy blonde; the smart, perky brunette; the red-headed mother of a many small children and the raven-haired single vixen. Everything unfolds in a Winnetka kitchen.

In the first act the gals establish their defining traits and run through the funny-in-retrospect-but-not-really edicts of the time. In the second act, the women spill secrets they've uncovered about their pasts and give each other updates on their lives. They sing of empowerment. ("Don't define me with just one noun/ I got a whole lotta shakin' goin' down.")

The music throughout is fine; the first act mines the sounds of '50s rock and pop in the first act. A gentle version of the sounds of the '60s informs the second act. The kitchen set works, and the backdrop of retro-ads for Lucky Strikes, Necco Wafers and Creamola is striking and fun.

But the show only delivers only a vapid view of the decades its purports to explore. It's as shallow as the ads or the era. And as problematic.

CRITICS' PICKS

Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, through April 15. Hailed as a clash of queens—Mary of Scots vs. Elizabeth of England—it's far more about the power game behind the throne, and realpolitik hasn't changed much. JA

Sweeney Todd, Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre at the No Exit, through April 29. For this final performance in Glenwood Avenue's most intimate playhouse, Fred Anzevino's troupe brings Stephen Sondheim's Victorian London opera even closer to spectators. MSB

Merchant on Venice, Rasaka & Vitalist Theatre Companies at the Greenhouse, through April 15. A decade after premiering at Silk Road Rising, Shishar Kurup's SoCal-based adaptation of Shakespeare's most controversial play is as timely and perplexing as it was to Elizabethans in 1596. MSB

On Your Feet, Broadway in Chicago at the Cadillac Palace, through April 8. Unlike that other boffo musical celebrating the immigrant experience in these United States, you can actually get tickets to this Gloria Estefan-powered extravaganza, which includes 20+ hits and a cast that's a blaze of energy and talent. CES

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Sullivan

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photo by Nathanael Filbert

THEATER REVIEW

hang

Playwright: debbie tucker green
 At: Greenhouse Arts Center,
 2257 N. Lincoln Ave.
 Tickets: GreenhouseTheater.org;
 \$42.50-\$52.50
 Runs through: April 29

BY BRIAN KIRST

We live in a world where the worst truths of the lives of near-strangers are forever orbiting our consciousness. These unfortunate realities can present themselves in public forums or in internet postings, but what gives them a commonality is the fact that, as witnesses, it is almost always difficult to come up with the right words to express our sympathies. The women in *hang*—debbie tucker green's 2015 emotional mystery-play, being given its U.S. premiere in a taut production by Remy Bumppo—know this feeling very well.

Brought into a brightly lit British office setting by two cautiously overeager white female officials, a young Black woman is treated to a series of niceties and rambling small talk. It is clear something is at stake, though. The visitor's hands tremble and she treats every kind suggestion with a mute blankness or a terse, uninterested reply. It eventually becomes clear that the women know each other from a previous encounter and that there is some sort of tragic circumstance that



Patrese D. McClain in *hang*.
 Photo by Michael Courier Photography

links the three together. But the concerned statements of the women in power do nothing to dim the anger of the distraught figure in their midst and eventually the nature of the crime committed against her and the brutal decision she is being forced to make is revealed.

While green's script unfolds with a sweet sense of surprise, the issues she deals with are clearly

SPOTLIGHT

The DuSable Museum of African American History and Black Ensemble Theater are combining forces to for the **Jackie Taylor Drama Series**, a series of staged readings curated by its namesake, BET's founding artistic director. The plays include Ervin Gardner's *National Anthem*, an exploration of protests and professional athletes, (April 7, 8); Reginald Williams' *The Plea*, which deals with the toll violence takes on Chicago neighborhoods, (April 14, 15) and L. Maceo Ferris' *In the Shadow of Justice*, which delves the lives of two Black police detectives in Chi-



cago (April 21, 22). DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 E. 56th Pl., \$35; Black EnsembleTheater.com

Caption: Photo of Jackie Taylor by Daniel Nicholas

presented. She reasons, powerfully, that it is almost impossible for people to truly grasp another person's pain especially when circumstances of chance, race and class serve as constant dividers. Sometimes all that can be done is to support one another in unknowing, heartstruck silence.

Nicely, this production not only showcases powerful roles, on stage, for women, but most of the major behind the scenes craftspeople are women, as well. This energy gives the production a sense of common purpose and truthful energy. Keira Fromm directs with scalpel sharp reasoning while Linda Buchanan's scenic design gives the situation the appropriate sense of time and place. Meanwhile, Christine Pascual's accurate costume

design and Christine A. Binder's precise lighting define the piece, as a whole.

As the traumatized mother at the heart of the story, Patrese D. McClain radiates with both fury and ironic posturing. As with the other performers, her English accent seems spot-on throughout the proceedings, as well. Eleni Pappageorge, meanwhile, brings a more lighthearted, even handed sense to the proceedings. As always, it is a joy to watch Annabel Armour, as Pappageorge's more seasoned, but truly tender colleague. A multiple Jeff Award winner, Armour allows all the conflict and jangled emotions of the circumstances here to register, fully, in her body and her face.

THEATER REVIEW

Pretty Woman:
The Musical

Written by Garry Marshall and J.F. Lawton,
 with songs by Bryan Adams and Jim Vallance
 At: Oriental Theatre
 24 W. Randolph St.; BroadwayInChicago.com
 Tickets: \$33-\$125
 Runs through: April 15

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

Within the first 10 minutes of the new musical *Pretty Woman*, a prostitute is found beaten to death in a dumpster. Everybody shrugs and moves on. This pretty much sets the tone for the evening.

Based on the 1990 movie of the same name, *Pretty Woman the Musical* is a misogynistic piece of male-fantasy propaganda.

Pretty Woman is as rooted in the male gaze as a Playboy pictorial. There's no nudity, but the message is the same: If you look like you just stepped out of a centerfold and act like a quirky manic dream girl who bathes in innocence and unicorn sparkles, you will live happily ever after.

Here's the reality: Sex work is a valid career choice for many, not (as it is for *Pretty Woman's* Vivian Ward) a source of constant shame and disappointment. Research the stats, and you'll see sex work is also among the most dangerous professions in the world. The average prostitute in the U.S. starts working at 14. She is 400 times



Samantha Barks and Steve Kazee in *Pretty Woman: The Musical*.
 Photo by Charles Osgood

more likely to be murdered on the job than women in other professions. She will be raped eight to 10 times a year. She works for a pimp who controls her money.

Pretty Woman's all-male creative team (director/choreographer Jerry Mitchell, bookwriter J. F. Lawton, music and lyrics by Jim Vallance and Bryan Adams) offers two sides of prostitution: One is the dead woman in the dumpster. The other is a world of penthouse suites, bubbly bathtubs and sugar-coated strawberries.

Burn. It. All. Down. (Figuratively, of course, as I am not advocating arson.)

Pretty Woman sticks largely to the movie's nearly 30-year-old script. Vivian (Samantha Barks) is a hooker with a heart of gold, a small-town gal who knows in her heart of hearts that she is better than your average Hollywood Boulevard streetwalker.

She's adorably charming, a wide-eyed, adult version of Shirley Temple if Shirley Temple grew up to trade in her tap shoes for blowjobs. We're to believe Vivian is empowered because (as is oft repeated lest you miss the empowerment) she "says who, when and how much." Despite the insistent redundancy, these are empty words. If

Viv doesn't say "yes," "soon" and "at least \$300," she will be evicted from her apartment.

The rent crisis is averted when Vivian picks up Edward (Steve Kazee), who has more money than God, but is also a workaholic who doesn't realize how empty his lonely life is. That is until, of course, Vivian and her heart of gold melt his heart of stone by showing him that money can't buy happiness. The plot is as predictable as it is preposterous.

When Edward and Vivian have sex, it's the kind of sex that Erica Jong famously described as the "zipless fuck." There's no sweat or clumsiness or weirdly placed hair or smeared makeup or embarrassing noises. To quote Jong: "Zippers fell away like rose petals, underwear blew off in one breath like dandelion fluff." It's like watching a cheesy soft-focus ballet.

As for Adams and Vallance's score and lyrics: The former is forgettable and derivative of the three-chord pop that reigned in the early 1990s. The latter insists that if you wear the right clothes, you will transform into your best, most empowered self. Granted there's a kernel of truth there—clothes can have transformative powers. But in *Pretty Woman*, empowerment is tied directly to access to a credit card.

There is plenty of talent on stage in *Pretty Woman*. That only puts the wasted opportunities the show presents into stark relief. If they'd had even one woman on the lead creative team, maybe *Pretty Woman* wouldn't be as heinously sexist, tone deaf and offensive as it is. Then again, maybe not.



From left: Jenna Steege, Kelley Holcomb and Reid Coker in *How I Learned to Drive*.
Photo by Joe Mazza/Brave Lux

THEATER REVIEW

How I Learned to Drive

Playwright: Paula Vogel

At: The Artistic Home, 1376 W. Grand Ave.

Tickets: \$28-\$32

Runs through: May 6

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Throughout the ages, love obsessive, forbidden and/or undying has been exalted in Romantic literature. Pity the man who pledges his heart to a damsel herself little more than a child, however. (Before you go “Eeew,” remember that this category includes Edgar Allen Poe, Lewis Carroll and Elvis Presley.) Not only must he suffer the censure of society and, in many instances, the law, but his devotion is doomed to end in disaster and ruin. Little girls don’t remain little girls, you see, but grow into adult women, who leave youthful companions to follow their own path.

Paula Vogel’s memory-play makes a fair case for the illicit attraction of Li’l Bit and her uncle-by-marriage Peck: Their immediate kin’s social values reflect the barnyard culture still indigenous to the Southern United States in the early ‘60s, making the favored topic of conversation at holiday gatherings the progress of the clan’s procreative capabilities. When the womenfolk exchange confidences, there is general agreement that males are selfish rutting animals to be repelled by any means necessary and copulation, an excruciation to be endured. In such a tribal environment, is it any wonder that a smart, mature adolescent and a shy, self-effacing war veteran should find solace in each other’s company?

This attitude represents a paradigm shift on the popular image of pedophiles as rapacious bullies

ripping teddy bears from victims’ arms before consigning their prey to a fate worse than death. Nowadays, we confer heroic status on penitents striving to atone for gender-linked misbehavior, but in 1997, Vogel’s courage lay in her willingness to explore the extenuating complexities of this elusive dynamic—the ambiguity of legal prohibitions regarding age of consent, the collusion of family members in promoting a preoccupation with erotic pursuits to the exclusion of the benevolent aspects frequently augmenting intergenerational companionships.

Yes, but how do audiences in 2018 suppress their horror and repugnance for the 90 minutes required for the star-crossed fugitives—played with unbiased compassion by Elizabeth Birnkrant and John Mossman under the direction of Kayla Adams—to arrive at their inevitable parting of ways? The Artistic Home never crosses the line into gratuitous vulgarity, instead invoking a purview that, while undeniably disapproving, opens the way to a wider understanding of the aberrant conduct under scrutiny.

THEATER REVIEW

Smart People

Playwright: Lydia R. Diamond

At: Writers Theatre, 325 Tudor Court, Glencoe.

Tickets: 847-242-6000; WritersTheatre.org;

\$35-\$80

Runs through: June 10

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

Writers Theatre’s production of *Smart People* is sleek, stylish and zinging with witty repartee. It is also more of an intellectual exercise than a dramatic one. As the titular brainy folks engage in razor-sharp banter, playwright Lydia R. Diamond makes the audience privy to the kind of

performative cocktail conversation deployed by people out to impress more than connect. What’s said is often fascinating, but it’s impressive for its brains rather than its heart.

Director Hallie Gordon’s top-tier cast is on its A game from start to finish. But as the paths of the four characters intersect, *Smart People* becomes more than a little contrived. It’s as if the players were game pieces, and Diamond a strategist carefully positioning them to maximize their eloquence.

Smart People unfolds as a series of conversations, primarily about race but occasionally branching into sex. The players include Brian White (Erik Hellman), a white Harvard neuroscientist whose research proves that racism is ingrained in all white people—inherent more than learned. Ginny Yang (Deanna Myers) is also a Harvard scientist. She’s of Japanese-Chinese descent; her research is aimed at debunking the belief that the root cause for anxiety in Asian American women is “familial.”

The quartet also includes Jackson Moore (Julian Parker), a African American doctor serving his residency at Harvard, and Valerie Johnston (Kayla Carter), a young African-American actor whose career includes playing Shakespearean leads and auditioning for groaningly awful television shows.

The lines that connect the characters range from probable to highly unlikely except in a play that requires certain interactions for the plot to hold. Valerie meets Jackson in the ER after walking into a piece of scenery and then gets a job assisting Brian, who plays basketball with Jackson and starts dating Ginny who comes to Jackson’s clinic in search of patients she can study for research purposes. They all end up having dinner together and discussing—among other things—how life is like the game *Seven Degrees* of Kevin Bacon.

The plot primarily serves to provide a sounding board for each character’s take on race and racism. Diamond’s dialogue comes in swift, dense bursts which the cast delivers with finesse and verve.



Kayla Carter and Erik Hellman in *Smart People*.

Photo by Michael Brosilow

Carter exudes charisma and charm as an actress struggling to please those who might employ her, even as she’s fielding their micro-aggressions from those same people. Myers’ clipped speech and graceful, confident physicality make Dr. Yang gleam with self-assured authority. This is a woman who knows exactly where she is going and how she will get there. She does not suffer fools, gladly or otherwise.

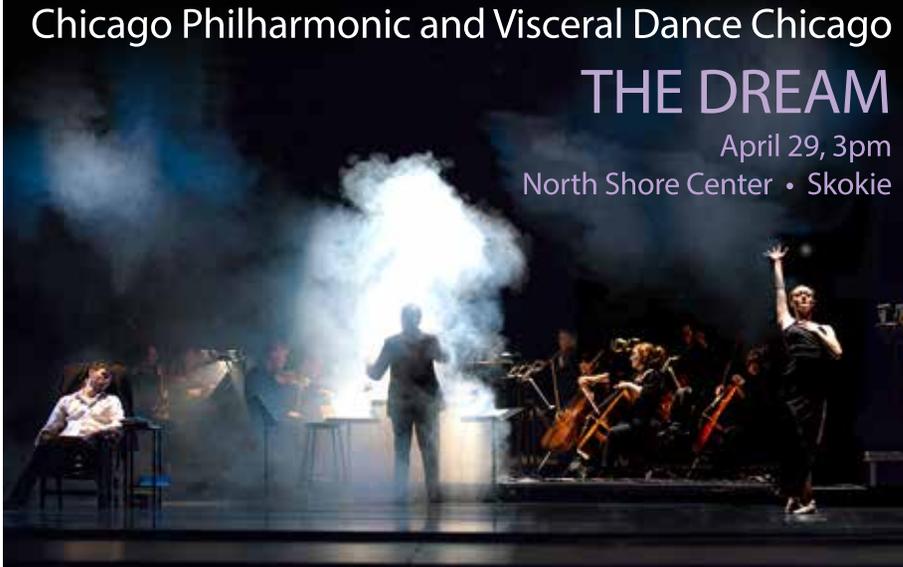
Hellman’s Dr. White has both a boyishness and Everyman quality. Hellman gradually (and sometimes not-so) reveals that although Dr. White has spent his career studying racism in Caucasians, he isn’t exempt from the very traits he abhors in his research subjects. Dr. Moore is arguably the most low-key of the four, but in Parker’s hands, he’s also the most memorable. Between Parker’s work here and earlier this year in *Steppenwolf’s* galvanizing *Pass Over*, it’s clear that he’s an extraordinary talent. When he’s on stage, your eyes are on him.

In the end, though, *Smart People* doesn’t linger long. The piece is largely forgettable, even if the actors are not.

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THEATER

'Gentleman Caller' explores intersection of art, sexuality

BY REGINA VICTOR

Director Cody Estle and playwright Philip Dawkins laugh and vibe like old friends and frequent collaborators, finishing each other's sentences and feeding off of each other's energy. Their camaraderie bodes well for *The Gentleman Caller*, Dawkins' new play about a fateful encounter between playwrights Tennessee Williams and William Inge. Directed by Estle, the world premiere opens April 6 at Edgewater's Raven Theatre.

As Dawkins and Estle explain it, *Gentleman Caller* brings a queer lens to the lives of Inge (*Bus Stop*, *Picnic*) and Williams (*Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*.) At the heart of Dawkins' play is an examination of queerness, history, art and the intersection of all three.

Commissioned by Raven, Dawkins is the author of such acclaimed dramas as *Charm* and *The Homosexuals*. He wrote *Gentleman Caller* with an eye on Raven's longstanding history of producing classics from the mid-20th century, many Williams' works among them. Dawkins wanted to bring contemporary relevance to Williams and Inge's work, without erasing their roots in the past.

"That is our American history, that's Raven's history. (H)ow do I acknowledge that and say let's move further into today with that conversation?," Dawkins asked.

Dawkins' commission was sparked by Raven's founders, Michael Menendian and JoAnn Montemurro. Estle served as Associate Artistic Director for years during their tenure, including when *The Gentleman Caller* was in its earliest discussions. Menendian and Montemurro stepped down last summer, when Estle was named Raven's new artistic director. *The Gentleman Caller* will be Estle's first production in the position.

In an era when queer legacies are being forged by today's artists, *The Gentleman Caller* offers a reexamination of history. The play explores the relationship between creativity and desire, whether that desire is suppressed or expressed.

Like the collages and shadow boxes of artist Joseph Cornell, the boxy set for *The Gentleman Caller* evokes far more than a simple structure of right angles.

"What does it mean to be inside of that box and what does it mean to step out of that box, be seen or not seen?" Estle said. Dawkins likens the set to Cornell's evocative pieces: "They're like these shadowboxes, and life happens inside them."

Raven isn't the first to see Inge through a queer lens. Last summer, Will Davis' gender-defying production of *Picnic* at the (now-closed) American Theatre Company earned heaps of critical acclaim. Both ATC's *Picnic* and Raven's *The*

Gentleman Caller approach Inge's closeted queerness, but in drastically different ways. Dawkins detailed the core of his approach:

"This is a room where as far as Inge knows, there are only queer men in this room. He would not say queer, there are only 'inverts' in this room, there are only men who are 'afflicted' in this room. He would have used any of cultural shaming language around that existed to make him feel bad.

"That culture of pushing queer people down [still] exists still but doesn't quite permeate in the way that it was inescapable for people like Inge and Williams," Dawkins said. "If you weren't of a constitution like Williams where you could drink enough or 'art enough' to where you could tell the world to go take a flying leap, then you were stuck to being constantly pounded down. Where could you go to escape it?" Dawkins added.

"We have seen often this story of being met with persecution on the outside, but we see less often the stories where the antagonism is on the inside," Dawkins said. "When we're the only people here and we are the only queer people how do we get rid of that antagonism? How do we leave it outside? Can we? In the way that I don't think queer communities can exist without pride I also wonder if they can exist without shame," he said.

"For these two men in particular it has to do with how necessary queerness is [to] artistry," Dawkins said. There's a line in the play that asks where a heterosexual could have written either the Bible or Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of*



Curtis Edward Jackson and Rudy Galvan in *The Gentleman Caller*.

Photo by Michael Brosilow

Things Passed. Dawkins thinks the answer is 'no.'

Queer folk are "constantly positioning themselves against social constructs," he explained. "To me, that's the heart of queerness," he said. "Whether you're a woman sleeping with a woman or a trans* person, if you are positioning yourself against the social constructs that have been put on you, then you are a queer person moving

through the world in a queer way. And that lends itself to an artistic world."

The Gentleman Caller runs April 6-May 27 at Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark St. Tickets are \$38-\$41, and \$15 for students, seniors, vets, active military. For more information, call 773-338-2177 or go to RavenTheatre.com.

THEATER REVIEW

The Spitfire Grill

Playwright: Book, music and lyrics

by James Valcq and Fred Alley

At: Refuge Theater Project at the

Windy City Cafe, 1062 W. Chicago Ave.

Tickets: \$30

Runs through: May 5

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

The location of the diner lending our production its title is identified in the playbill as "Northern Wisconsin" (though textual clues indicate the state's southwestern counties)—specifically, an economically depressed town ironically named Gilead. Here the young Perchance "Percy" Talbot arrives, after serving time in prison, seeking sanctuary and a fresh start. As she struggles to overcome the suspicions of the citizens, we learn that they, too, chafe under regrets too

long unacknowledged. One day, Percy and her co-worker Shelby hatch a plan to help restaurant owner Hannah sell the business. Soon the malaise infecting the blighted village is banished, and peaceful harmony reigns.

Why should this surprise us? From Nathaniel Hawthorne to Saul Bellow, a nostalgia for pastoral paradises permeates our nation's cultural DNA. When you factor in the emotive sensibilities generated by the introduction of music, you have a sure-fire formula for sentimentality—but while composer/authors James Valcq and Fred Alley deliver anguish and elation in abundance, their yarn also hints at more.

The immediate attraction of flight from civilization lies in the promise of solitude ("getting away from it all"), but human beings were never meant to dwell in isolation. Percy may initially resist the overtures of her peers, Shelby submit to her husband's restrictive demands and Hannah adopt a gruff surliness, but once the scheme to raffle off the property brings a flood

of mail from contestants as far away as Canada, Gilead's resurrection is ensured, not only by the allure of the surrounding forests, but the fellowship of strangers sharing in the pantheist fantasy suggested thereby.

The Refuge Theatre Project continues its practice of employing environmentally appropriate performance spaces—in this case, an actual West Town cafe equipped with booths, napkin dispensers, a kitchen housing industrial dishwashers and an entrance door off the sidewalk (albeit not opening on stately groves of oaks and maples). This places actors at a proximity to the audience facilitating a warmth and empathy so unswerving that by the time their crystalline voices are raised on the score's rousing anthems (accompanied by a three-instrument one-man band and some astonishingly sophisticated sunrise effects), we are ready to book our vacations for the Badger State's Platteville-Lancaster district.

'L'imitation of Life' through May 6

Hell in a Handbag Productions will kick off its 2018 season with a revival of its 2013 hit *L'imitation of Life*—a parody of the 1959 film *Imitation of Life*, about race, mothers and daughters.

The production will run through May 6 at Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave.

L'imitation of Life will feature Handbag ensemble member Ed Jones as Lana Turner, with Robert Williams as Annie Johnson—two very different women raising their daughters in a world made for a man.

Tickets are currently on sale at HandbagProductions.org (through Stage 773) or 773-327-5252.

'Frederick Douglass Now' April 6 at NU

Frederick Douglass Now—a one-man show by award-winning writer/actor Roger Guenveur Smith—will take place Friday, April 6, at 7 p.m. in the Josephine Louis Theater, 20 Arts Circle Dr., on Northwestern University's Evanston campus.

The show blends contemporary tropes on American race relations and politics with writings from the former slave and famous 19th-century social reformer.

Smith has appeared in eight films by Spike Lee, including *Do the Right Thing*, *Malcolm X* and *He Got Game*. Recent screen credits include roles in *Behind the Movement*, *Dope*, *The Birth of a Nation* and *Queen Sugar*.

Admission is free; RSVP at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/frederick-douglass-now-by-roger-guenveur-smith-tickets-44371093134>.

PFP's 'His Greatness' in Dublin in May; fundraisers planned

Pride Films and Plays' Chicago premiere production of Daniel MacIvor's *His Greatness*—inspired by a 'potentially true story' during the declining days of Tennessee Williams—will be performed at the 15th Annual International Dublin Gay Play Festival that will take place May 7-20 in Dublin.

The entire original cast of last fall's production will travel to Dublin and will perform the play May 14-19, with two performances on May 19.

Two special benefit performances will be staged in Chicago to help defray expenses for the company to travel to Dublin and perform at the festival. On Wed., April 18, at 7:30 p.m., Pride Films and Plays will present an "all-star" staged reading of *The Women*, by Claire Boothe Luce, performed entirely by men. The cast will include Chicago Ald. James Cappelman (46th Ward), David Cerda, Ed Jones, David Zak, Danne W. Taylor, Casey Chapman, Kevin Bishop, MarkleBeau, AK Miller, Manny Ortiz, Christopher Sylvie and Oscar M. Munoz in the Broadway, Pride Arts Center, 4139 N. Broadway.

There will also be one farewell benefit performance of *His Greatness* on Monday, May 7, at 7:30 p.m. in the Thrust Stage at Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave.

Admission will be \$25-\$50 for the April 18 event, and \$25-\$30 for the May 7 benefit; visit Stage773.com or call 773-327-5252.

Also, those wishing to support the production's trip to Dublin can contribute directly at <https://www.gofundme.com/send-his-greatness-to-dublin>.

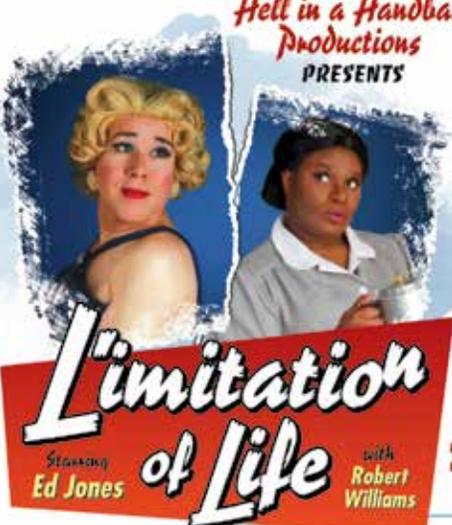
'Waa-Mu Show' May 4-13 at NU

The 87th annual *Waa-Mu Show*—Northwestern University's student-written and -orchestrated musical presented in collaboration with the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts at Northwestern University—will take place May 4-13 at Cahn Auditorium 600 Emerson St., Evanston.

Patrons can reserve the seats for the production *Manhattan Miracle*, a fictionalized account of the origins of the American musical.

Online sales for *Manhattan Miracle* have begun, and phone orders begin Jan. 2, 2018. See <https://wirtz.northwestern.edu/waamu> or call 847-491-7282.

CULTURE CLUB



Hell in a Handbag Productions PRESENTS

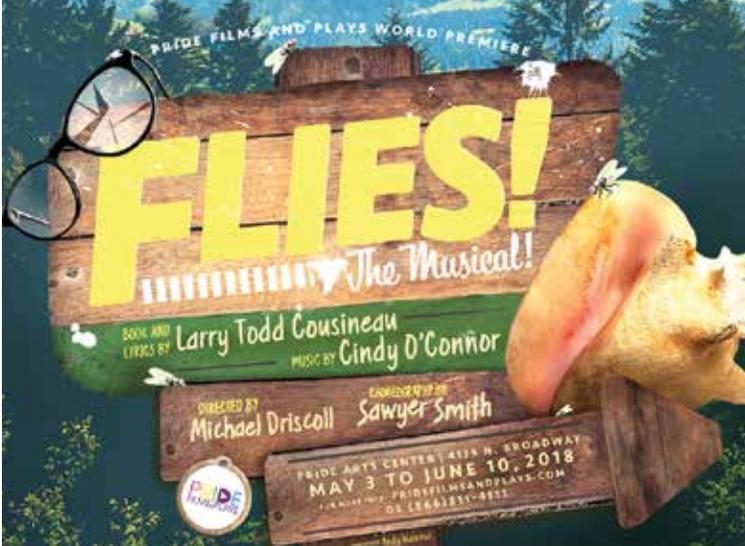
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Concert event spotlights Trans Day of Visibility

BY VERN HESTER

On March 31, The Center on Halsted, in partnership with The Art Music Project (AMP) and Lurie Children's Hospital, presented "Rattle the Walls," a concert celebrating The Trans Day of Visibility. The event—which featured a wide range of musical styles performed or composed by trans, LGBTQ individuals and allies—marked the eighth year that Center on Halsted has marked the day with proceeds from the event benefiting Trans programming at the center.

Vanessa Sheridan, director of transgender programming at the Center, said, "Last year, we had an art exhibit which was a big success; this year, we wanted to do something musical. There are two days a year when we acknowledge the trans community; the first is on March 31, which is a celebration. Then there is The Trans Day of Remembrance in November, which is another kind of event."

Forrest Ransburg, founder and director of "Rattle the Walls" and the AMP Ensemble, said, "This concert is about honoring, validating and celebrating the transgender community."

The concert got off to a lively start with a performance by The Emily Kuhn Ensemble, which fused jazz and Spanish folk music and featured original compositions by the group. Trans musician Devin Clara Fanslow performed twice—in the first half of the program as a solo artist using musical loops, and again with her ensemble, Sneaky Archer. Fanslow's music focused on her trans process and growth.

Pianist John Urban presented one of Paul Bowles' Six Preludes before he was joined by vocalist Jessie Lyons for a performance of "Emily's Aria," from Ned Rorem's opera *Our Town*. Isabelle Rozendaal joined Ransburg for Georg Philipp Telemann's *Sonata in G Major*, while Sheridan sang a feisty "Keep On Rising Up," which she said was inspired by the last presidential election. The concert closed with spoken/musical performances with Lyons joining Ransburg for Alex Temple's "Willingly" and Kate Soper's "Only the Words Themselves."

"Rattle the Walls" is a musical activism series that embraces inclusive programming to raise funds to benefit causes and organization in social justice.



Vanessa Sheridan at "Rattle the Walls."

Photo by Vern Hester. More photos with the online version of this story.



Fashion designers at OUT at CHM event.
Photo by Vern Hester

OUT at CHM event puts queer fashion in the spotlight

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

OUT at CHM (Chicago History Museum) proved queer fashion never goes out of style with its program "Celebrating and Contextualizing Queer Fashion" on March 22.

OUT at CHM, now in its 15th year, examines and displays various topics within the history of Chicago's LGBTQ communities. "Celebrating and Contextualizing Queer Fashion" is the first of three programs of the OUT at CHM 2018.

"I was aware of this program but I knew that my community wasn't—my community of young people—and I wanted more young folks to know their history and know that they didn't have to reinvent the wheel and that folks had come before them and paved the way for what we're able to accomplish now," said Andie Meadows, a volunteer on the OUT at CHM committee who spearheaded "Celebrating and Contextualizing Queer Fashion."

Kicking off with a reception, the main event was the fashion show featuring performances that showed off queer designers' creations.

The history museum deals with fashion a lot and queerness is often there, but Meadows said this event allowed for it to be explicit.

The Chicago designers included Authentic Skidmark's Kaleigh Moynihan, who makes eccentric queer designs often found in clubs and nightlife; Gnat Rosa Madrid, of GNAT Glitter Kin, who creates femme-centered kink and fetish wear; and Sky CubaCub, of Rebirth Garments, with collaborators Compton Quashie and Jake Vogds, focusing on trans, genderqueer and disability-specific needs in lingerie and swimwear.

"These are a lot of just my dear friends who are just doing amazing work and making hyper visible spaces for our community, which is something I think about and care about very much as a fem sort of straight-passing person, so I wanted to give that space in a large institution like this but also contextualize it within their own histories and our histories of being queer," said Meadows, joyfully calling the evening magical.

Following the show, Ciera Mckissick, founder of lifestyle brand and Chicago-based incubator space AMFM; and JoJo Baby, who has been work-

ing in the nightlife scene since the age of 13 and has experienced queer fashion's movement throughout their career, joined the designers for a panel discussion. Kelly Reddy-Best—a queer fashion historian and assistant professor in apparel, merchandising and design at Iowa State University—moderated the panel.

"Having JoJo on the panel was everything because JoJo, as a club kid and a DIY sort of person fucking it up on the scene in the '80s and '90s, really made space for these designers to exist in clubs today," said Meadows. "So, putting them in the same room was really special."

"It's creating intergenerational spaces, so getting our elders in the same room as our young folks who are carrying on their legacy and occupying their spaces," said Meadows of the program, which welcomed a little over 300 people. "The more we can make that happen, the more we are able to learn and when we need to change spaces that have been built for us, it's not as contentious or a battle over ownership, it's much more smooth when we have that relationship with our elders. Also just bringing queerness to a history museum and shouting really loudly that it's here."

For more information, visit ChicagoHistory.org/event/out_fashion/.

Levithan wins literary award

The Chicago Tribune announced that its 2018 Young Adult Literary Award winner is out writer David Levithan.

His novels include *Boy Meets Boy* (2003); *Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist* (2006); *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010); *Every Day* (2012); *Hold Me Closer* (2015); and *You Know Me Well* (2016). Levithan will be honored at the 2018 Printers Row Lit Fest on Saturday, June 9.

Past winners have included R.L. Stine, Lois Lowry, James Patterson, John Greene, Judy Blume, and LeVar Burton. Levithan was scheduled to be receive the award at the 2017 Printers Row Lit Fest, but was unable to attend due to an eye injury sustained that week.

COUNTRY Financial, C-SPAN, and the Chicago Public Library sponsor Lit Fest.



Waithe on cover of Vanity Fair

Out actor/writer Lena Waithe—an Emmy-winning African-American who hails from Chicago and Evanston—is on the cover of the April issue of Vanity Fair.

Described in the article as “on the butch side of queer but with delicate edges,” Waithe, 33, said, in part, “I don’t need an Emmy to tell me to

go to work. I’ve been working. I’ve been writing, I’ve been developing, I’ve been putting pieces together and I’m bullets, you know what I’m saying?”

However, she also said, “How has the Emmy changed me? It got me all these meetings that I go in and say I’m too busy to work with you—you should have hollered at me. You can take my call when I call you about this black queer writer over here who’s got a dope pilot, or this person over here who’s got really cool ideas, or this actress who’s really amazing but nobody’s seen her.”

Ravinia season: Diana Ross, Whoopi, Culture Club and more

This year’s Ravinia Festival’s schedule has been announced—and genres ranging from jazz to comedy to classical music to hip-hop will be part of the season.

According to Ravinia’s website, just a few of the highlights include Diana Ross (June 2); R&B singer Anita Baker, known for her hit “Sweet Love” (June 10); musician Jackson Browne (June 15); quartet Well-Strung (June 24); lesbian singer Janis Ian (June 24); out actor/musician Alan Cumming (July 13); Audra McDonald and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (July 15).

Other shows include a tribute to Leonard Bernstein (July 27); the observations of Whoopi Goldberg (Aug. 3); Steve Martin and Martin Short

(Aug. 12); Culture Club, the B-52’s and Thompson Twins (Aug. 31-Sept. 1); actor/hip-hop musician 50 Cent (Sept. 6); and crooner Tony Bennett (Sept. 8)

See Ravinia.org.

Blues exhibit to open April 7 at CHM

People will be able to explore how blues music was electrified and amplified in Chicago in the immersive and interactive exhibition, “Amplified: Chicago Blues,” that opens Saturday, April 7, at the Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark St. It will run through Friday, Aug. 10.

The photography of Raeburn Flerlage, a local record distributor and photographer of the city’s music scene, provides the foundation for the interactive exhibition. Among other things, visitors will be able to write and sing their own blues song, or belt out a blues classic in a club setting that pays tribute to the live performances that energized Chicago clubs on the city’s South and West sides.

Also, public programs (such as discussions and concerts) will take place throughout the run of the exhibition.

Admission to the exhibition is included with regular museum admission (\$19 adults/\$17 se-

niors and students, and free for children 12 years of age and younger as well as Illinois residents 18 years and younger). For more information on “Amplified: Chicago Blues,” visit chicagohistory.org/blues.

‘Bolder Than Out’ ball April 6

In Demand Entertainment (IDE) and Chicago State University (CSU) Student Government Association (SGA) will participate in the Coalition for Justice and Respect (CJR) Bolder Than Out (BTO) Conference: Bridging the Gap by hosting the “Bolder Than Out” ball on campus at 9501 S. King Dr. on Friday, April 6, at 5 p.m.

According to a press release, “The BTO Ball will be a safe space for queer and trans people to be themselves, have their voices heard and celebrated for their talents. This will also be a great way to embrace and educate the CSU student body as a means to creating a more supportive campus culture for its Queer and Trans students. In creating this space, the house and ballroom [communities] we will be providing an informative and entertaining experience.”

To RSVP, visit “Bolder Than Out Ball” on Facebook.



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Jake Shears.
Photo by Ivan Bideac

BOOKS

Shears' genius: Musician on memoir 'Boys Keep Swinging'

BY OWEN KEEHNEN

These days, Jake Shears is busier than ever.

In addition to starring as Charlie Price in *Kinky Boots* on Broadway, he has an upcoming album in the works, and also recently released the frank, sexy, and very engrossing memoir, *Boys Keep Swinging*. In the new book, Shears chronicles his youth and life as an outsider, his struggle as an artist in New York City circa the millennium and his eventual success as frontman of the glam-rock band Scissor Sisters.

Windy City Times: Congrats on *Kinky Boots* on Broadway, your upcoming album and the new memoir, *Boys Keep Swinging*.

Jake Shears: Thank you!

WCT: What made it the right time to write your book?

JS: The idea came at a perfect time, when I was headed to New Orleans for awhile, and needed something to do to keep me busy. Also, the main period that the book covers is the early 2000's in NYC, which is something that I felt hadn't been written about that much yet.

WCT: In the book you discuss being bullied and coming to terms with your sexuality. What do you consider the most crucial element in your transformation from Arizona kid Jason Sellards to glam rocker/Broadway star Jake Shears?

JS: The most crucial element was New York City itself. I had been searching for a long time for a place that gave me the freedom that I really longed for. I landed here when I was 20, which was the perfect time. New York is always a little hard going, but my appetites were being satiated

in a new way.

WCT: In your memoir you talk about being mentored by Dan Savage and Terry Miller after moving to Seattle for school. What was the most important thing they taught you in that role?

JS: I think the best thing about Dan and Terry coming into my life when they did, was that it made me feel like I had an intellectual value. That the stuff I cared about was important. They made me feel like I was actually a special person, and that one day, I could be as interesting as I found they were.

WCT: You also dated Anderson Cooper for a couple months back in the early 2000s. Do you have a favorite AC story?

JS: Neither of us will ever forget when he told me that I was definitely going to have to face reality and get a real job. We still laugh about it.

WCT: In *Boys Keep Swinging* you talk a lot about your early years in New York City—working as a go-go dancer, the clubs, starting to perform, etc. What was it about the city and the era that made it the perfect time and place for you?

JS: It was still possible to get by in NYC on not a lot of money. I think that's important for anybody who is creative, starting out. I think certain young people nowadays might even be better off in other cities seeing as how cost prohibitive NYC has gotten. The city still had some grit to it, and I loved the feeling that the possibilities were endless.

WCT: Is there a band or artist your fans

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PERFORMANCE

'9 to 5' in the age of #MeToo: Firebrand runs problematic play

BY KAREN TOPHAM

This is the era of #MeToo, Time's Up and many other "woke" movements that are changing the zeitgeist of the country, especially where women are concerned. Sexual harassment is no longer tolerated; women are, more and more, speaking up for themselves.

Into this moment in time, Harmony France of Firebrand Theatre (the company that gave us *Lizzie* this winter and brands itself as a truly feminist organization) has chosen for her next project the musical version of *9 to 5*, a movie that (while certainly empowering) is problematic in its antiquated portrayal of office sexual politics. I asked France what this play brought to the table at this time.

"For me," she said, "it's always been a kind of dated piece. But after the election and the

much is still the same."

Hamilton said that the most difficult part for her is handling the women-on-women sexism in the show.

"We have to be careful not to victim blame and say that any way of being a woman or being feminine is wrong. What's wrong is pushing others to the outskirts where we don't feel like we have an ally. That's the sad part of *Doralee*: she's getting it from both sides. It's messed up but it's something that happens."

This is why France is working to downplay the harassment humor of the show.

"The script is what it is, and it's still going to be a comedy, but we're definitely not going to play that up especially with the number of women who face harassment in workplaces all over America. So much is because we have been conditioned to believe we need to compete with one



Anne Sheridan Smith, Shariiese Hamilton and Sara Reinicke (from left).
Photo courtesy of Firebrand Theatre

#metoo and Time's Up movements, I find it isn't that dated at all. We haven't come as far as we thought we had."

France said that, as with many other movies and TV shows she enjoyed growing up, there are things in *9 to 5* that she just wasn't aware of at the time. "We're at an age when a lot of questioning is going on. But it's still a base story that everyone can relate to: we've all worked someplace where we've experienced discrimination, especially women and people of color."

Actress Shariiese Hamilton—who plays *Doralee*, the *Dolly Parton* character—agreed.

"I remember overhearing when I was bartending a man saying he was aghast because: you're telling me that a guy is going to lose his job because he whistled at a woman at work and there was just a bit of friendly flirting? And I was like, 'Yeah man.' There were some terrible things happening to women, but what [the women in the movie] are doing is a huge step. It WAS a movement for women. It's hard to look at because so

another; it's still rooted in the patriarchy. One of the great things here is that they realize that they don't have to compete and become allies."

Anne Sheridan Smith, who plays *Violet* in Firebrand's production, also said that France is working to make sure that the experience is uplifting for women.

She said that the show will be "a little bit more layered, a little bit more complex than [audiences expect], and that's exciting. Some audiences will walk in expecting something fun, kitschy, and dated because they love the film and actors, but they might find themselves cringing more than they expected to. In a fun and light-hearted way we are coming at something much more serious than perceptions used to be. We're kind of fed up in society; there is less tolerance for that now."

Hamilton sees that element as well.

"It's a comedy so we're not going to stare at the audience and say 'SHAME, don't laugh at this.' It's the job of comedy sometimes to get people to

Turn to page 30

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Weekly Dining Guide in
WINDY CITY TIMES

SAVOR

Tied House; Dining Out for Life

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Rarely will you see a restaurant revamp as total as the one at **Tied House** (3157 N. Southport Ave.; <https://www.tiedhousechicago.com/>).

Next door to the popular spot Schubert's, Tied House occupies the spot where Harmony Grill used to be—and it features a more upscale decor (including a huge fireplace in the outdoor patio area) and cuisine.

As with many Chicago restaurants, there is history steeped in this spot. A “tied house” used to sell beverages connected with a particular brewery in exchange for a fee (so they were “tied” to said brewery)—with many local spots connected to Milwaukee-based Schlitz. Tied House still features a Schlitz facade.

The restaurant, which opened in late February,



Tied House Executive Chef Debbie Gold.
PR photo

is spacious and has a lot of “clean lines,” as they would say. There are 60 feet of sliding doors and a 25-foot bar in this 12,000-square-foot spot (including the full basement).

And the staff! Former Everest Pastry Chef Debbie Gold is the executive chef of Tied House, and Ryan Carbone (formerly of Dusek's) and Chuck Woods (who used to work at Girl and the Goat) are the sous chefs.. (By the way, according to a widely circulated report, women represent only 19 percent of chefs and 7 percent of head chefs across the culinary world—which is absolutely shameful.)

As for the cuisine and service, they're both pretty impressive at this high end-yet-approachable restaurant. (Our server, who resembled Mark Consuelos, was extremely affable and made sure every patron's need was tended to—even if it

was finding out a hashtag or keeping water in an ice bucket.)

Even the bread service was a step above that of most restaurants. Guests can select from Parker House rolls, seeded rye bread or honey-oat porridge bread that can come with bone-marrow butter, chicken-liver mousse, green-tomato marmalade, whipped lardo or creme fraiche honeycomb in addition to the dairy butter.

The rest of the menu is divided into “Vegetable,” “Sea” and “Land.” However, there is nothing standard beyond those category names. For example, one selection in the first category is maitake mushroom, a delicious and earthy dish that comes with farm egg, broth and shoyu. (Yes, I know a mushroom isn't technically considered a vegetable, but in any event...)

Other dishes are just as enticing and complex. My friend loved her beeswax-aged mackerel, which came with leek, yellow beet, horseradish and duck sauce. I chose the milk-braised pork (with cabbage, salsify and apple) and it was absolutely delicious—although it was a bit too fatty for me. (A little fat goes a long way.) And don't go anywhere without trying the chocolate mousse, which comes with cocoa nibs; the deconstructed wedding cake, to me, was merely okay.

Among some of the other dishes I'm dying to try on a return visit are the monkfish, lamb rack and short rib. However, with a spring menu likely to debut within the next month, some of these items may not be around too long—or, simply,

some of the vegetables that accompany them may change.

One other note: If you dare, you can try a dive-bar special here: a shot of Malort. Rarely does anyone have anything good to say about this drink—and I can add my name to that list. However, I can say that I tried it (and it was followed by my first—and last—“Malort face”). However, the actual cocktail I got (and they're numbered one through six) was very tasty.

If you hear about Tied House reaping awards within a year, don't be surprised.

Dining Out for Life

The annual event known as **Dining Out for Life Chicago** will take place Thursday, April 26.

This year, up to 75 local restaurants (including Big Chicks, Urban Belly, Honey Butter Fried Chicken, The Dearborn and others) will donate all or a portion of their proceeds to HIV/AIDS-service organization TPAN (Test Positive Aware Network). The event returns to Chicago after a three-year absence.

Dining Out For Life started in 1991 and is now an international fundraising event raising awareness and over \$4.2 million in vital funds and for those affected by and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. See <https://www.diningoutforlife.com/chicago>.

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



BIG CHICKS

Get into the groove of Madonna night.

Photos by Jerry Nunn

SHEARS from page 26

would be surprised to hear was a musical inspiration to you?

JS: Queens of the Stone Age remains one of my favorite bands of all time. I actually dedicated my book to Josh Homme and his wife, Brody Dalle. Their records are so gorgeous and glam and heavy. One of the new songs on my record, *The Bruiser*, is definitely influenced.

WCT: Boys Keep Swinging is so well-written. I'm curious as to what book or books have influenced you the most as a person and an artist?

JS: I am a massive reader and a book collector. Favorite writers are Jennifer Egan, Jeff Vandermeer, Haruki Murakami, Nick Cutter, Joe Hill, Nicholson Baker, Patrick McGrath, Sarah Waters, Tom Spanbauer, Donald Ray Pollack, Patrick DeWitt [and] Kelly Link, to name a handful.

WCT: As someone who has been described as an exhibitionist, was there any part of your life that you were especially hesitant to share in the book?

JS: The whole thing. I had a huge amount of anxiety when this book was turned in and as it has come out. Now that people are reading it and liking it, I feel a lot more calmed, but I felt a little vulnerable putting that much personal information into the world.

WCT: With your upcoming solo album, how did the autonomy of being able to do what you wanted compare to the collaborative energy of working with the band?

JS: It was still a very collaborative experience. But it was extremely liberating knowing that it's

only my name on it, and knowing that I'm the only person I really needed to please making it. I think it's going to prove to be one of my best pieces of music work in a long time.

WCT: Do you think your role as an out musician and artist has changed in the Trump era?

JS: I feel that my role as a musician is the same that it always has been, making music that everyone can relate to, that has the ability to bring people together, and to change people's minds.

WCT: How did your Broadway debut as Charlie Price in *Kinky Boots* come about?

JS: Just with a phone call! That one moment definitely changed the course of my year. Doing this has been one of the great joys of my life. I've learned so much, and I know I'm going to miss it so much when it is over.

WCT: Often, writing a memoir is a way of purging something and learning from the past. What was the biggest thing you realized about your life with writing this installment of your life story?

JS: I realized how much of an era that that time was. It was a completely different time, and though it doesn't feel like that long ago, it actually was. It gave me a lot of confidence, in a way, and made me realize as well, that my story is far from over. There's a hell of a lot more for me to do in this world. It now feels like an entirely new chapter, and that's exciting to me.





BILLY Masters

"There is no hell. There is the disappearance of sinful souls. They are not punished. Those who repent obtain the forgiveness of God and enter the rank of souls who contemplate Him. But those who do not repent and cannot therefore be forgiven disappear."—Pope Francis makes heaven sound like a hot club. If you don't get past the velvet rope, you just wander around outside with the others. Been there, done that, met some great people. I'll take my chances.

I have about a month before I have to unexpectedly head overseas. But, don't ask me for details. All I can say is that my first stop will be London. But, that's it. I can disclose no more. Like **Stormy Daniels** and that bitch who bit Beyonce, I had to sign an NDA. Now, all I have to figure out is what to bring as a wedding gift. (That was a hint.) Here's what I'm thinking—what about offering the happy couple the chance to sleep in **Nick Jonas'** bed? Yes, you too can rent out Nick's tour bus for a mere \$1,500—presumably that is the price sans Nick. But at least you'll be close enough to leave behind a note or a scent on some bedding.

You may have seen headlines that an ABC on-air reporter came out as HIV-positive. Certainly, the dashing **Karl Schmid** looks familiar in that way I can't quite place. I knew he was either a Facebook friend, someone I saw on TV or someone I had sex with. Then I went through the archives on BillyMasters.com and saw that two years ago, the irrepressible **Carson Kressley** was openly flirting with Karl post-Oscars and then tweeted him an invitation to go out. Schmid is a 37-year-old Aussie who is on Los Angeles' local ABC affiliate. He said he's wanted to come out earlier, but "industry professionals said, 'Don't! It'll ruin you.'"

So why now? He posted, "I'm me. I'm just like you. I have a big heart and I want to be loved and accepted. I may be on TV from time to time, but at the end of the day I'm just an average guy who wants what we all want. To be accepted and loved by our friends and family and to be encouraged by our peers. Labels are things that come and go but your dignity and who you are is what defines you. I know who I am. I know what I stand for and while in the past I may not have always had clarity, I do now. Love me or hate me, that's up to you. But, for anyone who has ever doubted themselves because of those scary three letters and one symbol, let me tell you this, you are somebody who matters." Bravo!

While one person came out, another kinda went back in. Remember **Aaron Carter** telling us that he's bisexual? Well ... maybe not so much. He said, "It was more so just a story that happened when I was like 17 with somebody. I can find men and women attractive, but when it comes down to it, I think it was a little misconstrued. I see myself being with a woman and having kids. I want to have a family. I keep telling people that. I don't want it to be misconstrued too much, just because I was open about a story." You know



Yes, you can sleep in Nick Jonas' bed—but there's a catch, Billy says.

Photo by Michael Loccisano

the only thing I got out of that statement? That "misconstrued" was the word of the day on his calendar!

Remember a few weeks ago when I told you that **Armie Hammer** and **Timothée Chalamet** had a "no-frontal nudity" clause in their contracts for *Call Me By Your Name*? Many of you said this was news to you. You know who else it was news to? Writer **James Ivory**! The Oscar winner was none too happy when he found out about this clause, saying, "Certainly in my screenplay there was all sorts of nudity. But according to Luca, both actors had it in their contract that there would be no frontal nudity, and there isn't, which I think is kind of a pity. Again, it's just this American attitude. Nobody seems to care that much, or be shocked, about a totally naked woman. It's the men." Originally, Ivory was supposed to write AND direct the flick. Wonder what his version would have been like!

I always enjoy talking about **Pietro Boselli**, the Italian model whose career got a jump start while he was teaching math at University College London. With each photo shoot, Pietro has been inching his way closer to posing completely nude. How far has he gotten? See the latest pics on BillyMasters.com.

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Jason in San Francisco: "I just saw *Game Over, Man!* and couldn't believe **Adam DeVine** was totally naked. Do you have pics? Was that all him? And what about that gay sex scene?"

For the benefit of my readers who have no idea what Jason is talking about, *Game Over, Man!* is a movie Netflix released last week. It's sorta like a cross between *The Hangover*, *Die Hard* and one of the later Cheech and Chong efforts. It is true—Adam DeVine goes full-frontal. He also goes full backal. That leads to more conversation about buttocks than I thought straight men had—but what do I know? Anyway, he is hiding in a closet, not wearing any pants and faking death by auto-



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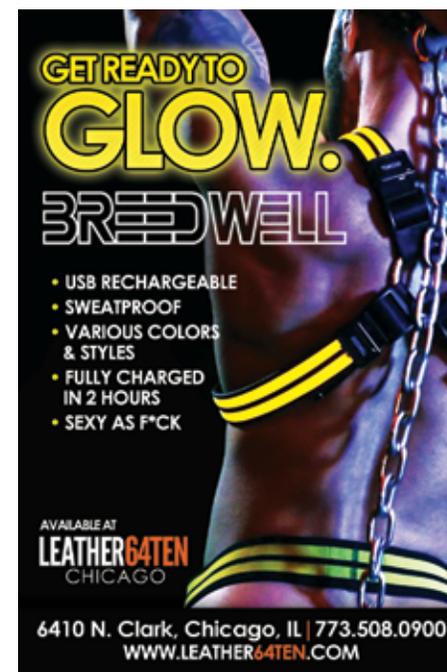


erotic asphyxiation when two hit men come into the hotel room and decide to have sex! It'll all make sense if you ever watch the film! Aside from DeVine, my attention was captured by the sight of the sizzling **Steve Howey**, who is playing one of the two hit men. Of course, we've seen him nude before in *Shameless*, but it bears repeating. You can see the full scene on BillyMasters.com.

When DeVine is going where Hammer and Chalamet didn't, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Maybe that *Call Me By Your Name* sequel should just go to Netflix—it doesn't seem to back away from a little dick. The same could be said of BillyMasters.com. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com, and I promise to get back to you before I tell my British host I'm allergic to corgis! Until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

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WINDY CITY TIMES COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., April 4

Songs of the Chicago Freedom Movement: A Concert Remix 50 Years After Dr. King's Assassination, the Addie Wyatt Center Event commemorates an era with live renditions of the music that helped to keep spirits high and fuel the Chicago Freedom Movement. 7:00pm The Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. West. Tickets: <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/songs-of-the-chicago-freedom-movement-a-concert-remix-the-promontory-tickets-42172306504>

No Fats, No Fems, No Asians: Unpacking the Asian American Dating Experience Actor, creator, and producer Lee Doud will talk at the University of Illinois at Chicago in partnership with the UIC Asian American Resource and Cultural Center. Free and open to the public. aarcc@uic.edu 3:00pm - 4:00pm UIC Richard J. Daley Library, 801 S Morgan St, Room 1-470, Chicago <http://aarcc.uic.edu>



DOUD AND CLEAR
Wed., April 4

Actor Lee Doud will speak about "No Fats, No Fems, No Asians" at UIC.
PR photo

Thursday, April 5

American Veterans for Equal Rights Chicago Chapter of American Veterans for Equal Rights, the national organization of LGBT veterans formerly known as Gay,

Lesbian and Bisexual Veterans of America (GLBVA). 7:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.averchicago.org/>

Chi-Town Squares Dance Party With Michael Maltenfort. No Experience Necessary. Bring a friend and show them the fun of square dancing. 7:00pm - 9:00pm Ebenezer Lutheran Church 1650 W Foster Chicago <http://www.chitown-squares.org>

Friday, April 6

Seeds of Change 2018 annual benefit Join Crossroads Fund grantees, board members, and friends of the Crossroads Fund 5:30pm Chicago Cultural Center 78 E. Washington St. Chicago <http://crossroadsfund.org/seedschange2018>

Gender and Sexual Liberation as Revolutionary Practices Radical queer, trans, & non-binary people are already on the vanguard of creating the world in which Nicole Garneau wants to live. 6:30pm - 8:30pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <https://community.centeronhalsted.org/pages/revolutionarypractice?erid=7749495&trid=fc1a7562-0192-492d-91c2-9b95e19893b2>

The Flesh Hungry Dog Show Party rock for the gay community Joan Crawford inspired party band The Joans, pop/porno-punk marvels Super-8 Cum Shot,

swanky purveyors of the forgotten B-side Bric-A-Brac, Gary Airedale hosts, DJ Mercedes Ben spins before and between the bands, Go-Go dancing troupe, The Revelettes and burlesque artist Bold Hilaire (aka the artist FKA Ms Bea Haven). \$12. Doors 8pm. 9:00pm Jackhammer 6406 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3342818>

Keith Haring: The Chicago Mural Exhibition Celebrating the monumental mural created by Haring and Chicago Public School students in 1989. Free admission. Through Sept. 23 10:00pm - 7:00pm Chicago Cultural Center 78 E. Washington St. Chicago <http://chicago-culturalcenter.org>

18th Annual Spring Art Sale Purchase one-of-a-kind art created by more than 120 undergraduate and graduate students, including paintings, prints, drawings, jewelry, ceramics, sculptures, fashion accessories. All proceeds directly to artists and designers. Through April 7. MacLean Ballroom School of the Art Institute 112 S. Michigan Ave Chicago <http://saic.edu/artsale>

Saturday, April 7

Frontrunners, Frontwalkers Chicago Frontrunners, Frontwalkers Chicago Chicago's LGBT running and walking club. Meet at the totem pole 9:00am Ad-

dison and Lakeshore Dr. <http://www.frfwchicago.org>

Love is Love: LGBTQ Faith Community Event Worship, food and fellowship. Suggested \$10. 9:30am - 11:30am Morgan Park UMC, 11030 S. Longwood Dr., Chicago 773-238-2600 <http://morganparkumc.org>

Monday, April 9

Season of Concern Cabaret for Care Chicagoland theater community's fundraising effort providing compassionate care to those in our community with catastrophic illness and Chicago-based HIV/AIDS service organizations. E. Faye Butler and Honey West will headline. \$35 to \$100 7:00pm Goodman Theatre 170 N Dearborn St Chicago <http://www.seasonofconcern.org>

Wed., April 11

Equality Illinois LGBTQ Advocacy Day Daylong advocacy event in Springfield; lobbying training, lunch, meetings with legislators. Details at link. 6:00am - 5:00pm Illinois State Capitol, Springfield <http://www.equalityillinois.us/events/2018-advocacy-day/>

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PUBLISHED PRAYER

St. Jude's Novena: St. Jude's Novena: May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved, and preserved throughout the world, now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us. St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us. St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us. Say this prayer nine times a day for nine days. By the ninth day your prayers will be answered. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you, Sacred Heart of Jesus and St. Jude, my prayer has been answered. M.J.R. (4/4/18-1)

9 TO 5 from page 26

say, as they are laughing, why are we laughing at this? You reflect on it afterward. We see how far we've come and how far we have to go."

She believes that France's vision is what will keep the play vibrant and funny while at the same time making it even more powerful. "I feel very safe in Harmony's hands. I don't know if I would do it if there was a man directing because he wouldn't get it."

France understands that her "special" cast is counting on her.

"The show already has really great themes of women getting over their differences and working together; we're going to push it along even further. It's going to be a slow burn; change will not come as quickly as we want it to. But with the #metoo movement women are speaking up. I don't think we could be doing a more relevant show at this time."

The production 9 to 5 will be presented by Firebrand Theatre Company at the Den April 7-May 20; visit FirebrandTheatre.org.

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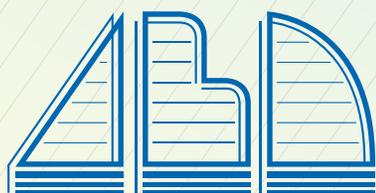
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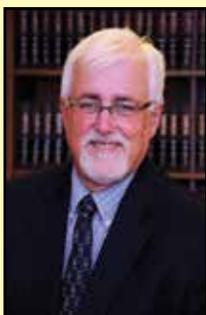
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