

WINDY CITY TIMES

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'ISLAND' LIFE

New play tackles Chicago's racist history.
PR photo of Dr. Marcus Robinson

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BARBARA POMA

Pulse Nightclub owner discusses foundation.
PR photo

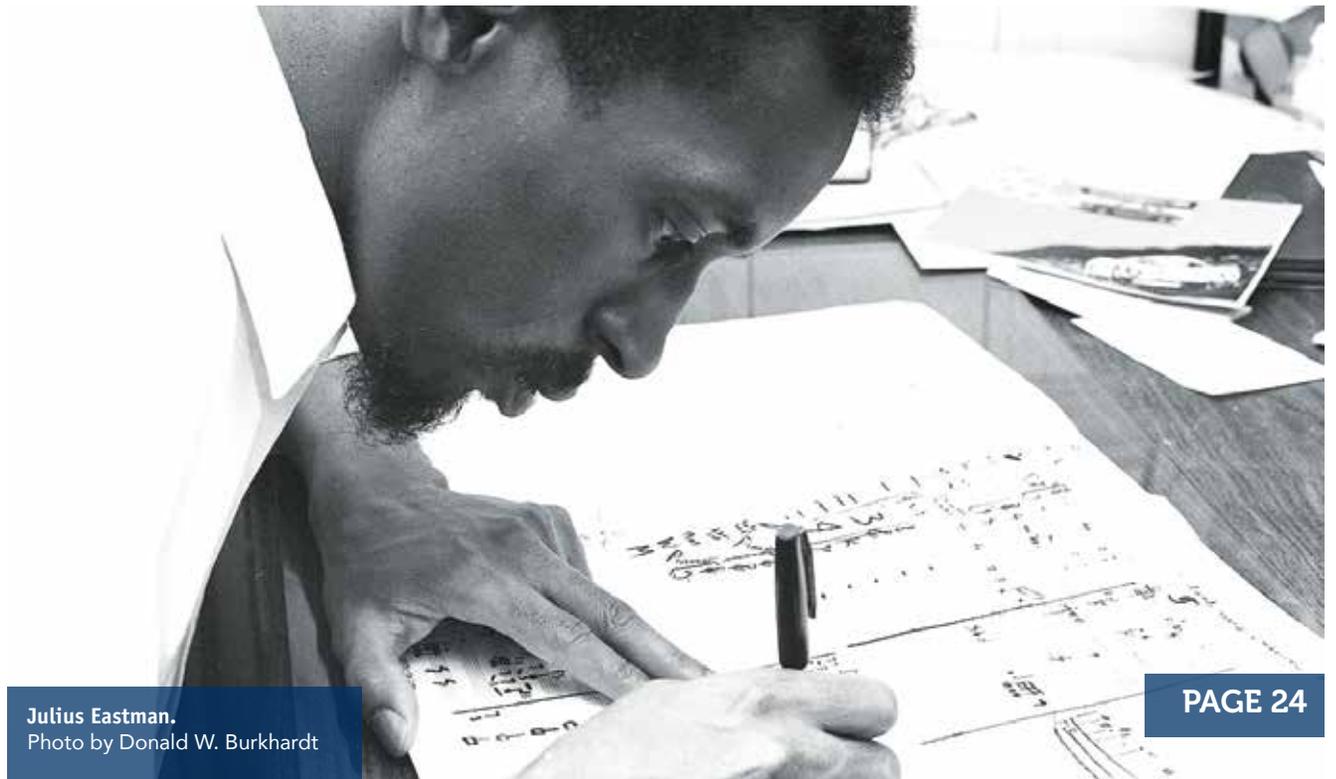
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GEEK-END FUN

Fanboys and fangirls hit comic expo C2E2.
Photo by Tracy Baim

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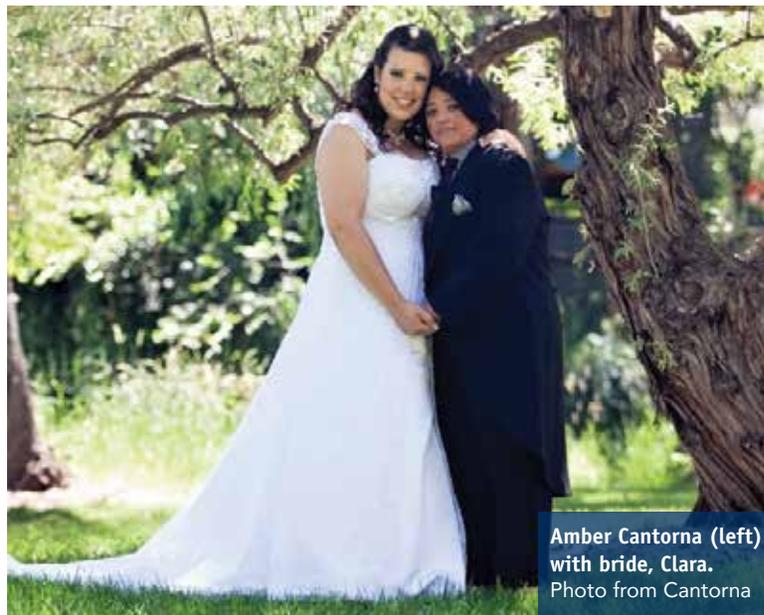


Julius Eastman.
Photo by Donald W. Burkhardt

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BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

Cellist discusses gay composer Julius Eastman



Amber Cantorna (left) with bride, Clara.
Photo from Cantorna

FAMILY AFFAIR

Ex-Focus on the Family daughter's new mission

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Above: WCT reviews The Rosenkranz Mysteries: Physician Magician.
PR photo

online exclusives at
www.WindyCityTimes.com



EXTRA CREDIT

Windy City Times reviewer Lauren Emily Whalen muses on being an extra in *An Enemy of the People*.
Photo (left) courtesy of Whalen

SHAKE UP



Portillo's chocolate cake shake (above) and the book *Given Up for You* are among Five Worth Finding's offerings.
PR photo

PEACHY KEEN

Filmmaker Peaches Christ talks about worshipping Mink Stole and John Waters.

THAT'S SHOW BIZ

Find out the latest about *Imagine Dragons*, Viola Davis and fashion designer Marc Jacobs.

plus
DAILY BREAKING NEWS

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Cherry Circle Room	Lady Gregory's	Venici Italian
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Chicago Diner Logan	Las Mañanitas	Vincent
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Drew's on Halsted	Moody's Pub	Wakamono
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ELECTIONS 2018: COOK COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Morrison 'presumed winner' in tight race

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Recounts and mail-in ballots have been tabulated in the race to be the Democratic candidate for 15th District Cook County Commissioner. Openly gay candidate Kevin Morrison is the presumed winner with just 12 votes, which amounts to 50.03 percent of the vote in the race.

The contest took an additional two weeks to determine a winner, since on the night of the March 20 primary Morrison's opponent, Ravi Raju, had a lead of just 24 votes. A winner could not be declared until final mail-in ballots were tabulated.

The final count took place April 3. Morrison pocketed 11,759 votes while Raju had 11,747, or 49.3 percent. Morrison presumably now goes on to face incumbent Republican Tim Schneider in November. The County does not certify a winner until the week of April 9.

"I would like to thank all the voters who trusted in me on March 20," Morrison said in an April 3 statement. "Our hard work and message of putting our working families first and protecting vital county services clearly resonated with the voters of the 15th district as it will on November 6. For too long Republican Cook County Commissioner Tim Schneider has neglected the families of the district in favor of special interests and



Kevin Morrison.

Photo by AJ Kane Photography

billionaires. I will continue to take my message to every voter in the 15th district to ensure that they know where I stand on issues that are important to our families, unlike the entrenched incumbent who is solely ruled by his many conflicts of interests. I look forward to a spirited debate with the incumbent on the challenges that the 15th district is facing and discussing the solutions that I will be providing. The status quo isn't working for our families so I am confident that once again my campaign will be successful on November 6."

Lambda Legal's Bon Foster on April 19

Lambda Legal will hold its annual Bon Foster event on Thursday, April 19, 6-10 p.m., at Morgan Manufacturing, 401 N. Morgan St.

The Bon Foster Celebration is named in honor of the man whose legacy was the founding of Lambda Legal's Midwest regional office and the subsequent civil-rights victories fought and won in that area.

Judge Patricia M. Logue will be honored during the event.

Visit <https://www.lambdalegal.org/bonfoster>.

Correction

In the April 4 issue, trans musician Devin Clara Fanslow was misgendered in an article about the "Rattle the Walls" concert at Center on Halsted. Fanslow goes by she/her.

The correct paragraph should be: "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."

Windy City Times sincerely regrets the error.

as) Sullivan, Andrew (Molly) Howard and Amy Howard; fond uncle and great-uncle of many; and loving partner of Kenny Thomas.

The funeral Mass will take place Saturday, April 14, 12 p.m. (visitation 11:30 a.m.) at St. Paul on the Lake Catholic Church, 157 Lake Shore Rd., Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in his name to Howard Brown Health Center (<https://howardbrown.org/donate/>).

Arrangements by Cremation Society of Illinois (773-281-5058 or www.cremation-society.com)

PASSAGES

Daniel J. Howard

Daniel Joseph Howard—who was born in Grosse Pointe, Michigan; grew up in Detroit; and lived his last 18 years in Chicago—passed away Easter Sunday, April 1, in Chicago. He was 53.

He was the beloved son of the late Francis John "Jack" Howard and Suzanne Hergenrother Howard; loving brother of John (Laura) Howard, Cynthia (Scott) Paradise, David (Susan) Howard, Stephen Howard, Suzanne (Thom-

WINDY CITY TIMES' LGBTQ WEDDING & SPECIAL EVENTS GUIDE



Local businesses to help make your special day more special!



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Guzzardi files bill expanding employment protections

BY MATT SIMONETTE

State Rep. Will Guzzardi (D-Chicago) has filed new legislation that expands state employment protections to individuals working for smaller firms.

While Illinois has fairly robust employment anti-discrimination laws, those protections apply mainly to persons working for businesses or organizations with 15 or more employees. But legislation filed by Guzzardi, HB 4572, "provides that 'employer' includes any person employing one (instead of 15) or more employees within Illinois during 20 or more calendar weeks within the calendar year of or preceding the alleged violation."

Guzzardi filed the bill Feb. 6 and it has been assigned to the House Labor & Commerce Committee, which is scheduled to hear it April 10. Co-sponsors include state Reps. Elizabeth Hernandez (D-Cicero) and Mary Flowers (D-Chicago).

"Discrimination on the basis of gender, age, religion, or sexual orientation is perfectly legal in Illinois, as long as you're a small business," said Guzzardi in an April 3 statement. "That's wrong, and we're setting out to change that. The Hu-



Will Guzzardi.

Photo courtesy of Guzzardi

man Rights Act should protect everyone at every workplace in Illinois."

Further information on the bill, including full text, is at <https://bit.ly/2GDh7Sc>.

Howard Brown wants symposium submissions

Howard Brown's Center for Education, Education, Research and Advocacy invites you to submit an abstract for the 2018 Midwest LGBTQ Health Symposium.

It is looking for presentations, panels and posters that reflect the theme "Moving Towards Health Equity. Strengthening Our Community of Care." The symposium call for abstracts will be open until June 1.

The Midwest LGBTQ Health Symposium Planning Committee is looking for submissions focused on the following competencies:

—Best practices for working with LGBTQ patients in clinic settings;

—Evidence-based strategies to reduce health disparities within communities, focusing on intersections of LGBTQ identity and race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic factors;

—Organizational policies and strategies that facilitate LGBTQ health equity; and

—Understanding of key LGBTQ health advocacy issues and how healthcare professionals can influence LGBTQ health policy.

The symposium will take place Sept. 14-15 at

the JW Marriott hotel, 151 W. Adams St.
See HowardBrown.org for more information.

Belmont Rocks lecture at Columbia April 19

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

The lecture will take place at Columbia College, 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.



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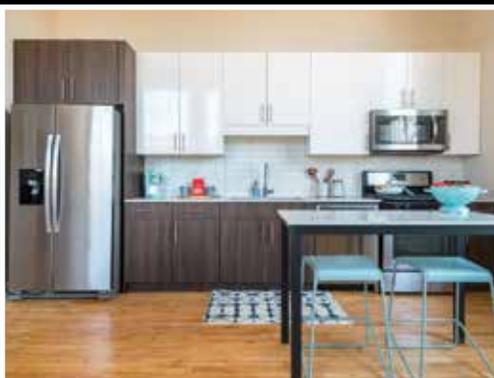
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'Bolder Than Out' features variety show, panel discussion

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

As a part of the Coalition for Justice and Respect (CJR) sixth annual Bolder Than Out (BTO) conference, "Kitchen Table Action," Chicago State University's (CSU) Student Government Association (SGA) and In Demand Entertainment (IDE) hosted

the BTO Ball April 6 at CSU.

The event featured a VIP reception, free HIV testing provided by South Side Help Center, a ballroom-fundamentals workshop, variety show, ballroom competition, the premiere of the audio documentary *Who Knows Best* produced by IDE Founder and Executive Director Solomon Arnold (Icon Solomon Infiniti) about queer and trans empowerment and a panel on "The Phobia Complex: An Interconnected Discussion About Gender Identity, Sexuality and the Empowerment of Queer and Trans People of Color."

Arnold moderated the panel discussion, which

featured The Association of Clinical Trial Services (TACTS) founder/executive director, epidemiologist and bioethicist Sista Yaa Simpson; Kristian Michaels Talent Career Center founder and clinical mental-health counselor Donita M. Lake; Chicago House and Social Service Agency research manager and Legendary Overall Mother Jasmine Ferre ("mother" being a ballroom term); House of Enigma Legendary Mother Charisma Enigma; Howard Brown Health Human Resources Manager Tatyana Moaton (Legendary Tati Rodeo); Brave Space Alliance program director and Legendary Mother Myah Mizrahi; and Cut Magazine publisher

and House of Enigma founder Aaron Brown.

Arnold asked the panelists what they would tell their younger selves. Simpson said she would tell herself to be more confident and not worry about what others think. Ferre spoke about telling herself to continue to strive even when life gets hard. Lake focused on not hiding behind a facade and being genuine and authentic with every interaction while Mizrahi said she would have practiced more verbal self-love and let more things go that do not contribute to her growth as a person. Brown explained that if he could go back in time he would have finished college faster. Moaton said she would live her full truth and that includes not dimming her lights for anyone's comfort. Enigma noted that when she was younger she thought of her trans sisters as competition and now she knows that is not true.

In terms of how each panelist has been able to turn things around so they could be their authentic selves, Ferre and Mizrahi said all of their adversities have made them the confident people they are today. Simpson explained that delving into the public health realm made her realize she had a voice in science and now she wants to open those doors for other Black people to become scientists.

During the audience Q&A session, CSU SGA Speaker of the Senate Angel Buckley sparked a spirited discussion among the majority transgender panelists regarding labels within the LGBTQ community, specifically regarding the Black experience.

Both Arnold and SGA Senator Mario Knowles hosted the Ballroom competition.

Among the many Ballroom competition winners were: Best Dress Spectator (Mother Africa Ultra Omni), Transman Realness (Founder Overall Father Antonio Lauren), Butch Queen (BQ) Executive Realness (Detroit Father Andre Ultra Omni) BQ Schoolboy Realness (Mylon Lauren), Women's Face (Buckley), BQ Up in Pumps and European Runway (Rio Valentino), American Runway (Legendary Reavis Royalty), Virgin Runway (Montel Ultra Omni), BQ Vogue Femme (Lil Magik Moskow), Virgin Vogue (Prince Bangy Ultra Omni), Realness with A Twist (Kenny Bvlgari), Hand Performance (Zizi Lauren) and Dance Off (Draya).

Ahead of the ball, an afternoon luncheon organized by CJR (including a focus group that Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office coordinated) took place at the King Center. The focus group, which Alicia Crosby led, focused on the U.S. Justice Department's consent decree regarding how the Chicago Police Department is supposed to conduct itself in the wake of police shootings of unarmed Black and brown people. CJR Founder/Executive Director Marc Loveless, SHARP President Thomas (Icon Tommy Avant-Garde Moskow) Sampson (keynote address) and Arnold also spoke following the focus-group discussion.

Town hall examines Latinx issues

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Association of Latinos/as Motivating Action (ALMA) Chicago and Equality Illinois sponsored a town hall meeting between community members, advocates and elected officials to discuss issues pertinent to the Latinx community in the current political climate.

The gathering, held March 28 at the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance, 3000 N. Elbridge Ave., featured a panel comprised of state Sens. Iris Y. Martinez and Omar Aquino, as well as state Rep. Will Guzzardi. The discussion was moderated by ALMA Vice President Kenny Martin-Ocasio.

"Our charge was to bring state officials into the conversation—where do we go from here after all of the gains that we have made?" Martin-Ocasio later told Windy City Times.

Discussion focused on the challenges the politicians had faced in supporting the LGBT community. That included speaking not just about rights-issues, but where they stood on the budget impasse, he added.

"They were talking about making sure that resources were actually available—if there is no budget and no allocation, there was no action and no services," Martin-Ocasio said. "There were challenges all around."

He further recalled that much of the conversation centered around what "true activism" looked like.

"One of the elected officials spoke about the continued low turnout of voters," he added. "It's difficult to make a case against anybody when people making it are not engaged in the actual voting process, so I appreciate that there was a

call to do that."

Participants further concluded that the overall LGBT Latinx community needs to be more deliberate about and inclusive of its transgender members. Aquino in particular encouraged advocates to hold meetings "in other districts, where the environment is not as forthcoming" as Chicago's, Martin-Ocasio noted.

Martin-Ocasio hopes this would be the first of many such meetings across the state, engaging Latinx LGBT Illinoisans beyond the Chicago city limits.

"We wanted to start someplace where we know we had allies, but we know that the work needs to include those communities where, even if the legislators may have voted for marriage equality, they're not out and openly known as allies. ... They may feel a little more apprehension about engaging in an open conversation or dialogue," he said.

Aquino offered to attend future meetings, Martin-Ocasio recalled, adding, "That lets people know that this kind of conversation is needed, for work that can bridge divides. That was sort of comforting."



Standing, left to right: Luis Roman, Kenny Martin-Ocasio, Dulce Quintero, David Gauna, Rodrigo Carrillo, Mary Johnson and Orlando Reyes all ALMA Board members. Sitting, left to right: State Sen. Omar Aquino, Sen. Iris Y. Martinez and state Rep. Will Guzzardi.

Photo courtesy of Julio Rodriguez

Curriculum work, ERA among EI agenda items

BY MATT SIMONETTE

An inclusive public schools curriculum, an expansion of employment protections, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and the state budget are among the issues that LGBT-rights organization Equality Illinois has on its radar as the Illinois General Assembly continues its session this spring.

The organization's central lobbying priority is a bill that would implement the teaching of LGBT history in schools, which Equality Illinois has been working on in tandem with Illinois Safe Schools Alliance and the Legacy Project.

Mike Ziri, Equality Illinois' political director, noted that the bill passed the Senate Education Committee with bipartisan support in March.

"It was a nine-to-two vote, and we received some Republican support," Ziri said. "In the House, we also have a Republican co-sponsor on the bill as well. We're excited to have some bipartisan support on a major LGBTQ initiative."

Illinois would become the second state in the Union—California is the first—to have such a mandate should the bill pass.

"We hear from our stakeholders across the state, whether it's parents or LGBTQ youth, that they don't see themselves in the curriculum," Ziri

explained. "You can learn about Jane Addams, but not learn all about Jane Addams. You can learn about Walt Whitman, but not learn about Walt Whitman, that he was a gay man. You can learn about these famous figures, but you don't learn the whole story."

GLSEN estimated in 2015 that only about 27 percent of LGBTQ school students in Illinois hear anything positive about LGBTQ people, Ziri further noted, adding, "You can imagine the effect that that has on them, never to learn that history."

The bill is important, he said, "because folks will know that there were folks like them who made contributions in history and played important roles in historical events. The same is true for non-LGBTQ students—they will also learn that history. We see it as fostering more affirming schools as well."

Another priority is a bill introduced by state Rep. Will Guzzardi (D-Chicago) that would apply the state Human Rights Ordinance to businesses with fewer than 15 employees, which were previously exempt; that rule would apply mainly for outside Cook County, since Chicago and county ordinances cover firms with under 15 employees.

Other initiatives Equality Illinois is joining include a push to ratify the Equal Rights Amend-



Mike Ziri, of Equality Illinois.
Photo by Tracy Baim

ment.

"It's been a long time coming, but there's going to be a renewed effort to make Illinois the 37th state to ratify it," Ziri said. "Illinois has a provision in the state constitution that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, and we think it's time that the U.S. Constitution ensures that protection as well. It's long overdue."

Looking ahead to the organization's LGBTQ Advocacy Day at the Statehouse on April 11, when citizens meet and lobby their representatives about pertinent issues, Ziri said Equality Illinois was encouraging participants to discuss a fair budget as well as the curriculum issue.

"We ask them to talk about what matters to them in a budget," he explained. "Is it equitable

HIV funding? Providing funding for homeless youth? We want to convey that LGBTQ people care about an equitable budget as well."

One other priority on the organization's agenda, which was launched by organizations such as ACLU Chicago and Chicago Votes, is a bill that assists incarcerated persons and persons recently released from prisons in knowing their voting and other civil rights.

"We know that LGBTQ people are disproportionately represented in the jail and prison population," Ziri said. "So we know if this bill can be a mechanism to get folks civilly engaged, we support that."

See EqualityIllinois.us.



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Gay Asian actor Lee Doud speaks on anti-Asian bias

BY LIZ BAUDLER

Racial bias fails to surprise Asian-American actor Lee Doud. Speaking with professor Mark Martell in front of a small crowd at the University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC's) Richard J. Daley Library at an event Martell entitled "No Fats, No Femmes, No Asians: Unpacking the Anti-Asian Bias in the Modern Dating World," Doud outlined the ways in which anti-Asian sentiment manifests both professionally in his life as actor, and personally on gay apps like Grindr and in real-life encounters.

Born in Hong Kong to a Chinese mother and white father, Doud grew up outside San Francisco. With Sean Connery in the film *From Russia With Love* as inspiration, he used to march around the house pretending to be James Bond. (In fact, Doud aspires to make Bond both Asian and gay.) Dedicated to high school theater, he went to UCLA for acting, although his mother initially wished he'd made a more conventional choice.

"I guess I was just really rebellious," Doud said about convincing his mother that acting was his chosen career. He said she eventually grew to respect his commitment and professionalism, particularly when he managed to get into UCLA despite mediocre grades, and had an agent a year before he graduated.

Doud's breakout role came in the show *Californication*, and he currently plays Jeff, the Asian best friend of main character Nate in the gay-focused web series *I'm Fine*. According to Doud, show creator Brandon Kirby had been disappointed by *Looking*, the HBO series about gay men, which, despite its San Francisco setting, features very few characters of color. *I'm Fine*, by contrast, focuses on characters "on the fringe" and in addition to featuring POC (people of color) and queer characters, brings up topics like PrEP and open relationships.

"We didn't want to showcase the glitz and glam of LA," Doud explained.

Initially Doud had been worried about being relegated to an "Asian sidekick" role in *I'm Fine*. "I wanted Jeff to have more dimension to him," Doud said. "I wanted to tell his story honestly." In the second season, Doud said he got the chance to shape Jeff's story and address his race, though drawing on his own experiences for the show was "scary." In a viral clip from the show, a white date compliments Jeff by telling him "you're mixed, I would never even think of you as Asian," and Jeff swiftly ends the date in response.

"That date is an amalgamation of some experiences I've had in West Hollywood," Doud said. While he acknowledged that perhaps people don't often realize they're saying something insensitive, he agreed with Martell's quip that comments

like the one in the clip are "compli-saults." "What am I supposed to do, bow and say thank you?" Doud joked.

That clip prompted the Advocate to ask for Doud for an editorial about the gay distaste for Asian men, which Doud both had great trepidation about and great difficulty in writing. His original first sentence, he recalled, was "I don't give a shit if you like me or not," but he quickly realized that approach was damaging.

"Rather than turning in a piece that was attacking anyone, I wanted to start a conversation," Doud said. The finished piece, entitled "The Gay Community's Fear and Loathing of Asian Men Must End" has been shared over 10,000 times since the beginning of February—and it brought about Doud's UIC appearance. Martell, who teaches a course on "Asian Americans in Pop Culture," tweeted at Doud after reading, and eventually arranged the visit, marking Doud's first time in Chicago.

Doud was open with Martell about his experiences as an Asian-American actor. "Asians are the most underrepresented minority on television by leaps and bounds," Doud said.

He explained that most roles for Asians are "generic." Producers won't often either pick a certain ethnicity—Japanese, Chinese, Korean—or they won't understand the differences between them.

Doud said he'd been asked to play a Korean in a film, and often gets called on for Vietnamese and even Latino roles. Accentless in real life, he's also been asked to have a "fresh off the boat" accent. He also pointed out that Asian actresses are still consistently confused for one another, and joked about creating a pamphlet with white faces that would explain how to differentiate between them—as a way of explaining that Asian faces have similar differences. "Maybe a lot of mistakes of identity occur because of few points of reference," Martell agreed.

For Doud, an issue in both acting and dating is the desexualization of Asian men. He pointed out that actors like Jackie Chan are more often considered comic relief, and in the rare instance where an Asian man is a romantic lead, the actual romance is often relegated to a mere kiss.

"Media representation translates into what people say are their sexual preferences," Doud said.

To illustrate the Asian experience on dating apps, Martell showed screenshots of Grindr and Tinder profiles where Asians were often explicitly singled out as undesirable, often in a vulgar way, or occasionally fetishized by the term "rice queen."

"This type of messaging isn't new," Martell added, showing historical photographs of signs enforcing Japanese, Chinese and Filipino discrimination.



Lee Doud at UIC forum.

Photo by Liz Baudler

Doud called the dating world phenomenon "sexual racism," and said that while having types is fine, it ceases to be so when types are based on what people believe or to what they have been exposed.

"You don't come out of the womb saying, 'I

don't like Black people,'" Doud said.

He called the response to his words "humbling."

"It made it all worth it," he said about sharing his experiences. "It created a community."

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 leading 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.

Precious Minds project seeks to mentor youth

Precious Minds Mentoring Program is a program for young women, founded by a youth who has experienced her own struggles and who now seeks to help others.

Keonza Phillips is a young entrepreneur adult who grew up on the North and South sides of Chicago. Her main passion was finding a way to give back to the youth in her communities, creating positive reaction decisions, safe spaces and safe circles.

This is she decided to found a start-up program called Precious Minds. Precious Minds is a mentoring program targeting youth who identify as women, ages 10 years to 18 years old, to build confidence, academics and compassion.

According to Phillips, Precious Minds aims to educate youth who identify as women on vital assets of personal development; implementing the value of self-confidence and empathy; gaining communication and leadership skills; and building a solid foundation of trust and support in personal, professional and academic events and/or advice.

Contact Executive Director Keonza Phillips at 773-272-5463 or phillipskeonza22@gmail.com.

30 Under 30 Award nominations due April 13

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 Williamson 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, poli-

tics, 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 aca-

Storytelling class for women of color

Feminine Comique (Fem Com) is a Chicago-based class that provides opportunities for cisgender and transgender women of color to use comedy to share and convey their unique stories in an all-female supported environment:

CDPH and FemCom are piloting a free six-week project at the end of March to make the art of storytelling available to a wider audience. This is a beginners workshop and participants do not need any prior comedy or performance experience.

Participants are asked to commit to one two-hour session per week for six weeks. Exact times and locations will be finalized next month with interested participants. Refreshments will be provided at each class.

See <https://www.femininecomique.com/>. To be added to the class list, contact H.L. Anderson at Hannah.Anderson@CityOfChicago.Org or 312-745-0537.

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

democratic careers and much more.

Individuals, organizations, co-workers, etc. can nominate a person by emailing Andrew@Windy-CityMediaGroup.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.

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.

LGBTs to be excluded from 2020 Census

A draft of the 2020 U.S. Census has been released—and it shows that questions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity have been

removed.

The U.S. Census Bureau, part of the Department of Commerce, has to issue a list of categories it plans to track three years before the survey is conducted. The draft for the next survey covers race and gender—but also includes such categories as the length of a daily work commute.

Pro-LGBTQ advocacy groups have been campaigning for years to include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity, and it seemed their wishes had been granted when the initial draft was released. However, the proposed addition suddenly disappeared, followed by a statement from the Census bureau that called the LGBTQ inclusion a mistake.

'On the Table' to return May 8

The Chicago Community Trust announced the return of its annual region-wide civic engagement initiative On the Table on Tuesday, May 8.

Over the past four years, On the Table has provided an annual forum for tens of thousands of Chicagoans to engage in conversation, develop new relationships and inspire action to make differences in communities.

Anyone can host an On the Table conversation. Those interested in doing so are encouraged to call or call 866-737-6951 or sign up at OnTheTable.com, where hosts will have access to materials and resources to help prepare for and guide conversations.

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Community, activists meet with AG's staff on policing issues

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Representatives from Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office met April 6 with advocates, service providers and community members to discuss difficulties between some LGBT Chicagoans and the Chicago Police Department (CPD).

The meeting was held at Center on Halsted, and was the first small-scale gathering officials are holding to formulate a consent decree for reform of CPD. It was facilitated by advocate Lisa Gilmore of Morten Group, in association with University of Illinois at Chicago.

The consent decree—a court order putting into place “reforms that govern police training and policies and provide officers the support they need to implement safe and constitutional policing practices,” according to a website established by Madigan's office—comes after U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions pulled the plug on federal efforts to hold CPD accountable in the wake of the 2014 shooting of Laquan McDonald and myriad other incidents. Madigan wants to get the matter before a judge prior to her departing office early next year. The city will likely not contest

the matter.

Madigan's website, and the community meetings, are being used to garner feedback as the decree is composed.

The April 6 meeting was closed to media to foster open conversation, but a few participants discussed the issues that inspired them to get involved.

Activist Gloria Allen said, “The police department have their good points and their bad points, but the bad policemen get off so easily with a slap on the wrist. They'll say, ‘They're suspended until further notice with pay.’ They need to cut that out completely. ... If you give someone who holds a city or official job just a slap on the wrist, they are going to continue to do what they do.”

Activist Donald Bell added that he appreciated the initiative “especially because I feel we've been abandoned by the current federal administration, especially since the current attorney general has not followed through from the findings of the [Obama-era] Justice Department. The state attorney general has stepped into the breach and I appreciate that.”

Activist Yordana Adedokun said that “the po-



Activist Yordana Adedokun.

Photo by Matt Simonette

lice department appropriates certain acts of discrimination and racial bias in our community. ... I'm a firm believer that, with the proper frameworks of community building and relationship building, we should [ultimately] not have to need police. I believe in a society where we can

govern ourselves as a community—I know that that's a long path, and there's a road we can take to get there.”

To read about and offer feedback for the police consent decree, visit ChicagoPoliceConsentDecree.com.

HOWARDBROWN.ORG/CHIQU2018

 Howard Brown Health



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Howard Brown Health invites the LGBTQ community and allies to support services for women and TGNC people.

Advocate recounts challenges facing women with HIV

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Even as technology to prevent and treat HIV infections improves, obstacles continue to impede efforts by providers and advocates to assist women living with HIV.

One such organization committed to facing those obstacles however, is Oakland, California-based Positive Women Network-USA (PWN-USA). Founded in 2008 by 28 women living with HIV, it now has staff in several American cities and is led by Executive Director Naina Khanna.

Khanna recalled that a decade ago, "Nobody was advocating on our behalf. There were huge gaps to be filled. We were also very concerned about the leadership landscape not having enough women living with HIV, particularly with very few women of color and trans women with HIV. We were born to shift that dynamic."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 7,529 women received an HIV diagnosis in 2016; that is about 19 percent of all new infections. Women of color were disproportionately represented among those numbers: Black women represented 61 percent of the new infections; Latinx women represented 16 percent; and other groups represented five percent. White women accounted for about 19 percent of new infections.

PWN-USA fights racial and socio-economic disparities that hinder prevention and treatment strategies. According to its website, the organization "inspires, informs, and mobilizes women living with HIV to advocate for changes that improve our lives and uphold our rights. In addition to federal advocacy, PWN-USA supports regional chapters to build leadership at a local and state level."

"We build leadership in the communities most impacted by the epidemic," Khanna explained. "We advocate using a human rights and social justice framework for policies that are grounded in human rights and dignity."

Racism, poverty and lack of access to equitable healthcare are three key barriers the organization works on, she added, noting those challenges also intersect with HIV stigma.

"In the current political climate, we're sort of seeing a resurgence of sexual- and reproductive-stigma, in the form of reduction of available services and the [attempts to] control what people do and not do with their bodies," she said. "This trend in political actions, policy decisions and funding mechanisms is targeting communities that are already the most marginalized for various reasons. That's a big part of what people living with HIV contend with today—[from challenges to] our reproductive futures to transgender folks being discriminated against in healthcare settings, not being able to have their types of medical care covered by insurance companies."

Khanna said the socio-political challenges have



Positive Women Network-USA Executive Director Naina Khanna.

Photo from Khanna

been ever-present, but the previous presidential administration had been making significant efforts to combat HIV-related issues.

"That presented a great opportunity that many cities and states started to pick up in the form of epidemic plans, and things like that," she recalled. "With the [current] administration, we're seeing a lot of threats to HIV-funding and -services and a lack of commitment. After more than a year, we don't have a director of the National Office of AIDS Policy or leadership in the administration on the domestic epidemic."

A key goal for advocates, according to Khanna, should be advancing models of trauma-informed care. "We know that 30 percent of women living with HIV, according to one study, are living with current post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We know that women living with HIV have high-rates of living with intimate partner violence and other forms of violence—and that's not even talking about structural violence that most women living with HIV are dealing with, in the form of systemic discrimination, poverty, racism and stigma."

Trauma-informed healthcare services delivery would increase engagement and retention in healthcare, so that medical care would be "a place of healing, and not just treatment," Khanna added. "We have the medications today for people to live long, healthy lives, but we can't get them to everyone. Part of that is the structural barriers like co-pays, distance to pharmacies, how hard it is to fill a prescription. But a lot of it is also about mental and emotional health and whether people have stability on their lives."

For more information, see pwn-usa.org. Khanna created a video discussing her work and experiences as part of amFAR's EPIC VOICES series to raise awareness about HIV-related issues. The video can be viewed at curecountdown.org/epicvoices/.



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COMPASS



Pulse vigil in Orlando in 2017.
Photo by Tracy Baim

Pulse nightclub owner speaks about onePULSE Foundation

BY FRANK PIZZOLI

"Within a few weeks I knew I'd be doing something," Barbara Poma said over the telephone.

That something is onePULSE Foundation.

Poma was the owner of Pulse, the Orlando, Florida, gay nightclub when on June 12, 2016, when Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old security guard, killed 49 people and wounded 58 others in a terrorist attack and hate crime inside the club.

The shooter was himself shot and killed by Orlando Police Department (OPD) officers after a

three-hour standoff. Pulse was hosting a "Latin Night" and thus most of the victims were Latinx. It is the deadliest incident of violence against LGBT people in U.S. history, and the deadliest terrorist attack in the U.S. since the September 11 attacks in 2001.

At the time, it was the deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter in the U.S., being surpassed the following year by the Las Vegas shooting. It remains the deadliest U.S. mass shooting in which the perpetrator did not commit suicide.

"Events like the Pulse massacre you cannot pre-

pare for," Poma said.

"It's been 20 months, a long time, from Los Angeles to New York City, other locations. Our original idea has evolved as we have travelled around the country," she explained. "I've had a very positive reception everywhere. We've been doing fundraising, community events, educational programs, researching our ideas for the foundation."

The foundation is in the process of establishing a memorial at the nightclub site. A museum is also underway, hopefully adjacent or nearby the site of the massacre.

"We also have a scholarship program we're establishing that has a unique feature. In return for receiving the funds, recipients must have a plan to give back through community work," Poma said. If successful, victims will have a scholarship named after each of them.

Scholarships will be further "personalized" to represent dashed aspirations and careers.

"If a victim was or always wanted to be a fire fighter, we will have a fire fighter scholarship. Their lives were cut short so the scholarship will honor them by aspiration and name," Poma explained. "There are hair salons and cosmetology schools coming on board soon, too," Poma said. "We never want these people forgotten. They were children in families. They were loved by others."

The foundation is also engaged in community town halls, "although we re-arranged one when Parkland happened. We didn't want to interfere, we wanted those students and families to have their space. We deferred," Poma said.

Grieving

"Grieving after the massacre was a human ebb and flow among the 49 sets of families, friends, lovers," Poma said softly about her immediate contact as club owner after the tragic episode.

"All grieving is personal and unique and so is my involvement with survivors, some more than others, some not at all. I respect everyone as they cope," she said.

"Contrary to what many people think, the foun-

ation does not have a 'list' of contacts who are survivors or family and friends, no lists," Poma said. "Our contact has been 'organic' not formal or programmatic," she said.

Encouraging people to finish the work the foundation has started is paramount.

"We've started the foundation and we're working on a memorial and museum. They need to be completed," Poma said. "We need to preserve for after we are gone all the lessons learned from so many gun tragedies." Her voice strong and direct, "These shootings shouldn't happen anywhere. Not in schools, churches, concerts, or casinos. That's enough," Poma said.



Pulse owner Barbara Poma.
Publicity photo

Ex-Houston mayor at El Pride Brunch June 3

As part of LGBTQ Pride Month, Equality Illinois will host a Pride Brunch on Sunday, June 3, with an appearance by Annise Parker, the former mayor of Houston and the first out mayor of a major U.S. city.

The brunch will take place at Venue West, 221 N. Paulina St., 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

As the keynote speaker at the 2018 Pride Brunch, Mayor Parker will discuss her role as President & CEO of Victory Fund—the only national organization dedicated to electing openly LGBTQ people.

Tickets are \$35 each; visit <https://www.equalityillinois.us/events/pridebrunch/>.



Annise Parker.
Photo from Victory Fund



From left: Target Q CEO Cathy Renna, onePULSE Foundation founder Barbara Poma and Alex Fruchtmann, Manhattan Chamber of Commerce.
Publicity photo

\$2.5 million raised at Holocaust museum dinner

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center recently hosted its signature event: the annual Humanitarian Awards Dinner.

More than \$2.5 million was raised to support the educational mission of the Museum. Former Great Britain/Northern Ireland Prime Minister Tony Blair, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner provided remarks.

The museum honored Chicagoans Mitchell Feiger and Pamela L. Netzky with the Humanitarian Award, along with the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, represented by David D. Hiller, with the Distinguished Community Leadership Award.



Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.
Photo by Mariah Smith

Center's 'Human First' gala April 21

Center on Halsted's annual "Human First" gala will take place Saturday, April 21, that Grammy-Winning music legend Jody Watley is scheduled to perform live at the Center's gala on Saturday, April 21, at The Geraghty, 2520 S. Hoyne Ave.

Cocktails and a reception will start at 5:30 p.m., with awards, dinner, performances and dancing commencing at 7 p.m.

This year, the Center is honoring four outstanding civic leaders known for their important contributions to the LGBTQ movement. The Human First Award honorees include Marcia Lipetz, Victoria Raymont, Dr. Tom Klein and David Gitomer. The ACLU of Illinois is the recipient of the 2018 Community Spirit Award, and Executive Director Colleen K. Connell is accepting the honor on behalf of the organization.

In addition, Grammy-winning singer Jody Watley is slated to perform live. Also, long-term supporters of the Center and elected officials planning to attend include Michael and Cari Sacks, Laura Ricketts and Brooke Skinner Ricketts, Illinois gubernatorial candidate J.B. Pritzker, Illinois state Sen. Heather Steans and Chicago Ald. Tom Tunney.

Visit CenterOnHalsted.org/hf/.

Howard Brown's 'ChiQ' on April 28

Howard Brown Health will hold "ChiQ" (formerly Garden of Eve) on Saturday, April 28, 7-11 p.m., at South Shore Cultural Center, 7059 S. South Shore Dr.

There will be dancing, performances by Jeezy's Juke Joint, light bites and community-building. DJ All The Way Kay and DJ Sandra Suave will provide music.

Admission is \$75-\$200 each; visit <https://howardbrown.org/event/chiq/>.

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Ex-Focus on the Family daughter 'refocuses' her life mission

BY SARAH TOCE

In her authentically jarring memoir *Refocusing My Family: Coming Out, Being Cast Out, and Discovering the True Love of God*, author and activist Amber Cantorna rips the mask off the anti-LGBTQ evangelical ministry Focus on the Family—and does so from the inside. That's because from the age of three years old, Cantorna's father was an executive in the mission to save traditional families everywhere.

"I acted in *Adventures in Odyssey* as a kid, I was home-schooled K-12, and I vowed myself to the 'True Love Waits' campaign by putting a purity ring on my finger at the age of 13," she writes for HuffPost.

A typical evening around the dinner table in her childhood home was pretty standard for the "perfect" family.

"We never ate in shifts, we ate as a family," Cantorna remembered. "My mom was an excellent homemaker and always had dinner on the table when my dad walked through the door from work. We'd pray over our food before we ate it, and then sit around the table and talk about our day while we ate. After we were through, there was usually a devotional of some kind that my dad read, which included a Bible passage and some reflective thoughts. It was also not uncommon for us to memorize a passage—or even an entire chapter—of Scripture as a family and we'd practice it together at either breakfast or dinner time as well. Friday nights were our 'family night.' We always looked forward to it because that was

the night we got to eat pizza and have dinner in front of the TV. We'd choose a family-friendly movie, which to my mom meant no cussing, no sex, limited violence, and a good moral message. Often, we'd have homemade ice cream or frozen yogurt for dessert."

Focus on the Family claims to "save and strengthen families" and Cantorna agrees—if you're referring to one specific type of family module.

"Focus on the Family claims to 'save and strengthen families,' but really, they only focus on one type of family—a family with one mom and one dad who are married and have born children together," she said. "But there are so many other types of families—families that, by choice or by circumstance, do not fit the cultural norm or cookie-cutter shape of that family. There are families with one male and one female parent, but there are also families with two male or two female parents.

"There are those with adopted children or foster children, those with biological children, those with single moms or single dads, those with blended families, those with no kids—each one brings a unique richness and depth to the beautiful, diverse family of God. If we are going to focus on strengthening families, we need to focus on strengthening all families and not favor some while pushing others to the margins. The fact is that we all want to love and grow our families to the best of our ability and we all deserve the same rights and support."

The ultrareligious group also claims to save



Amber Cantorna (left) and wife Clara.
Photo from Catrona

marriages.

"Again, I believe if you are going to help save marriages, then you need to help save all marriages," she said. "Focus on the Family may be known for helping 'save marriages,' but they have also destroyed a lot of marriages by convincing someone who is gay that their only choice they have is to still marry an opposite sex partner. Doing that has not only done deep psychological damage to the LGBTQ person by persuading them they are innately flawed, but it has also been incredibly insensitive and unfair to the person that that LGBTQ person marries."

The group's standard anti-LGBTQ rhetoric runs deeply in the intersection of faith, religion, family, and interpersonal relationships.

"Because of this theology, so many LGBTQ people have been deeply wounded and traumatized by the church to the point that many of them walk away from God completely," Cantorna said. "Those that do keep their faith have had to work extremely hard and often undergo extensive therapy to be able to heal from that kind of spiritual trauma. The damage being done is life-threatening, which is why I feel it is imperative that we rethink these topics and how we address them, especially in faith communities."

Cantorna is openly gay and married to a woman named Clara. The decision to embrace her own truth almost cost her everything.

"Coming out to my family was by far the hardest thing I have ever had to do," she remembered. "The fear and anxiety that led up to that day was overwhelming at best and completely crippling at its worst. But once I was able to reconcile my own faith with my sexuality, I knew I was going to have to be honest about it with my family."

She remembered, "Deep down, I knew that it could potentially cost me everything. I wasn't prepared for the fact that it actually would. Telling my parents I was gay was to them, the equiv-

alent of dying. In fact, when I came out to them, they literally got up and walked out of my house without any conversation around it whatsoever. We didn't speak again for three weeks, and when we did, the conversation was brutal. The first thing they said to me was, 'We feel like you've died.' They went on to compare me to murderers and pedophiles, told me I was selfish for doing this to the family and putting my dad's job in jeopardy, and took away my keys to their house."

It only got worse over time. Harmful words and passive aggressive behavior continued to slowly shun Cantorna from her family to the point that she no longer felt safe around them. "We tried to maintain some degree of contact for the first couple of years, but it was emotionally exhausting and caused deep inner turmoil. My family became the place where I felt like I least belonged instead of where I most belonged. They kept hoping and praying I would change, but as I fell in love with Clara and we dated and became engaged, that hope for them waned. I had no family present on the day of my wedding and shortly after we got married, they cut ties with me completely. We haven't spoken since."

As for Clara, "My life finally started the day we met...This June we will celebrate four years of marriage and that time has gone so fast! Being with my wife Clara has brought my heart alive in a way I only dreamed was possible. For so long, so much of my life felt bleak and dark, but finally coming into my identity and coming out was like being set free after living in a cage my entire life. I've never felt more alive, more at peace, or more at home in my own skin. Yes, our marriage takes work and commitment just like any marriage, but my heart feels at home and like it is finally where it belongs. I am by far the happiest I have ever been in my life."

Cantorna's close friends also abruptly exited her life after she told them the truth about her heart and her life.

"Unfortunately, almost all of my extended family along with the majority of my friends turned their back on me as well," she recalled. "I grew up in such a cocooned and sheltered world that most of the people I knew thought and believed exactly what my parents did: that being gay was an abomination, that I had given into temptation and was deceived by the devil, and that it was going to send my soul to hell. For many of them, I believe they feared that simply by associating with me—someone they believed to be involved in the darkest kind of sin—put their soul in jeopardy of hell as well. At the very least it made them uncomfortable. So many people, rather than facing something difficult or confronting their fear, felt it was easier to simply not engage at all. As a result, I ended up feeling completely isolated and alone."

Now that time has passed, a few friends have circled back around to Cantorna.

"In recent years, there have been a few people from my past that I have been able to reconnect with and that has meant more to me than anything in the world," she said. "I cherish those people, even though they are few, and find such life and healing in those friendships."

Cantorna's overall message in her memoir *Refocusing My Family* is clear: "It is fully possible to be LGBTQ and still have a healthy, thriving relationship with God. They are not mutually exclusive and I believe God embraces us—LGBTQ people—and blesses our committed same-sex marriages just as much as he embraces and blesses any straight person or marriage."

Initially, Cantorna's story was published in a



Amber Cantorna.

Photo from Cantorna

blog post that she says was "a kind of test run and overnight it went viral. Since then, I've gotten an overwhelming number of messages and emails from people from all over the world with similar backgrounds and stories."

In part because of the immediate emotional response to her life's story out in the open and the response from likeminded individuals, Cantorna is taking it on the road.

"The unfortunate thing is that this is not just my story," she said. "There are thousands of other people whose dads may not work at Focus on the

Family, but instead is a pastor or missionary or ministry leader and they've grown up—or raised their kids—on James Dobson's parenting principles, they've listened to *Adventures in Odyssey*, they've been homeschooled or immersed in the purity culture. There are so many themes that those from an evangelical Christian background have in common.

"And unfortunately, those who are coming out as LGBTQ within those communities are living many of the same horrors I did: feelings of unworthiness and self-hatred, deep depression,

self-injury, shame, suicidal thoughts or ideations. This story is far more prevalent than I wish was ever possible. So *Refocusing My Family* was written to A) give a beacon of hope to the LGBTQ person who grew up in a conservative faith community and is struggling to come out, and B) to create conversations for change among parents, families and friends of LGBTQ people of faith so that we can become more loving and inclusive, rather than shame them out of fear."

She concluded, "I hope that by reading my story, people will realize that the theology that says being gay is a sin isn't just a hot political topic or a good news story—this is affecting real people with real lives. And it is causing people to actually take their lives. We need to do better. And I believe that by humanizing the issue and making it a story that many of people can relate to, that lives will be changed and families will be restored because they are able to look at it through a lens of love and understanding, rather than judgment and fear."

Cantorna's story is in her new memoir, *Refocusing My Family: Coming Out, Being Cast Out, and Discovering the True Love of God*. Available now (almost!) everywhere books are sold.

Amber Cantorna is the author of *Refocusing My Family* and the founder of *Beyond*, a non-profit organization offering support to LGBTQ people through their coming out process. People can see Cantorna at one of her 20+ tour events nation-wide by checking out her tour schedule, and follow her on Facebook and Twitter @AmberNCantorna.

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viewpoints


**Rev. Irene
MONROE**

MLK's assassination reminds nation of gun violence

The 50th anniversary of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination is, sadly, a searing reminder of unaddressed gun violence in the United States. And, because gun violence has gone unaddressed for half a century, future generations of children residing in a safer and healthier America MLK spoke about so dreamingly in his speeches now in 2018 live in fear of guns—when they are not running scared for their lives from them.

During the “March for Our Lives” student-led demonstration demanding safer gun laws that took place in Washington, D.C. last month, one of the surprise guest speakers was 9-year-old Yolanda Renee King, granddaughter of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Like the hundreds of thousands of children and teens who came to the nation's capital with the mission to end school shootings, Yolanda told the audience, “My grandfather had a dream that his four little children will not be judged by the color of the skin, but the content of their character.” Standing on stage alongside one of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivors, Yolanda continued sharing her hopes with the crowd, saying, “I have a dream that enough is enough. And that this should be a gun-free world, period.”

As I watched King's cherubic-looking granddaughter deliver her speech to a cheering crowd, I nearly cried realizing Yolanda never met her grandfather because a bullet shortened his life, leaving us all wondering how long he might have lived.

King wrote in his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” in April 1963 that “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. ... This is the interrelated structure of reality.” In 2018, no one could have fathomed the number one issue all American school-age children face is an epidemic of school shootings—whether in wealthy suburbs like Newtown and Parkland or cities like Chicago and Baltimore. Gun violence is killing our children, and gun reform continues to be that hot-bottom issue as a country we can't seem to budge on.

It was a similar problem 50 years ago.

Just two months after King's death in April, with a nation still in mourning, New York Sen. and then-presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in June. His brother, President John F. Kenne-

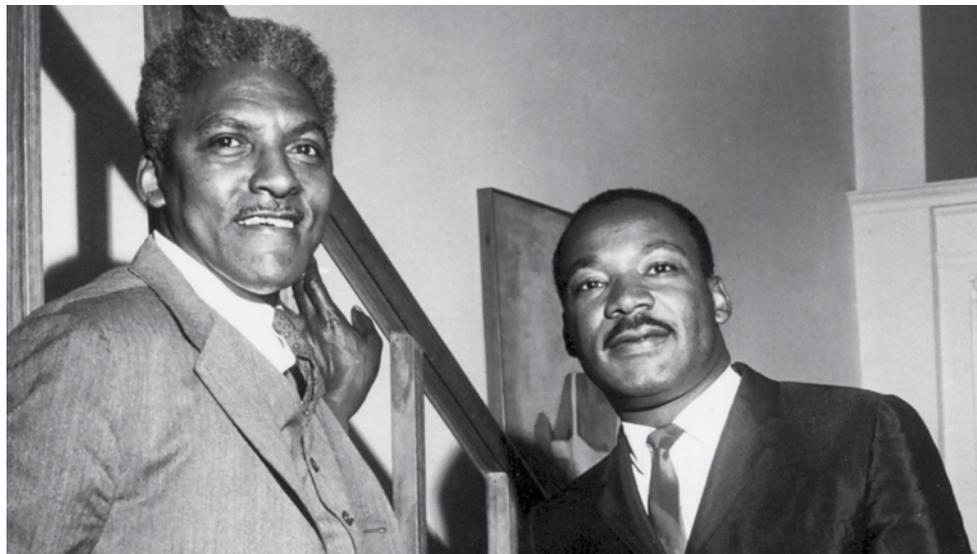

Martin Luther King Jr. (right), with gay activist Bayard Rustin.

Photo by Monroe Frederick, from the estate of Bayard Rustin

dy, was assassinated five years earlier, in November 1963. Immediately following JFK's assassination, King told his executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Andrew Young, Jr., “Guns are going to be the death of this country.”

President Lyndon B. Johnson thought so, too. Johnson wrote to Congress requesting stronger gun laws in the wake of RFK's death: “Far too many [guns] were bought by the demented, the deranged, the hardened criminal, and the convict, the addict, and the alcoholic. So, today, I call upon the Congress in the name of sanity ... and in the name of an aroused nation—to give us the Gun Control Law it needs.” Johnson passed landmark civil-rights legislation during his tenure, but he could not make a dent on gun reform.

King would have been proud of The “March for Our Lives” demonstration. It demonstrated the collective power of children and teen activists to shame and to bring recalcitrant Second Amendment advocate lawmakers to their knees as the “Children's Crusade” of 1963 did in Birmingham, Alabama. The Children's Crusade protesters braved arrest, fire hoses and police dogs to bring to the nation's attention their state's unrelenting segregation laws.

I don't know if MLK could have ever imagined an epidemic of school shootings. No one could. He did, however, speak out about this country's children being reared on a steady diet of violence, suggesting a link between watching violent acts in movies or television shows resulting in antisocial behavior or acting aggressively in life.

“By our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim, by allowing our movie and

television screens to teach our children that the hero is one who masters the art of shooting and the technique of killing, by allowing all these developments, we have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes,” King stated in 1963.

King's assassination shocked the nation. The alleged weapon was the Remington 30-06 hunting rifle, a weapon easily obtained then—like the AR-15 is today, and which was used in the Valentine's Day massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Johnson redoubled his efforts to get sensible gun laws in place with each act of gun violence, unlike President Trump, but the NRA was able to quickly mobilize an opposition team in Congress against Johnson to oppose gun-reform legislation.

There have been 17n school shootings since March of this year. The high volume of school shootings can be pointed to the NRA and its allies employing similar tactics used 50 years ago to obstruct gun safety legislation. No one, however, could have fathomed the NRA would use those same tactics against the safety of our children, too. But our children have spoken up, and they want sweeping new gun control laws now and not crumbs.

King's assassination is a glaring reminder of what happens to a future generation when an important issue like gun safety goes unaddressed. In King's famous “I Have a Dream” speech he said, “Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment.” I'm hoping lawmakers are listening this time.

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WINDY CITY TIMES

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Photo by iNDie Grant Productions

THEATER

'The Cake' is very 'personal play' for lesbian director

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

When director Lauren Shouse came out years ago, one of the people she told was her oldest, closest friend. "At first, she was OK with it," Shouse recalled. "Then she told me she had talked to her pastor. And she had some Bible verses she wanted me to read. She finally told me we all had a choice about how to live our lifestyles, and she could not support my choice. I had to cut her out of my life."

The anecdote illustrates how closely Shouse, a North Carolina native, identifies with Bekah Brunstetter's *The Cake*. Set in North Carolina, the drama centers on Macy (Krystal McNeil) and Jen (Tuckie White), a lesbian couple engaged to wed, and Della (Tara Mallen), a master baker who has long viewed Jen as a daughter but whose religion condemns homosexuality. The cast is completed by Keith Kupferer as Tim, Della's husband.

Shouse is making her Rivendell debut directing the drama, but she's no stranger to dealing with LGBTQIA issues on stage. Last year, she helmed the critically acclaimed *The Legend of Georgia McBride*—a tale of two drag queens—for Northlight Theatre. When she was earning her MFA at Northwestern, she took on *Stop Kiss*, Diana Son's intense, moving drama about two lesbians and a late-night hate crime.

"*The Cake* is one of the most personal plays I've ever worked on," said Shouse. "When I first read it, I was like, oh my god, I have to direct this. It's set in North Carolina. I'm from North Carolina. I'm

married to a woman. And when I came out to best friend, she was not OK with it."

For Shouse, making the friend an ex-friend painful but possible. For *The Cake*'s Jen and Della, the situation isn't so simple. Jen's mother died young. Della has filled that role for her for years. The two genuinely love each other.

"What the play does is show the divide and two people trying to bridge it," said Shouse. "I can understand that. My parents have very different values than I do; they love my wife and call her their second daughter, but we also get into some real arguments sometimes because they're Republican. I can't cut them out of my life. I wouldn't want to. We had to figure out a way to go forward."

Brunstetter's plot is partially inspired by the Supreme Court-bound dispute between Colorado cake-maker Jack Phillips, and same-sex couple David Mullins and Charlie Craig. Mullins and Craig asked Phillips to bake their wedding cake. Phillips refused, citing religious beliefs. The case is expected to be heard later this year. With *The Cake*, Brunstetter, a native of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, wasn't interested in pitting strangers against each other. She wanted to make the characters as deeply personal as her own experiences.

"Della's entire life has been grounded in her religion, what she's been taught to believe," said Shouse. "She also truly, truly loves Jen. So what happens if those two things collide?"

There's also a divide in Jen's character, Shouse said. "Jen talks about being split in two," Shouse

said. "I understand that pull. When you're from the South—and I'm from the South—you can be surrounded all your life by like-minded people. I'm not talking about tiki torch bearing hateful people, but people operating under a belief system that's all they know. I think that's where empathy comes in. You understand that you're exposing them to something completely new to them."

At her own nuptials in Holland, Michigan, Shouse and her wife both went full-on white

wedding dress. "We had one person ask us if we were doing a double wedding," Shouse said. "I told them 'no. We're marrying each other.'"

The Cake is in previews through April 18, with a regular run through May 20 at Rivendell Theatre, 5779 N. Ridge Ave. Preview tickets are \$28 (\$18 students, military, vets); regular run is \$38 (\$28 students, military, vets). For more info, call 773-334-7728 or go to RivendellTheatre.org.



Lauren Shouse.
PR photo

THEATER REVIEW

Gaslight District

Playwright: the Cast
 At: The Second City e.t.c. (sic),
 230 W. North Ave.
 Tickets: 312-337-3992;
 SecondCity.com; from \$21
 Runs through: Open run

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

Shakespeare called them soliloquies, when actors stepped away from their surroundings to reveal their innermost thoughts.

The 19th century called them “asides,” spoken for the audience’s benefit. This new revue calls them “scene holes,” when the action freezes so an actor can “tell the truth” directly to the audience. Although a time-tested device, it’s cleverly refreshed in *Gaslight District*, The Second City e.t.c.’s lightning-fast 42nd revue, composed of blackouts, short scenes and songs in traditional format rather than a Harold.

Left behind are the often-tired routines about



Emily
 Fightmaster in
Gaslight District.
 Photo by
 Todd Rosenberg

dating, parenting, office life and the mayor—mainstays of past revues—in favor of the flavor of the times: national politics. Trump is targeted repeatedly, although he appears (portrayed by Andrew Knox) only twice, briefly. His presence looms large nonetheless in skits such as three Germans celebrating the fact that Nazism is illegal in Germany but not in the USA, or the song about finding “salvation in the Power of the Gun.” Another skit parodies how news outlets spin the

same story: regarding divorce, Fox News states “The more divorces you have, the better prepared you are to be president.” Most potent of all is an Act II sketch in which a Dreamer turns himself in for deportation. Most of it is hilarious—an absurd treatment of a sober subject—but the ending twist is serious and earnest, which is tremendously affecting and not the usual scene button at The Second City.

Other noteworthy scenes are a song about “a

gender alien from planet Dildo,” a brilliantly-improvised rap song and an improvised scene with an audience member, who cleverly is worked into both Act I and Act II sequences.

For some years The Second City has promoted inclusiveness in its companies, so it seems somewhat retro when they call attention to inclusiveness, but they do. Cast member are introduced with nicknames such as “Tall Gay One” (Emily Fightmaster), “Ethnically Ambiguous One” (Sayjal Joshi) and “Really White Man” (Knox). Other players are “Short Troll Man” (Jasbir Singh Vazquez), “Skeleton Nerd” (slender Alan Linic) and “Thicc” (plumpish Katie Kershaw). All of them are talented, energetic players and very evenly matched as an ensemble under director Anneliese Toft. By the end of the show, however, Vazquez stands first among equals for his skillful physical work. Jacob Shuda is the stellar keyboard man and composer, and proves how integral sound and music are to revues such as this. Also contributing to the show’s success are Abby Beggs’ lighting design and veteran Bob Knuth’s set design, a clever wall of doors with clerestory windows above.

Gaslight District is a winning show.

THEATER REVIEW

Down the Rocky Road and All the Way to Bedlam

Playwright: D. Matthew Beyer
 At: Otherworld Theatre at Nox Arca
 Studio, Suite 405 at 4001 N. Ravenswood Ave.
 Tickets: Pay-what-you-can
 (suggested price: \$20)
 Runs through: May 13

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Whether exemplifying the technological utopias

of the 1890s, the space operas of the 1930s, the social commentaries of the 1960s or the cyberpunk nihilism of the 1990s, all science fiction must mirror its own cultural context or risk its viewers wasting valuable time orienting themselves within its dramatic universe, instead of heeding its author’s lesson.

The premise for D. Matthew Beyer’s play is based in a genealogical practice frequently observed, but rarely articulated: that of parents who, confronted with a sickly first child, promptly produce a second, in order to ensure continuance of the family line (“an heir and a spare”) and to provide a caretaker for the afflicted sibling. The drug-resistant tuberculosis that Tom Bedlam and Lain Jerusalem feared would soon destroy their

beloved daughter Lucy, however, has condemned her to a lingering death, making for an uneasy filial dynamic in which the now 11-year-old Lucy rages against her infirmity, Lain flees her kin to seek a remedy for her crippling depression, and Tom buries himself in his work, pausing only to remind Lucy’s sibling, Z, that she is merely a device created to serve the needs of her “makers.” He means it, too: Z, you see, is a robot.

So what happens when post-21st-century artificial intelligence is packaged in a vintage body and raised as the demographically inferior companion of a physically imperfect mortal? Tom and Lain heap blame for their misfortune on one another, while Lucy and Z quarrel over which their parents love best, until an accident renders this

war of attrition forever moot—but what then is to become of the AI android who now really, really needs her mother?

Beyer’s text employs several literary references likely familiar to Otherworld Theatre Company’s audiences, but a pre-curtain wiki-search of Isaac Asimov’s three Laws of Robotics and the canon of Roger Zelazny (Z’s namesake) is advised generally. Playgoers of less fanciful disposition need not dread becoming engulfed in STEMspeak, though. Lauren N. Fields’ direction retains a firm grip on its subtext to keep the progress of Beyer’s characters (in particular, Chase Nuerg’s Z) precise and palpable right up to a final moment that just might bring forth a *bona fide* human tear.

THEATER REVIEW

The Rosenkranz Mysteries: Physician Magician

Playwright: Eugene Burger, Jessica Fisch & Ricardo Rosenkranz
 At: Opus Magica Music at the Royal George Theatre, 1641 N. Halsted St.
 Tickets: \$50-\$75
 Runs through: May 6

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

If the notion of a physician who professes to believe in magic makes you uncomfortable, remember that the initial step in any scientific discovery is a perceptual one: First you observe that something works, and then you search for the secret of *why* it works. The shamans of yore may have bowed to expedience in the execution of their practice, relying on divine intervention for explanation of its efficacy, but medical tech-

nology today continues to acknowledge the importance of unseen factors in determining the outcome of pathogenic wars.

Ricardo Rosenkranz—that’s *Dr.* Ricardo Rosenkranz, rather—recognizes the connection between the mechanics of healing and belief in the possibility of healing, making his exhibition, currently occupying the cabaret space at the Royal George, less a “magic show” than a “show with magic” (as *Evita* is a musical, but *Threepenny Opera* is a play with music), its feats of legerdemain presented, not as mere clever stunts, but illustrations of principles necessary to saving lives.

To be sure, his demonstrations often employ tangible props—the drollest being Balsamo, an animated skull-in-a-box, but also alphabet blocks, Rubik’s Cubes and the familiar silk scarves—while others replicate, with dazzling accuracy, such legendary illusions as the fin-de-siecle “Orange Tree” teleportation involving a quasi-E.T.A. Hoffmann automaton into whose botanical foliage an audience member’s wedding ring flies, to be later restored to its owner by artificial doves, or a re-enactment of

a gilded-age “ghost portrait” seance, originally staged by a pair of hucksters from Chicago’s history.

Rosenkranz’s soothing voice and benign countenance—remnants of his former profession—are a departure from the staccato delivery of, say, the Palmer House Magic Parlour’s Dennis Watkins, but any potential somnolence arising from its tranquil tone is counteracted by the vivacious visual display inherent in a scenic decor featuring serpentine motifs drawn from Symbolist art and a collection of tschotchkes constituting a veritable museum of prestidigital paraphernalia.

The most heartfelt reminder of the close connection between health and death, however, is the memorial to the recently deceased co-scriptwriter Eugene Burger, called “one of the most influential magicians of the 20th century,” launching the evening’s activities. Though not physically manifest, his mentorly presence permeates this celebration of his craft and philosophy thereupon.

CRITICS’ PICKS

How I Learned to Drive, The Artistic Home, through May 6. Paula Vogel’s early play looks at intergenerational sex from a perspective rarely discussed today. Can you handle the paradigm shift? MSB

Southern Gothic, Windy City Playhouse, extended to July 29. The birthday party from hell—hell being a suburb of Atlanta in 1960—has been extended through the summer and you-all are invited to sit in and eavesdrop. MSB

An Enemy of the People, Goodman Theatre, through April 15. A self-righteous, naive doctor confronts his community’s ethical and political corruption when he discovers toxins in the local water. Henrik Ibsen’s 1882 play remains essential, especially in this vigorous modern version. JA

The Rosenkranz Mysteries, Royal George Cabaret, through May 6. Dr. Ricardo Rosenkranz may be the nation’s only physician magician. In addition to his day job as a surgeon (specialty: neonatology), he’s a master conjurer whose beguiling illusions explore the links between magic and mortality. CES

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Sullivan

THEATER REVIEW

The Wolf at the End of the Block

Playwright: Ike Holter
 At: 16th Street Theater,
 6420 16th St., Berwyn
 Tickets: \$18-\$22;
 16thstreettheater.org
 Runs through: May 5

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

Ike Holter's *The Wolf at the End of the Block* comes suffused with a palpable sense of unease. Before the first word is spoken, you know that something bad, very bad, has happened. Something awful enough to render you fearful for months to come.

When we meet Abe (Alberto Mendoza), there's blood streaming down his face. But even if there weren't, you'd know that Abe's world has taken a turn into territory no one enters willingly. By the time his opening monologue is over, you can practically see the raw, needle-sharp nerves jangling under his skin. His tone is clipped and disjointed, his eyes wide, his every gesture skittish.

Directed to maximum impact by Lili-Anne Brown, the 16th Street Theater production will leave you rattled. Set in Chicago, it's a chilling drama about the kind of crime that often goes unreported and leaves its victims to navigate their lives from a place of distrust and shame and rage.

For siblings Abe and Miranda (Gabriela Diaz), life isn't easy. He's supporting them both, working in a neighborhood bodega. She wants to be a reporter, and roams the city with a cross-body bag very similar to one carried by Frida (Stephanie Diaz), a star reporter who's made a career of exposing social injustices.

There are two more marvelously vivid characters in Holter's taut drama. Nunley (Tony Santiago) is the (mostly) affable owner of the bodega where Abe works. James (Christian Isley) is initially just some guy from another neighborhood, who winds up at the same bar as Abe in the final scene. It's a scene to make hair on the back of your neck stand up.

Racial tension pierces virtually every interac-



Stephanie Diaz, Alberto Mendoza in *The Wolf at the End of the Block*.

Photo by Anthony Aicardi

tion. Abe and Miranda are Latinx; Nunley is an African-American. James is a lantern-jawed white man with a buzz cut and biceps the size of teacups.

Holter's dialogue is scathing in its exploration of the intersection of racism and privilege and violence. At one point, Abe explains exactly why he's willing to go after his attacker(s). It's a passage that's pure righteous heat, a call to arms in an world roiling with new wave white nationalism.

The cast is flawless. Gabriela Diaz's Amanda is a vivid, complex bundle of adolescent swagger and uncertainty. Stephanie Diaz's supercharged reporter is a blend of toughness and sorrow, both continual side effects from years on the job. As James, Isley exudes the kind of menace that makes you shiver like someone just stepped on your grave.

Then there's Mendoza's Abe. Mendoza anchors the drama with his fire-eyed anger and bravery.

With set designer Jose Manuel Diaz-Soto, Brown has created a shadowy Chicago street lined with neglect and poverty. We are very much in the world of noir here, a place where violence seems inevitable and escape unlikely. Throughout, Abe and Miranda are everyday warriors you'll be rooting for until lights out.

STEPPENWOLF

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SPOTLIGHT

Neil Tobin's exegesis on death (and what happens to you next) is a fine way to celebrate the season of rebirth. The 60-minute **Necromancer** takes place in Rosehill Cemetery's May Chapel. Tobin's no sham spiritualist or horror schlockmeister. Pro tip: Don't bring children and don't expect ectoplasmic manifestations. *Necromancer* isn't about jump scares or ghoulishness, but about the precious gift of mortality. And how to come to terms with the fact that as gifts go, this one is but a loan. It's at 3 p.m. on April 14-15 and May 5-6. May Chapel, Rose-



hill Cemetery, 5800 N. Ravenswood; \$25-\$30. neardeathx.com

Caption: Photo of Neil Tobin by Jonathan Cohon, Prism Studios

THEATER REVIEW

The Gentleman Caller

Playwright: Phillip Dawkins

At: Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark St.

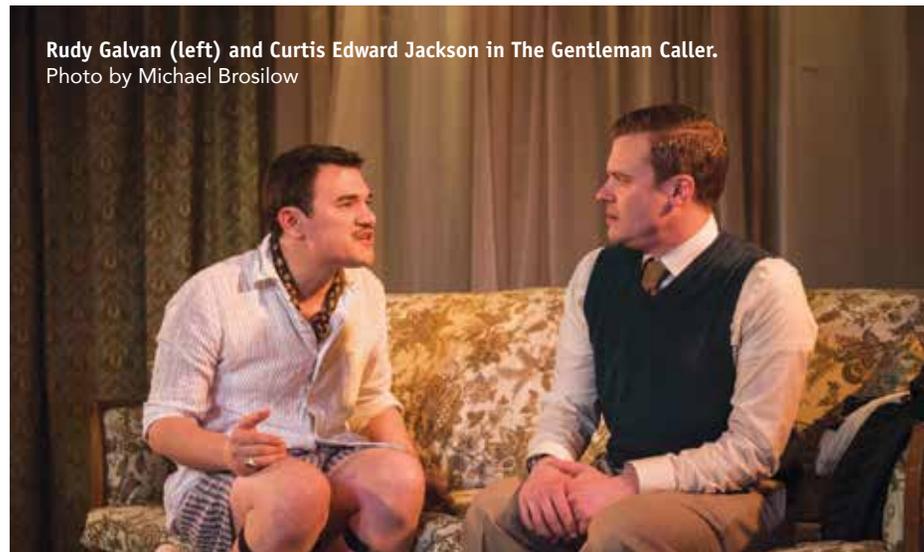
Tickets: RavenTheatre.com; \$38-\$46

Runs through: May 27

BY BRIAN KIRST

Last year, American Theater Company delivered a powerful, experimental look at William Inge's Pulitzer Prize winning *Picnic*. This production examined the underlying sexuality in Inge's work, seemingly uncovering multiple layers of queerness.

Phillip Dawkins' *The Gentleman Caller*, being given its world premiere at Raven Theater, examines Inge's homosexuality with a more direct approach. A fictionalized examination of the relationship between Inge and fellow illustrious playwright Tennessee Williams, this work presents the two as brilliant yet troubled gay men who were both compelled to give voice to the



Rudy Galvan (left) and Curtis Edward Jackson in *The Gentleman Caller*.
Photo by Michael Brosilow

realities of the human condition through beautiful works of art.

Acknowledged as a real-life mentor to Inge, the Tennessee Williams presented here in 1944 is on the cusp of receiving worldwide fame for

The Glass Menagerie. Naturally, he doesn't know this yet and is, insecurely, eager for any publicity that he can get. Thus, Inge, the arts critic for the *St. Louis Star-Times*, has invited Williams to his garden apartment to conduct an interview for the paper. Drinks flow, sexual tensions flare and the frightened, uptight Inge is encouraged to more fully explore his true artistic leanings by the flamboyant, devil may care Williams. Months later, Williams is joined in Chicago by Inge. Haunted by the enormous success of his play, he

hopes to seduce the reporter in his messy hotel room. Inge, overcome by Williams' talent, cannot comprehend such a physical altercation. His reluctance, ultimately, allows Williams to lead the frightened young man towards his desired path—the chance to become a brilliant and influential writer, himself.

Decorating his script with glorious bits of humor, Dawkins undercuts the self-loathing of Inge and the drunken follies of Williams with poetic monologues that examine the circumstances of their most intimate desires and their deep-rooted fears. Inge's childhood remembrance of the torturous cruelties of some small town boys, in particular, is hauntingly beautiful and compellingly grotesque. Nicely, as the year in the play turns to 1945, Williams' remark that "the future is here" seems a hopeful foreshadowing to our present day when most of our young gay men can be themselves without having to hide behind whiskey bottles and twisted regret.

Meanwhile, director Cody Estle works with an obvious love for the piece. He also, nicely, delivers some truly erotic yet tasteful stagecraft involving his two devoted actors here. This work is highlighted by Rudy Galvan's often giddy yet occasionally desperate Williams and Curtis Edward Jackson's emotionally taut yet multileveled Inge. These two, compellingly, wrestle with their demons—and each other—on a couple of period perfect sets, brilliantly designed by Jeffrey D. Kmiec.

THEATER REVIEW

Birdland

Playwright: Simon Stephens

At: Steep Theatre, 1115 W. Berwyn St.

Tickets: 773-649-3186;

SteepTheatre.com; \$10-\$38.

Runs through: May 12

BY KERRY REID

What Todd Rundgren memorably termed "the ever popular tortured artist effect" is on full display at Steep Theatre in Simon Stephens' *Birdland*, in which a British rock star spirals downward—and takes a few others with him—during a world tour. But though Jonathan Berry's staging has style in spades and a terrific charismatic central performance from Joel Reitsma, Stephens' story feels hollow at the center.

The problem is that Stephens doesn't ever let us see whether Paul (Reitsma) behaves abominably because he's an indulged rock star, or if his narcissism and destructive vindictiveness is a feature, not a bug, for someone who wants to stand in the spotlight in front of adoring throngs. There are hints that he may be suffering from mental illness, but once again we don't know if that's been exacerbated by his overindulgent lifestyle, or is something that has been masked by that lifestyle.

He's not an idiot. We learn that early on as he spars with Annalisa (Cindy Marker), a British expat journalist in Moscow. To Paul, everything in life can be quantified. In fact, "money graces us," he tells her, offering an eloquent (if glib) defense of the profit motive. But later at the Café Pushkin, where the married Annalisa joins Paul,

his long-suffering bandmate Johnny (Dushane Casteallo) and Johnny's French girlfriend, Marnie (Lucy Carapetyan), Paul learns that not everyone has their price.

A tragedy in Moscow should provide the central anchor for the play, as Paul and Johnny's tour moves on to Paris and London. (We never hear their music, so have no way of judging their actual talent.) But the women here—even level-headed Jenny (Aila Peck), a hotel employee and former mathematician in Moscow who Paul takes to Paris on a whim—function mostly as mirrors for Paul. And that reflection becomes more distorted and dissolute as the two hours (sans intermission) unfold.

Berry's staging plays up the voyeurism of fandom by having the actors sit in folding chairs on either end of the runway-style stage, often snapping pictures on their cellphones. Reitsma, who is in every scene, wrings everything he can out of the material in what must be an exhausting performance. The rest of the cast play multiple roles and make the shifts with adroit precision.

There is also plenty of wit in the play, even if the laughter ultimately feels as hollow as Paul's soul. At one point, Johnny tells his bandmate that "anyone else would have glassed you." We get that impulse—and it's to both Berry's and Reitsma's great credit that Paul's monstrous behavior holds our interest as well as it does.

The play's title comes from a Patti Smith song, by the way. If ever there were proof that one can be a vital artist for decades without being a monster, Smith's career demonstrates that. Guys like Paul will always be with us. What's unclear in *Birdland* is if they really have anything new to teach us.

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photo by Nathanael Filbert

THEATER REVIEW

L'Imitation of Life

Playwright: Ricky Graham with Running with Scissors, adapted from the film *Imitation of Life*

At: Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave.

Tickets: 773-327-5252;

HandbagProductions.org; \$29-\$34

Runs through: May 6

BY KERRY REID

Douglas Sirk's storied run of lush cinematic melodramas ended with 1959's *Imitation of Life*, starring Lana Turner and Juanita Moore as two single mothers in New York—one white and striving to be a Broadway star, the other Black and just hoping to find a home for herself and her light-skinned daughter, who resents being trapped in a "Black" identity. Of course, the white woman shoots to the top, while the Black woman is consigned to the role of long-suffering housekeeper and confidant.

The film was Turner's comeback from the 1958 stabbing death of her mobster boyfriend, Johnny Stompanato, by her 14-year-old daughter, Cheryl Crane. The death was ruled justifiable homicide, but the scandal lingered.

That story forms one of many meta running gags in Hell in a Handbag's *L'Imitation of Life*, a remount of the company's 2013 parody of Turner, Sirk and problematic racial tropes masquerading as social awareness. I missed the earlier incarnation, but Stevie Love's staging, despite a few pacing hiccups here and there, provides a fantastic vehicle for Ed Jones as Turner and Robert Williams as Annie Johnson, her housekeeper.

When I say "fantastic vehicle," imagine a pink Cadillac Eldorado convertible with chrome for days. Jones' Lana (the script strips away the film character's name) parades around in a narcissistic fog, never remembering Annie's name, literally using people as coat-racks, and jump-

ing from man to man at the drop of a gauche evening gown (credit to costumer Gary Nocco). "You're not cheap," one of her paramours tells her. "You're drastically marked down."

Williams, meantime, balances these excesses with perfectly timed nonverbal hints of exasperation for Annie, whose workload grows as Lana's star rises. Katherine Bellantone brings warped pixie charm to Suzie Turner, her mother's Mini-Me who keeps a collection of knives and lusts after Mom's pedophilic boyfriend, Steve Martin ("Not that Steve Martin"), played with greasy insouciance by Chazie Bly.

A montage at the top of the second act juxtaposes Jones' face on actual Hollywood fan rags with images from the Jim Crow era, reminding us that Sirk's film was already headed toward relic-of-another-age status when it was released during the heating up of the civil rights movement. It also reminds us that Hollywood's relationship to social justice has always had a whiff of the self-serving and hypocritical.

But the played-for-laugh histrionics go down a notch at the end, as Ashley Hicks' prodigal daughter, Sara Jane (who ran away to pursue her own show-biz dreams) returns and brings out the earnest (if still somewhat operatic) emotions that Sirk unabashedly utilized in his work. It moves *L'Imitation of Life* from camp to homage—and it works.

#NeverAgainChicago town hall April 15

The #NeverAgainChicago town hall—in which attendees will openly discuss the call to action taking place across the nation by students and allies to end gun violence—will take place at Victory Gardens Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave., on Sunday, April 15, at 6 p.m.

In response to that call and the National School Walkout on April 20, people are urged to attend for an excerpt of Lauren Gunderson's new



Ed Jones and Chazie Bly in *L'Imitation of Life*.

Photo by Rick Aguilar Studios

play *Natural Shocks* as well as a civic dialogue with local students and teachers.

This event is free and open to the public; visit <http://victorygardens.org/also-playing/neveragainchicago/> to RSVP. Also, HowlRound Theatre Commons will livestream the event at HowlRound.tv.

'The Roommate' June 21-Aug. 5

Steppenwolf Theatre Company will present the Chicago premiere production of *The Room-*

mate, by Jen Silverman and directed by Tony Award winner Phylicia Rashad.

The *Roommate* begins previews June 21, and the production runs through Aug. 5 in Steppenwolf's Downstairs Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St. The production will feature ensemble members Ora Jones (as Robyn) and Sandra Marquez (as Sharon).

Single tickets (\$20-\$93) are currently on sale through Audience Services at 312-335-1650 or Steppenwolf.org.

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PRIDE FILMS & PLAYS

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>.

'Cornerstone' at ArtSpace 8 in April

Chicago non-profit theater company Nothing Without a Company has announced the location and cast of its next show, *Cornerstone*.

The production will take place at ArtSpace 8, 900 N. Michigan Ave., third level.

The show will run through April 29 on Thursdays-Saturdays at 7 p.m., and Sundays at 6 p.m. Visit NothingWithoutaCompany.org for tickets.

THEATER

'A Blue Island in the Red Sea' tackles Chicago's racist history

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

Here's a piece of rarely taught Chicago history: Wrigley Field was built by one of the nation's foremost Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members.

Charles Weeghman built the field and named it after himself, opening it for baseball in 1914. Weeghman also organized the first KKK rally in Illinois, presiding over a crowd of some 12,000 Klansmen.

If you've never heard of Chicago's baseball-Klan connection, you aren't alone.

"I was stunned," says Collaboraction Theatre Artistic Director Anthony Moseley of learning Weeghman's involvement in America's pastime and the Ku Klux Klan. "And then I was, like, 'Why aren't we taught this?'"

With *A Blue Island in the Red Sea*, Collaboraction presents a docudrama's worth of often hidden history. Going back to the Native American Potawatomi and continuing through the current revival of white nationalism, the production explores the legacy and the causes of racism in Chicago.

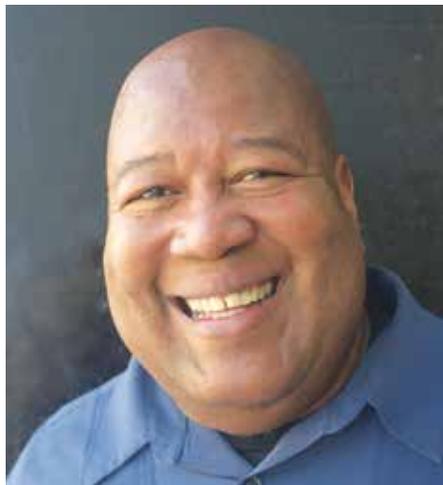
"This play opened my eyes," said cast member Shannon Leigh Webber. "For now, I feel like white people need to shut up and listen. We have a tendency to apologize and ask what we should do to be better. But it's not anybody's job to educate us on how to be better. We need to hear other peoples' stories. We need to listen."

Chicago, Mosely added, pioneered the practice of red-lining in real estate, which effectively kept some neighborhoods off limits to anyone who wasn't white. In 1919, race riots lasted for a week after 17-year-old Eugene Williams was stoned to death for swimming in a "whites only" section of Lake Michigan. And in 1966, Martin Luther King told local reporters that "I have never seen—even in Mississippi and Alabama—mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I've seen here in Chicago."

For Collaboraction Managing Director Dr. Marcus Robinson, moving to Englewood after 13 years in Michigan was a ground-level way to effect change.

"I felt I should go where the pain was," Robinson said. "Most people try to leave areas like Englewood. I decided to swim against that tide. I feel like 99 percent of helping is showing up. That's what I'm trying to do. Going shoulder to shoulder with people who have lived their their whole lives here, trying together to have an impact."

Robinson's work with the Resident Association of Greater Englewood dovetails with his Collaboraction duties. With degrees in music and hypnotherapy, he's spent decades heading up organizations including The Consortium of Community Development and Citizens for ProgressiveChange,



Collaboraction Managing Director Dr. Marcus Robinson.
PR photo

Inc. He's also the founder of the Social Innovation Group, which helps clients create inclusive cultures that yield optimal results and high work performance.

In its early stages, *A Blue Island in the Red Sea* was composed of some 20 hours of rehearsal footage as the performers culled through facts, anecdotes and interviews to shape the story. Ultimately, Mosely and his cast came up with a two-act structure that tracks Chicago's history through the lens of a newly opened museum on racism.

"This idea that we're the friendly, jovial, progressive City of Big Shoulders—that's not accurate," Mosely said. "In the South, racism is overt. Here? We're not as obvious, and that's scary to me. It's this invisible thing that is in us. And by us, I mean me as well. As a loud, dare I say sometimes charming white man, I have had huge privilege in my life. And for years, I've been complicit in keeping it that way. My own family made a lot of money in Chicago real estate, because of their privilege. But once you see things, once you know, it's your responsibility to make change."

For Webber, that responsibility gets to the core of creating a drama that is at once utterly compelling and a call to action—or at least awareness.

"People say that theater is a hobby. Frivolous. Not important," Webber said. "But pieces like this? They are important. It's a powerful way to engage."

A Blue Island in the Red Sea runs April 12-May 20 in the Flatiron Arts Building, 1579 N. Milwaukee Ave. Tickets are \$15-\$30 (\$5-\$15 for students); visit <https://www.collaboraction.org>.



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MUSIC

Cellist Seth Parker Woods discusses gay composer Julius Eastman

BY JUSTIN CURTO

Seth Parker Woods is on a first-name basis with Julius Eastman.

When talking with the cellist about working with the music of Eastman, the minimalist composer who died in 1990 after years of addiction, he abandons academic courtesy and refers to the composer as “Julius.” It makes sense given his years close to Eastman’s work, as part of a larger effort by musicians to re-establish and continue a performance practice of his progressive, experimental music.

For this year’s Frequency Festival (which took place Feb. 20-25), Parker Woods curated the triumphant Chicago premiere of three pieces by Eastman: the haunting “Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan of Arc,” for a solo vocalist; the thundering “Holy Presence of Joan of Arc,” for 10 cellos; and the awe-inspiring “Gay Guerilla,” for four players on two pianos. A packed audience

Windy City Times: How did you first discover Julius Eastman’s music?

SPW: Five years ago, roughly, I was sent a recording of the piece “The Holy Presence of Joan of Arc,” and that was my first big introduction. I had never heard of him. I listened to the work, and I was really taken aback by the work. I don’t want to say it’s an infatuation, but thus started the beginnings of my exploration of who he was and the music he wrote.

WCT: How did you choose the three pieces for the Chicago premiere?

SPW: I definitely wanted to do the cello piece [“The Holy Presence of Joan of Arc”] because I thought it was such a seminal work that people needed to hear. But also I wanted to continue giving life to the prelude, which was never a concert work—it was an improvisation that he did for a live radio broadcast. Eventually we found the space: It would be there at Preston Bradley [Hall], and the almost holy acoustics that are

then on top of that, you get this big, beautiful Lutheran hymn that’s connected into “Gay Guerilla.” So it’s this very spiritual being.

WCT: How do you decide how to present something like the prelude, which was never performed in concert?

SPW: We have the recording of Julius doing it, but we must be reminded that he was an amazing improviser as well. I take that recording of him as a guide essentially and coach each new performer. Even with the cello piece, he could’ve changed certain things each performance, but we only have an archive of one performance. So each performance, I try to change a few things in the way I’m trying to coach each group of cellists that I play with, where it still stays extremely visceral. That way it becomes a practice, but it’s still unique and it’s still alive.

WCT: At the show, you mentioned changing the narrative around Eastman. How should we be remembering him?

SPW: Let it really be more about the music than his demise. When we interpret Beethoven and we interpret Mozart, it’s never about, “Can you hear the drunkard that he was in this music?” That doesn’t become a part of the performance practice. So, why should there be a double standard for Julius Eastman? Let it really be about the genius that he was.

WCT: Why should we acknowledge Eastman’s identity as a gay, Black man along with the music he created?

SPW: He was unapologetically himself, and the

it or you’re going to leave it.” And those are the pieces: Some of it’s very just direct, in your face.

WCT: What is your goal in working with Eastman’s music?

SPW: I’m not saying that I’m aligning myself with Julius and who he was, but I see some parts of myself. In reading his scores and listening to interviews and listening to people’s stories about him and reading about him, there’s moments where I burst into tears. There’s moments where I wish he was still around and I could say, “You are worthy and you are amazing and you should keep going.” I always, now, even now, wonder: What would have become of him had he continued on and his life had gone a different way? In many ways, I feel like that music is still timeless. I believe he is one of those people that can change the times and whose music is changing the times, and it’s my duty to keep that going. As more things keep becoming discovered, if I can do even a little part—not only by performing and helping coach new generations of performers, but also be a part of the archival team that ensures his scores and recordings are kept in the canon—then I’d do that.

Gay composer
Julius Eastman.
Photo by Donald
W. Burkhardt



at the Chicago Cultural Center’s Preston Bradley Hall received the portrait concert with a standing ovation.

Parker Woods is far from done working with Eastman. Now, he’s transcribing the cello quintet “That Boy” from recording, which will eventually also premiere in Chicago. He recently talked with Windy City Times to reflect on the premiere, along with Julius’ life and identity.

that space. I was like, Oh, we have to do “Gay Guerilla.”

That piece evolves in a majorly big way. It’s almost like he takes you to church. You have the prelude to the cello piece in which he quotes the three saints who were said to have come to Joan in a time of need. Then also in the cello piece, you have the first three cello voices that open, these still represent those same three saints. And

music he created reflected that. What he was feeling was what he was feeling, and this was how he was going to describe it. You can’t ask someone to dumb down his art, because then it’s like you ask them to silence themselves. I felt that’s a lot of what was happening for him. So eventually he just said, “Fuck the system, fuck it all. I’m going to just be me, and I’m going to lay it on the table, and you’re either going to take



Seeking out history: Jean shorts mystery

The following curious email request made its way to Windy City Times, so we said we’d share it with our readers, in case anyone can uncover the true tale of these shorts:

“I’m researching a story for the podcast Nancy from WNYC. I found these shorts mounted in a shadow box at the Halsted Brown Elephant at the end of September in 2013. The box looks hand-painted in parts and maybe wallpapered in others. There’s a rainbow racing stripe that runs around the entire frame. The shorts are mounted on a piece of wood with a hand-painted red and white plant-like pattern.

“The shorts themselves are Levi’s 501s and they date to the early 1980s. The leather tag is torn out at the top and there is a big patch sewn in between the back two pockets. They are cut off but cuffed, making about a 4” inseam. I’m trying to find out the story of how the shorts got to the Brown Elephant. Who they belonged to, why they were mounted, and where they were displayed. Anyone with any info can reach out to me, Ben Riskin, at nancy@wnyc.org.” See <https://photos.app.goo.gl/A7gqaTmm2RL15cc72>.

So—does anyone know the story behind these shorts?

THEATER

'Tchaikovsky' delves into gay composer's symphonies, struggles

BY CATEY SULLIVAN

When would-be patrons from Russia approached pianist and composer Hershey Felder about performing a musical biography of Peter Tchaikovsky in the Russian-born maestro's homeland, Felder turned them down flat. "If I told Tchaikovsky's story in Russia, I would be thrown in jail because of their anti-gay laws," Felder said.

Russia's ministry of culture officially and categorically denies that Tchaikovsky—the man who brought the world lush, intricate works including *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*—was gay. However, historians and the letters Tchaikovsky left behind tell a very different story. And while Felder won't be taking his one-man musical biography "Our Great Tchaikovsky" to Russia any time soon, the show opening April 11 will offer audiences here a window into the world of a musical wunderkind whose works continue to influence everything from movies (*Black Swan*) to Independence Day celebrations (*The 1812 Overture*).

Felder's performance is part concert, part biography—and is wholly unblinking in its depiction

of both Tchaikovsky's demons and his genius. It's a format Felder excels at: His previous concert-bios—sonically exquisite and emotionally resonant takes on Gershwin, Chopin, Bernstein and Berlin, among them—enjoyed critical acclaim and a healthy box office in Chicago.

But Felder has never before taken on a subject whose life was so largely defined by his secrets. Nor has he performed a piece that flat out defies an entire country's political regime.

Russia's minister of culture may have proclaimed Tchaikovsky straight, but as Felder notes: "That's contradicted by basically every single letter Tchaikovsky left behind."

"In shaping this piece, Tchaikovsky's sexuality was a driving force," Felder continued. "I'm not really dramatizing it—it's very clear from his writing that being in the closet was an issue. So much of his music is about what he's hiding from. If you listen, you can hear so much anguish. And so much joy. And humor.

"Harmonically and melodically, the chords and the progressions pull at you. You can analyze and diagram the structure, but the magic of the whole

Hershey Felder in *Our Great Tchaikovsky*.

PR photo

thing is in how deeply it makes you feel. He is speaking to us through his music," Felder said.

Tchaikovsky's life (1840-1893) dovetailed with the rein of Emperor Alexander III, the penultimate ruler of Czarist Russia. (His successor, Nicholas II, would be gunned down in the uprising of 1918.) And while Tchaikovsky's life story is more than a century old, it retains an almost dismaying relevance.

After performing the show last year, Felder got a letter that spoke to the story's stark, contemporary terms.

"It was from a teacher who was gay," Felder recalled. "Grew up with conversion therapy and medication and all kind of 'treatments' to 'fix' her.

She wrote about the young people she worked with, and the importance of helping them understand what came before them. Of showing people that you can't take things for granted.

"It seems like since the [2016] election, a lot of you people are starting to see how things they've taken for granted can be taken away," Felder continued. "I had one gay couple see the show in New York; they talked to me after ward about how three or four years ago, they felt completely safe walking through their neighborhood holding hands. Now? They don't hold hands in public so much any more. They are afraid. They are looking over their shoulders."

Tchaikovsky spent his life looking over his shoulder. His death, at 53, remains murky. Some say it was cholera; others say suicide.

Music is always at the heart of Felder's shows, whether he's blazing through Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* or Chopin's mournfully ear-wormy funeral dirge. Every once in a great while, he gets hate mail for his exploration of the lives behind the music.

Our *Great Tchaikovsky* features roughly an hour of music, including two symphonic movements, a piano concerto and portions of *The Nutcracker Suite*.

"The Russians are trying to erase his life at the same time they're calling him a hero," Felder said. "You can't erase his life. Anymore than you can erase his music."

Our Great Tchaikovsky runs April 11-May 13 at the Steppenwolf Upstairs Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St. Tickets are \$55; call 312-335-1650 or visit Steppenwolf.org.

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Ai-jen Poo is Co-Founder and Director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and Co-Director of Caring Across Generations. An award-winning activist, thought leader, social innovator, and a leading voice on domestic workers' rights and family care advocacy, Ai-jen recently joined Meryl Streep on the red carpet at the Golden Globes to say #TimesUp.



Mónica Ramírez is the co-founder and President of Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, the first national farmworker women's organization in the U.S. Mónica authored an open letter to Hollywood published in *TIME* magazine which sparked the creation of #TimesUp, which has raised more than \$20 million to support lower-income women seeking legal justice.



Andrea Pino is co-founder of End Rape on Campus, and co-author of "We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out." Andrea was one of the first students to publicly file a Title IX complaint against a university for mishandling her sexual assault report. Her work and personal journey is prominently featured in the Emmy-nominated film, *The Hunting Ground*.



MODERATOR

Laura S. Washington is a *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist and a political analyst for ABC-7 Chicago.

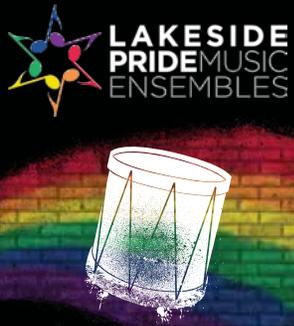
Rick Astley.
Photo by Ignacio Galvez

NUNN ON ONE: MUSIC

Rick Astley: '80s icon talks touring, gay fan base, Boy George

BY JERRY NUNN

English singer Rick Astley broke out with the 1987 song "Never Gonna Give You Up" and after several hit songs later retired in 1993 before a comeback in 2007.



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Thanks to rickrolling he became an internet phenomenon. On a recent phone call, Astley mentioned he has new music coming out in the future, but plans on playing much of his last album, 50, live in the upcoming Chicago show.

Windy City Times: So you started singing in the church choir originally?

Rick Astley: Yes—our local vicar just came to the school and picked out the boys who could sing a bit. We used to get paid for weddings. How good is that?

WCT: Nice!

RA: I don't think I will ever forget the experience of making music literally with your voice. Whenever I am with a choir or a group of singers I still get a bit of a thrill out of it. It is very special. There is no instrument to translate to. It is just humans making a noise. When that works it's amazing.

I always have more admiration for backing vocalists than the lead singers sometimes because they are the guys with the chops.

WCT: How did the producers Stock Aitken Waterman, who did Bananarama and Kylie Minogue, take you under their wing?

RA: They did loads of artists; not so much in America, but in Europe, they were enormous. They had records out every month. It was the early days when I met them. They weren't really known. I signed a deal with them and shortly after that they exploded. I was in the right place at the right time.

The first tune that they wrote was "Never Gonna Give You Up" and, to this day, I feel it is the best song they ever wrote. I got lucky with that one!

WCT: Do you ever get tired of singing it?

RA: I retired for 15 years so it is not like I have been doing it since 1987! [Laughs] To be honest, I have sung it quite a lot and it's been played by so many radio stations, but I have come full circle. It is part of my life, really. That's a good thing. I don't see it as a negative.

That song has been really good to me and keeps being good to me. I sing it now with relish. It's like a nice cozy pair of slippers.

WCT: What made you come out of retirement?

RA: I never planned on coming out of retirement. I would always get offers to do gigs in different parts of the world but would turn them down. I got an offer to go to Japan and they made me do it. It was like doing giant karaoke. I had people sing along. Two or three songs in something snapped and I thought, "I can do this whenever I want to." It is not like back in the day when I was part of a massive machine pushing me through hoops. Something changed in me so I have been doing it again for about 10 years.

It has been nostalgic for me because I have been doing gigs with artists from around the world, bands like The Human League, who I bought their records.

WCT: I saw you performed with the Foo

Fighters onstage.

RA: That was nuts. I was in Tokyo doing a festival and they were the headliners. Me and the band went to see them and were standing there. They invited me to sing and I was pushed out on the stage. It was just brilliant.

For a band that makes such ferocious music, they are unbelievably chilled out. They were comfortable so they made me feel comfortable. It was a last minute thing.

WCT: What was one thing you learned from touring with Boy George?

RA: He's one of those people that has been through it. He's had some high and lows. He's had some tragedies. The overriding thing is he's intelligent and he has a sharp sense of humor. He was truly a global star and iconic. Culture Club had great songs, but he as a figurehead broke down so many barriers. He was androgynous in the way he dressed. Everything about him was different. He shook things up a little bit.

He had great songs. I think if the material was not very good that the rest of it wouldn't have lasted five minutes.

WCT: You have played at Madrid's Pride and at England's G-A-Y at Heaven Nightclub. Did dance music contribute to your gay fan base?

RA: I think if you go back to my early tunes they were played in gay clubs a lot. I always recognized that and have known that.

Some people put themselves in a bracket and say they are one kind of artist. I am just someone who makes music and anyone who wants to like it I am all for that.

I take notice that you sometimes get a little cuddle or embraced by a certain audience and it is nice to go with that, as opposed to deciding who your audience is.

It would be ghastly to deny or say that part of society didn't embrace me. I remember how they were to me. When I was invited to do gay Pride, it was a priority for me to do it. It was a good fun, but a little scary as well because it was so massive. The whole city just gets taken over!

It was intense. Madrid is a pretty city and love it. That was a crazy weekend to be there, for sure.

WCT: Do you have a crazy fan story?

RA: Nothing too menacing. I think they are all crazy. When I do a gig and someone is outside wanting me to sign something, I say to their faces, "You must be crazy. Why haven't you gone home?" When someone is losing it and wobbling a little, I usually give them a hug to help them calm down. I just want them to talk to me.

I was never a person that waited around for an autograph. That's not because I didn't love certain artists, because I did big time, but it was not a part of what I did. I find it odd now.

I am happy to sign anything for anyone, but I think it's a bit nuts in a way. I know how I am and I wouldn't be nuts about me!

WCT: How do you stay so young-looking?

RA: Oh, you are a lovely man. When I was 21 and released my first hit song I looked about 11, so I have a few years on my side in terms of that. I probably hated looking that way at 21, but now I am glad I looked younger.

My wife is from Denmark and a really healthy cook. We always eat pretty good stuff. We plan our tours around good restaurants.

Turn to page 30

Comics expo brings thousands to Chicago

The cosplay and fan favorites were ever-present at the jam-packed Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo, also known as C2E2, April 6-8 at McCormick Place.

Among the tens of thousands were many creative characters, plus the expected Star Wars,

Wonder Woman and Black Panther. LGBTQs and people of all interests and backgrounds attended the event, which included lots of autograph sessions, panels, comic books and related merchandise. The LGBT group Geeks Out had a booth and there were lots of LGBTQ artists at the expo.

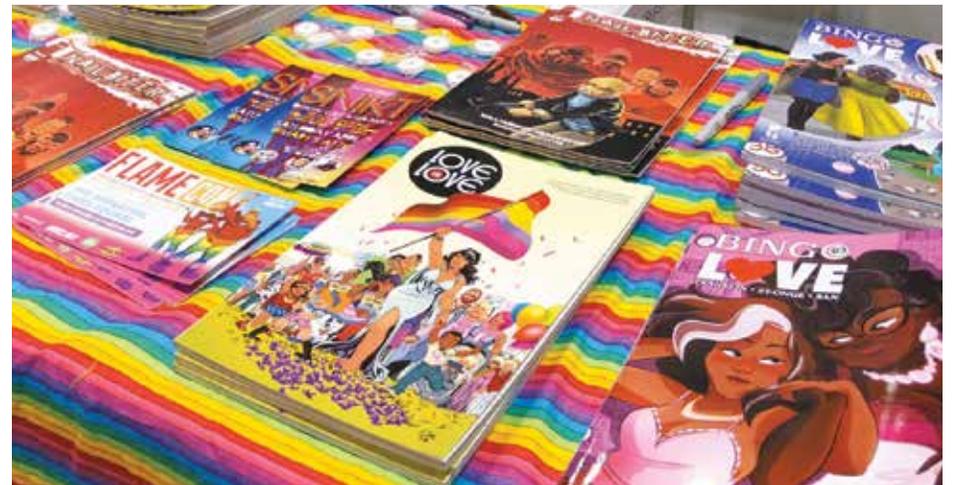


Kara Leopard at C2E2.
Photo by Tracy Baim



Above: Tony Breed (sitting, left), Eric William Green and Seth Scott Schindehette of Geeks Out. Below: The work of New Jersey's Tee Franklin, a self-described "queer, disabled, Black woman comic writer."

Photos by Tracy Baim



CONNEXIONS

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the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in
WINDY CITY TIMES

SAVOR

The Fifty/50; Francesca's brunch; Baconfest Chicago

BY ANDREW DAVIS

The Fifty/50 (2047 W. Division St.; <http://www.thefifty50.com/>), from—who else?—the Fifty/50 Restaurant Group, beat a lot of other places to the punch regarding sports bars kicking it up and serving patrons something more than plain burgers and corn chips.

For more than a decade, this casual spot has claimed that it's a sports bar that offers something more—and a recent has convinced me of that, at least for now.

The smoked pork-belly burnt ends are quite beguiling appetizers—maple-cured and applewood-smoked, and accompanied by honey-mustard dipping sauce. However, there are other apps such as tempura popcorn shrimp (addictive), beer-battered pickles, buffalo calamari and even tempura-battered cauliflower (reaching out to vegetarians, in another turn for a lot of sports bars).

The Fifty/50 is famed for its wings, and they come in three varieties: regular breaded, boneless breaded and applewood-smoked. (They



The Fifty/50's smoked pork-belly burnt ends.

Photo by Andrew Davis

like applewood here.) On the other end, there are several salads available, including the Wicker Park, appropriately (mixed greens, toasted pine nuts, goat cheese, cucumbers, vine tomatoes and roasted shallot vinaigrette).

And, of course, there are burgers and baby-back ribs galore. I actually found the burgers particularly fascinating, with varieties such as HELL (with habanero salsa, roasted jalapeños, Fifty/50 hot sauce and pepper jack cheese), The O-Face (Mercks cheddar, BBQ pulled pork, waffled mac'n'cheese on a pretzel bun) and the very tasty Big Hered, which is a bison-based concoction.

By the way, keep this place in mind for casual patio dining this summer if you're a dog owner, as that area of this spot is canine-friendly.

Francesca's on Chestnut brunch

Francesca's on Chestnut (200 E. Chestnut St.; <http://www.miafrancesca.com/locations/profile/francescas-on-chestnut-gold-coast>) has a brunch that measures up with its other meals.

That's wonderful for at least two reasons: great quality at fantastic prices (especially considering the restaurant is in the heart of Streeterville, one of the most most expensive neighborhoods in Chicago, if not the Midwest). Arancini



Francesca's French toast.

PR photo

Benedict (\$13) involves crispy risotto balls with prosciutto, poached egg, hollandaise and house potatoes—and could be a meal on its own. Ditto for the delicious brioche French toast (\$10), which is made simply and wonderfully.

However, practically everything is a hit here, including the Davanti burger (\$16; roasted tomatoes, crispy mozzarella, arugula, bacon jam, and roasted garlic aioli, served on a brioche bun—and, yes, it's served with fries). However, if that's not your style, other offerings at this particular Francesca's restaurant range from smoked salmon salad (\$14) to rigatoni alla paesana (\$13; rigatoni with roasted sausage, wild mushrooms and peas in a light tomato cream

sauce).

And with the money you save, you can hit the shops on nearby Michigan Avenue—maybe.

Baconfest: Meat-and-greet

Thousands of attendees got to “ham it up” April 6-7 at the UIC Forum, where **Baconfest Chicago** took place.

At Baconfest—where a portion of the proceeds go to the Greater Chicago Food Depository—Chicago and suburban chefs concoct and serve dishes to thousands of bacon lovers. Just a few of the restaurants present this year included The Heritage (which served bacon-and-red floriani cornmeal dumplings), Bites (Billionaire's BLT bao), Carnivale (maple-bacon pops), Inspiration Kitchen (bacon pistachio beet empanadas), Italian Village Restaurants (bacon BBQ truffle) and Edzo's Burger Shop (pancake-and-bacon milkshakes). In addition, there were alcoholic beverages and other products (such as Burton's Maple Syrups) that complemented the meats.

Keep up with the latest Baconfest news at <https://baconfestchicago.com/>.

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



Burton's Maple Syrup's Bradley Kirouac at Baconfest.

Photo by Liz Baudler



SIDETRACK

Just some general sexiness.

Photos by Jed Dulanias



BILLY Masters

"I would let them both die."—Kathy Griffin answers **Howard Stern's** question, "If you had to save **Anderson Cooper's** life, or **Andy Cohen's** life, who do you choose at this point?" When pressed to choose one, she saved the Silver Fox. PHEW. Of Cohen, she said, "I hate him. I loathe him. I think he is a talentless piece of shit." That pretty much says it all.

Adam Rippon made a startling revelation about his love life. He just announced that he's been dating **Jussi-Pekka Kajaala**. And, despite all his talk about Grindr, they actually met on Tinder—so I guess Grindr is where you go to hook up, but Tinder is where you go to find a boyfriend. Adam met the Finnish realtor online about seven months ago. At first, it was just chatter. Rippon said they then "started to hang out a little bit more, because we were both really busy. Now that I'm even busier, I thought it was a better time to hang out." He went public with the news by posting a shirtless pic of the pair hiking in Runyon Canyon with the caption "Good boys Finnish first." Do they?

Adam's time is even more precious these days ... he'll be competing on *Dancing with the Stars*. Remember I told you that ABC was trying to woo the skater to join the "All Athletes" season, but Rippon was already committed to the Stars on Ice tour. We hear that Adam and his dancing partner (who has not been named) will be rehearsing on the road and then flying to Los Angeles for the competition. The "Stars on Ice" tour continues through May 20.

This special season of *DWTS* will be much shorter than usual. It starts on April 30 and will run for just four weeks—apparently ABC is only interested in airing it during May sweeps. Joining Rippon on the *DWTS* journey will be snowboarder **Jamie Anderson**, softball player **Jennie Finch**, and, thank the Lord above, skater **Tonya Harding**. Although the entire cast won't be announced until Friday, April 13, may I ask a question? Who does **Greg Louganis** have to whack before he's invited to compete?

Insiders tell me that *RuPaul's Drag Race* is trying to produce an abbreviated season of its own—dedicated to drag legends! If the buzz is correct, we could see people like **Coco Peru**, **Lady Bunny**, **Chi Chi La Rue**, **Lypsinka**, **Jackie Beat**, **Heklina** and oodles of others with varying degrees of talent battling on the catwalk. Frankly, I think they should just give the award to **Lypsinka** now and call it a day.

Ryan Murphy has been known for resuscitating the careers of many once-hot actors. He's bracing himself for one of the biggest challenges of his life. Murphy just announced that one of the stars of the next season of *American Horror Story* will be **Dame Joan Collins**! Now, I know what you're thinking—backstage footage of Joan without her wig and makeup could be a horror story on its own. But it should be noted she previously ditched all glamour for her last film, *The Time of Their Lives*, which was pretty good. We don't



Kathy Griffin has made her feelings about **Andy Cohen** known.

Photo from Bravo

know much about the next season of *AHS*, except that it will also star **Kathy Bates**, **Sarah Paulson**, **Evan Peters**, **Adina Porter**, **Billy Eichner**, **Leslie Grossman**, **Cheyenne Jackson** and possibly **Anjelica Houston**. We also know Evan Peters will play a hairstylist and that **Joan Collins** will be his grandmother. I bet she was angling to play his love interest!

A show which may not be returning is **Project Runway**. The franchise is owned by The Weinstein Company, which is currently in bankruptcy. A+E Networks cancelled the Weinstein's contract for the next two seasons due to the allegations and pending legal battle against Harvey. In fact, some outlets have claimed that Harvey used *Project Runway* as a "pipeline" to young female models. **Lantern Capital** has been angling to buy the Weinstein assets and if that happens, **Lifetime** is happy to work with them to keep "Project Runway" afloat.

One of the least-talked-about aspects of the Weinstein drama has been estranged wife **Georgina Chapman**. Rumors continue to swirl that a multi-pronged deal was made between Harvey and **Georgie Girl** that included bankrolling her design house and placing her on *Project Runway All-Stars* as a judge. In return, she turned a blind eye to Harvey's peccadilloes and enjoyed the favors of a certain dancing man who Harvey also promised to pay off in a tit-for-tat manner. People swear to me that everyone involved could be hauled in to testify should the legal battle get ugly.

Darin Houston sent in this "Ask Billy" question: "I heard that **Harry Styles** performed somewhere in Europe with a cock ring. Is it true? Do you have videos or photos?"

While we don't know exactly what was going on under Harry's trousers, we can at least fill in a few gaps. First, it happened in Munich, Germany. Harry was wearing a snug purple suit and brandish-

ing flags in both arms—apparently he thought he was a gay man in a disco in 1985. (Were it 1975, he'd have had a tambourine.) As he arches his back, it does appear that a small cylindrical form pops from the front of his trousers. But, upon closer inspection, a similar shape pops from the side as well. This made me think it could be the pant pockets and the angle of the camera. So we did more investigating, found a video from a different angle and, well, let's just say you can see exactly what's happening on **BillyMasters.com**.

When **Dame Joan Collins** could compete on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, it's definitely time to end yet another column. One of the advantages of celebrating Orthodox Easter is that all the lilies and candies are half-price. But where, oh where, are my daffodils? While I look, check out **BillyMasters.com**—the site that's been known to raise more than the dead. If you have a question, send it to **Billy@BillyMasters.com**, and I promise to get back to you before I eat my weight in Peeps! To the Albanians, **Krishti u ngjall**. To the Greeks, **Christos Anesti**. And to everyone else, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

WINDY CITY TIMES

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Speak Truth to Power Major touring exhibition based on the book, *Speak Truth to Power: Human Rights Defenders Who Are Changing Our World*, about activists working tirelessly to defend justice in political rights, freedom of expression, honor killings, demilitarization, environmental activism, mental health, children's rights, and national self-determination. 10:00pm - 8:00pm Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center 9603 Woods Dr. Skokie, IL 60077 <http://ILHolocaustMuseum.org/speak-truthtopower>

Surrogacy Seminar & Gay Parenting Expo Peer and expert advice. USA and Canada options. Financial assistance. 25+ parenting exhibitors. Limited space, pre-registration encouraged. Through April 15 (8:30 am-5:30 pm). 3:30pm - 8:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://MenHavingBabies.org/chicago>

Social Justice Book Group Suggested reading: *When They Call You a Terrorist* by Patrice Khan-Cullors 4:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>

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/>


CAPITOL FACTS
Wed., April 11

Equality Illinois LGBTQ Advocacy Day will take place in Springfield.

Photo of Capitol by
Owen Keehnen

Thursday, April 12

Reading and Book Signing: True Stories from an Unreliable Eye Witness Christine Lahti in conversation with Bernardine Dohrn. Tickets on sale March 1st. 7:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago

Friday, April 13

Queer Genre Fiction 2nd Fridays 7:00pm - 9:00pm Gerber Hart Library and Archives 6500 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.gerberhart.org/>

Fat Kid Dance Party, On Tour From LA A mash-up of dance aerobics, line dancing, sing alongs and unbridled enthusiasm, Fat Kid Dance Party is an act of dance floor reclamation. 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <https://community.centeronhalsted.org/pages/fatkiddanceparty?erid=7749495&trid=fc1a7562-0192-492d-91c2-9b95e19893b2>

Saturday, April 14

Proud to Runway Come see models bring it to the runway, rocking the latest fashions. Principal fundraiser for Chicago's original Pride week running event, Proud to Run. \$20 suggested donation gets you a drink ticket, nibbles, access to silent auction. 6-9 pm, Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted St., <http://bit.ly/ProudToRun2018>

NO H8 Campaign Open Photo Shoot with Adam Bouska Proceeds promote and raise awareness for marriage, human equality, anti-discrimination, anti-bullying. Single/Solo Photos: \$40. Couple/Group Photos \$25 per person. Cash and credit cards only. Wear white shirt and be camera ready. 2:00pm - 4:00pm W Chicago City Center 172 W Adams Chicago <http://noh8campaign.com>

Cecile Richards: Make Trouble Book Tour In conversation with David Axelrod. 4:00pm Nicholas Senn High School, 5900 N Glenwood Ave, Chicago Tickets: <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3335756>

Chicago Red Dress Party 2018 Dedicated to raising funds and awareness for the HIV/AIDS movement and to building a strong, unified LGBT and allied community. Silent auction and raffle. 7:30 pm VIP event includes performer from RuPaul's Drag Race. 9:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.chicagoredressparty.org>

Sunday, April 15

Neil Tobin, Necromancer: Near Death Experience Interactive, magical theater about life and death in a once-in-a-lifetime setting. Presented at May Chapel, a rarely open-to-the-public architectural gem. 3:00pm May Chapel at Rosehill Cemetery, 5800 N. Ravenswood Ave <http://neardeathx.com>

Wed., April 18

Poetry Reading: From the Inside Quietly Eloisa Amezcua with special guests Jose Olivarez and Xandria Phillips 7:30pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago

LGBT Chamber of Commerce Yelp 101 Free workshop on Yelp for Business Owners 10:00pm - 11:30pm Chicago Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce 3179 N Clark Chicago <http://business.lgbttc.com>

Thursday, April 19

Bon Foster 45 years of fighting for justice. Honoring Patricia M. Logue, founder and former managing director Lambda Legal Midwest Regional office and associate judge, circuit court of Cook County. Remarks by Rachel B. Tiven, Lambda Leagl CEO. Open bar by Sidetrack, food by Jewel. \$150 6:00pm - 10:00pm Morgan Manufacturing, 401 N. Morgan St., Chicago, IL 312-663-4413 <http://lambdalegal.org/bonfoster>

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ASTLEY from page 26

WCT: Chicago has some good restaurants for you.

RA: Yes, and I think we have a day off as well so we will be checking some places out.

WCT: Do you have a band on this tour?

RA: We pretty much have the same band with some personnel change but fairly the same unit whenever we play. For me it is just enjoying it really. I appreciate the fact that I can still do it and however small the gig is somebody still wants to come. I treat it like that.

When we are in the UK and some parts of the world I might be doing arenas. Some parts of the world I am not. That is fine.

Most artists want to do arenas, but that is their ego talking. In the little gigs you remember more. The little ones you can hear people shouting things to you. You can have conversations.

WCT: I believe the show in Chicago is almost sold out.

RA: That's good news. I always wonder how people know about it. The internet is such a wonderful thing.

WCT: Have you played in Chicago in the past?

RA: No. I didn't really tour a lot in America. I did tons of radio promos, so I have been there to do radio and stuff like that. I did gigs around there years ago like in Detroit but not there.

I didn't do a lotto touring because I was selling records and that is what they wanted me to do. I would go on the Arsenio Hall show and sell hundred of albums. People didn't want me to play live. I only found out I could afterwards. It is nice to go out and play now!

Be "Together Forever" with Astley at House of Blues, 329 N. Dearborn St., on Wed., April 25, with tickets at HouseofBlues.com/Chicago.

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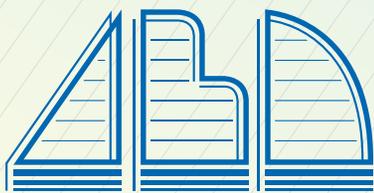
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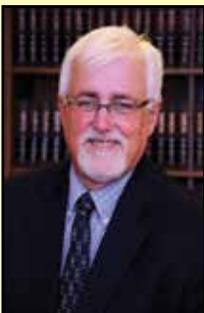
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