WCT has features and reviews of LGBTQ film fest options

WILLING AND ABELS
Talking with 'Get Out' composer.
Photo by Todd Robinson

AMY ARMSTRONG
LGBTQ ally talks singing career—and cancer.
Photo by Steve Owen Photography

Lili Reinhart, Jennifer Lopez, Keke Palmer and Constance Wu in Hustlers.
Photo by Barbara Nitke

STARTING ON PAGE 19
Above: Shiny Shrimps.
Photo by Carolina Jaramillo, courtesy of Reeling

OH, WHAT A REELING!

FALL MOVIE PREVIEW
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CANDACE GINGRICH
Activist joins cannabis 'Revolution'.
Photo by Angelika Bermingham

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Post debate analysis: Buttigieg has staying power

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

No LGBT-specific issues came up during the third national Democratic presidential debate Sept. 12. That, and the fact that LGBT issues have been barely mentioned in the previous two national Democratic debates, is likely to put increased attention on next week’s LGBT presidential forum in Iowa, as well as next month’s Human Rights Campaign presidential forum on CNN.

The only reference to LGBT Issues in last Thursday’s debate came near the end of the three-hour event when candidates were asked to describe “the most significant professional setback” they have ever faced and how they recovered or learned from it.

South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg—the only openly gay candidate in the field of 10 candidates on the stage in Houston—said his was the decision to come out while serving as mayor and in the military.

“I had to wonder whether just acknowledging who I was was going to be the ultimate career-ending professional setback,” said Buttigieg. It was a moment Buttigieg has described publicly before, including in his memoir Shortest Way Home.

“I came back from the deployment and realized that you only get to live one life. And I was not interested in not knowing what it was like to be in love any longer, so I just came out. I had no idea what kind of professional setback it would be, especially because, inconveniently, it was an election year in my socially conservative community,” said Buttigieg. “What happened was that, when I trusted voters to judge me based on the job that I did for them, they decided to trust me and re-elected me with 80 percent of the vote. And what I learned was that trust can be reciprocated and that part of how you can win and deserve to win is to know what’s worth more to you than winning. And I think that’s what we need in the presidency right now.”

Besides being the only openly gay candidate in the race and the only candidate among the top 10 with military service, Buttigieg is clearly trying to position himself as a moderate among Democrats. In the debate over “Medicare for All” versus the Affordable Care Act, Buttigieg offers “Medicare for All who want it.” In the debate over assault weapons—which to ban them entirely or to make sure they can’t fall into the hands of dangerous killers—Buttigieg told CNN’s State of the Union candidate Beto O’Rourke was wrong to say he would take away all assault weapons. But then Buttigieg explained, “We have agreement among the American people for not just universal background checks but we have a majority in favor of red flag laws, [bans on] high-capacity magazines [and] banning the new sale of assault weapons.”

Many political pundits said they don’t think much will change in the poll standings as a result of the Sept. 12 debate, but it does seem clear now that Buttigieg has raised enough money and voter interest to remain a viable candidate in the Democratic presidential race through Iowa. His candidacy has drawn repeated comments from incumbent Republican President Trump, has inspired repeated editorial scrutiny from the Wall Street Journal and scored appearances on two Sunday political talk shows post-debate. And this month, the Buttigieg campaign began opening 20 offices across Iowa to ramp up support ahead of the February caucuses. The Des Moines Register reported Buttigieg had raised more money from Iowans than had any other candidate.

Buttigieg is in second tier

Polling data has separated the field of viable Democratic candidates into four distinct tiers: double digits (former Vice President Joe Biden and U.S. Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren), single digits above the DNC threshold (U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris and Buttigieg), single digits at the DNC threshold (businessman Andrew Yang, U.S. Sen. Cory Booker and former U.S. Rep. Beto O’Rourke) and single digits below the threshold (all others). The Democratic National Party has set 2 percent as the threshold of polling support in order to participate in the party’s nationally televised debates.

Ten candidates met that criteria for the Sept. 12 debate and all have reportedly qualified for the next debate, Oct. 15. So far, only one other Democratic candidate, businessman Tom Steyer, has been added to the roster for the next debate.

Polling has been consistent for weeks now: Biden is in the lead by between six and ten points over the next contender. He is followed by either Sanders or Warren, depending on the poll. The latest CNN poll showed Warren with 18 percent, and Sanders with 17 percent. The latest RealClearPolitics.com averaging of many recent polls showed Biden with 26.8 percent, Sanders with 17.3 percent, and Warren with 16.8 percent.

On the second tier, using RealClearPolitics averaging, Harris has 6.5 percent and Buttigieg has 4.8 percent.

Making up a third tier are Yang with 3 percent, O’Rourke with 2.8 percent and Booker with 2.3 percent. And the fourth tier includes U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard with 1.3 percent, U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar with 1.2 percent, former Housing and Human Services Secretary Julian Castro with 1 percent, and Steyer and U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, with under 1 percent.

Nate Silver, the openly gay polling data guru at fivethirtyeight.com, recently commented on the odds of winning the nomination, given candidates’ placement at this point.

“Td much rather wager a few shekels on Joe Biden than Pete Buttigieg, for instance. But I don’t think there’s any hard-and-fast distinction between the top tier and the next-runners-up,” said Silver. But he added that candidates in the low single digits have almost no chance now of winning.

Silver doesn’t buy into some media speculation that the nomination race is down to just the three double-digit candidates: Biden, Warren, and Sanders. He points to polling in the early primary states as “historically fairly predictive” of who wins the nomination.

Next debate: Sept. 20

The latest poll in Iowa (taken August 28 to September 4) shows Biden with 29 percent support, followed by Sanders with 26 points, Warren with 17, Buttigieg with seven, and Harris with six. (The survey was conducted by CBS News and YouGov.com with 835 registered voters in Iowa who identify as Democrats. Margin of error is 4.3 percent.)

Four out of those five candidates (everyone except Sanders) has confirmed they will participate Friday, Sept. 20, in an LGBT-specific debate sponsored by the Iowa statewide LGBT group One Iowa and three media groups. Six other participants, thus far, are Booker, Castro, Gabbard, Klobuchar, former U.S. Rep. Joe Sestak, and author Marianne Williamson.

The debate will be livestreamed on several internet sites, including TheGazette.com and a YouTube site. The forum is slated to run 7-8:30 p.m. at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

[Note: It was revealed Sept. 16 that transgender Pose star Angelica Ross will host the forum, with out singer Billy Gilman performing the national anthem.]

Eye on the sidelines

Just hours ahead of the Sept. 12 debate:

—Healey endorses Warren: Openly lesbian Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey announced she is endorsing Warren.

“I’ve been lucky to work with Elizabeth since well before she became our Senator,” said Healey, in an email blast to supporters. “What I’ve come to know is that Elizabeth Warren is laser focused on how we help families in this state and across this country. She also knows that you can’t just tell people what you’re going to do. Real change happens when you have a plan to get it done, and the resolve and strategy to fight for it.”

—Biden video touts LGBT gains: Biden’s campaign released a new campaign video Sept. 12, underscoring Biden’s time as vice president to President Barack Obama. Among other things, the video reminds viewers that the Obama administration “led on marriage equality” and “repealed don’t ask, don’t tell.” Biden has often been given credit for persuading Obama to make a statement in favor of allowing same-sex couples to marry. In May 2012, Biden said he was “absolutely comfortable” with allowing same-sex couples to marry, something that was possible only in a few states at the time. Obama had been walking a tightrope between support for repealing the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and support for full legal marriage equality. While Obama has vigorously supported the repeal of DOMA and had spoken in opposition to bans on same-sex marriage in California and North Carolina, he and his administration had not yet made any explicit statements in support of legal marriage equality in the states. Commentary at the time was split—some saying Biden was paving the way for a supportive statement from President Obama and others saying he had committed a “gaffe” by expressing a view that the president had not yet endorsed.

—Trump mocks Buttigieg: In an hour-long rambling speech to Republican U.S. House members Sept. 12, President Trump took several jabs at Buttigieg. Trump said the South Bend mayor was “doing a rotten job running his own city.” and he dismissed polls showing Buttigieg could beat Trump by two points in Texas. “I don’t think so,” said Trump. “I don’t worry about that too much.”

Trump also made fun of Buttigieg’s last name, saying “nobody can pronounce this guy’s name,” and then he repeated “Boot-edge-edge.” Trump followed that by pointing to his mid-chest and saying, “I’ve had him up to here,” drawing laughter from the audience. Trump mocked Buttigieg before, including in a North Carolina rally in July. Two national polls in the past month have shown registered voters preferring Buttigieg to Trump by a margin of four to nine points.

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**PASSAGES**

**John Rent**

John Leonard Rent passed away Sept. 9 after battling pancreatic cancer for two years.

For more than 15 years, John was the owner and designer of the floral design firm Into The Woods, Inc. He was a creative visionary. He loved sports, drag and leather, making him “masc for mascara.” John did not want an obituary, a memorial service or any public remembrance.

For the first time in 55 years, John’s friends get the final say.

John dodged death twice in his life—first after being diagnosed HIV in the early 1980s and then surviving being hit by a car in his 20s. John often spoke of Chili Pepper dressing as his mother to come visit him in the hospital during this time.

John loved to eat out and take his friends to dinner. He could be frequently be seen dictating his friends’ food choices at Yoshi’s, Mon Ami Gabi, Maxim’s (back in the day) and Las Mananitas.

Throughout his 25+ year career as a floral designer, John won the hearts of his clients, who often became his lifelong friends. He brought joy, beauty, and laughter to everyone he encountered. His friends hope that you remember his uniquely irreverent (often teetering on the edge of inappropriate) wicked sense of humor and sincerely hope this has made you chuckle while remembering one of the most interesting, giving and loyal men.

Lastly he’d like to remind you to put down your phone and go talk to someone. F--k Trump!

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**Disability rights advocate Marca Bristo dies**

**BY MATT SIMONETTE**

Chicagoan Marca Bristo, who was at the forefront of numerous causes relating to disability rights, passed away Sept. 8. She was 66.

Bristo was founder of the advocacy Access Living, which she began in 1980, a few years after a diving accident in Lake Michigan left her paralyzed from the chest down. Among her accomplishments were helping to author the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act legislation, as well as fighting for rules that led to Chicago Transit Authority’s installation of ramps and closed-captioning functionality on televisions.

Bristo recently stepped down from her post as Access Living’s CEO and president because of health issues. She had also worked as a nurse and worked in a number of advocacy and governmental advisory capacities, among them a 1994 appointment from President Bill Clinton to chair the National Council on Disability and having served as president of the U.S. International Council on Disabilities, where she campaigned for the United States to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. She was named as a trustee of the Ford Foundation in June 2019.

“Marca was exceptional,” said Access Living Board Chair Andres Gallegos in a statement. “[She was] a visionary and leader with extraordinary skills who built Access Living into the most influential center for independent living in the country. She loved Access Living and foremost for its people. She challenged and helped those around her achieve their full potential, and in doing so, she has cultivated the next generation of disability rights leaders.”

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-9) added, “Marca will go down in history as one of the most influential leaders of the disability rights and independent living movements. Because of Marca, countless people have been freed from confining living arrangements and liberated to live independently in communities. She was the founder and long-time President of the premier advocacy organization for people with disabilities, Chicago-based Access Living. Marca played a central role in the passage of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, and was an important advisor to President Barack Obama.”

“Marca reached out to me during my first few months home after Walter Reed, and she has been a friend and counselor—especially on disability issues—ever since,” recalled U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth. “Without Marca’s work over the last 30 years, the Americans with Disabilities Act would not be in existence and I would not be a U.S. senator. While we have so much progress yet to make, the disability community can thank Marca’s leadership, activism and sacrifice for the more inclusive society we live in today. I was honored to call her my friend and will miss her dearly.”

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**Howard Brown Health**
Candace Gingrich joins cannabis ‘Revolution’

BY JULIA HALE

In July, medical cannabis provider Revolution Enterprises appointed LGBTQ+ activist Candace Gingrich as Vice President of Business Relations for the company’s Florida operation. Gingrich, who worked at the Human Rights Campaign for over two decades until this year, is married to Illinois State Representative Kelly Cassidy and is also the half-sibling of former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich.

“I left the Human Rights Campaign in March, and I was quite happy being a house spouse,” said Gingrich. What caught their eye about Revolution Enterprises appointed LGBTQ+ activist Candace Gingrich.

“Staffed by queer people, created and designed in a way to ensure that people feel comfortable, know they’re welcome and can see themselves in our dispensaries. That’s exciting because I’m not sure that there are many places [if any] where that’s been a focus for a cannabis company, and it’s going to be one of ours in Florida.”

“I’m excited about the opportunity to work in Florida side by side with LGBTQ activists, with people of color, with veterans, to advance the idea and the truth that marijuana is medicine,” said Gingrich. “[I’m excited] to help remove the stigma that is still associated with being a medical cannabis user, to work with healthcare providers to ensure that they are culturally competent [enough] to work with queer patients, and also to engage those [marginalized] communities as we build our grow site [and] as we look to begin opening the first of our 35 dispensaries.”

The idea of “queer forward” dispensaries is something that Gingrich said they see for Revolution Enterprises in other locations moving forward as well. “As Revolution expands around the country, the model that we’re building in Florida with regard to working with the queer community [and] bringing in historically marginalized communities, that’s the kind of thing that we [want] to replicate in those other states,” they said. “This is a chance, as a company, to do good, as well as do good business.”

Selichot

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odhcil.org
Panelists discuss trans physician cultural competency

BY MATT SIMONETTE

A panel of Chicagoans—all of them members of the city’s transgender community—gathered at Malcolm X College Sept. 13 to discuss the availability and importance of culturally competent healthcare.

The panel, moderated by Channyn Parker, Howard Brown Health’s manager of external relations, featured Angelina Nordstrom, Soren Hodshire and Samantha Dunn. The discussion was part of a Howard Brown Health seminar on issues pertaining to transgender healthcare access.

An inherent difficulty lies at the center of transgender healthcare delivery. The patient’s initial access can hinge on whether a provider, an insurance company or some other bureaucratic entity trusts the patient’s sincerity about identifying as transgender or gender nonconforming, and agrees that gender dysphoria is even a valid concern in the first place.

The system is predicated on “gatekeeping based on assumptions of who you think I am,” said Hodshire, who later added, “It’s about knowing and trusting that [the patient] knows who they are.”

Nordstrom emphasized that physicians who treat transgender patients have a significant role to play within that patient’s support system, and, as such, need to understand the many facets of the transgender community, not just the immediate health needs of their patients.

“Even if it’s not an employment obligation, it’s a moral obligation,” Nordstrom said. “[They] must do the right thing at all times, not just on the clock.”

Dunn ultimately concluded that the best physician is someone who “is going to help me mold into a better part of myself.”

LGBTQ Victory Fund brunch Sept. 22

LGBTQ Victory Fund’s annual Chicago Champagne Brunch will take place Sunday, Sept. 22, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., at Chez Chicago, 247 E. Ontario St.

Victory Fund President/CEO Mayor Annise Parker and elected officials and leaders from the Chicago area will attend the event. The organization helped elect a rainbow wave of openly LGBTQ leaders at every level of government in 2018—more than at any time in our 27-year history.

The keynote speakers will be Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot as well as Chasten Buttigieg, the husband of Democratic presidential candidate Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

See “Chicago Champagne Brunch 2019” on Facebook.

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With a vision to build a queer and trans movement for economic justice, the National LGBTQ Workers Center organized Chicago’s LGBTQ Economic Justice Summit, held at SEIU Healthcare Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas (Chicago office) on Sept. 7-8.

The National LGBTQ Workers Center is an organization where LGBTQ workers can go to confront workplace discrimination and fight for economic justice. Established in 2018, its mission has been to create a world where all LGBTQ people understand their rights as workers and have available resources to organize their workplaces and communities.

According to its website, the organization works to create social change, with emphasis on uplifting queer and trans people of color, through issue-based grassroots organizing and labor education.

This effort’s Chicagoland chapter, Chicago’s LGBTQ Workers Center, launched earlier in 2019 and Chicago’s LGBTQ Economic Justice Summit served as a kick-off event where people could learn and connect.

“The purpose was to get people together because I know a lot of times we talk a lot about the LGBTQ rights and just as a community, but we don’t often make the connection to our rights as workers and how it affects us in the workplace,” said Joan Jones, president of the National LGBTQ Workers Center and the lead organizer for the Chicago LGBTQ Workers Center. “So, I really wanted to begin to build that language; ... I think a lot of this work is talking with existing LGBTQ organizations and allies and really getting to see the effect that discrimination and bias has on our work lives, and thus our ability to survive and thrive in community. I really wanted this to be a place where people can come and orient their experience as an LGBTQ person in context with their experience as a worker, and I feel like that’s exactly what it’s been.”

The first day of Chicago’s LGBTQ Economic Justice Summit contained the breakout sessions “Organizing 101: Vision Stories, Worker Power” and “From the Summit to the Streets-Building LGBTQ Worker Political Power.” The evening concluded with a “Queer Take Over Happy Hour.”

“We went through vision stories where we were talking about what makes us passionate about worker justice now, using our past to inform our present and also think about what the future looks like; what we would desire for a better future for ourselves,” said Jones when describing day one.

The second day’s agenda included a welcome from Miss Black Trans Kansas 2017-18 and National LGBTQ Workers Center Board Member Nyla Foster, as well as breakout sessions such as “Workers Rights 101, Unions 101, Past Victories: LGBTQ Paid Time Off” and “Protections, and Underground Economies and Queer Trans Workers.”

Additionally, attendees were able to get HIV screenings from Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital, who had a table at the resource fair alongside Chicago Black Gay Men’s Caucus, Labor Notes and Raise Chicago. Also along the lines of self-care, if needed, attendees could visit the designated mindfulness space for some quiet time.

“(Sunday) was meant to be more practical strategies, like what’s actually happening in the world and how could we get involved,” Jones described. “The goal of this entire conference is to figure out what’s going to be the brunt of our work for the next year and I feel like it’s really served that purpose where people are excited about what they see and want to get involved.”

The Workers Rights 101 panel provided perspectives from people of color working on the city, state and national levels. Mona Noriega, Chicago Commission on Human Relations commissioner; Sunu Chandy, legal director at the National Women’s Law Center; and Maurice (Mo) Green IV, public affairs director at the Illinois Department of Human Rights introduced themselves, shared how each got involved in their work and the meaning of their work as an LGBTQ-identified person. Jones moderated the panel.

In the panel discussion, Noriega shared her own experience of discrimination in the various jobs she has held throughout her life. She stated if someone came to file a complaint with the commission on human relations, “I don’t want them to worry that I don’t believe them; I do.”

“That discrimination is real,” Noriega said. “That sexual harassment is real. A point that needs to be made is that sometimes sexual harassment is more pervasive, often times because LGBT people are perceived based on our sexuality. Noriega emphasized that discrimination is in all levels of employment, and may look different in different fields and types of jobs.

Chandy, visiting from Washington D.C., focused on worker’s rights protections, explicit protections for LGBTQ people on the city and state levels and protections for LGBTQ people only through the protections against sex discrimination on the federal level.

Saying it is a critical moment right now for the Supreme Court to do the right thing and confirm for everyone in the country that federal law protects LGBTQ workers, Chandy detailed some specific items she said people should be aware of, including the Equality Act, which could provide clear explicit protections on the federal level; The Oct. 8 arguments of Title VII employment cases where the U.S. Supreme Court will hear and decide whether LGBTQ workers are going to be included or excluded from federal civil rights protections; and the National Women’s Law Center’s resource for individuals facing sex discrimination to connect people with lawyers through the Legal Network for Gender Equity and to connect those lawyers to funding if it is a case of sex harassment in the workplace or related retaliation in the workplace.

Overall, Jones said they hoped people got a sense of empowerment from the summit.

“If there’s one thing I hope folks take away from this, is that their voice matters and it makes a difference when people use their voice to speak out,” Jones said.

To learn more about The National LGBTQ Workers Center, visit LGBTQWorkersCenter.org.
Incoming Second Unitarian minister discusses new role

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Rev. Jason Lydon, who in August took over as minister at Second Unitarian Church of Chicago, 656 W. Barry Ave., said that his Lake View church has a long legacy of activism he hopes to see it “lean into” in the years ahead.

“We are striving to be a welcoming community—all people are welcome to be here,” Lydon said. “During the AIDS crisis of the ’80s and ’90s, this was a place where as many as 200 funerals happened for men of AIDS-related illnesses. We want to continue making a space that is affirming, justice-seeking and that welcomes all people.”

A native of Massachusetts, Lydon has been a Chicago resident for about two years. During 2012-2017, he was head of the not-for-profit organization Black and Pink, which advocated on behalf of LGBT and HIV-positive persons in incarceration.

“I founded Black and Pink after I had gotten out of prison,” he said. “I’d done six months in prison for an act of civil disobedience. I experienced a lot of violence by prison staff and was in queer-segregated cells in county jails in Georgia, and was in solitary confinement for 45 days in a federal prison in Massachusetts.”

When Lydon was released in 2003, national LGBT organizations had little interest in prison reform issues.

“Folks would say, ‘We’re not really working on that—that’s not really an issue for us,’” he recalled. “I was very frustrated, so Black and Pink really began as a response to that, really building up connections with prisoners. It started with me just writing my friends, people who’d looked out for me, so I’d wanted to look out for them. Over the years, more folks got involved on the outside writing letters.”

Among Black and Pink’s efforts were a newspaper with prisoner-created content, direct advocacy that supported prisoner-led organizations and organizing against solitary confinement, and chapters opened across the country.

“It’s now an organization of about 16,000-18,000 prisoners across the country,” Lydon added. “It’s by far the largest network of LGBTQ and HIV-positive prisoners in incarceration.

“The way I believe change happens in the world is when communities of people come together to support each other, work on conflict, share values and figure out how we go about living in this world that is so broken,” he added. “How do we engage each other lovingly? How do we challenge injustice? How do we nurture each other through transitions in life? That’s the way I work in secular organizing, and it just feels so appropriate to keep that, and build it up, in faith-based organizing and the ministry of church life.”

Study: Bias affects suicides in trans adults

New analysis of data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) found that more than half (51.2 percent) of respondents who had experienced four instances of anti-transgender discrimination and violence (job loss, eviction, homelessness and physical attack) in the past year reported attempting suicide in that year. Nearly all (97.7 percent) had seriously thought about suicide.

The 2015 USTS—which the National Center for Transgender Equality conducted—surveyed 28,000 transgender adults and is currently the largest survey of transgender people in the country.
LGBTQ ally Amy Armstrong talks cancer, giving back, ‘Amy and Freddy’

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

When LGBTQ ally Amy Armstrong was growing up in Detroit and later Camden, Michigan she dreamed of becoming a performer. Since graduating from Henry Ford Community College and Wayne State University, she has parlayed that into a thriving career as a solo artist and duo with Freddy Allen—aka "Amy and Freddy."

"I was around a lot of gay guys in college due to my major, and I loved them all," said Armstrong. "My best friend, Kevin Walsh, said we should leave Detroit so we can pursue our careers and the closest place we could afford is Chicago so we moved to Boystown."

Armstrong found her first job and shortly after went to her first gay bar, Charlie’s, where she met drag queen Fifi Depraved.

"I told Fifi I wanted to perform but I did not have any music," said Armstrong. “Fifi said sing in my ear and if you are good I will let you go up there. I sang a Patsy Cline song and he thought it was good so I got to perform."

The cabaret bar Gentry was another place where Armstrong showed her talents during an open mic night; that led to the owner Dave Edwards giving her a show. Shortly after that, Armstrong met Allen at an open mic night at Gentry.

They have been performing together for 25 years.

"We hit it off right away," said Armstrong. "It was so natural and wonderful to work with him. Within the first year we were traveling together to perform with the Denmark Symphony and we’ve been on cruise ships since 1998. We traveled to about 35 countries. Any time there was a Pride event or gay bar or LGBT-focused cruise that needed entertainment I am there. I have done thousands of shows over the years."

Armstrong has done benefit performances for many LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS organizations over the years, from Equity Fights AIDS to any HIV prevention group to the marriage equality fight.

"I am very grateful toward the LGBTQ community because it was where I grew up as an adult and found my voice and career," said Armstrong.

Of the many people Armstrong has worked with, she said her favorites have been Leslie Jordan (who helped her get an agent), Ty Hendon, Anne Hampton Calloway and Michael Feinstein. Growing up, Armstrong said George Carlin, Richard Pryor, Bette Midler, Liza Minnelli, Moms Mabley, Mae West and other outspoken women inspired her.

For the past 17 years, Armstrong has made Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, her home for half of the year while the rest of the year she travels and stays in Chicago for extended periods. Her goal is to move to Palm Springs, California, so she can audition in Los Angeles.

While in Puerto Vallarta, Armstrong works with the four piece band Piel Canela at the Nacho Daddy live music venue. She also volunteers at a local orphanage and pet sanctuary.

However, her life has taken quite a turn. During gallbladder surgery on June 13 in Puerto Vallarta, doctors found that she had ovarian cancer, of which her mother died from at 50.

"It is kind of wild that we both got the same cancer," said Armstrong. "I have an opportunity to fight this while she did not. Throughout this whole process, people have sent me texts saying they love and support me and are praying for me. These messages have lifted me up."

For Armstrong, it was better for her that she was in Mexico. She said she did not have the insurance to cover the treatments in the United States, adding that unlike in the United States, medical professionals in Mexico seem to have a better bedside manner—which makes a big difference regarding recovery. Armstrong said the process is a lot faster and easier to navigate in Mexico; within a week of being diagnosed, she had her first chemo treatment. Her CA125, which is a person’s cancer count, went from 13,100 to 285.

"One Sunday, I was concerned about the pain I was feeling so I called my doctor," said Armstrong. "I thought I would not hear back from her until Monday but she called five minutes later. This would never happen in the United States."

The cancer diagnosis has hastened her performing career with Allen.

"We were booked for shows but I had to back out so he has been performing with other artists," said Armstrong. "He has said it is not the same without me."

"I consider Amy my sister," said Allen. "We have been best friends and musical partners for 25 years. As I watch her fight cancer, I am so inspired by her strength and spirit. She is seriously kicking cancer’s ass."

Of all the Amy and Freddy albums that have been released, Armstrong said Naturally Flawless stands out, adding that when she recovers they will be doing a “best of” album.

Recently, Chicago’s Hydrate Nightclub held a fundraiser to help pay for Armstrong’s treatments. The night featured performances by Allen, Honey West, Denise Tomaszello, Russ Goeltenbodt, Daryl Nitz, feathered Beaus, Russ Raineir, Dixie Lynn Cartwright, Richard Streetman and Alexis Bevels, with Armstrong appearing via video to thank everyone. Armstrong also sang “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?” at the event, which raised $5,000.

Armstrong is still in need of funds for treatments that include more surgery and chemo sessions.

“Any money left over will go toward helping women here in Mexico because a lot of them are not getting tested for any diseases,” said Armstrong. “Doctors should have to ask if a patient wants a CA125 during regular check-ups to see if there is anything wrong in their bodies.”

When asked what message she wanted to send, Armstrong said, “If your body is feeling weird, go to the doctor for a full check-up because it is important to know your health status, especially as you age. Specifically, I want the lesbian and transgender male community to know they still have to get checked by an OB/GYN. It is much better to find out because if you wait too long it will be harder to defeat the disease.”

Trans activist speaks on staying optimistic in the age of Trump

BY MATT SIMONETTE

While speaking at Center on Halsted Sept. 9, activist Mara Keisling said that, though the trans community has been beset by numerous setbacks since President Donald Trump came into office, she is nevertheless optimistic about what the future holds.

“The sky will be blue again,” she said, “The grass will be green. We know how to do these things.”

Keisling is founding executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), which has both advocacy and political action committee arms. She reflected on the advances that the transgender community was making before the Trump administration came into power, noting that transgender folks had been making a steady “uphill” progression until 2016.

“I’m shocked and appalled every day that he has power over anybody,” Keisling said of Trump.

Keisling further recalled speaking at her alma mater, the University of Chicago. An audience member there asked her what it was like for trans people at the time she was a student in the late 70s. Keisling struggled for a moment and answered that there didn’t seem to be any trans people there when she attended school.

“There was nothing to exit the closet into [back then],” she said Sept. 9. “We had no role models.”

Among NCTE’s major current projects is interviewing Democratic presidential candidates about their viewpoints on transgender issues. The organization has finished five such interviews and have two more scheduled; the organization expects to have the remaining interviews finished by the primaries, Keisling added. Another major victory for the organization was a successful push to change the International Building and Plumbing Code—which is often used as guidance for state and municipal regulations—to include or clarify rules pertaining to gender-neutral washrooms.

“We can win if we fight together,” Keisling said.

Survey wants LGBTQs who experienced harm

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) is conducting a survey to gather information on harm and help-seeking experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals living in Illinois.

Research indicates LGBTQ+ individuals experience higher rates of crime—specifically higher rates of violent crime. ICJIA researchers collaborated with LGBTQ+ service providers and advocates to design a survey for LGBTQ+ individuals who have experienced harm that will help inform local and state-level policies and practices to address victimization within the community. The survey covers several topics, including stressful experiences, disclosure of victimization, and the need for and receipt of services after experiencing harm.

Participant feedback also will help shape priorities for federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) program funding. Last year, ICJIA disbursed $51.8 million in VOCA and VAWA funds to victim service providers across Illinois.

The 45-to 60-minute survey can be taken online or via hard copy. Participants will be asked to complete a brief screening process either online or by phone prior to taking the survey. Survey respondents will receive a $10 gift card for their participation.

For more information or to take the survey, visit http://www.icjia.state.il.us/research/lgbtq.
Activists disrupt the United States Conference on AIDS (USCA) opening plenary.
Photo by Derrick Mapp

Activists halt U.S. Conference on AIDS to protest CDC

Dr. Robert Redfield, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) surely saw it coming. Protests are part of the DNA of the United States Conference on AIDS (USCA), and conference organizers have never shied from welcoming dissent from activists. In fact, they schedule time in their finely produced event for just such occasions. [Editor’s note: The conference took place Sept. 5-8.]

Still, when a large group of diverse activists stormed the stage during the opening plenary on Thursday, their sheer number was impressive, as were their considerable list of grievances against the CDC and, in sometimes very direct and personal terms, against CDC Director Redfield himself.

God, I love a good protest. This one gets high marks. The speakers were passionate, concise, and withering in their takedowns of everything from the erasure of transgenders from epidemiological data to the ongoing controversy over Truvada pricing and patents to the quite troubling new policy of testing HIV genetics in a way that links transmissions to individuals, known as “molecular HIV surveillance.”

As the activists laid out their cases to a cheering crowd in the massive ballroom, plenary host Joy Reid of MSNBC and Director Redfield remained in their places on stage, joined by conference organizer Paul Kawata of NMAC, as if he were offering assurance and moral support to both the activists and his slightly stunned plenary guests.

Once the protest was complete, Reid assured the conference attendees that Redfield would be meeting with a select group of the activists to have a calmer conversation.

I joined them for that meeting, a group of a dozen or so, and although we agreed the meeting would stay off the record, I can report that each of the major issues outlined during the protest were revisited with Redfield. Some items, such as the battle over patent royalties from Gilead’s PrEP drug Truvada, are things Redfield cannot discuss due to litigation, which he has stated publicly.

Most reassuring to me was that, even after the drama of the protest, Redfield was receptive, circumspect, and agreed to have future meetings with various activists to address their concerns in more detail.

Act up. Fight back. Fight AIDS.

Mark S. King is a GLAAD Award-nominated blogger (MyFabulousDisease.com) and AIDS activist diagnosed with HIV in 1985.

Visibility isn’t the goal

In mid-July, I interviewed non-binary rapper CJ Run. In discussing the coming out of gay country rapper Lil Nas X, Run articulated something interesting regarding queer visibility. “Around the country there are a lot more queer-ish rappers around,” they said.

“I don’t know if that’s acceptance or just hypervisibility.” This got me thinking about how visibility in the mainstream relates to acceptance.

Queerness isn’t uncommon in popular culture, or even in politics nowadays. GLAAD’s 2018-19 “Where We Are on TV” report found that broadcast, cable and streaming had “significant increases in LGBTQ+ characters of color.” From the Netflix reboot Queer Eye, to Tyler the Creator (the Grammy-nominated rapper who’s come out as gay in recent years) to openly gay presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg, it’s evident that queerness is having a moment in the mainstream. Sure, this can manifest as genuine advocacy, space-making and people feeling comfortable enough to come out (as in the examples above), but it can also manifest as tokenism queerbaiting.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines tokenism as making a “symbolic effort,” as opposed to a real one. Queerbaiting, while not in the dictionary, is defined by Wikipedia as a marketing technique in which same-sex romance is hinted at, but not actually depicted. For example, the CW show Riverdale has been accused of tokenism, queerbaiting and following the Bury Your Gays TV trope.

Queerbaiting is also common in the music industry; pop singer Ariana Grande has been accused of it, among many others. A Them.us article (at https://www.them.us/story/what-that-queerbaiting) outlines the recent history of queerbaiting in pop music, including everything from February’s Dua Lipa x St. Vincent Grammy performance to the iconic 2003 Britney Spears/Christina Aguilera/Madonna Video Music Awards kisses.

To be hypervisible is to be extremely visible. Some might argue that the hypervisibility of queerness in the media serves as proof of acceptance, but that is not the case. “I feel like in the media, being queer is like the hot new topic,” said Run. “It’s very in, and I don’t know if that’s so much acceptance or if it’s just, like, a microscope is kind of on us now,” they said. “That doesn’t mean we’re being accepted more, it just means people know about us more.” So, given the evident influx of queerness into the mainstream, this begs the question: Is hypervisibility actually beneficial to queer people?

GLAAD’s 2018 “Accelerating Acceptance” report says that after years of positive momentum, in 2018, “the acceptance pendulum abruptly stopped and swung in the opposite direction.” This 2017 study from RTI International, a North Carolina nonprofit research organization, titled “Violence and LGBTQ+ Communities” stated that “despite perceptions that society is becoming more open and accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals, estimates of victimization disparities between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ populations appear to have generally worsened or been sustained since the 1990s.” Furthermore, “the very ‘outness’ and gender nonconformity that decades of collective struggle have made possible for some LGBTQ+ individuals may also expose them to victimization at higher rates than ever before.”

People might be coming out of the closet more than they used to, but that doesn’t mean queer people are suffering any less because of it.

Hypervisibility (as we know it) is only accompanied by perceived acceptance, not true progress. Visibility simply does not mean acceptance. Sure, RuPaul popularized drag, but the 26 trans characters found on TV during 2018-19 is matched by the 26 transgender women who died in the United States in 2018. Additionally, the casualties of hypervisibility, including tokenism and queerbaiting, are harmful and don’t do anything to benefit LGBTQ+ persons. So, let us not equate representation, or the promise of it, with acceptance or even tolerance among the people of the United States. Just because you see more gay shit doesn’t mean gay people have to deal with any less shit. In the words of non-binary rapper CJ Run: “It’s nice that we’re visible. Hopefully the acceptance piece can come with that.”

Julia Hale is a rising senior at DePaul University studying journalism and Spanish.
LANCE BASS
BAPTISTS, BROADWAY AND 'THE BOY BAND CON'

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THEATER REVIEW
Tiny Beautiful Things
Playwright: Adapted by Nia Vardalos from the book by Cheryl Strayed
At: Victory Gardens Theater at the Biograph, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave.
Tickets: VictoryGardens.org 773-871-3000; $31-$565
Runs through: Oct. 13

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Once upon a time, there was an online publication called Rumpus. Its table of contents included an advice column, where readers could address queries pertaining to the literary topics constituting the magazine’s focus, and have them answered by a curator identified only as “Sugar”—but in 2010, Sugar’s pseudonymous voice underwent an abrupt change, as did the scope of her mission.

It’s a fictional work based on fact: Richard Nixon’s 1994 funeral brought together former Presidents Gerald Ford (Tom McElroy), Jimmy Carter (Martin L’Herault), Ronald Reagan (James Leaming) and George H. W. Bush (John Carter Brown) and sitting President Bill Clinton (Stephen Spencer). Playwright Rick Cleveland imagines their conversation in the handsomely bland hotel-style function room (thanks to Grant Sabin’s scenic design) where the Commanders in Chief gather before the service, share a drink and engage in talk not always small. As Cleveland has demonstrated before, he’s a witty writer with a sharp understanding of politics and politicians.

Ultimately, these are familiar guys if not entirely ordinary. My dad would say, “They put on their pants one leg at a time, just like every- one.” They are proud, indulged (used to being obeyed), salty, vulnerable, worried about legacy, petty and surprisingly personable. Yes, they have old axes to grind and deeds to defend but, as George Bush comments, they’ve not gathered to talk politics. Their shared bonds are greater than any disagreements, for only these five people totally understand what being POTUS means. Often called the world’s most exclusive club, it rarely has even five members at any given time. Two things upon which they agree: Richard Nixon was home and his Presidency made it harder for all who followed.

Cleveland’s play boasts no revelations—except, perhaps, the assertion that Reagan had an affair with Marilyn Monroe “before the Kennedys”—and it ends with the familiar caution that people in a democracy get the government they deserve. We learn that Bubba drinks beer, Carter sips bourbon, Bush prefers gin and tonic, Reagan imbibles Orange Blossoms (gin, vermouth and 01) and Ford is on the wagon. When mightily tempted to have a drink, his fellow Presidents dissuade him in support of his sobriety, one of the play’s more touching moments.

Cleveland’s real skill—honed by his years as a playwright and Emmy Award winning writer/producer of superior television drama—is creating credible tension for each President and shifting focus between them to keep us engaged. A fictional Secret Service Agent (Denzel Tsonopan) also has a momentary spotlight. Cleveland’s dialogue—vocabulary, phrasing and rhythm—is exactly on target for each President, and is aptly delivered in suitable physical and vocal impressions by a top veteran cast, directed by Marty Higginbotham who smartly keeps his players moving across a potentially static setting.

THEATER REVIEW
The Great Leap
Playwright: Lauren Yee
At: Steppenwolf Theatre Company, 1650 N. Halsted St.
Tickets: 312-335-1650; Steppenwolf.org; $20-$89
Runs through: Oct. 20

BY JONATHAN ABarBANEL

The year 1989, Chinese popular uprising, Tiananmen Square, the iconic Tank Man... The real Tank Man was the son of high-ranking Chinese officials, and began an Army career as an interrogator before his break with the Party, which compromised his parents’ careers. Escaping to America through a Christian organization (although he wasn’t Christian), he met a man who became his life partner. They lived in the rural Midwest until one of them died early this year. I knew them as a couple and still know the surviving partner.

As improbable as this sounds—I’ve no independent proof of its truthfulness—it’s far more probable than Lauren Yee’s brilliant Tank Man creation myth: an elaborate fairytale featuring a 5’5”, 18-year-old Chinese American basketball star, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, a second-rank basketball coach, international politics, the birth of institutional b-ball in China and a 1-in-1.3 billion Chinese coincidence. Set in 1971 and (mostly) 1989, and switching between San Francisco and Beijing, The Great Leap also substantially concerns personal identity and choices we make to protect ourselves under political and emotional pressures.

That’s a complicated web to spin in two hours, and Yee, as ever, combines punchy, witty dialogue with strongly-drawn characters and a highly theatrical presentation, given an ever so physical staging by Jesica Prudencio on Justin Humphreys’ 1/2 size basketball court setting, with audience on two sides just like in the school gym. If the play is less raucously funny than some of Yee’s other work—and she uses comedy most effectively—it’s due to the complex threads of the story and the serious issues at heart. At first, it focuses on the uncouth, foul-mouthed and often thoughtless coach (Keith Kupferer) and the fearless, driven and often thoughtless boy wonder (Glen Obrozo). In Act II, however, the self-contained, seemingly cold Beijing basketball coach (James Seol) becomes the crucial character.

The cast—completely by Deanne Myers as the boy’s cousin—is splendid, but Obrero is an utterly dazzling ball of fire in a reputation-making role as prodigy Manford Lum. Agile, lithe and rarely still for a second, his face a mask of emotions, his award-worthy performance drives the entire show. Kupferer, one of our finest veteran actors, has gruff charm to spare as always but knows when to reveal the more sensitive under- side of his character. Seol is their emotional match, which he must be in a far less showy role. Myers is strong in the play’s least developed role as Lum’s friend and support system.

There’s no Steppenwolf Ensemble member among the cast or production team of The Great Leap, but it’s Kupferer’s fifth Steppenwolf show since the subsequent compilation of Strayed’s precepts into a single volume allowed readers ample contemplation time to distill wisdom from homilies conveying solace and comfort, but few concrete directives. Repackaged within the abbreviated duration dictated by modern theater practice—80 minutes, in this case—Sugar’s petitioners are reduced to foils for their healer’s personal anecdotes, rendered nominally empathetic by the flimsiest of epilogues.

A muscular ensemble led by Janet Ulrich Brooks as a curiously understated Strayed, also featuring Eric Slater, Jessica Dean Turner and the always-watchable August Forman playing numerous correspondents, strive to sustain momentum sufficient to suggest progress in a flattened narrative inevitably skewing toward repetition, while director Vanessa Stalling struggles to impose mobility on a stage picture composed of flat-pack coffee shop decor and quasi-meditative bridging music. If you’re already a Strayed fan, none of these shortcomings are likely to disturb you, but playgoers of drier temperament may want to look elsewhere for counsel.

CRITICS’ PICKS
You Can’t Fake the Funk. Black Ensemble through Sept. 22—Funk music tribute with two dozen ‘60s, ‘70s and early ‘80s songs, exceptionally well performed by singers sporting towering platform shoes, billowing Afros and multitudinous spangles! JA

Timeless Magic, Chicago Magic Lounge, through Oct. 2—A souvenir from Chicago’s 1893 Columbian Exposition—which included the Ferris Wheel—launches young magician Sean Mansor on a search to identify its owner. MSB

The Recommendation. Windy City Playhouse, through Oct. 6—Environmental theater reigns here, even an entire house once. This time three young men lead audiences through locales of West-coast privilege, although they may lose their way amid the stratagems and squallor. MSB

Love, Chaos & Dinner. Teatro ZinZanni, open run—A special but pricey night out: excellent clowning, acrobatics, singing and elaborate costumes presented with a tasty four-course meal in an ornate, palatial tent on the Cambria Loop Hotel’s 14th floor. SCM

—By Mary Shen Barnidge, Scott C. Morgan and Jonathan Abarbanel
RESERVED SEATS $9 EACH WITH 10 PUNCH PASS
AT RAVINIA.ORG
‘Get Out’ composer talks career, race and LGBT developments

BY ANDREW DAVIS

In advance of its 2019-20 season, the Chicago Sinfonietta will perform a live concert screening of Jordan Peele’s smash hit film Get Out—conducted by openly gay score composer Michael Abels—at the Auditorium Theatre.

Life has taken some twists and turns for Abels since he last talked with Windy City Times in 2009—including composing the Peele horror films Get Out and Us. He discussed his achievements, the LGBT community’s achievements and what guests can expect at the Sept. 21 show.

Windy City Times: How did the collaboration with the sinfonietta come about?

Michael Abels: I’ve been collaborating with the sinfonietta for about two and a half decades. [The orchestral group first performed one of his pieces, Global Warming, in the early ’90s.] When I decided to do this in concert, [this group] seemed like the logical presenter for that and, so, I wanted them to know about it right away. I reached out to them last year to let them know this [concert] was something I was working on; I thought the sinfonietta would be a great choice.

WCT: Regarding Get Out, is it true that you didn’t believe it was Jordan Peels calling?

MA: Well, he didn’t call me personally; he had the production company, Blumhouse, call me. But, yeah, lots of people in L.A. say they’re producers and you don’t necessarily believe that. [Laughs] So I consulted IMDb, but then I called a friend who see if the caller was legit—and it turned out that if I was being punk’d, someone had taken the time to make a very elaborate IMDb profile. [Laughs]

WCT: The last time we talked, we discussed the aspect of race and your exploration of your Black roots. [Abels, who is mixed-race, was raised by a white family in South Dakota, but explored his Black roots in L.A., including working with the legendary Rev. James Cleveland.] Was part of the reason for working on Get Out was to further connect with the African American aspect of your heritage?

MA: That’s interesting. So I’ve spent a lot of my life recovering my Black identity—and that has happened amazingly and beautifully since I last talked with you, although it’s happened in stages. It wasn’t so much that I did Get Out for that reason; but I wanted to ... represent. This was for me, as a Black person, wanting to reach out to the rest of the world.

In my first meeting with Jordan, he said two things to me. First, he said the music has to be scarier than shit. [Both laugh.] But he also said, “I want the African American voice, both literally and metaphorically, in this film.” So we instantly starting talking about voices and he said, “The thing about African American music is that there’s always this thread of hope that runs through it,” and I thought, “What an insightful, brilliant comment to make.” But then he said, “You have to drain all hope out of it.” [Laughs] I then said, “I think you’re talking about ‘gospel horror,’” and he said, “Yeah!” So that was the catchphrase I took away from our conversation.

I went home and wrote a couple demos for him—one of them—“Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga” [which means “Listen to the Ancestors” in Swahili]—became the main title track of the film.

Looking back on it, I received the future Oscar-winning script for Best Picture. It was so brilliant constructed. So that—combined with the fact that Jordan is smart, funny and nice—[compelled] me to work with him. I’m very honored to be a part of it.

WCT: I thought Get Out was a great horror film and a brilliant social commentary.

MA: I still think it’s the best social commentary about understanding race relations that I’ve ever seen. I just can’t believe it.

WCT: Did the success of Get Out surprise you at all?

MA: Yes! Jordan said he didn’t think it’d be released. Many things can happen from the script to a film opening, so I was just thrilled about the nature of this project. My only goal was just to complete the film and make a contribution. And I didn’t know if it would be successful, I knew it’d be very polarizing. So when it opened at number one at the box office and took off like a rocket, I was stunned. To see so many people respond to it and get all the layers to the film was beyond my wildest dreams.

WCT: Of course, that led to the collaboration on Us.

MA: Yes—and Jordan said he definitely did not want this to be Get Out 2. So it’s a very different film; it was a huge, fun experience as well.

By the way, with [the ‘Get Out’ concert], we’ll be doing the source music—which is music that wasn’t used, for different reasons—so we do that creepy song “Run Rabbit Run” and the Childish Gambino song “Redbone.” And the song “(I’ve Had) The Time of My Life”—the song that’s playing on [Alison Williams’ character’s] earbuds—we do that live. It’s so much fun.

Also, there’s a way in which you’re not really supposed to be aware of the music; it taps into your subconscious. So when the music’s live, you become aware of the contributions the music makes. And we encourage the audience to respond; if you want to talk back to the screen, it’s encouraged. [Laughs]

WCT: Lastly, since the last time we’ve talked, a lot of things have happened regarding the LGBT community, such as same sex marriage and transgender rights/visibility. Has anything surprised you?

MA: Yeah, for sure. I was surprised and elated that we won our marriage equality rights; growing up, I never thought that would happen. I’m equally surprised by how severe the backlash has been and how much we, as a country, tend to backpedal. The progress we’ve made in the past 50 years has been pretty dramatic—but things can turn around even more quickly.

The Chicago Sinfonietta concert with guest composer Michael Abels will take place at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells Dr., on Saturday, Sept. 21, at 7:30 p.m. For tickets, visit AuditoriumTheatre.org.

YEPP director receives theater award

On Aug. 8, Youth Empowerment Performance Project (YEPP) Executive/Artistic Director Bonsai Bermudez received the “Leadership in Community-Based Theatre and Civic Engagement” award from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE).

ATHE is a U.S.-based non-profit membership organization whose mission is to support and advance the study and practice of theatre and performance in higher education. The ceremony took place in Orlando, Florida, as part of ATHE’s annual conference.

YEPP strives to create a safe environment for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness to access resources and healing through the expressive arts. The organization uses harm reduction, social justice, transformative justice and education for liberation frameworks to contain and guide the work. See WeSayYEPP.com for more information.

Equity Jeff Award nods announced

Eleven world premiere plays and musicals seen first by Chicago audiences were among those receiving nominations by the Jeff Awards.

A total of 192 nominations were made in 34 categories that honor Chicago Equity theatrical productions that opened between Aug. 1, 2018, and July 31, 2019. During the 2018-19 season, Jeff Awards judges attended opening nights of 132 Equity productions offered by 43 producing organizations; from these openings, 112 productions were “Jeff Recommended” and eligible for award nominations.

Porchlight Music Theatre led with 17 nominations, followed by Paramount Theatre with 16 and Court Theatre with 15. Paramount Theatre’s The Producers led all productions with nine nominations, followed by its production of The Wizard of Oz with seven nominations.

The 51st Annual Equity Jeff Awards ceremony will be held Monday, Oct. 21, at Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace.

Advance purchase tickets, which include the ceremony and pre-/post-show parties, are $85 ($65 for members of Actors’ Equity Association, United Scenic Artists, Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Stage Managers’ Association, IATSE, The Dramatists Guild of America, and the American Federation of Musicians). Tickets at the door, if available, will be an additional $10 each. Visit https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pe/10450265 or JeffAwards.org.
In July, Los Angeles-based photographer Jan Dee Gordon released the second book in her “of Steel” book series.

The book, LGBTQ of Steel, is a compilation of portraits accompanied by personal profiles that tell the stories of 50 LGBTQ subjects. While the subjects are all based in Los Angeles now, they hail from all over, and the ages of those featured in the book range from early 20s to a 93-year-old man who was at Stonewall.

“Robert Clemont sticks out,” said Gordon, whose partner is a gay man. He never told anybody until he got sick, Gordon said. The book is dedicated to her brother, Ben Lewis, whose daughter is featured in the book along with her partner.

The book is dedicated to her brother, Ben Lewis, whose daughter is featured in the book along with her partner.

The process of finding people to interview and shoot for the book was very organic, according to Gordon. “I have a son who has a social life that’s very outside of the box, and he had many friends who are gay, in one way or another,” she said. “That started it, then they had friends, some of whom are famous, and we networked. Then we asked people who came to the studio for their shoot, and were recommended to other people.”

The idea of using bent steel to represent struggles that have been overcome is rooted in Gordon’s earlier artwork. “Before I did this book, I did a book called Women of Steel, and that book came about because of the theme of my artwork,” said Gordon. “The theme of the artwork is about a woman who can—who has to—use her inner strength to overcome obstacles in her life in order to lead the life she chooses. I chose steel in my photographs to [represent] our reality, our lives, because it’s hard but you can bend it. And it’s a great graphic image in a photograph, by the way.”

Gordon added, “The artwork came first, and it’s a long history of artwork. When I look back at the beginning, I painted over women and then I photographed them. Then I used a mannequin [with the steel]. Then I used living things, like flowers and branches, with the steel. Finally a mentor said to me, ‘for God’s sake, use a woman!’”

The [final] artwork is actually nude women with steel, rather abstracted. “This eventually led to the idea of talking to and photographing real women in the world, and compiling all of these profiles into a book. ‘I found women who had dealt with different things and come out at the top, successful, leading a life they chose,’” she said.

While Women of Steel was rooted in Gordon’s personal experiences, LGBTQ of Steel is personal to the artist in a different way. “My brother died of complications of AIDS, at 48 years old. He led a double life, married with a child, and [was also] a gay man. He never told anybody until he got sick,” Gordon said. The book is dedicated to her brother, Ben Lewis, whose daughter is featured in the book along with her partner.

Gordon plans on compiling more “of Steel” books in the future, although she said she has no idea how many. “The name over all of these ‘of Steel’ books is Humanity of Steel. I’ve always believed in individual rights, you can do what you want, you can say what you want, and all these people are just human,” said Gordon. “I would hope that young people who don’t have any role models, who are struggling with coming out, understanding who they are, that they could get a hold of this book. It has wonderful role models in it.”
A look at what's hitting the big screens this fall

BY JERRY NUNN AND MATT SIMONETTE

Fall back into the movie theater after a summer that certainly had some lackluster moments, cinematically. We head into awards season and it shows with films begging for accolades, such as Judy and A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood. Oscar just loves a dead celebrity with a legacy and personal problems.

Locally, Reeling 2019, the 37th Chicago LGBTQ+ International Film Festival celebrates being the second longest running festival of its kind in the Windy City. Opening night includes The Shiny Shrimps and a party on Sept. 19. The festival continues through Sept. 19 with a complete schedule at ReelingFilmFestival.org.

The 53rd Chicago International Film Festival officially announces its Out-Look section spotlighting LGBTQ+ themes here. Only one is represented from the United States with Jennifer Reeder’s Skins and Skin about high school students disappearing in a too close for comfort Illinois town. Look for other films like Carmilla and Seahorse from the U.K., the Chilean prison drama The Prince and the French film Portrait of a Lady set in the 18th century. A full line up is at ChicagoFilmFestival.com.

Here’s a list of more movies rolling out in the next few months. Remember, all dates are subject to change and reflect current Chicago market release schedules.

September

—Hustlers: (Sept. 13) Buried under single dollar bills is a hidden part of history where stripers and hustlers team up to take on rich men by drugging and robbing them. Jennifer Lopez is the experience swindler that leads a pack of an all-star cast that includes body positive performer Lizzo and Transparent’s Trace Lysette in minor roles.

—Downton Abbey: (Sept. 20) The award-winning series Downtown Abbey opens its doors on the big screen this fall. A royal visit turns the Crawley house upside down as King George V and Queen Mary pop in for a bit. Catty Maggie Smith and Dame Penelope Alice Wilton supply the humor and a 1927 gay bar raid happens decades before Stonewall.

—Ad Astra: (Sept. 20) Brad Pitt is slated for five films possibly released in 2019; in this one, he’s lost in space. Look for an Orange Is the New Black cast member cameo in a solar system of stars—and one monkey almost steals the show.

—Judy: (Sept. 27) Expect Renee Zellweger to take home the trophies come award season after portraying Judy Garland in the late years of her life. The soundtrack features Zellweger teaming up with gay friends Sam Smith and Rufus Wainwright and is released the same day as the film.

—Where’s My Roy Cohn?: (Sept. 27) The notoriously homophobic and anti-Semitic McCarthy-era prosecutor—who was gay, Jewish and would years later become a mentor to real estate mogul Donald Trump—is the focus of this new documentary by director Matt Tyrnauer.

October

—Joker: (Oct. 4) Warner Bros. is not kidding around with this character that has terrorized heroes for decades. Joaquin Phoenix takes over the role that has—so far—been immortalized by Cesar Romero, Jack Nicholson, Heath Ledger and Jared Leto. Robert De Niro also appears.

—Lucy in the Sky: (Oct. 4) Natalie Portman plays an astronaut who forges a relationship with a colleague (Jon Hamm), then gets sucked into a black hole of emotions when things go south.

—Pain and Glory: (Oct. 4) Gay director Pedro Almodovar presents Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz in the story of an aging filmmaker reflecting back on his creative life.

—The Addams Family: (Oct. 11) Bette Midler is the Grandmama voice in The Addams Family cartoon and Christina Aguilera sings on the soundtrack. What could go wrong?

—Maleficent: Mistress of Evil: (Oct. 18) The Addams Family release date was moved up to not compete with Maleficent: Mistress of Evil. Angelina Jolie returns as the title character of a queen that the drag queens seem to love, joined this time around by Michelle Pfeiffer. Expect gay fans and children to keep this franchise alive for part three.

—JoJo Rabbit: (Oct. 18) A queer character pops out of the rabbit hole of JoJo Rabbit. Set in World War II, a German boy keeps company with his imaginary friend Adolf Hitler. Scarlett Johansson and Rebel Wilson are part of the cast.

—End of the Century: (Oct. 18-24) Gene Siskel Film Center screens the Spanish film Fin de Siglo about a relationship between two men in three acts.

—Good Kiss: (Oct. 25-31) Pucker up as three women navigate a tryst together in the indie project Good Kisser. Director Wendy Jo Carlton appears at several screenings with a complete schedule at SiskelFilmCenter.org.

—Cat People: (Oct. 25 and Oct. 31) Director Paul Schrader’s Cat People is purrfectly shown on 35mm at the Gene Siskel Film Center this Halloween season. A David Bowie theme song, incest and blood are all part of the fun in this 1982 erotic tale starring Nastassja Kinski and Malcolm McDowell.

—The Sideshow: (Oct. 26) This 1928 B-picture—presented in 35mm by the Chicago Film Society at the Music Box Theatre—depicts a small-town sideshow troupe and features among the cast members “Little Billy” Rhodes, who years later would appear in The Wizard of Oz. Music Box’s house organist Dennis Scott accompanies the film.

November

—Waves: (Nov. 1) Writer-director Trey Edward Shults explores the dynamics of a Black South Florida family.

—Doctor Sleep: (Nov. 8) Halloween isn’t over yet with a highly anticipated follow up to Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining. Doctor Sleep, based on Stephen King’s sequel novel. I guess the title The Shinin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo was already taken. Ewan McGregor plays Danny Torrance, who beats on a redrum before checking in once again at the Overlook Hotel. Hopefully the housekeeper has picked up in room 237.

—Charlie’s Angels: (Nov. 15) Ariana Grande, Miley Cyrus and Lana Del Rey team for the theme song for the reboot of Charlie’s Angels—and we are here for it. Bisexual Kristen Stewart stars as Sabina Wilson who changes wigs more often than a Lips drag queen.

—Frozen 2: (Nov. 22) A part two for musical lovers that can’t “Let It Go.” Wicked’s Idina Menzel and Tootsie’s Santino Fontana return to the voice cast in this popular Disney Animation Studio franchise.

—A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: (Nov. 23) Tom Hanks plays PBS icon Fred Rogers in a storyline involving a journalist profiling Rogers’ life. Young lives are changed—and hopefully they depict the gay policeman Francois Clemmons in the process. The film was pushed back to a November release date because Hanks needs more awards.

December

—Cats: (Dec. 20) Want more felines after your screening of Cat People? The trailer of the live action classic may be scratched into our memories forever. The Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats by T.S. Eliot is brought to life with pop stars Jennifer Hudson and Taylor Swift.

—Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker: (Dec. 20) Christmas comes early for sci-fi fans in the third installment of the Skywalker saga. Even the now deceased Carrie Fisher is back after unreleased footage from past films. Will C-3PO finally come on a redrum before checking in once again at the Dagobah System?

—Little Women: (Dec. 25) Director Greta Gerwig follows up Lady Bird with her protege Saoirse Ronan and another version of Little Women. This one jumps back and forth in time instead of following the traditional narrative as in the past, and co-stars Emma Watson, Laura Dern and Meryl Streep.
REELING FILM FESTIVAL

Wendy Jo Carlton explores life, love in 'Good Kisser'

BY JERRY NUNN

Wendy Jo Carlton is an out director, producer and teacher known for indie films like Hannah Free, starring Sharon Gless, and the lesbian romance musical Jamie and Jessie Are Not Together—which was a hybrid musical/romantic comedy.

Good Kisser is Carlton’s latest movie; in it, two characters, Jenna and Kate, open their relationship to a third person. This takes them on an unexpected journey and stars Kari Alison Hodge, Julia Eringer and Rachel Paulson.

Windy City Times: Are you currently living in LA?

WJC: No. I grew up in Michigan. I was in Chicago for 12 years almost.

WCT: Were you always interested in filmmaking?

WJC: I always wanted to be in media, such as radio, photography, television and then film.

WCT: I met some of the Good Kisser cast at Outfest in LA. What was the story inspired by?

WJC: It was my first feature film directed there in Chicago. I then did my second feature written and directed in Chicago—Jamie and Jessie Are Not Together—which was a hybrid musical/romantic comedy.

What I really loved about Hannah Free was the story that Claudia Allen wrote about two older women in their 70s are still having sex and are in love. They are both complicated and flawed. I think it’s a profound story and not just about visibility of older people. The story is older and it’s still relevant about LGBT people being denied legal access to their partners because of homophobia.

WCT: What was the overall experience for you with Hannah Free?

WJC: It was my first feature film directed there in Chicago. I then did my second feature written and directed in Chicago—Jamie and Jessie Are Not Together—which was a hybrid musical/romantic comedy.

WCT: Are you originally from Chicago?

WJC: No. I grew up in Michigan. I was in Chicago for 12 years almost.

WCT: Were you always interested in filmmaking?

WJC: I always wanted to be in media, such as radio, photography, television and then film.

WCT: I met some of the Good Kisser cast at Outfest in LA. What was the story inspired by?

WJC: Relationship trauma. I am interested in telling stories about visceral romantic experiences that are not often explored in movies. I love John Sayles and Jane Campion movies. I like subtlety and nuance. I love to write about power imbalances.

With Good Kisser, I was interested in showing what it can feel like to be in a relationship that isn’t healthy for you. It can be a passive-aggressive partner or someone that is not valuing you. I wanted to honor that experience that I think a lot of people have in life, regardless of gender or sexual identity. Because I’m queer and lesbian, it’s a specific experience that I don’t see in movies much.

It’s a woman with a woman and it’s not about coming out or falling for a straight woman. It’s an adult movie with themes and experiences for adults. I wanted to give a nod to polyamory and being attracted to more than one person at a time.

WCT: I remember it being hard for the actresses to talk about the movie without giving too much away. Do you have that problem?

WJC: I tell the premise, but don’t say everything that ends up happening. I don’t want to take away the experience of being in it. I try not to be predictable in how a story is told.

WCT: What would you like audiences to take away from this film?

WJC: I would love the audience to recognize themselves in each of the women. I first started writing Good Kisser with the image of a woman eating watermelon on the floor at night. The rest of the movie came after that image. That image felt to me like a break down and a realization moment.

WCT: How is your series Easy Abby going?

WJC: Great. That was set in Chicago as well. There have been two seasons and it’s currently on Revry.TV. When that license runs out in November, I will have it back on YouTube, where it got 55 million views. I was out in LA pitching it, because other series have been bought with far less organic viewership. I honestly feel that if it wasn’t a lesbian protagonist that it would have been picked up by a studio with a lot of money.

The resources with money are still going to keep throwing the money at people who are already famous. As far as independent LGBT filmmaking, it’s even harder than it ever was.

That’s why it’s important that film festivals like Reeling continue to be supportive and give queer filmmakers the platform and promotion to get the stories out. There are thousands of stories that we are not seeing.

Look for Carlton and the cast of Good Kisser at Reeling Film Festival, Landmark’s Century Centre Cinema, 2828 N. Clark St., on Thursday, Sept. 26, at 7 p.m. with Jerry Nunn moderating the Q&A portion the evening directly afterward. Head over to ReelingFilmFestival.org for tickets and information.

Plans are in the works for Good Kisser to be screened at Gene Siskel Film Center of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 164 N. State St., on Oct. 25-31. Tickets will soon be available at SiskelFilmCenter.org.

'Savage Love Live' in Chicago on Sept. 26

Author, sex-advice columnist, podcaster, pundit, public speaker and It Gets Better co-founder Dan Savage will bring his famous column to Chicago when “Savage Love Live” takes place at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport Ave., on Thursday, Sept. 26, at 8 p.m.

Savage, who’s openly gay, is a regular contributor to public radio’s This American Life and a frequent guest on MSNBC, CNN, Real Time with Bill Maher and other programs. See https://btt.boldtypetickets.com/events/91682596/savage-love-live-chicago.
**Unexpected legend takes stage in ’Broadway’**

*BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN*

He calls women “darling” and drops f-bombs in the same sentence. He’s both Jewish and gay, and has never hidden either. He keeps photos of his ex-boyfriends in silver frames and can recount detailed anecdotes about each—and at the tender age of 90, he’s bringing a show to Broadway.

Leonard Soloway’s Broadway is a documentary about an unexpected legend: a producer who’s been hustling in the New York theater scene for 70 years. Soloway’s brought almost 150 productions to the Great White Way; his shows have accumulated 40 Tony Awards, 21 Drama Desk Awards and two Pulitzers.

According to friend Jeff Wolk, producer and director of Leonard Soloway’s Broadway, Soloway didn’t think the proposed documentary would see the light of day.

“I think he was sort of amused,” Wolk said via phone. “He just gave me that smile of his, that you see in the film. I don’t think he ever really thought I was going to make a full feature film about him.”

Wolk is not a director by trade but has known Soloway for a decade—both hail from Cleveland and their families are friends.

“I just got such a kick out of spending time with him and hearing his stories,” said Wolk. “I felt these stories needed to be shared with a larger audience. In the world we live in, the more you can laugh, the better.”

As depicted in the film, Soloway approached Wolk—who had recently sold his real-estate business—to invest in his latest project, a revue entitled Tappin’ Thru Life. With director Maurice Hines at the helm, and featuring talented up-and-coming tappers, the show was a hit in Boston. Leonard Soloway’s Broadway presents parallels between Soloway’s history as a producer with his journey in bringing Tappin’ Thru Life to New York.

For Wolk, including Soloway’s past and present was vital.

“I didn’t just want to do a documentary about him, but I didn’t just want to do a documentary about following him,” Wolk said. “I believed from the very beginning that the only way to make this [film] work was to show him still working at a very old age, which I admire…and intersperse his history.”

Wolk put together a team to find photographs and archival material from Soloway’s career, and interviewed stage and screen stars like John Slattery, Tovah Feldshuh and Olympia Dukakis about their work with the producer. The documentary’s narrator is actor Campbell Scott, son of actress Colleen Dewhurst, a close friend of Soloway’s.

“Campbell loved Leonard, and this was his personal gift to Leonard,” Wolk said.

The film also shows how the role of producer has evolved since Soloway began his career.

“Everything was done on a handshake for decades,” Wolk said. “In the old days, if Leonard was trying to put together a project and he had a drink with somebody at Sardi’s, they’d be in for $100,000 and that was it.”

“I think what’s different now is that everything has to be in writing, you have to have the money in the bank and then you keep raising money until you have what you need. It’s much more corporate and business-oriented. And Leonard is still doing it the old way.”

A two-year attempt at retirement in the Hamptons didn’t take for Soloway. He lives mainly in Palm Springs, but is currently raising money for a New York production of Fellow Travelers, a new play about the effects of McCarthyism on playwright Arthur Miller and director Elia Kazan. He is also on the hunt for a superstar who can lead the production to financial success.

“At 90 years old, he put his personal belongings into storage and goes back to New York City to live in a studio, as if he was a 20-year-old kid, to try and make another show,” Wolk said. “It’s a special story.”

**Lesbian director highlights queer history in ’The Archivettes’**

*BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN*

Megan Rossman is an out and proud lesbian filmmaker. But while making The Archivettes, whose Chicago premiere is part of the Reeling Film Festival, she had a lot to learn.

“I had never thought of my history as a lesbian and how I fit into the larger LGBTQ+ community,” said Rossman, a tenure-track professor and communications department chair at the State University of New York’s Purchase College. “When I walked into [the Lesbian History Archives], it was really powerful to realize there were people like me that were here before and were able to successfully exist. I think everyone should know their history, and it doesn’t have to mean your genealogy.”

The Archivettes is a documentary about the Lesbian Herstory Archives, now located in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Co-founders Deborah Edel and Joan Nestle established the all-volunteer museum after realizing “our history was disappearing as quickly as we were making it.” Over the past four decades, Edel and Nestle have sought and preserved artifacts that chronicle both pivotal and everyday moments in queer history. “Some of the most engaging materials are women’s personal diaries,” Rossman said. “You can learn what it was like to be a lesbian in 1947.”

After making three short films about the Archives, Rossman decided a longer feature was the next step.

“One thing everyone at the Archives told me is that we have to know our history so we don’t repeat it,” she said. Time was also of the essence. “The original founders are in their final chapter of involvement, and I wanted to document their stories,” Rossman said. “There’s a woman in the film [who] had a stroke a couple months after I interviewed her, and her memory is not at the point that it was when we did the interview.”

Everyone involved in making The Archivettes identified as female or nonbinary. According to Rossman, this was a deliberate choice. “As women and LGBTQ+ people, we are underemployed in the film industry,” she said. “When I set out to make this film about queer women, I wanted to make sure I could include folks that...would treat the content with care and tenderness.” Because of the project’s limited budget, the crew made necessary sacrifices. “People would work at reduced rates, and they were willing to do it because of the nature of the project.”

Rossman learned a few surprising facts in the process. “When [the Archives] first started, everyone was always concerned there would be an attack [or] someone would come in and destroy the materials,” Rossman said. “In the beginning they had a lot of strategies. There was a caretaker in Joan’s apartment building, and when they bought a larger building, they continued the tradition, and always had more than one person staffing.”

Perhaps even more surprising was the Archives’ “secret” location. “At first they didn’t even publish the address. You would have to call and talk to someone,” Rossman said. “I don’t know exactly when that stopped, but it was their M.O. [modus operandi] for quite a while, including the early ‘90s.”

When asked about the film’s takeaways, Rossman emphasized personal documentation.

“When we’re here and we’re well, that’s when we have the power to document our lives and think about what kind of legacy we want to leave,” she said. “I think it’s important for [queer people] to take control of that, whether we’re 17 or 77.”

Rossman recommended keeping a paper journal. “Have your stories written down,” she said. “I would [also] encourage people to print their pictures and make sure they’re keeping a physical record as well as a digital record, so they have that narrative to go from.”

Although Rossman now lives in New York, the Cleveland native spent a summer interning at the Chicago Tribune and still has family and friends here. She’s excited to share The Archivettes with a Windy City audience. “In some ways, the Chicago premiere feels like coming home.”

The Archivettes will screen Sunday, Sept. 22, at 3:15 p.m. at Landmark’s Century Centre Cinema, 2828 N. Clark St. Director Megan Rossman will attend. For more about the 2019 Reeling Film Festival, which runs Sept. 19-29, visit ReelingFilmFestival.org.
**Operas of the fall**

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

The fall 2019 opera season is already in full swing. There is plenty to take in from the tiniest of fringe companies to the most lavish spectacles filling the stage of the 3,563-seat Civic Opera House.

**Grandest of the grand**

As it enters is 65th anniversary season, the **Lyric Opera of Chicago** remains the Windy City’s mothership when it comes to grand opera. But there’s a change on the horizon.

It was recently announced that music director Sir Andrew Davis will step down by the end of the 2020-21 season. Italian conductor Enrique Mazzola will succeed Davis.

Lo and behold, audiences can compare and contrast the two right away. Davis is conducting the season opener of Rossini’s comedy *The Barber of Seville* (Eight performances from Sept. 28 to Oct. 27), while Mazzola conducts Verdi’s early tragedy *Luise Miller* (Six performances from Oct. 12-31).

The Lyric also stages the Chicago professional premiere of the 2000 opera *Dead Man Walking* featuring a score by Jake Heggie and a libretto by Terrence McNally (Six performances from Nov. 2-22). Lesbian soprano Patricia Racette plays Sister Helen Prejean, while Susan Graham (who originated the role of Sister Helen) has moved on to play Mrs. De Rocher. This fall, the Lyric also revives Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (Nine performances from Nov. 14 to Dec. 8) in an updated 2014 production by Goodman Theatre artistic director Robert Falls. Also, Chicago-area native soprano Sondra Radvanovsky stars in the concert *The Three Queens* (Three performances from Dec. 1 to 7) featuring selections from Donizetti’s Tudor-era operas *Anna Bolena, Maria Stuarda* and Roberto Devereaux.

Lyric Opera of Chicago performances are at 20 N. Wacker Drive. Info/tickets: LyricOpera.org, 312-827-5600.

**The next tier**

**Chicago Opera Theater** opens its season with an intriguing double bill of Windy City premieres. *Everest* is a 2015 work by composer Joby Talbot and librettist Gene Scheer about a recent historical tale of a mountaineering tragedy. Sergei Rachmaninov’s 1892 revenge-filled opera *Aleko* is based upon Pushkin’s poem *The Gypsies*. Both operas are performed Nov. 16-17 at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph St. Info/tickets: ChicagoOperaTheater.org; 312-704-8414

**Haymarket Opera Company** is fairly new on the scene and specializes in baroque opera. Their fall offering is the 1737 comedy *The Dragon of Wantley* by John Frederick Lampe, a contemporary of Handel who delighted in taking the piss out of his colleague’s more serious operas. There are two performances on Oct. 27 and 29 at the Studebaker Theater, 410 S. Michigan Ave. Info/tickets: HaymarketOpera.org

**On the fringes**

Opera can be done on a more experimental or intimate scale, as evidenced by the following productions:

The **Storefront Project** is an operatic performance art collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Prop Thtr, director “Dado” and Chicago-area artists. Their task was to take a piece of public-domain text not intended for theater and to theatricalize it. Eight performances remain through Sept. 22 at either the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago Ave., or Prop Thtr, 3502 N. Elston Ave. Info/tickets: MCChicago.org; 312-397-4010

The Falling and the Rising is a world-premiere project staged by Park Ridge-based **Petite Opera Productions**. Conceived by Dr. Ben Hilgert, the opera is based upon interviews with military patients at Walter Reed Hospital. It features a libretto by playwright Jerre Dye and composer Zach Redler. Eight performances run Nov. 2-24 at Mary Wilson House-Beyer Auditorium, 306 S. Prospect Ave., Park Ridge. Info/tickets: PetiteOpera.org; 847-553-4442

Georg Buchner’s play *Woyzeck* has already inspired a 20th century operatic masterpiece: Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*. But there’s another version inspired by a concept by Robert Wilson featuring music and lyrics by Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan. **Chicago Fringe Opera** presents four performances from Nov. 14 to 23 at Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave. Info/tickets: ChicagoFringeOpera.com; 773-312-3930

**New Moon Opera** presents a workshop performance of Elizabeth Rudolph’s new opera *Imogen*, which is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s romance *Cymbeline*. The performance is on Nov. 22 at Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church, 600 W. Fullerton Parkway. Info/tickets: NewMoonOpera.org

**Thompson Street Opera** teams up with the Intuit Center Gallery for performances of *Faulty Systems*: Hope & Home featuring the opera *Apar*ment by Rebekah Driscoll. There are two performances at 7:30 p.m., Dec. 6 and 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, at the gallery at 756 N. Milwaukee Ave. Info/tickets: ThompsonStreetOpera.org

**College creativity**

It’s not just the standard repertory for two college productions this fall.

**DuPaul Opera Theatre** stretches back to the very early days of opera with Cavalli’s 1643 mythological tale *L’Egisto*. There are two performances on Nov. 1 and 3 at Holtschneider Performance Center at Gannon Concert Hall, 2330 N. Halsted St. Info/tickets: Events.DuPaul.edu; 773-325-5200.

Northwestern University’s **Bienen School of Music** goes post-apocalyptic with performances of the 2012 opera *Dog Days*. Featuring a score by David T. Little and a libretto by Royce Vavrek, *Dog Days* imagines a dystopian world where a family living on the fringes encounters a man who looks to have devolved into a dog-like creature. There are four performances from Nov. 21-24 at the Ryan Opera Theater at the Ryan Center, 70 Arts Circle, Evanston. Info/tickets: Music.Northwestern.edu; 847-491-7575.

**Other companies to check out**

**Chamber Opera Chicago** will likely stage a revival of Menotti’s *Ah! Maialina* and the Night Visitors for the holiday season (check chamberopera.chicago.org for future dates). Folks Operetta will likely continue its drive to stage 20th century works by composers who were exiled, oppressed or killed by the Third Reich (check folksopera.chicago.org for future projects).

Other companies to look into include **Vox 3 Collective** (vox3.org), **Transgressive Theatre Opera** (TransgressiveTheatre-opera.org) and **Chicago Summer Opera** (ChicagounderwoodSummerOpera.com). Of if you just want to go to the movies, check out the Metropolitan Opera Live in HD series (MetOpera.org/season/in-cinemas).

Photo: The Lyric Opera of Chicago revives Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in a 2014 production by Tony Award-winning director Robert Falls. Photo courtesy of Todd Rosenberg/Lyric Opera of Chicago

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Tommaso. Her overabundant imagination leaves experiences of director and co-writer Karole Di travel to Barcelona to get Ali inseminated, and Karole (Linda Caridi) and Ali (Maria Roveran) Lesbians are forbidden to co-parent in Italy, so—Mom + Mom feel excluded—and I did.

They're part of a group of mostly thirtysomething style of a pretentious artist (Patricia Clarkson, Adam is a struggling painter, doing works in the moon is over for Adam (Scott Evans) and Marklin that saves the day.

Stories play out, but it retains a positive energy rather dramatic or melodramatic. After a funny for the Gay Games is Matthias (Nicolas Gob), who water polo team in this French comedy is based ining a bunch of losers into champions, but the gay —From Zero To I Love You

coppa

—Cubby (★★★) (Sept. 21, 1 p.m.): That Mark Blane wrote, co-directed and stars as Mark, who also hails from Indiana, could lead you to expect an element of autobiography in his impressive debut, a comedy about a 30-ish gay misfit on his own for the first time in New York. He finds a group apartment to share and gets part-time work babysitting a 6-year-old. Mark, who draws gay sex he hasn't experienced, has an imaginary friend, Leather-Man, who he discovered in a hidden magazine—when he was 6. Mark can be lovable or scary but he's always fun to watch—from a safe distance.

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—Coppa 181 (★★★) (Sept. 21, 9:30 p.m.): The title establishment is a gay Brazilian sauna but, probably due to the film’s limited budget, they don't seem to have more than a dozen customers. The sex we see involves either of two resident hustlers. One of the regulars is half of an apparent straight couple, Taná, a Japanese immigrant who runs a small store. His wife, Eros, is studying to be an opera singer. And that’s about it—a little sex, a little plot, a lot of shots where nothing happens. It’s not unpleasant to watch, but writer-director Dannon Lacerda appears hampered by limited budget and talent.

—An Almost Ordinary Summer (★★★/2) (Sept. 22, 3 p.m.): This year’s Big Gay Italian Wedding isn’t as good as last year’s, but it’s not bad. Toni (Fabrizio Bentivoglio) has invited his own family and that of Carlo (Alessandro Gassmann) to his fabulous vacation home so the men can announce their engagement. Carlo’s homophobic son Sandro plots with Toni’s daughter Penny to prevent the union. The dramedy runs out of laughs about halfway through and it’s a chore to keep track of all the characters, but the overall story of two older men finding themselves and each other makes it worth the effort.

—Straight Up (★★★/2) (Sept. 22, 5:15 p.m.): I think I’m in love with writer-director James Sweeney, who also stars as OCD-afflicted Todd in this odd romcom. I know I’m in love with his movie. Todd can’t stand bodily fluids, so he doesn’t want to have sex—with anyone, even though he’s obviously gayer than Pride. Rory (Katie Findlay) is a wannabe actress who blows every audition. Individually they’re a mess, but together they’re a perfect match; but is a lack of sex a dealbreaker for a young couple? Straight Up isn’t for everyone, but it sure is for me!

—Making Sweet Tea (★★★) (Sept. 23, 7 p.m.): Despite its haphazard organization there’s a lot to like about Making Sweet Tea, in which Dr. E. Patrick Johnson (call him Patrick) visits or revisits six of the men he profiled in his book Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South. The film is partly about adapting the book into a stage play, apparently a solo show with Patrick playing all the characters. He tells their stories well in their voices, but the film is at its best when it just lets the men spill their own tea.

—The Garden Left Behind (★★★) (Sept. 23, 7:15 p.m.): Like a contemporary version of Pose without the ballroom aspect, Flavio Alves’ first feature follows 30-ish Tina (Carlile Guevara), who’s lived with her grandmother (Miriam Cruz) since coming from Mexico at 5, as she begins transitioning to womanhood. A lot of information about the process transgender people face (it ain’t easy) is woven into the story, which focuses on Tina, her supportive, already transitioned friends, and a couple of men in her life, one of them a wild card. The script glosses over some financial questions but it covers a lot of bases, most of them very well.

—The Blond One (★★★/2) (Sept. 25, 7 p.m.): Most foreign films require too much patience for American viewers. This one, by writer-director Marco Berger, may set a record in that regard, but not unintentionally. In Buenos Aires Juan (Alfonso Barón) has rented his spare room to a co-worker, Gabriel (Gastón Re). Both men have girlfriends; divorced Gabo has a seven-year-old daughter who lives with his parents. The sexual tension between them mounts ever so slowly for more than half an hour before anything happens, and there are many uneventful stretches after that. It’s frustrating but effective, and I can’t deny being seriously turned on.

—Leonard Soloway’s Broadway (★★★) (Sept. 25, 7:15 p.m.): Leonard Soloway was born a theater queen. If you were too, as I was, you’ll en-
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Lance Bass: Baptists, Broadway and 'The Boy Band Con'

BY JERRY NUNN

Popular performer Lance Bass wears many hats these days. After rising to fame in the boy band NSYNC, he moved into working in movies and television. Along the way, the Mississippi native even became certified to fly in space and planned to visit a space station.

He came out of the closet in 2006 and wrote an autobiography called Out of Sync. Bass is married to Michael Turchin and they are currently seeking their first child together through surrogacy.

Recent projects include a newly opened sports bar in West Hollywood called Rocco’s and a documentary called The Boy Band Con: The Lou Pearlman Story, depicting Pearlman’s discovery of the Backstreet Boys and NSYNC, along with a $300-million Ponzi scheme.

Backstage at Joe’s Live in Rosemont, Illinois, he took a break from hosting the Pop 2000 Tour to talk about his life.

Windy City Times: I was raised Southern Baptist like you. How was your relationship with your family after coming out?

Lance Bass: As we both know, Southern Baptists are ignorant in a lot of things, but my family was very open minded, especially when I came out. They were confused by it and didn’t understand what it was, but they never abandoned me at all, which is a win in the South!

WCT: How was it being in a boy band when the girls are all throwing themselves at you?

LB: It was God’s little joke for me to be in a boy band because it was 99 percent girls. It kept me out of trouble, though!

It was hard and lonely. I knew since I was 5 years old that I was gay. Going into the band, I knew I was gay, but at that point I had never been in any relationship. I was just coming of age where I was hitting puberty. I hadn’t started dating yet. I missed that in joining the group.

For a few years I could get away with it because I was so busy, but then I got to the age where I should be dating someone. That’s when it got scary and lonely.

I would go to have Christmas with my family, I remember having dates with guys when I was still in the closet and being sad that I couldn’t spend Christmas with my loved one. I still had to pretend in front of my family. I would wake up every Christmas morning feeling depressed because I didn’t have the person I wanted to be with around me to be with my family.

WCT: Most of the boy bands had a gay member, whether they knew it or not.

LB: Odds are there is going to be one. We are up to what percentage of that now that we know of?

[Laughter]

WCT: I asked the Backstreet Boys on a red carpet once who was their gay member.

LB: AJ McLean is very LGBT+ supportive. He’s your ally...

WCT: He did chase after me and assured me he has lots of gay friends and is supportive.

LB: He wore a dress at his wedding! He’s been such a vocal ally for us. I’ve really grown to love AJ.

WCT: He is in The Boy Band Con documentary that you produced. How hard was it getting subjects to participate?

LB: It was difficult. I was going to do the scripted version of Lou Pearlman’s life first, but then YouTube decided to jump in. When I started casting it, it was difficult. No one wanted to do it because they didn’t want to go down that path. They didn’t know what the tone was because at that point everything written on Lou was salacious. Eventually everyone just had to trust me to tell the story the way I was going to tell it.

Once I started filming, I had footage to show others and that’s when everyone jumped on board.

WCT: Are you happy how it turned out?

LB: I was so happy with the way it turned out. I am so proud of that doc. Not only the subject and the interview, but the way it was shot. The director I found was brilliant. Now we are going to do several docs together.

WCT: Did you ever get the vibe that Lou was gay?

LB: I did. You don’t want to assume on someone, but I remember even at 16 years old when I joined the group one of the first thoughts I had about Lou was that he was gay.

I felt sorry for him because I knew what it felt like. I thought he was like me and couldn’t talk about what he felt. I just assumed he was because he never had a girlfriend.

WCT: I thought about that while watching the film. He had a lot of money so you would think he would have women all around...

LB: Yes, and he surrounded himself with boys all the time.

WCT: How did Coachella happen with NSYNC?

Did Ariana Grande call you up?

LB: Yeah. I have known Ariana for years. Her dream was to do “Tearin’ Up My Heart” with NSYNC one day. When she was little she learned the choreography. We all wanted to do the appearance with her, even Justin, but his tour didn’t allow him to get there.

When the biggest star in the world and tells you to do Coachella you have to say yes. I was so happy that she wanted to do that song because we hadn’t done it in a long time. I hadn’t done the choreography since 1998! We thought we were going to have to relearn it, but in two hours we were ready to go.

WCT: Just like riding a bike...

LB: It really was.

WCT: The documentary really showed how hard the group works at dancing.

LB: I compare it to an Olympic athlete. You train so much and have no life. You have to be on top of your game and competitive.

WCT: Are you trying to work on more things with NSYNC?

LB: Maybe, but I don’t see anything really happening. Because of Coachella, we are having lots of great offers coming through. At some point this year we have to sit down and say yes or no to these things.

WCT: Do you have a crazy fan moment from the band?

LB: Oh, too many. It depends on what country you go to. The fans are different everywhere you go. Spain has the most vocal and independent fans, to the point where you can’t wear jewelry because it will be ripped off of you. They get really hyper.

I’ve had people sneak into hotel rooms on service carts and jump onto the luggage conveyor belts passing TSA. They are very crafty!

WCT: Is it time for an all-gay boy band?

LB: Wouldn’t that be amazing?

WCT: You could host the show.

LB: Trust me, I have been wanting to put a TV show together making a new great American boy band, kind of like what Making the Band did. I was definitely going to put in some gay guys. An all gay both band was be even more fascinating to me, so we will see if that ever happens!

WCT: Would you host a gay dating show, like you did for Finding Prince Charming, again?

LB: Yes. It was such a great show and such a success for Logo. I guess they don’t make original content like that anymore so we were cancelled. I wish they had kept going with that show because I think the community needed to see guys dating other guys. Most people watching that show had never really seen other gay people that they could date, such as people from towns like mine where it’s impossible to find anyone. It was a good representation with big visibility for us—a normal dating show just with gay guys.

WCT: How is the new restaurant going?

LB: It’s really fun. We didn’t expect it to be accepted so quickly. It’s the hot spot of WeHo right now. It’s funny how the neighborhood changed it.

It’s a sports bar at its bones, but I made more into an entertainment complex. We have lots of great live performances. I wanted it to be for the locals and not have go-go dancers. Two days in, the community said we needed go-go dancers. It turns into a club at nine o’clock and goes crazy!

WCT: Talk about your appearance on ABC’s Single Parents.

LB: The writing on that show is so good. They make it easy for an actor. Basically, if you have great writing you always sound good. I love over the top stuff and that was just brilliant. I love that they put me in Lance Bass Space Cump. I want that to be a real thing.

WCT: Do you still have a Dr. Seuss room?

LB: No, not anymore. That was in my house in Mississippi, but we building a nursery right now and it will be very Dr. Seuss-y. We are working on the family now and should be pregnant very soon. So hopefully we will have some babies next year.

WCT: What do you recommend for LGBT people who want to have kids?

LB: They should find a really great embryologist. Our surrogacy company was incredible. They are called Dwell. They found us our egg donor. We went through seven, but our last one just fell in our lap. They found a girl that was perfect for us.

People need to know it takes time. We were supposed to be pregnant last August. It takes a long time. So many of my friends had to do it like three times to even get a success.

Try not to get your hopes up. Fate will bring you what it’s supposed to.

WCT: What else is coming up?

LB: The next immediate thing I’m releasing is Tar film that I’m producing and writing. We don’t have a name yet. It’s an untitled RV movie right now. It’s a true, crazy story.
WEBSERIES

‘Kissing Walls’ creators on Chicago, sex scenes, independent TV

BY JOSHUA IRVINE

Local webseries Kissing Walls has continued to challenge television’s traditional boundaries in its second season with its upfront depiction of the lives of twentysomething gay men living on the North Side.

Windy City Times sat down with showrunners Zak Payne and Nathaniel Tenenbaum to talk about their take on Chicago’s LGBTQ scene.

Windy City Times: Where did the idea for Kissing Walls come from?

Zak Payne: I had just moved to Chicago, and I was having a great time living here with the friends that I was making, a lot of people in the queer community. I hadn’t really seen a show that really portrayed a world like that, where queer communities are prevalent. I brought Nathaniel into the fold, and the story became very much about our real-life friendship.

WCT: Nathaniel, what sold you on the project?

Nathaniel Tenenbaum: Zak and I met in a production of “Rent” at community college. In that production, he made a feature-length documentary of the entire process. I saw that documentary and it turned out being unbelievably compelling and really well-edited. So I had a lot of faith in his ability to tell a story really well, and once he presented me with the idea of the show I was all on board.

WCT: And the show continued to develop as a collaboration between the two of you?

ZP: Nathan was solely an actor in the first season, but there was the story of one of Nathaniel’s, um, gay...

NT: You can say hookup.

ZP: …hookups involving a ladder that became an impetus scene in season one. (Note: The scene featured Tenenbaum’s character humoring a casual partner’s sexual fantasy.)

WCT: That happened?

ZP: Yeah [laughter from Zak and Nathaniel]. It was stuff like that, like, “Huh. Why is no one telling stories like these that are actually pretty real and common?”

In the beginning, I imagined it as a much larger ensemble story, and then I quickly realized that having the two of us in the room and on screen is what people wanted to see.

NT: The true essence of what makes it so special and so sincere and earnest is the fact that it is us, through and through.

WCT: What sort of shows or movies influenced Kissing Walls?

NT: It’s hard to say artistically, because there’s not a lot of that with people of color to draw from.

ZP: We weren’t really drawing from TV as much as we were from film. I think we were very much looking at classic romantic comedies like When Harry Met Sally. We were looking at The Apartment.

NT: Drew Barrymore’s entire catalogue. Never Been Kissed, Legally Blonde, all of that.

WCT: What’s it like playing characters who are very similar to yourselves, especially in emotionally intense or raunchy scenes—like the ladder scene?

NT: There’s an element of disbelief that it’s happening again. Zach got it very close to the original experience. It was kind of liberating in that we told the story in a way that didn’t kinkshame. But my adopted parents are LDS [Latter Day Saints], so there’s always this element of, “Dear God—now they know what their son is into.”

ZP: It goes through the wash a few times so that you’re distanced from it. It’s a retelling of a retelling that goes into a script and is then rehearsed and then its edited. So it goes through so many washes that you’re so far removed from what actually happened and it has a nice glow to the memory.

WCT: Many scenes in the show deal with the anatomical realities of gay sex. What sort of mindset do you bring when shooting those scenes?

ZP: We always went at it with a level of professionalism and respect. It was always off-frame: it’s raunchy, but in a PG way. I didn’t want to do the explicit, full-frontal nudity, because that isn’t what the story is about.

NT: And we had a predominantly queer team. I don’t think we’re necessarily pushing any boundaries in the realm of us being queer people. These occurrences happen every day. It’s a part of, as queer men and queer people, our day to day: we’re just shedding a light on it artistically. Sleepless in Seattle had that whole thing where they’re talking about cunnilingus and how women look at butts now.

Sex and the City constantly pushed the boundaries in heteronormative sex. What we try and take on and champion is when it transitions from heterosexual engagement over to anything other than that. There shouldn’t be, “well, this is an extra-deviant situation that we have to carefully navigate.” That’s not the narrative we’re trying to promote. It’s no different than when fucking Meg Ryan faked an orgasm in the middle of a restaurant. This is it, this is our day to day, and we’re inviting you to see what happens in that situation.

WCT: Talk to me about how Chicago factors into the story.

ZP: Moving to Chicago was an awakening for me. I just fell in love with the architecture; I would see a new place every time I left my house, and I was like, “why is no one shooting this?” I wanted to show the Chicago that I was seeing. I think the show resonates with people that live in Chicago, and people that aren’t like, “that’s so beautiful.” People constantly throw around the term “love letter,” but I don’t know what else to refer to it.

WCT: Is there gonna be a season three? If so, what’s it gonna look like?

ZP: There is gonna be a season three. We’ve begun the pre-production process and we’re writing it. I’m really proud of what we were able to do between season one and season two, and I love this idea of independent television, that there’s no studio that can cancel us. It’s up to Nathan and I to create this series, and find whomever wants to support that.


BASS from page 24

I was talking about in Variety and the chairman of Sony called me afterwards. He said the girl it was about has been his nanny for 10 years.

It’s about two girls that quit college and hatched a plan to go on The Price Is Right. They want to win a Winnebago and enough money to follow us on our PopOdyssey Tour for three months. It happened just like that. It’s a really fun, road trip, coming-of-age story.

ZP: How would you ever do Broadway again, like you did in Hairspray?

LB: Yes. I would love to do Broadway again, but it’s going to be an original. I don’t have time to join one anymore.

With this RV movie, we would like to turn it into a musical. This will be something I will work on after we film it, so years from now. My dream is to take it to the stage and that will be my first Tony!
Former NFL player talks football, politics and Madonna

BY JOSHUA IRVINE

Ryan O’Callaghan made headlines two years ago when the former NFL defensive tackle came out as gay, making him one of the league’s few openly LGBTQ players. Two years later, he’s about to publish a book detailing his years-long struggle with his sexual identity and the physical and psychological toll of pro football.

My Life on the Line: How the NFL Damn Near Killed Me and Ended Up Saving My Life, co-written with Outsports’ Cyd Ziegler, takes readers inside the mind of a star player that never wanted to be, pushed into a paranoid spiral of prescription drug abuse, depression and suicidal thoughts set at center field of the most American of sports.

Windy City Times: What was the impetus for writing My Life on the Line?

Ryan O’Callaghan: The goal of coming out publicly, I was approached by a literary agent with the idea of writing a book and telling my story. That changed as you got into college and pro ball?

RO: In high school, there was a little more homophobia—kids saying “faggot.” In college, it was less homophobia, but just more intense guys-acting-heterosexual. Just talking about girls they’re getting with, and all the different things they’ve done. It’s very in your face.

In the NFL I had a coach that liked to say, “no homo,” but that was really the only homophobia I experienced in the NFL.

WCT: You talk about putting on a “performance” of behaving stereotypically straight while rejecting “gay” behavior—“gay guys lis-

my charity to give back to my LGBTQ community.

WCT: You describe your choice to play football as a practical necessity rather than a dream come true. Have you gained more of an appreciation for the sport from playing?

RO: Looking back, I have a tough relationship with football because I tend to associate it with those times of my life where I just couldn’t be myself and I was an absolutely miserable person. I respect the game and the people that play it, but it’s not for me.

WCT: You’re very explicit about the anti-gay culture present in high school football, but that changed as you got into college and pro ball?

RO: In high school, there was a little more homophobia—kids saying “faggot.” In college, it was less homophobia, but just more intense guys-acting-heterosexual. Just talking about girls they’re getting with, and all the different things they’ve done. It’s very in your face.

In the NFL I had a coach that liked to say, “no homo,” but that was really the only homophobia I experienced in the NFL.

WCT: You talk about putting on a “performance” of behaving stereotypically straight while rejecting “gay” behavior—“gay guys lis-

their homophobic behavior, Aaron Rodgers [a contemporary in O’Callaghan’s in high school, at Cal Berkeley and in the NFL] for abandoning you after he was accused of being gay—but I couldn’t help but feel a lot of these people get off pretty lightly.

RO: My relationship with my family is better than its ever been, so out of respect for them and how far they’ve come I left some things out. Everything that’s in there is true, but I could have put more. As far as Aaron goes, I just don’t have answers to why things happened the way they did. I could speculate, but that’s not necessarily the right thing to do.

The NFL... The amount of drugs they give you is detrimental but, in the end, it was their people that recognized the problem I was having and it was their people that sent me to get help.

If I wanted someone to come out of the book feeling a certain way about a person I would have put it in there. I think people are intelligent enough to come up with their own conclusions.

WCT: You describe yourself as politically conservative. In today’s political environment, how do you reconcile that identity with anti-LGBTQ sentiment in many conservative circles?

RO: I should make a blanket statement that I think the Republican Party these days is absolutely disgusting—the hatred being spewed, the actions being taken to harm trans people and all sorts of minorities. I would never vote against my own self-interest. I never understand how some Republicans can be quote-quotec “allies” with the gay community and then still vote for people who actively pass bills that hurt us. It’s not an a la carte thing; you can’t take one, leave one.

WCT: One last question: What sort of impact do you hope to see from the book?

RO: I’ve had countless people reach out that once weren’t allies or were ignorant to the fact that gay people come in all shapes and forms, that have said they’ve had a change of heart. I don’t know if [LGBTQ] people will gain as much from the book as someone who’s a football fan who sees a picture of a football player on the cover and picks it up and reads it. I hope that it makes them think twice.

REELING from page 22

joy Jeff WolK’s biographical film. Cleveland-born Soloway has been a fixture in New York theater for 70 years or so, and he’s been out most of that time. You don’t know him because he’s played spotlight-averse roles like producer and general manager for more than a hundred shows. The film’s framework involves his efforts in 2014 to bring Maurice Hines to New York in Tappin’ Thru Life; but there are plenty of interviews with Soloway (at 90!) and his friends to provide backstage gossip.

—Scream, Queen! My Nightmare on Elm Street (★★★) (Sept. 29, 6 p.m.): It wasn’t planned but Freddy’s Revenge, 1985’s sequel to A Nightmare on Elm Street, became a gay cult classic. Mark Patton, who played Jesse, thought it would make him a star—but the public thought he and it were “too gay.” In the year Rock Hudson was outed while dying from AIDS, gay actors didn’t work. Patton vanished for almost 25 years, until another Elm Street documentary had him attending horror conventions, including a celebration of Nightmare 2’s 30th anniversary. Afterward, we see Patton confronting writer David Chaskin, who’d thrown him under the bus initially. Will this be Mark’s Revenge?

Expanded reviews are at WindyCityMediaGroup.com. For complete festival information including locations, and to buy tickets, visit ReelingFilmFestival.org.
“Also, it’s just nice to have toasted nuts.” — Sexy Great British Bake Off contestant, David, who is an international health adviser and dabbles in pottery. And he can cook, too. He also has a boyfriend, Nick, who works in the fitness industry, but I’m trying not to dwell on that.

Prior to leaving Boston, I went to the new Saturday night gay hot spot, Legacy. Later, I was driving a friend home when we came upon one of those random field sobriety stops and were asked to pull over. In addition to being scantily clad, I should also mention that my companion was a very hot African American. I thought perhaps I was finally in a racially motivated incident and prepared to dial Gloria Allred but, alas, the cops couldn’t have been nicer. (Well, I guess they COULD have been.) They walked me through the test and, lemme tell you—it’s harder than it looks on TV. Nonetheless, I passed with flying colors. I also got a phone number, but that’s another story.

I wasn’t the only one who made out with the law (literally). Felicity Huffman had some luck during the sentencing for her part in the Operation Varsity Blues case. You’ll recall that Felicity paid $15K to the Key Worldwide Foundation for someone to take the SATs for her daughter. How stupid. Never leave a paper trail—always use cash! You’d think someone who had been on Desperate Housewives would know better. Huffman admitted guilt, appeared remorseful and threw herself on the mercy of the court. The result? She was sentenced to 14 days in jail, $30K in fines and 250 hours of community service. I know I’m in the minority here, but why jail time? And I’m not singling Huffman out—why jail time for anyone? Skip jail (which costs taxpayers) and just increase the fine.

Someone who I’m sure is watching this case very closely is Lori Loughlin, who paid $500K to get her bratty daughter, Olivia Jade, into college (where she probably attended classes for fewer than 14 days). Given that Loughlin is not admitting guilt, is not repentant and is fighting the charges, her inevitable sentencing should be harsher. On a purely mathematical level, since Huffman got two weeks for $15K, Loughlin would be lucky to get 66 weeks in the pokey! Some are saying that his actions have caused.” Reinhart said, “Then he shared his experience of being publicly outed and he spoke about his family’s reaction to him being gay.” Details, please. Reinhart added, “He’s actually no longer a public official, so it feels a bit slimy for me to say everything that he told me. Basically he told me his family’s reaction was not positive—it was very bad. And he insisted that he wasn’t looking for sympathy, and he said that he was working on putting out a statement.”

Someone else who has been caught in flagrante delicto is the lovely Orlando Bloom. Earlier this month, he was on Howard Stern—well, he was on Howard’s show. During the lengthy interview, the subject of those nude photos of him with Katy Perry came up (up being the operative word, as you’ll see on BillyMasters.com). Orlando took a bit of bloom off the photos by saying, “It is really not that big. Things are expanded on camera with a big optical lens. It is an optical illusion.” Well, I guess images could appear bigger in photos, but I’d really need to see it for myself.

Our “Ask Billy” question this week comes from Warren in San Francisco: “Did you see Ma? Nobody has mentioned it, but I’m sure I saw Luke Evans’ penis when Octavia Spencer cut it off. Was it really his dick?”

At the time the film was released, Luke posted the following on social media: “So...who has seen @MAmovie? And is wondering about that scene...you know the one...” I didn’t see it—the movie or the penis. So I went and looked for it—the movie and the penis. And I saw it—both. What pokes out from under the sheets is a rather substantial flaccid phallus. And it sure looked real to me. Decide for yourself on BillyMasters.com.

When we’re wondering if it’s live or is it Memo-rex, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. Since we ran a bit long (three penises will do that), I barely have time to remind you to check out BillyMasters.com—the site that delivers a peck of peckers. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before footage of my sobriety test shows up on a very special episode of Cheaters! So, until next time, remember: One man’s filth is another man’s bible.
When searching the city for a well-prepared and interesting take on seafood, one could find themselves lost at sea—no pun intended. So many restaurants provide what the customer is looking for, so it's easiest to just pick one of what seems like hundreds.

If you're looking for mussels, salmon and well-crafted twists on American classics, Fisk & Co. (225 N. Wabash Ave.; FiskAndCoChicago.com) is an excellent contender. With mussels and frites as its self-proclaimed specialty, the seafood restaurant gives customers all their asking for and more, coupled with an unbeatable view of Wacker Drive and the Chicago River (if you're sitting outside, or inside at the window).

The mussels come in two varieties: classic or coconut curry. The adventurer and avid mussel fan will enjoy the coconut curry, with its hints of lemon and garlic bringing out the sweet and spicy in the shellfish. To be shared or to enjoy as a main dish will suffice for anyone looking for an interesting take on the seafood staple.

The restaurant doesn't disappoint in its claim to fame, but does it surprise in its non-seafood options. Its main course of sautéed gnocchi highlights light and appetizing flavor that doesn't overstuff but delightfully satisfies the eater. Tomato, pesto, green beans and walnuts make for soft eating and some crunch to keep the flavor exciting and enjoyable.

One thing to skip is the white chocolate mousse, the restaurant's newest addition to their dessert menu. Although it is somewhat enjoyable at first, the multitude of flavors with cocoa, grape sorbet and hazelnuts leave something to be desired. The sorbet overwhelms the other flavors, leaving them as an afterthought.

Despite this, Fisk & Co. doesn't disappoint in its appetizers, main courses or its decor. The restaurant's bright, blue and yellow decor and dark wood paneling harken back to a time when elites traveled on the fanciest of ships. If you close your eyes, you might feel like you're on one, too.

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

NAME
“My name is an homage to three things: “Hollaback Girl” by Gwen Stefani; the British sitcom, “Keeping Up Appearances” (It's pronounced, BOUQUET! It's spelled, B-U-C-K-E-T!); and just some good old-fashioned alliteration!”

FIRST DRAG PERFORMANCE
“They always say there’s three times of year drag performers are born: Pride, Halloween, and college drag show. I got sucked into performing at my college drag show back in 2012 as Mama Mammaries where I performed Gwen Stefani to a crowd of 400. God bless that Kate Gosselin-looking queen who wore “banana” yellow flats. Once I moved to Chicago, Kahmora Hall took on two drag babies: myself and Soju. We have been family since.”

GO-TO NUMBER TO SLAY A CROWD
“One of my specialties is something I call Broadway Roulette, where I grab an audience member, ask them their favorite musical and perform a song from it on the spot. My fight-or-flight kicks in when I have to improvise and it’s truly special for the show.”

FUN FACT
“I was featured as a contestant on the first season of Mental Samurai! I won’t spoil what happens, but I am on the premiere episode. If you have trouble finding me, I’m the one that makes Rob Lowe blush.”

WHERE CAN WE CATCH YOU
“Every Thursday, the drag troupe I’m a part of, Outhaus, performs at The Annoyance in Lakeview.”

GUILTY PLEASURES
“I come off as a HUGE Broadway and disco fan, so a lot of people are shocked to hear I’m OBSESSSED with hair metal of the ’80s. I mean, with names like, Cinderella, Twisted Sister and Madame X, how can a queen not love it?”

SOCIAL MEDIA
Instagram: BriawnaB
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Photo by DS Shin
CLASSIFIEDS

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SPRITUALITY
South Asian Film Festival Sept. 19-22

The 10th Annual Chicago South Asian Film Festival (CSAFF) will take place Sept. 19-22. The Red Carpet and opening night film, The Last Color, will be shown at Venue SIX10, 610 S. Michigan Ave., in the Spertus Institute. More than 50 other films will be screened throughout the weekend at the Showplace ICON Theater, 1011 S. Delano Ct., and DePaul University, 247 S. State St. The festival will feature films from and about South Asia, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Afghanistan.

CSAFF will host screenings of films highlighting various topics, including LGBTQ issues, women’s empowerment, social justice and more. (The LGBTQ panel will take place at Showplace Icon on Sept. 21 after the screenings of Monsoon Date and Nagarkirtan (5:15-8:30 p.m.), and will feature actor Arjun Mathur, screen Gazal Dhaliwal and writer-director Tanuja Chandra.) Additionally, the festival will have an augmented reality/VR booth.

See CSAFF.org.

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Sept. 18, 2019

WINDY CITY TIMES
COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., Sept. 18
LGBT Chamber of Commerce Member Q&A Session For business owners in the Lakeview East or Boystown neighborhood and members. Learn how the LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois, Lakeview East Chamber of Commerce and Northalsted Business Alliance can help you grow your business. 11:30am - 12:30pm Drew's on Halsted 3201 N Halsted http://business.lgbtcc.com

Thursday, Sept. 19
Chicago South Asian Film Fest Screening 65+ films and over 100 film makers. LBGTQ panel discussion, red carpet, cocktail reception and media day with industry experts. Through Sept. 22 10:00am various downtown locations http://www.csaaff.org/

Equal Access Rule re LGBTQ+ Transgender Rights webinar This past May, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced that it would propose a change to the Equal Access Rule, jeopardizing the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people seeking safe housing in homeless shelters. To prepare organizations that work with youth who are experiencing homelessness and others who are concerned about this population, Pride Action Tank and The Night Ministry are partnering with the National Center for Transgender Equality on a webinar. Register at link. 3:00pm Online http://register.gotowebinar.com/register/8028423200811647245

SEEING THE LIGHT Sunday, Sept. 22
Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot is slated to speak at the Victory Fund Champagne Brunch at Chez Chicago. Photo by Matt Simonette

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Friday, Sept. 27
WERO! Chicago LGBTQ Job Fair Last year, more than 30 major corporations, small businesses, government agencies and non-profits participated. Free and open to the public. RSVP not required 11:00am - 2:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted St; http://community.centeronhalsted.org

Saturday, Sept. 28
Jonathan Van Ness: Beyond Permission, part of Chicago Ideas Week The Queer Eye co-host will explore how the hate and rejection he experienced while growing up taught him how to accept, love and celebrate himself. Tickets include a copy of Van Ness’s new memoir, Over the Top: A Raw Journey to Self-Love. 7:00pm - 8:30pm Music Box Theatre 3733 N Southport Chicago Tickets: https://www.chicagoideas.com/events/jonathan-van-ness-beyond-permission

7th Annual Edgewater Arts Festival 100+ artists and 25 musical acts. Two day fest for artists and art lovers benefiting Edgewater Artists in Motion. 11:00am - 7:00pm Edgewater, 100 W Granville to 1200 W Granville. Ends Sept. 29. Between Broadway & Sheridan http://www.edgewaterartists.com/
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Opening Oct 3 | TICKETS AT wrightwood659.org

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