Sami Grisafe thrives in L.A., but maintains Chicago ties.

Local queer actor on Chicago, coming out on TV.

Unveils Haring sculpture.

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS
FROM THE FURRY FRIENDS OF
WINDY CITY TIMES
Looking back at 2019: National LGBTQ headlines

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

One might argue that 2019 was a pretty good year for LGBT people. An openly gay man rose to the top tier of a large field of Democratic presidential candidates. A second openly LGBTQ person was sworn into the U.S. Senate. A record number of openly LGBTQ candidates won office to Congress and local government offices.

Others might argue that 2019 was a year of looming and unresolved battles over the soul of American democracy and the harbingers of uncertainty for the future of the political and legal movements for LGBTQ equality. However, one assesses the year in LGBTQ news, here are some of the year’s most headline-grabbing news stories to consider:

1. Buttigieg surges to the top: Pete Buttigieg’s success with his longshot bid to win the Democratic nomination for president could probably take up all 10 slots of any “LGBTQ Top Stories” list for 2019.

   He became not only the first openly gay person to seek the Democratic presidential nomination, he raised enough support to participate in the first official Democratic debate, quickly surged to a top five slot in a field of more than 20 viable candidates, and held onto that position while candidates who were much better known fell away. His success continued throughout the year, helped by an early staking out of a moderate position just as progressive candidates were taking heat for appealing for dramatic changes, such as Medicare for All. Buttigieg pitched “Medicare for All Who Want It,” spoke openly about how his religious faith informs his views, and proved to be a respectful but formidable contender in debate.

   By December, he held first place in Iowa polling, second place in New Hampshire polling, and fourth place in national polling.

   But with success in any presidential bid comes additional scrutiny and challenge. In May, two Republican operatives tried to promote a false accusation that Buttigieg had sexually assaulted two men, but both of those men denied the claims. In October, he was criticized for being too straight-looking and derided as “Mary Pete.” And at year’s end, Buttigieg was still struggling to prove he could win support from African-American voters and fending off suggestions that his post-graduate work for a conservative management consulting firm, McKinsey, included work that led to the loss of jobs for many. So far, he has astutely navigated a daunting landscape and blown through a wall that most LGBTQ people expected would block a path to the White House for any gay person in their lifetimes. Win or lose, he could well become 2020’s top story, too.

2. Supreme Court tackles Title VII: The U.S. Supreme Court in October heard oral arguments about whether existing federal law—Title VII of the Civil Rights Act—already prohibits discrimination in employment based on two things: sexual orientation and gender identity.

   The court’s eventual ruling on each issue, expected by next June, will have profound consequences for LGBTQ people everywhere in the U.S. And it could be a mixed outcome: The court could rule one way for sexual orientation and a different way for transgender status. Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch articulated that he was “really close” to seeing how the law already protects each category, but he said he was worried about the “massive social upheaval” that might take place if the court rules for either. Because Gorsuch is seen as being part of the conservative five-person majority on the court, media attention riveted to him following oral argument.

   But even progressive Justice Sonia Sotomayor hinted she was concerned about what the court’s ruling might have on the “raging” bathroom issue. Those who fear change will argue that a “No” from the Supreme Court on either or both questions will simply preserve the status quo. But that status quo prohibits discrimination based on an employee’s LGBTQ status in only 21 states and provides little likelihood of passage for the Equality Act that seeks to provide protection nationwide.

3. House impeaches President Trump: The Democrat-controlled U.S. House began impeachment proceedings late this year against Trump, unleashing a torrent of partisan fighting for the very soul of the country.

   The two charges are that: 1. Trump abused the power of his office to pressure the Ukraine government to announce that it was investigating a rival 2020 presidential contender (lead Democrat Joe Biden) and 2. that he obstructed Congress by deliberately interfering with the ability of the House to interview crucial witnesses and examine documents.

   There were a few openly LGBTQ players during the proceedings, including openly gay U.S. Reps. David Cicilline and Sean Patrick Maloney, who serve on the key committees involved in the impeachment proceedings. And Stanford law professor Pam Karlan was a key witness before the impeachment proceedings late this year against Trump, among others. And at year’s end, Buttigieg was still struggling to prove he could win support from African-American voters and fending off suggestions that his post-graduate work for a conservative management consulting firm, McKinsey, included work that led to the loss of jobs for many. So far, he has astutely navigated a daunting landscape and blown through a wall that most LGBTQ people expected would block a path to the White House for any gay person in their lifetimes. Win or lose, he could well become 2020’s top story, too.

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W. Geoffrey Pritzlaff

W. Geoffrey “Geo” Pritzlaff passed away unexpectedly Dec. 13. He was 46.

A native of Rockford, Illinois, Pritzlaff was a technology product manager working for Cars.com.

He loved Star Trek, Doctor Who, Madonna, Transformers, cooking and entertaining.

Pritzlaff was the beloved husband and best friend of Marc F. Cicora, dear nephew of Doug and Nancy Newman, and son of the late Carol Ann Pritzlaff (nee Newman). Also, he was the faithful companion of Daemon, the husky/malamute mix, and Bigby, the shepherd-mix.

Friends are gathering 2-5:30pm (eulogies begin 2:30 p.m.) on Saturday, Jan. 18, 2020, at The Call, 1547 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in his name to offset medical and final expenses: https://www.gofundme.com/f/memorial-for-geoffrey-pritzlaff?utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer&utm_campaign=p_lico+share-sheet.

Arrangements by Cremation Society of Illinois, 773-281-5058 or Cremation-society.com

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Both involved Democratic candidates only, and one was nationally televised on CNN during prime time hours.

The first forum was livestreamed from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and most of the major Democratic candidates showed up. The CNN town hall in October was the first national television broadcast by a major media outlet of LGBTQ-specific discussion with presidential candidates. The latter was an opportunity for voters to hear how the candidates mostly agreed on a variety of LGBTQ issues and support equal rights and protection for LGBTQ people. It was also a chance for straight voters to see and hear from a wide diversity of LGBTQ audience members, asking their questions, expressing their concerns, and telling their stories.

9. Trump versus the LGBTQ community: The Trump administration has continued apace in its efforts to undermine rights and protections for LGBTQ people through the federal government.

In 2019 alone, the Department of Defense was able to put the trans ban into effect while it is being challenged in court, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development proposed rules to allow homeless shelters receiving federal funds to turn away transgender people. In addition to HHS’s rules to allow health care providers to deny care to LGBTQ people (See “Denial of Care” above), the Department of Justice took sides against LGBTQ people in important cases before the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the reach of employment protections under the Civil Rights Act’s Title VII.

This year, the Department of Labor proposed a rule change to “clarify” that religious organizations could require employees “share” their religious beliefs, a move that LGBTQ legal activists say gives a green light to discrimination against LGBTQ people. The list goes on and includes the departments of Education, Homeland Security, and State. It is a concerted effort to eliminate and/or diminish protections for LGBTQ people and it will almost certainly continue in 2020—and beyond, should Trump be elected to a second term.

10. Katie Hill forced out: Openly bisexual U.S. Rep. Katie Hill was a rising superstar among the first-term Democrats entering the newly minted Democratic majority in the U.S. House in January. She was one of only 14 Democratic members of the House to be voted by colleagues to the House Democratic leadership team, and she was designated vice chair of the House Oversight committee—which was helping with the impeachment investigation against President Trump. But by October, a right-wing website targeted her with claims that she had sexual relationships with a former campaign staffer and a current Congressional staffer. The website illustrated its report with photos of Hill nude in private settings. And the House Committee on Ethics initiated an investigation into whether Hill had a prohibited relationship with a Congressional staffer. Hill denied the charge but resigned her seat within days, saying she believes the attack had been helped by her estranged and “abusive” husband and “because of the thousands of vile, threatening emails, texts, and calls that make me fear for my life and the lives of the people I care about.”

In an op-ed essay for the New York Times Hill made clear that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi did not force her to resign but rather “told me I didn’t have to” resign. Hill said that, ultimately, she felt she needed to resign “for me, my family, my staff, my colleagues, my community.” But in her farewell speech on the floor of the House, Hill vowed, “We will not stand down. We will not be broken. We will not be silenced. We will rise, and we will make tomorrow better than today.”

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2019: The year in local LGBTQ news

Compiled by Matt Simonette

A new year in Chicago meant new developments, ranging from pro-LGBTQ measures to anti-trans vandalism to a history-making mayor.

—Breaking ground: Lamont J. Robinson Jr., became the first out Black LGBTQ Illinois General Assembly member following his swearing-in ceremony as the 5th district representative Jan. 2.


—Stanton arrest: A 17-year-old was arrested for the murder of Dejanay Stanton, a transgender Chigacoan who was killed in August 2018.

—Swearing in: Longtime Cook County Circuit Court Judge James Snyder, who is gay, swore in Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker the early afternoon of Jan. 14.

—Campaign lawsuits: A transgender woman who worked as a field organizer for the JB for Governor campaign, the organization whose work won J.B. Pritzker the governorship in 2018, sued the campaign in federal court, alleging that she was fired on the basis of her sex, among other factors.

—County ordinance: Cook County Commissioner Kevin B. Morrison announced an ordinance to establish a Committee on Addressing Bias, Equity, and Cultural Competency on Jan. 24.

—Runoff: Chicagoan Lori Lightfoot, the first Black lesbian mayoral candidate in the city’s history, won the Feb. 26 general election with about 17.69 percent of the vote. She thus faced off April 2 against runner-up candidate Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, who garnered about 15.95 percent of the vote.

—Moving: The Night Ministry, the Chicago-based advocacy for persons experiencing homelessness, announced Feb. 22 that its Lake View facility for young adults, the Crib, would likely be leaving for a new location in the Bucktown neighborhood.

—Jussie’s mess: A Cook County grand jury in February charged embattled Empire actor Jussie Smollett in a 16-count indictment that maintained he lied to Chicago authorities about being the victim of an allegedly phony attack the month before. The charges were dropped, but the case continued to inspire waves of litigation and controversy. Smollett was eventually let go from Empire.

—Victory: Attorney and former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot handily won the Chicago’s mayor’s office on April 2, becoming not only the first Black female mayor in the city’s history, but its first openly lesbian mayor as well, carrying all 50 wards in the city. She was sworn in May 20, with her wife at her side.

—End in sight: Long-running litigation involving public-accommodations access for transgender students in the Northwest suburbs came to a seeming end April 15, when U.S. District Judge Jorge Alonso on Monday approved the dismissal of a lawsuit seeking to bar transgender students from using the locker room of the gender with which they identify at District 211 in Palatine.

—Council changes: The Chicago aldermanic runoff races that were initially too close to call were settled later in April—and lesbian Ald. Deb Mell (33rd Ward) lost her seat while gay Ald. James Cappelman (46th Ward) narrowly retained his. Also, queer Ald. Maria Hadden (49th Ward) was elected.

—Lots of Pride: Throughout the spring, numerous Pride celebrations were announced in Chicago suburbs and exurbs, among them Woodstock, Joliet, Highwood and Buffalo Grove. The Aurora Pride parade ran into difficulties when its expenses multiplied, but was able to raise the needed funds.

—New lawsuit: Eight transgender Illinoisans filed a lawsuit, on May 1, against Cook County officials, maintaining that name-change laws pertaining to convicted felons are inherently biased against transgender persons.

—Progress controversy: Affinity Community Services, Chicago Black Gay Men’s Caucus and Lighthouse Church of Chicago members and their allies protested against Boystown’s Progress Bar June 2 following seemingly anti-persons of color directives from the bar’s owner. The owner eventually met with protestors. Lighthouse eventually carried out additional action against Center on Halsted as the summer continued.

—Community support: Cook County Commissioner Kevin B. Morrison called on residents to support one another amidst bullying and harassment of an LGBTQ youth in Barrington in June.

—Rainbow crossing: Crosswalks in Boystown were painted in the colors of rainbow flags in June.

—New CEO: Chicago House announced that its board of trustees appointed Michael Herman as its new CEO.

—Clerk candidate: Campaign activist and civil-rights attorney Jacob Meister launched his campaign for Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court last summer. His presumed opponent, longtime clerk Dorothy Brown, later announced she would not be seeking re-election.

—Executive orders: On June 30, shortly before the Pride parade began, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed an executive order protecting transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary students throughout the state. The next month, he signed an order that single-occupancy restrooms shall be designated and labeled as “all-gender” or “gender-neutral.”

—Rainout: The 2019 Chicago Pride Parade was initially halted and spectators told to seek shelter at about 2:15 p.m. on June 30 when a severe storm erupted, drenching parade goers and participants. City officials halted the procession because of the potential for lightning and high winds. The parade was then cancelled outright.

—Freedom: Strawberry Hampton—a transgender woman who was transferred to multiple Illinois men’s prisons after making abuse allegations against inmates and guards—was freed last summer.

—Confirmation: The U.S. Senate in July confirmed lesbian magistrate Mary Rowland to a U.S. district court judgeship in Illinois. She was sworn into office in November.

—More Halsted Street news: The rainbow pylons dotting the Halsted Street landscape—and which are the basis of the Legacy Walk outdoor museum—officially became city landmarks on July 24.

—More Pritzker signings: On Aug. 9, the governor signed at least three pieces of legislation that benefited the LGBTQ community. HB 246 ensured the contributions of LGBTQ people are taught in public schools. Another measure (SB 1378) protected LGBT persons from discrimination in jury service. Lastly, SB 1379 made LGBTQ older adults and people living with HIV target populations in aging programs funded through the federal Older Americans Act.

—More Palatine: Officials from Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 said Sept. 19 that they would be considering over the fall how to determine logistics of a policy that would permit transgender students to use the locker rooms corresponding to the gender with which they identify, according to reports.

—Andersonville support: Women & Children First bookstore, the Chicago Therapy Collective and Andersonville Chamber of Commerce joined forces Oct. 20 in a community activation event responding to multiple instances of anti-trans vandalism directed at the store.


—Pastoral closing: Greg O’Neill and Ken Miller—the couple who founded and owned Chicago business Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Bread & Wine—closed it in November, after 15 years.

Law school awarded for TGNC efforts

Chicago-Kent College of Law recently received the 2019 Henry J. Ramsey, Jr. Diversity Award from the Law Student Division of the American Bar Association.

The award—named in honor of Henry J. Ramsey Jr., who served as dean of the Howard University School of Law from 1990 to 1996—recognizes Chicago-Kent’s efforts to create a more welcoming environment for transgender, nonbinary and gender non-conforming (GNC) members of the law school community.

The Chicago-Kent Lambdas, a student organization for LGBTQ students and their allies, worked with the law school administration to create two gender-neutral restrooms as well as to encourage members of the law school community to share their pronouns in their email signatures and on name tags.

The restrooms in the Chicago Loop building opened for use at the beginning of the fall 2018 semester.
AIDS Garden Chicago supporters celebrate Haring art installation

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

AIDS Garden Chicago supporters gathered Dec. 20 at the lakefront garden site south of Belmont Harbor (near the location of the now-defunct Belmont Rocks) to celebrate the installation of the 30-foot Keith Haring sculpture “Self Portrait.”

The sculpture is a unique larger version of a smaller piece that the late iconic artist/AIDS activist Haring created in 1989 with the same name, and will serve as AIDS Garden Chicago’s anchor point. The garden is Chicago’s first public monument to memorialize and educate people about the city’s continuing HIV/AIDS epidemic and is set to be completed sometime in 2020.

This sculpture installation is the culmination of almost two years of work by Ald. Tom Tunney (44th Ward), who enlisted the Chicago Parks Foundation to be the garden’s fiscal partner and facilitator in securing the gift from the Keith Haring Foundation.


A breakfast reception took place at the Belmont Yacht Club following officials and supporters taking pictures at the sculpture.

Tunney said the lack of a response to the AIDS epidemic was the catalyst for his decision to run for alderman. He spoke about the history of the Belmont Rocks and his goal of retaining much of that landscape during the revetment process along the lakefront as well as his over a decade-long dream of making this garden come alive.

Rosenthal Fine Art, Inc’s Dennis Rosenthal spoke about how eager the Keith Haring Foundation was to have this sculpture as the garden’s anchor point.

Legacy Project Executive Director Victor Salvo said the garden’s role is to “capture the story of HIV/AIDS in Chicago” with a winding path through the garden featuring memorials in chronological order. He explained that this part of the garden will come at a later date.

Local community gardener Lorraine Kells spoke about the garden design while Chicago Park District Manager of Art Initiatives Michael Dimitroff said the park district is always looking for new ways to utilize the lakefront and this garden will give the space a vibrancy that it has not had for many decades.

Lastly, Chicago Parks Foundation Executive Director Willa Lang spoke about the road to completion and future plans to raise awareness about the garden throughout Chicago. She said the fundraising process is ongoing and called on attendees to spread the word about the garden.

AIDS Garden Chicago leadership will be meeting to discuss next steps.

See AIDSGardenchicago.org for more information and/or to make a donation.

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Affinity ED leaving to head NCLR

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Affinity Community Services Executive Director Imani Rupert-Gordon has been named as the new executive director of the San Francisco-based legal advocacy organization National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR). The move was announced by the respective organizations Dec. 17.

“I really would like to see out LGBTQ movement become a racial justice movement, and a gender-justice movement, and an economic-justice movement, for example,” she explained. “I want folks to be able to see themselves and their needs, and their family’s needs, within the LGBTQ movement. Too often, folks feel like they have to give up part of themselves to be part of the LGBTQ community. We know how difficult that is when you’re someone who experiences oppression on multiple levels.”

She further underscored that her understanding of the LGBT-rights movement grew out of her time at Chicago organizations: “Working at Broadway Youth Center, I saw a specific need that LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability [have]. At Affinity, I’ve been able to see how racism is very much present in the LGBTQ community. We see that people still experience oppression, even within the community.”

Considering intersectionality means considering how any issue can ultimately be an LGBTQ issue, Rupert-Gordon said. “We do have to start looking at everything within our movement,” she added. “It doesn’t help any of us when we’re working for laws or protections that aren’t able to support all LGBTQ folks—they’re also experiencing racism and transphobia, or they don’t have the economic power to fully appreciate what we’re doing.”

Affinity Community Services serves the needs of Chicago’s Black LGBTQ community, with a particular focus on Black women. NCLR, founded in 1977 by Donna Hitchins, is “committed to advancing the human and civil rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community through litigation, public policy advocacy and public education,” according to the organization.

Baim guest speaker at CME/HRC event

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Chicago Reader Publisher and Windy City Times owner Tracy Baim was the featured speaker at a Dec. 10 CME Group LGBTQ PRIDE Employee Group/ Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Chicago at Cantina Laredo restaurant.

CME Group Corporate Communications Director and PRIDE Employee Group President Matthew Stroud and HRC Chicago Steering Committee member Celeste Wright spearheaded this event.

Stroud and CME Group Executive Director of Finance Sam Coady welcomed the crowd, with Coady speaking about knowing Baim for about 35 years and that they worked together on the 2006 Gay Games when the event came to Chicago. He said the 2006 Gay Games garnered more than 300 corporate sponsors, including CME Group.

“Tracy has been at the forefront of seeing the LGBT movement in all of its forms,” said Coady.

Baim’s remarks focused on the role of corporations within the LGBT movement and how that is taken for granted by some in the community. She said that, at times, corporations would be open to LGBT inclusion but then backtrack when outside forces threatened them. Baim spoke about the early adopters, like entertainment companies and alcohol brands, that began to advertise in LGBT media through Rivendell Media.

Also, Baim spoke about co-founding the Chicago LGBT Chamber of Commerce in 1996 and the survey they gave to Chicago-based businesses, adding that this survey was similar to the one HRC used for its Corporate Equality Index (CEI) when it was created years later. Baim said corporations also need to dig deeper and look at how they are impacting not only the LGBT community, but also people with disabilities and communities of color with their business practices.

Baim switched gears to focus specifically on the 2006 Chicago Gay Games, including a primer on the history of the event and its founder, Dr. Tom Waddell, and the role she and other organizers played in getting corporate sponsors. She spoke about some of the roadblocks they experienced as well as Kraft’s $25,000 grant to the Games. Baim read a letter from then Kraft Foods Inc. Executive Vice President, Corporate Counsel and Corporate Secretary Marc Firestone sent to all employees in 2005 about why the company decided to award the grant to the Gay Games.

During the Q&A session, one person asked how corporations can give back to LGBT organizations that need it the most. Baim suggested they look into the ones based on the South and West sides of Chicago, such as Affinity Community Services, ALMA and Brave Space Alliance among the dozen that are a high priority for funding needs.

Lastly, HRC Chicago Corporate Engagement Co-chair Dru Holmquist welcomed HRC Chicago Board of Governors and Steering Committee member Bonnie Johnson. Johnson said when HRC started the CEI in 2002, there were not a lot of companies willing to fill out the survey—as opposed to today, when 87 percent of Fortune 500 companies participated in the 2019 survey.

Lightfoot, officials announce ‘Cannabis Facts’ campaign

With the legalization of cannabis in the state of Illinois on Jan. 1, 2020, Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) are issuing guidance and precautionary information for those who plan to consume products recreationally.

To ensure a safe and responsible implementation of legalized cannabis, the City is rolling out a new public service awareness campaign called Cannabis Facts Chicago aimed at offering residents, particularly parents and guardians, information on the potential impact of recreational cannabis as well as tips for adults on how to consume cannabis safely if they choose to do so.

The City is encouraging residents considering consuming cannabis (and who must be at least 21) to review health and safety tips, such as protecting their brains, knowing their does, avoiding frequent use, not driving while high and abstaining if one is pregnant or breast-feeding.


Raoul joins other AGs in pro-trans brief

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul joined a coalition of 23 attorneys general to file an amicus brief in the Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit in support of transgender rights in an anti-discrimination lawsuit, Gavin Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board.

Grimm, a former student at Virginia’s Gloucester High School, sued the Gloucester County School Board in 2015—when he was still a student—for discrimination that banned him from using the common male restrooms at his high school.

Raoul and the coalition argue that transgender individuals have the right “to live with dignity, be free from discrimination, and have equal access to education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and other necessities of life.”

Nearly 1.5 million people in the United States—including approximately 150,000 teenagers—identify as transgender.

Joining Raoul in filing the brief are the attorneys general of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and the District of Columbia.
Chicago LGBTQ leaders named as 2020 Bon Foster co-chairs

Lambda Legal announced the co-chairs of its 2020 Bon Foster civil-rights celebration.

The co-chairs are:
—Susan Blake and Pat Ewert: Blake and Ewert are leaders in Chicago’s LGBTQ women’s community. Blake takes an active interest in many LGBTQ causes and supports many local LGBTQ charities. Ewert, a plaintiff in Lambda’s case expediting marriage equality in Illinois with then-partner Vernita Gray, currently works for Illinois Rep. Lamont Robinson, the state’s first LGBTQ African-American elected official.

—Julius Carter: Carter is an attorney at Dentons, where he serves on their litigation and dispute resolution practice focusing on complex commercial litigation. He also has experience advising clients on media and entertainment, real estate and products liability matters.

—Timothy and Patryk Carwinski: Tim, an attorney with Reed Smith LLP, worked at Lambda Legal from 2009-2011 as a law fellow. Pat works at AAM, a third-party asset manager for insurance companies. Tim and Pat have been married since 2015, after a prolonged engagement awaiting Lambda’s eventual success in achieving marriage equality in Illinois.

—Channyn Lynne Parker: Parker is an advocate, public speaker and community-centric leader, currently working for Howard Brown Health Center, and serving on the board of Equality Illinois. Channyn is most noted for speaking at the Chicago Women’s March and being the recipient of the Equality Illinois Humanitarian, Freedom Award.

The Bon Foster event raises $500,000 for Lambda Legal every year and is named after Robert Bonvoullier “Bon” Foster, a Chicago attorney and civil rights leader who died in 1991 from complications from AIDS. Foster left a significant gift to Lambda Legal, to open the regional office in Chicago.

For more information or to purchase tickets to this year’s event, visit LambdaLegal.org/bonfoster.

Trans parents ask state not to misgender them on baby’s certificate

Myles Brady Davis and Precious Brady-Davis recently announced the arrival of their child, who was born earlier this month—and have made a request of the state.

Myles, who carried and gave birth to their baby and identifies as transmasculine, and Precious, his wife who is a transgender woman, have requested that the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) issue an accurate birth certificate that does not misgender them and either describes them both as “co-parents,” or alternatively lists Myles in the field reserved for “father/co-parent” and Precious as “mother/co-parent,” a Lambda Legal press release noted.

“We trust that IDPH will honor Myles’ and Precious’ request and issue a birth certificate that does not misgender them and accurately reflects their parentage,” said Kara Ingelhart, staff attorney at Lambda Legal. “Illinois has been a leader in taking steps to protect, recognize and respect the humanity and dignity of transgender and gender non-conforming people, such as facilitating access to accurate government-issued identity documents, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity, and improving access to gender-affirming health care for those receiving Medicaid.”
I understand that Pfeiffer’s husband, Tim Frey, wants to take over the Pride Parade to honor Richard. I hope Tim reconsiders. Our communities are polarized around politics, race, sex, and gender-identity concerns. His decision could be misunderstood as an act of white privilege. So many have given their lives on the altar of racism. Focusing on our community’s unity calls us to a place of justice and compassion. Those lost lives also need to be treated with dignity and remembrance. The urban fabric of overconsumption calls us to remember who our neighbor is, and what love and remembrance require of us. Human vanity should have no place in this matter.

Poverty and overindulgence are the two extremes of misery. In my opinion, it is an example of indirect suicide. Life indeed is sacred and wonderful. Choose the road that makes death a fulfillment, not a coward’s way out, that is dehumanizing.

We are all part of that dehumanizing culture that promotes a level of consumption that is sinful and dangerous to Mother Earth. We must learn moderation. Poverty and overindulgence are the two extremes of this social sin of misery. Advocate without accusation, disagree without disrespect, and see differences as places of encounter rather than exclusion. The time is long past for extremes of this social sin of misery.

Joe Murray
Executive Director
Rainbow Rush Movement (LGBTQ Roman Catholics)
THE BEST AND THE WORST
OF CHICAGO THEATER IN 2019

Mal Blasingame with the cast of 20/20.
Photo by Michael Brosilow
THEATER REVIEW

Working
Playwright: Book by Stephen Schwartz and Nina Faso, music and lyrics by Schwartz and others, including James Taylor and Lin-Manuel Miranda
At: Theo Ubique’s Howard Street Theatre, 721 Howard St., Evanston
Tickets: $42-57; theo-u.org (optional $29 dinner, reservations required)
Runs through: Jan. 26

BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN

Jobs: Most people have one. These days, most people have several.

Legendary radio journalist Studs Terkel published Working in 1974, celebrating “the extraordinary dreams of ordinary people” through a compilation of interviews with people about their jobs. Theo Ubique’s production of Stephen Schwartz’s Broadway musical adaptation—now updated with additional text and new songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda and James Taylor, among others—is an interesting watch in the days of late-stage capitalism. Director Christopher Chase Carter’s choreography and the ensemble cast are stunning, but Working is a mixed bag of down-tempo-to-earth delights and cringeworthy text that shouldn’t have survived the ‘70s.

Over the course of two hours, three men and three women play multiple characters who speak and sing what “working” means to them. A hard-working, overworked, underpaid project manager deals with long hours and wedgie-picking colleagues. A stonemason expresses pride in his precise eye for detail and the permanence of his labor. After a retiree takes the audience through the ups and downs of everyday existence, his caregiver explains why the difficult job of watching over others is equal parts frustrating and rewarding. From the first paycheck to the unemployment line and everything in between, Working is a musical about still waters running deep within regular folks.

Any show without a concrete story carries the risk of running hot and cold, and Working is no exception. Because it’s a collection of monologues and songs, no character sticks around for very long and is immediately replaced with another—sometimes without the actor in question exiting the stage. Director-choreographer Carter works hard to smooth every transition, and the results are small but beautiful balletic moments when a shy third-grader morphs into a confident flight attendant, for example. Standout songs include Miranda’s joyful tribute to food delivery (gleefully executed by Stephen Blu Allen), a full cast number about long-haul truckers courtesy of Taylor and a rocking yet soulful romp called “Cleanin’ Woman,” composed by Micki Grant and executed by Cynthia F. Carter in a true tour de force performance.

These positives, however, don’t quite overwhelm the negatives: A teacher’s lament quickly becomes a problematic whine about how kids don’t speak English anymore (her three students played by actors of color), a food server repeatedly belts the “g*psy” slur and, even with the updates, certain jobs (stay-at-home parent and the aforementioned waitress and teacher) are presented as very gendered.

Working is a tough nut to crack and may not have stood the test of time. Still, there’s a certain satisfaction watching the late Terkel’s masterpiece in his home city, vocalized by astounding talent and, overall, handled with care.

THEATER REVIEW

Rutherford and Son
Playwright: Githa Sowerby
At: Timeline Theatre Company at Baird Hall, 615 W. Wellington Ave.
Tickets: TimelineTheatre.com and 773-281-8463; $42
Runs through: Jan. 12

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Theater historians and classroom curricula have long credited Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw the chief proponents of realism in Western drama for their exploration of domestic injustices rarely examined by the privileged audiences of the period.

In 1912, however—a mere two years before the cataclysmic devastation of World War I, I would forever change the social order of the European population—playwright Githa (pronounced “Gee-tha”) Sowerby warned her native England of the price exacted by the unfettered rise of industry and the utilitarian principles en-gendered thereby.

For two generations, the Northeast Midlands firm of Rutherford and Son have manufactured “plain and lasting” pressed glass in its furnaces and kilns. The first Rutherford “son” referenced in the company’s name has devoted his life to the enterprise bequeathed him, and that he hopes to pass on to his offspring someday. In his obsession with bettering the fortunes of his successors, ironically, he has adopted a relentlessly pragmatic cosmology crippling his children’s spiritual growth. Prohibited from fraternizing with the village dwellers, shunned by the gentry as upstarts born of “commerce” the three now-grown siblings have emerged from an upbringing of forced idleness under the tyranny of their unforfing sire into a lonely adulthood racked by frustration barely concealed beneath deceptive torpor.

Rebellion is inevitable. Big sister Janet and little brother Richard may keep their plans secret, but middle-child John, the designated heir to the Rutherford empire, not only has audaciously married an emancipated job-holding London woman, but has also invented a new budget-cutting method of glassmaking, which he offers his father—in exchange for money to provide his own wife and son a future of their own choosing. As the intrepid patriarch schemes to seize the property he considers rightfully due the family business, his exiled kin gradually make their escape, leaving their inhumane progenitor to bargain with the one Rutherford as flinty and calculating as himself.

Playgoers anticipating a cheerful Shavian romp will realize their mistake at the first sight of the gloomy Gothic Revival furnishings of the Rutherford mansion and whaleboned gowns worn by its female occupants. Under Timeline director Mechelle Moe, though, the minor-scale “Home Front” volunteers.

When this idea proved successful, Three Cat returned the following year with another faux-radio program, this one set in 1943, composed of new-ly collected material reflecting a society struggling against despair during a bleak chapter in our history. Audiences in 2019 may be comforted by hindsight regarding that war, but so long as families and sweethearts are still forced to spend the holidays far from loved ones, it might as well be 1944.

Our hosts for this occasion are, not surprisingly, all female—even the traditionally male-operated technical equipment is helmed by a woman, with a pianist representing the sole man in the cast. Our emcees are solo chanteuses Dorothy Johnson and Ivy Brown, this year flanked by a trio of warblers wearing non-regulation WAC uniforms (no nylon stockings, though—there’s a war on, you know).

The evening’s agenda is dominated by songs, seasonal and secular, some familiar and some—less so. For example, the song listed in the playbook as “Santa Claus Is Coming” is not the “Coming To Town” chestnut, but a vintage 1914 ditty heralding the end of a different war. Even standard repertoire takes on a fresh energy with jazz arrangements by music director/arranger Roy Freeman, like the “Angel” medley combining the “Hark! The Herald” and “We Have Heard on High” carols rendered with a hint of boogie-woogie tempo.

The roster also encompasses dramatic dialogues adapted from authors such as Mark Twain, Willa Cather, Charles Dickens—whose “Ebsneezer McScrooge” now conducts business from his office on LaSalle Street and hoards ration coupons—and African-American journalist Augustus M. Hodges’ 1894 poem “The Christmas Reunion Down At Martinsville.” Most stirring, however, are the letters, read over the air, reflecting the loneliness of sons, husbands and fathers stranded on military bases, of daughters, wives and mothers training as nurses or toiling in munitions factories and of children exiled to live with grandparents for the duration. Torchlight ballads like “The Man I Love” and “My Buddy” heighten the wistful melancholy of the moment.

THEATER REVIEW

The Holiday Radio Show: 1944
Playwright: Gabriella Bonamici, Andre Richardson
Hogan II, Laura Scruggs, Rolfe Sick, Jason Paul Smith
At: Three Cat Productions at the Berger Park Coach House, 6205 N. Sheridan Rd.
Tickets: ThreeCatProductions.com and 312-970-9840; $15-$25
Runs through: Jan. 4

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

In 2017, the playwrights of the Three Cat “Artists Incubator” collaborated on a holiday show replicating a live radio broadcast in 1942, replete with music of the period, messages to troops stationed overseas and tributes to the patriotic “Home Front” volunteers.

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THEATER REVIEW

The Light in the Piazza
Playwright: Book by Craig Lucas; music/lyrics by Adam Guettel
At: Lyric Opera, 20 N. Wacker Dr. (a Scenario Two production)
Tickets: https://lyricopera.org
Price: $35-219
Runs through: Dec. 29

BY KAREN TOPHAM

It would be worth seeing The Light in the Piazza at Lyric Opera just to hear Renee Fleming sing. However, the new production (actually put on by Scenario Two, a new company) offers so much more that this revival of the Craig Lucas and Adam Guettel musical is one of the finest shows of the year. From the excellence of the cast to the 30-piece orchestra conducted by Kimberly Grigsby to the design team that helped to shape this show for the Lyric's space, every element of this production comes together to make it a joyous theatrical and musical experience.

Director Daniel Evans' cast couldn't be stronger. Fleming stars as Margaret Johnson, a Winston-Salem mother on a tour of Italy with her 26-year-old daughter, Clara (Solea Pfeiffer), a lovely young woman whose mental and emotional abilities were adversely affected by an accident when she was young. However, Clara might be "younger than her age," as Margaret says, but her libido shows every minute of her 26 years, and when she has a chance meeting with a sweet young Florentine named Fabrizio (Rob Houchen), sparks she doesn't even recognize fly everywhere.

Fleming's and Pfeiffer's voices blend beautifully, soaring above the complex, textured orchestrations in the opening song and drawing us in. Each of them also has lovely solo moments, such as Fleming's haunting "Dividing Day" and Pfeiffer's "The Light in the Piazza. But the show wouldn't work if the young lovers did not fit together just as well, and Houchen's rich tenor works perfectly with Pfeiffer's lovely soprano to create the impression of two innocent people falling in love. They fit so well together both vocally and visually that it's impossible not to root for them to succeed, though we know that Margaret has not revealed the truth about Clara to Fabrizio and his family.

As to that, Fleming's Margaret clearly loves her daughter and wishes to protect her from possible harm as well as protecting the family who would unknowingly inherit the role of Clara's caretaker. But a large part of Margaret's problem stems from her own failing marriage and her desperate need to hold on to the one constant in her life, her daughter. Fleming walks this line carefully, adding layers of depth to her character, visible especially when she tries several times to explain Clara to Fabrizio's father (Alex Jennings, lending an easy-natured gravitas to the role).

Whether you are unfamiliar with The Light in the Piazza, as I was, or have been a fan since its 2004 workshopping at the Goodman, I am confident that you will enjoy this version. The show (perfect for the Lyric because it is a sort of hybrid between opera and musical) features themes familiar to any parent who both loves and worries about their children...which is pretty much all of us. It's only playing for a very limited run in the midst of the hectic holiday season, but it is well worth the trip downtown for this glorious production.

CRITICS' PICKS

The Winter Wolf, Otherworld Theater, through Dec. 29—Death lurks in winter's cold and darkness, but our brave young heroine drives the wolf from the door in Joseph Zettelmaier's 70-minute holiday fantasy, back for Year Two. MSB

Rutherford and Son, Timeline Theatre, through Jan 12—Githa Sowerby's 1912 hit remains riveting drama in 2019, portraying a wealthy English industrial family (perhaps her own) crushed by an oppressive, ethically bankrupt patriarch. MSB

—By Mary Shen Barnidge

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Tickets & info at ABOUTFACETHEATRE.COM

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The best and worst of Chicago theater in 2019

Compiled and edited by Jonathan Abarbanel

The last 12 months have been celebrated city wide as Chicago Theatre Year and it’s been a whopper of a time, especially September through December when no fewer than 60 shows opened each month. When final numbers are crunched, it won’t be surprising if there were 850 or 900 productions during the calendar year and over 3 million tickets sold.

Theater critics, however, are not so impressed by big numbers. Their job is to assess individual productions and declare hits and misses. For this Windy City Times Year in Review, our most frequent reviewers have picked two shows each that were successes (in their opinions) and two that didn’t make the grade. Remember that all critics are right, even when they disagree!

Successes (alphabetized by critics’ last names)

—The Delicate Tears of the Waning Moon, Water People Theatre: Part of the Third Chicago International Latino Theater Festival, this poetic two-character play eased its way from a tender tale of a woman recovering from a horrific accident to a horrifying tale of attempted assassination and suppression of truth by ruthless forces. Rebeca Aleman starred (with Ramon Camin) and also wrote the work. Jonathan Abarbanel

—The Great Leap, Steppenwolf Theatre Company: Playwright Lauren Yee’s creation myth about the Tank Man of Tiananmen Square was filled with verve, passion, politics, comedy and basketball action, and featured a break-out performance by Chicago actor Glenn Obrero as a 5’5” Chinese-American basketball wiz. What fun! Abarbanel

—Herland, Redtwist Theatre: Too many playwrights treat the topic of advanced age as a problem for the caretakers of those afflicted with it, but Grace McLeod allowed her three elderly ladies to tell us what THEY wanted and refuse to be bossed by meddling kinfolk. Mary Shen Barnidge

—Kentucky, Gift Theatre; Leah Nanako Winkler’s comedy took a candid look at the values of urban snobs, country crackers, immigrant Asians, fundie African-American Christians and talking cats without ever stooping to mean-spirited stereotyping. Barnidge

—The Total Bent, Haven Theatre with About Face Theatre; Stew’s The Total Bent showcased director Lili-Anne Brown’s talent for emotional truth and stunning acting. As a father and son dueling through gospel music during the Civil Rights era, Robert Cornelius and Gilbert Domally smacked you in the heart. Sarah Katherine Bowden

—20/20, About Face Youth Theatre Ensemble: A joyful exploration of identity set during 1980s ball culture. From dance breaks to Lizzo’s “Good As Hell” to confessionals drawn from years of Youth Ensemble rehearsals, this company showed how claiming one’s self should be a celebration as much as a movement. Bowden

—Lottery Day, Goodman Theatre: Playwright Ike Holter capped his ambitious “Rightlynd Saga” of seven plays with a riotous party. Many characters from previous dramas returned to compete for a cash prize tied to a terrible tragedy. The fresh dialogue was tied to the here-and-now of a diverse Chicago. Scott C. Morgan

—Ms. Blakk for President, Steppenwolf: The past was the present in this free-flowing rally/drama about Chicago drag queen Joan Jett Blakk’s scrappy 1992 presidential campaign. Tarell Alvin McCraney and Tina Landau’s co-production was a scatter-shot affair, but a roaring voice for nearly forgotten LGBTQ history. Morgan

—The First Deep Breath, Victory Gardens: Featuring galvanic performances from a hugely talented cast, Lee Edward Colston II’s play uses the lives of a single Black family to tell a bitter but often simply hilarious story of the ways in which secrets, lies, religion, and sexuality can easily unravel the bonds holding us together. Karen Topham

—Midsummer (A Play With Songs), Greenhouse Theatre Center and Proxy Theatre: David Grieg’s inventive, chaotic play shifted time and viewpoint in a wildly imaginative production; a hilarious paean to the idea that change always is possible, no matter how hopeless, dull or repetitive our lives might seem. Topham

—I Know My Own Heart, Pride Films and Plays: The year’s steamiest history play offered a hot box of sexual tension vs. strict moral code via Anne Lister, 1800s agent of social & sexual chaos (played by Vahishta Vafadari), thanks to author Emma Donoghue and director Elizabeth Swanson. Sean Margaret Wagner

—SIX, Chicago Shakespeare Theater: This Broadway bound British import blew the roof off Navy Pier by portraying Henry VIII’s six wives as a pop group. Directors Jamie Armitage and Lucy Moss and six astounding vocalists made you forget theater and scream like you’re at a Spice Girls concert. Wagner

Misses (near, far or by a country mile)

—Pinocchio, House Theatre of Chicago: Too much of the horrifically dark original was sacrificed for too much modern sensibility . . . and Pinocchio never became a real boy, which blunted the audience’s emotional investment. Lovely physical production but a rare miss by The House. Jonathan Abarbanel

—Red Rex, Steep Theatre: Ike Holter’s world premiere was a powerfully acted ruse. Moments before intermission, Holter wrenched the play from a comedy about Off-Loop Theater to a drama about cultural appropriation. His somewhat naive attack on Off-Loop Theatre socio-economics (vs. artists’ personal foibles) bit the hand that fed him. Abarbanel

—Ada and the Engine, Artistic Home: Ada Byron Lovelace invented the computer in 1843, but playwright Lauren Gunderson fell into the sexist trap of reducing Lovelace’s accomplishments to pursue of male admiration. A final-scene tone shift suggesting vindication was too late and not enough. Mary Shen Barnidge

—Mother of the Maid, Northlight Theatre: If we’re asked to view the feisty career of Jeannie D’Arc through the eyes of her Mommy, then Mrs. Arc also must be worth our attention; but author Jane Anderson grew quickly bored with the drab housewife she created and so did we. Barnidge

—Act(s) of God, Lookingglass Theatre: Kareem Bandealy’s first play might have spiraled into a satisfying free-for-all about one family’s spiritual crisis, but the script obscured the purpose with too many elements. Director Heidi Stizzon’s effort to unite all the tones didn’t find a through-line. Sarah Katherine Bowden

—Sweet Texas Reckoning, Artmisia Theatre: This Texas showdown between liberal and conservative family members didn’t pack a punch. Author Traci Goldrey reached facile conclusions, and Julie Proudfoot’s stagey (although honest) direction hampered a complex experience. The dialogue failed working actors Anita Kavuu Ng’ang’a and Scottie Caldwell. Bowden

—Cruel Intentions: The ’90s Musical, Broadway Playhouse: This tonally confused jukebox musical of the 1999 film felt like SNL sketches overswaying their welcome. The ’90s pop hits were shoehorned awkwardly into this tale (inspired by Dangerous Liaisons) of preppy school kids playing manipulative sexual games. Scott C. Morgan

—Elizabeth Rex, Oak Park Festival Theatre: Timothy Findley’s overly analytic, historically inaccurate 2001 drama proved tedious for out-of-context lovers of the playwright’s work. The physical production but a rare miss by The House. Morgan

—Desire in a Tinier House, Pride Films and Plays: Ryan Oliveira’s script purports to concern the passion of two gay men in an increasingly hostile world, but mostly it’s a framework for what a lobby sign called “stimulated” sex before it bizarrely shifts gears in Act II. Karen Topham

—Kiss, Haven Theatre: In Guillermo Calderón’s complicated script, points are made and remade; monologues and scenes feel forced and artificial, even delivered by earnest actors. It’s sincere and thoughtful, but the intentionally self-interruptive format confuses the audience when it most needs emotional engagement. Topham

—Ruse of Medusa, Facility Theatre: Author Erik Satie and director Dado accomplished their goal of creating a nonsensical landscape of ab-
For Chicago-born actor Daniel Kyri, who identifies as queer, working on the NBC drama Chicago Fire has been both “incredible” and “educational.”

This series, filmed in Chicago, was Kyri’s first time working in television. He has long been a fixture of the city’s theater scene.

“My character had a three-episode arc, and then they decided to keep me on,” he recalled. “It’s opened up a whole new side of Chicago for me, different from the one that I had previously experienced. Growing up and living in the city, and working in the city as an actor are two totally unique and separate, but ultimately cohesive experiences. I just feel like the city of Chicago is unfolding in different ways for me, and it’s incredibly educational and rewarding.”

Kyri spoke of being surprised by the collaborative nature of the television industry, noting, “There are so many crew members that put together a single episode, learning what they do and how they impact how to tell a story is invaluable information.”

He added that the cast and crew has been “like a family. ... I’ve been accepted and loved here.”

When Kyri learned that his character, Darren Ritter, would be coming out in an episode this past fall, “It felt very personal in some pretty unexpected ways.” When he filmed the scenes in question, he added, “My own coming out experience ended up ‘covering’ those moments for Ritter.”

He admitted that, when first seeing the scene on the printed page, “I was honestly a little nervous. There is this idea, that is more popular with younger folks, about ‘not owing’ you coming out story to anyone. Reading it on the page I began to understand that testament a little more deeply. In a lot of ways it is very personal, and in the scene he is coming out to a person he respects, who holds a certain amount of power in terms of what we see as acceptance.”

The more he contemplated the scene, Kyri determined “more ideas about how to handle the moment and just make it as nuanced and fully formed as possible. It ended up being like an easy ‘non-event’ that just melts your heart when you see it.”

The response to Darren’s coming out has been positive, he added. “For our show to have the demographic that it does, which is largely blue-collar and working-class, I very much enjoyed having the fan base be so open and welcoming, and supportive of the character.”

Kyri, a South Side native, became interested in acting at age 10 thanks to his uncle, a performer and theater professional, who got him involved in a production of Once on This Island.

“It was the backstage life that enthralled me the most,” he said. “I got to watch these older actors trying to be backstage, do quick changes, have conversations in the wings, and then watch them ‘put on’ their character and go back onto the stage. There was something witnessing the act of transformation that I thought was so magical.”

Kyri and writing partner Bea Cordelia last year unveiled a web series, The T, about the relationship between a white trans woman and Black queer man in Chicago. The pair co-wrote, -produced, -directed, and -starred in the series. They hope to eventually get more episodes off the ground.

“Bea and I have a couple of prospects,” Kyri said. “We will do a second season if the money is there. Luckily enough, we have been in talks with a couple of people with whom that might be a probability. We have dreams and goals in our work, especially as it pertains to The T.

Kyri considers himself lucky to have grown up in Chicago, which he called “a city at the forefront of a lot of really innovative storytelling, especially in the theater community,” where he has been able to both work and be openly queer. Chicago, he added, “helped me to find my voice.”

“I found the stories that I care about telling,” Kyri explained. “Those involve the radical representations of all human beings as they exist. I’m not prettifying up, or covering up, or forcing a character, person, or story to fit into a predetermined mold. I frankly think that’s bullshit, and I want to be engaged in the work of dismantling that.”
Season's readings:
Books to choose

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

So, it's a wrap.
Everything's under paper and under the tree. You're done with all your shopping, except for one person. Or two. Maybe four.
So what do you get for that hard-to-buy-for person who never likes anything? Well, as they say, a book is a present they'll open again and again, so why not head to your local bookstore for these great gifts:

Biography/autobiography/memoir

For the fiercest of fierce women on your gift list, look for *Passionate Spirit: The Life of Alma Mahler*, by Cate Haste. It's the story of Mahler, wife of the artist, who was also the first woman to write an opera at a time when women were supposed to be shadows of their husbands. It's one of those little-know stories you should know.
The giftee who needs a boost of confidence will love unwrapping *More Than Enough*, by Elaine Welteroth. It's the story of the author's realization that she really WAS everything she needed to be and if that's a great lesson to take into the new year...

They say that this country's royalty sprang from the New England area and if your gift recipient is a fan or follower, then wrap up *The Kennedy Heirs*, by J. Randy Taraborrelli. This big book is all about the JFK kids and their generation, as well as their cousins.

For the person who's spent this time year as caregiver to a parent, *How to Forget*, by Kate Mulgrew, is the book to wrap. It's the story of caring and loss, and coming to terms with a past that one may or may not know until secrets are no longer kept...

The Anglophile on your gift list will love having *Our Rainbow Queen*, by Sali Hughes, under the tree. It's a celebration of Queen Elizabeth's colorful style and the splashy fashions she favors.

For the lover of music, feminism, and fierce women, Ani Di Franco's *No Walls and the Recurring Dream* will make a perfect gift. It's the story of Di Franco's first 30 years on Earth as well as her activism, life and music.

If there's a Hollywood watcher on your gift list this year, then wrap up *Seduction: Sex, Lies and Stardom in Howard Hughes's Hollywood*, by Karina Longworth. It's the story of a very rich man, the women who wanted him (or his money, or both) and the women who got what they wanted—much to their regret.

Historians and connoisseurs alike will love reading *The Bourbon King*, by Bob Batchelor. It's the story of George Remus, his crimes, and his totally illegal prohibition-era empire.

History

The historian who's likewise fascinated with architecture will probably never get a book they'll love more than *Cities: The First 6,000 Years*, by Monica L. Smith. This book takes your reader on a down-the-road trip into cities and villages, above them and below them. Hint: giftees who travel will enjoy it, too.
The person who longs for a gentler time when women dressed for dinner will love *What Would Mrs. Astor Do?*, by Cecelia Tichi. It's a book about manners and social expectations in the Gilded Age, and how people were supposed to behave. It's also about the woman who set the tone for it all, the lovely and suffers-no-fools-gladly Caroline Astor. Wrap it up with *Women Warriors: An Unexpected History*, by Pamela D. Toler. Mrs. Astor would approve.

Dad or Grandpa is always hard to buy for, right? Wrong: *There's The Darkest Year: The American Home Front 1941-1942*, by William K. Klinga. It's available now. This book reminds readers about how we “pulled together and won” during World War II, and he'll love it. Don't discount Mom or Grandma; it's a book she'll enjoy, too. Wrap it up with *No Surrender*, by Chris Edmunds and Douglas Century. It's a story of Edmonds' father, his brave actions during World War II, and how he impacted many people for many generations.

Anyone who's fascinated with military history from World War I through Vietnam will want to add *The Girls Next Door*, by Kara Dixon Vuic, to their bookshelves. This tale of a little-known bit of history explains why “respectable young women” and Hollywood starlets volunteered to go overseas so that men at war could enjoy recreation and a bit of home in a foreign country.

For more military history to make your history class gift, consider giving *Emancipated: My Family's Fight for Freedom*, by Cheryl Wills. It's the personal story of Wills' father, and her great-great-grandfather, who was a Tennessean slave who fought in the Civil War. Included is information so your young giftee can start his or her own family tree. Wrap it up with *I Missed the Bus, But I Arrived on Time*, by Willis S. Drake—a memoir by a Renaissance man and his dreams of doing it all.

LGBTQ interest

For the person who loves someone who doesn't identify strictly as male-female will appreciate unwrapping *Robyn Ryle's She He They Me* this year. It's a book that acts a bit like those old “choose-your-own-adventure” as it examines and explains gender, its definitions, and the way it's been perceived historically. Hint: This is fun, and it's also a book for someone who's questioning.

If your gift recipient is exploring the ideas and limits of gender, you can't go wrong by wrapping up *Nonbinary: Memoirs of Gender and Identity*, edited by Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane. This is a book filled with tales of those who've examined (or are examining) questions of gender, sexuality, age, and race.

For the child with two Mommies or two Daddies, and for the kids in that child's preschool session, *The GayBCs*, by M.L. Webb, will make a great class gift. It's the A-B-Cs, but with terms familiar to the LGBTQ community and their families, so it's for them, too. Or it might make a great gift for the adult who still possesses the wonder of a child. Or for an adult, just because.

For the newlywed (or the about-to-be-wed),

The Gay Marriage Generation, by Peter Hart-Brinson, is the book to give. It takes a look at how same-sex marriage became law across the country, and how it changed the way America looks at gay men and lesbians. The gay gift recipient might also like *Out of the Shadows: Reimagining Gay Men's Lives*, by Walt Odets, in that same wrapped gift.
Chicago fashion designer Cristy Pratt is bringing inclusivity to fashion, unapologetically.

Her clothing line, Morph Clothing, is dedicated to representing pieces that include all ethnicities, genders, ages, and body sizes. This element of inclusivity is important to her brand, and, from what she said, “important for the entire world.”

“Who'd knew that a night out with the ladies would be the start of a dress that has swept the entire fashion industry? Pratt sure had no idea, but now she's in the fashion limelight, and it's all because she is seeking to make fashion more inclusive.

“I am not a trained fashion designer. I did not go to school for fashion,” admitted Pratt. Her grandmother left her a sewing machine when she was just a young girl. She began her business in a closet space that she transformed into a small office.

That's how the hobby began. Even without much experience, Pratt became determined to start her own fashion line.

While out with her best girlfriends one night, Pratt wore what is now known as her “One Dress for All” piece. It is a dress that fits all body sizes and can be worn 60 different ways. The dress has been featured on Fox 32 and several fashion shows in major cities, including Chicago and Miami. Morph Clothing was also featured as part of the BET Awards Exclusive Gifting lounge this year and the MTV VMS Red Carpet.

Pratt’s clothing line took off after the debut of her “One Dress for All” concept. The idea is that one dress can be worn several ways really resonated in the industry. More importantly, the idea that Pratt was considering all body types, any age, every curve on anyone regardless of culture or gender, is what made her design so special.

The dress became popular and went viral. Over the last few months, she said she's been selling to places and people she didn't even know existed.

“I design my pieces to look good on any body size. I wanted to create a piece that whatever you love about your body, you show it off. Whatever you hate, you can hide, too,” said Pratt.

“‘The world is ready for change. People are turning more self-accepting.’

Pratt is a strong believer of embracing who you are and hoping that one day the world realizes why that is so important—not just in fashion but throughout all facets of life.

“My goal is that hopefully we realize it isn’t what we are but who we are. Gender and sexuality identity become secondary to who we really are.”

Recently, Pratt debuted some of her latest designs during Chicago Fashion Week's Trans and Media show, a fashion show segment dedicated to the transgender community. Pratt said her pieces worked well on the runway, adding it was great to see transgender models wearing her pieces.

“I hope that my piece provides a chance for people to be themselves. I believe that sexual persuasion is not a continuum. I don't think anybody is totally straight. Whether people act on fantasies or go out and create relationships, we are all the same thing,” said Pratt.

Although Pratt, a single mom of two, does not identify as a member of the LGBTQ community, she said she will always be open to loving who you are.

“When we have the opportunity to love more authentically, we become more loving in the world and less defensive of who we are,” said Pratt.

In addition to inclusivity, a huge part of Pratt’s message is that although someone may not have the resources, or the training they can still follow their dreams. Like many, she experienced struggles as she grew her business.

“It’s a beautiful journey. I didn’t start with any capital investment, I just worked hard,” said Pratt. “My goal is that hopefully we realize it isn’t what we are but who we are. Gender and sexuality identity become secondary to who we really are. If we can't get pass these labels, and even we identify, we can't move a place to where it’s love and acceptance.”

To shop Morph Clothing, visit MorphClothing.com.
Sami Grisafe: Immersed in L.A., but keeping Chicago ties

BY ROSS FORMAN

Sami Grisafe got some high-profile exposure for the first single to be released from her upcoming album, Manifest.

The former Chicago Force star quarterback who has transitioned into a Los Angeles-based singer/songwriter/actor, Grisafe played the acoustic version of her single “Key of Us” on episode two of the Showtime original series Work In Progress on Sunday, Dec. 15.

“Key of Us” is a modern-day love duet that has been described as a mix of pop, alt-folk and a hint of country in a relatable and single tune. “This track has a lot of Shawn Mendes elements with the percussive acoustic guitar and beats. It'll definitely make you move and sing-a-long,” Grisafe said.

Grisafe’s acoustic love song a pop makeover. The song features Linsea Waugh, a Chicago-based musician and long-time collaborator and friend of Grisafe. “Key of Us” is produced by KOIL PreAmp and Eren Cannata, the two who gave Grisafe’s acoustic love song a pop makeover. The single was released through Grisafe’s record company which she co-founded with Kathy Kuras, Vanguard Muse.

“The song was inspired by a late night/early morning in Chicago with friends and a new love interest,” Grisafe said. “We went out to the bars in Andersonville, then back to our friend’s condo. It was one of those epic nights you never forget: acoustic guitar sing-a-longs, drinking anything we could find from Jameson to flat champagne, heart-to-hearts and infatuation with a new love interest until the night turned to dawn and the tension turned into a nine-month-long relationship.

“It was the support of my best friend, Linsea Waugh, who I had always had in mind for the other part since its inception who has always been my partner in crime musically and the reason I had the confidence to pursue a career in music. I couldn’t think of a better, more talented person to sing this duet with me. We’ve been performing ‘Key of Us’ acoustically together for 6-plus years and it was really cool to be able to realize all those years of performing it through a live into a recording. I cannot speak highly enough about Linsea’s presence on this song. She is truly a remarkable talent.”

Grisafe, 34, performed the song on Showtime with Chicago-based singer-songwriter, Xoe Wise. “Key of Us” is the only duet on the new album—and the album is the soundtrack to the feature documentary film about women’s tackle football, Open Field, set to release in 2020.

The song is available as a single on all streaming platforms and online stores.

Grisafe said, “‘Key of Us’ is about falling for someone and the romanticism and intimacy of the act of singing together without caring so much about the ‘musical key’ you’re singing in.”

“I met Xoe Wise through [former] Chicago Force teammate Brandy Hatcher. She would come and play music at The Closet during my shifts. I always loved Xoe’s songwriting, voice, and exceptional kindness. We collaborated on a few shows over the years in Chicago and continued to connect through social media once I moved to Los Angeles.

“I was curious when I saw I had a missed call from her one morning in LA. When I called her back, Xoe asked if I might be interested in singing in a scene with her for this new Showtime series, Work In Progress. I (immediately) said, ‘Hell yes!’ [I] come to find out that the music editor for Work in Progress, Ethan Stoller, and I had met at a mutual friend’s showcase in L.A. a couple years back. Then, I discovered Abby McEnany was the co-creator and star and it just felt like all the stars were aligned.”

Grisafe added, “The whole process was truly amazing. Every person I interacted with on this project was so kind and professional. From the first email to the wrap, everyone treated each other with patience and respect. Having worked in entertainment for over a decade, I can tell you how rare and beautiful it is for a project and a message to take precedence over ego.”

Grisafe admitted when she saw the pilot of Work in Progress, she was filled with pride and joy. “I met Abby several years ago, while I was bartending at The Closet and she was performing at Second City,” Grisafe said. “She was always so kind and polite and just a wonderful person to be around. I couldn’t help but smile when she walked in the door.

“Seeing Abby and her talent on the screen, telling a story that hasn’t been told, diving into characters and stories that get little screen time, with Chicago as the backdrop, sent me over the moon. And, to be a part of a production that Lilly Wachowski and Tim Mason are a part of is absolutely incredible. The show is funny, dark, provocative [and] enlightening. It’s all of the things that I crave in great pieces of art and entertainment. I’m so honored to be a part of this show, even for just one scene, in one episode.”

Grisafe, born and raised in Southern California, moved to Chicago at 18. “I consider Chicago the place that raised the adult in me,” she said. “I came out as a lesbian in Chicago. My professional football career with the Chicago Force took place in Chicago. I started music career and co-founded my record label, Vanguard Muse, in Chicago.

“Boystown, The Closet, the Chicago Force and my music family were the support systems that got me through my 20s. Watching a series that takes place in similar social circles, in my second home, fills me [with] nostalgia and pride.”

On Dec. 15, Grisafe was in Los Angeles serving as the emcee for a private concert series that she co-founded called SunSeshLA (http://sunsesh.la). After that show, she went to a watch party for Work.

“When I got the call from Ethan Stoller that ‘Key of Us’ made the show, I was excited and incredibly grateful. Being able to perform my song with Xoe Wise and sing her song, ‘Careful’ with her, on such a sincerely groundbreaking series, is an honor,” Grisafe said.

Grisafe’s segment for Work was filmed in Uptown.

Grisafe said she gets back to Chicago about four times annually. When asked what she misses most about Chicago, she said it’s mainly the people.

“I miss my best friend, my Force family [and] my buddies from Boystown,” she said. “Chicago has so many amazing communities that I was lucky enough to be a part of, including the LGBTQ community. I miss that connection and the fantastic humans who make up Chicago.”

Grisafe’s music also is featured in the movie and soundtrack for Season of Love, a lightweight queer women’s holiday romantic comedy, which was just released by Tello Films.
Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2019


Berlin: Chicago Drag Superstars on New Year's Dida Ritz (Star off RuPaul's Drag Race), Margaret Y Ya (Mexico City, MX) (Star of La Mas Dragga), Tenderoni. Hosted by T Rex. DJ Greg Haus. No cover before 10 p.m. $15 After 10 p.m. Drag Show at 11 p.m. Countdown with the Queens at midnight. Party til 4 a.m. 954 W. Belmont Ave.

The Sofo Tap No cover, no attitude, all fun! Countdown to 2020 begins at 9 p.m. with video from VJ Thomas. $4.25 Tito's, $3 Miller Lite drafts. 4923 N. Clark St.

Meeting House Tavern: Big Gay New Year's Eve Party With Sofonda Booze. Best Dressed Contest for $50 2Bears gift card, plus a slew of other prizes. $7 big draft beers, $3 house shots, no cover. 5025 N. Clark St.

Jackhammer: Chicago's Fetish HQ NYE Party Music from DJ Jerry. $5 cover after 10, The Hole opens at 10. Champagne toast at midnight. 6406 N. Clark St.

Hamburger Mary's/Mary's Attic: Tea in A-ville Big Gay NYE 2020 Teaming up with the team with their popular Sunday Tea dance, music by DJ Marc 'Moose' Moder. Entertainment by Tasha Salad. Party on two floors. $5 advance tickets; $10 at the door. 5400 N. Clark St.

Touche: Black & Blue NYE Complimentary buffet at 9. Midnight champagne toast, then the blackout begins. Games, prizes, party favor and more. $10 tickets available at the bar. 6412 N. Clark St.

Lips Chicago: NYE Glitz & Glam Ball Dinner, dancing and live drag shows. Three-course prix fixe dinner. $45 early/$85 late seating. ABC-7 live broadcast of balloon drop at midnight. 2229 S. Michigan Ave., 312-815-2662. www.lipsusa.com

Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2020

Sidetrack: New Year's Day One-One-Onesie Party Doors open at 1 p.m. Fun and games all day in your PJs. Followed by monthly Men's Room Wednesday party with Sidetrack's own Dixie Lynn Cartwright. 3349 N. Halsted St.

Meeting House Tavern/The Sofo Tap Official waiting rooms for Dispensary 33. Both locations open at 9 a.m. Drink specials include $5 Sweetwater 420 Strain 313 IPAs. 4923 and 5025 N. Clark St.

BEST/WORST from page 14

surd noise, insane ramblings, and pointless visual stimuli. Why ask why? Just put on a mandatory bowler hat and enjoy/endure this exploration of absurdity. Sean Margaret Wagner

—Waiting For Godot, Victory Gardens Theater: Why do theater creators keep returning to this chestnut? To find new meaning or fresh perspectives? Director Dennis Zacek seemed content to rehash Samuel Beckett's bleak yet wryly witty landscape with a majority white male cast, which seems without relevance to Chicago today. Wagner

Extra Hits

—How I Learned To Drive, Raven Theatre: Paula Vogel's script has not lost its power since its late nineties run. Cody Estle's revival sharply delineates L'il Bit's (Eliza Stoughton) perception of her relationship with predatory Uncle Peck (Mark Ulrich) and the reality. And the actors never lose sight of the dark vein of humor running through piece.

—Head Over Heels, Kokandy Productions: So joyful, spirited, and inclusive, this production was half party, half journey of self exploration, and half showcase of stellar Chicago vocal and acting talent (I know that's too many halves). Directors Derek Van Barham and Elizabeth Swanson made this singing, dancing extravaganza look downright easy.

—Cambodian Rock Band, Victory Gardens: It isn't often that you find a play that, while being thoroughly entertaining, also opens your eyes to something important that you never knew about before. Lauren Yee's play is an amazing pastiche of rock concert, history play, mystery, and family drama that resonates with our modern era.

—Packing, About Face Theatre at Theater Wit: Playwright and actor Scott Bradley laid it all out for his autobiographical one-man show recounting his tumultuous life as an Iowa-born gay man. Horror mixed with humor as Bradley and director Chay Yew shared stories of disco, drugs, drag, bullying and seeking a sense of belonging.

—The First Deep Breath, Victory Gardens Theatre: The multigenerational saga recounting the sorrow brought upon a family by guilty secrets has lost none of its power in a new century, and Lee Edward Colston II's epic drama achieved all the dignity of classic tragedy.

Extra Misses

—August Rush, Paramount Theatre: The first world premiere musical staged at the award-winning Aurora theater was an artistic misfire. Too many deliberate blanks were left in not only the script for this screen-to-stage adaptation of the 2007 film, but also in director John Doyle's production that came off as a re-conceptualized off-Broadway revival.

—One for the Road, MPAACT: Steadily realistic and bound to solving social problems, One for the Road bites off more than it can chew. Director Runako Jahl's awkward staging did little to help the actors connect with their environment and the play's stakes. Static and effortful, the actors started at eleven and never let up.

—Proxy, Underscore Theatre: This musical from Alexander Sage Oyen, Austin Regan and Rachel Franco derives its plot from a real 2014 murder attempt, but doesn't cite its source material. Knowing there are real people, under the age of 18 who may not know they inspired this musical, makes it impossible to enjoy.
Sometimes, a spot’s success can depend on something as simple as location. **Francois Frankie** (222 W. Randolph St.; FrancoisFrankie.com), even though it’s in the Loop, is probably just a shade too many steps away from the theater district or from Michigan Avenue to draw tourists on weekends and holidays.

This is a shame, because this spot has one of the best brunches I’ve had this year. (Brunch is currently only on Saturdays, as the place is closed on Sundays.)

Besides the food, there are some intriguing touches—including the centerpiece carousel bar. Francois Frankie is only one of two restaurants in the country with such a conversation-starter; this one takes 66 minutes to make a complete revolution. (I joked that I wish it could go faster, but city ordinances ban that from happening.) Also, the bar features art with fictional character Francois Frankie, courtesy of Brittany Steiner.

Even the gender-neutral restrooms have a twist, with the letters “WC” (water closet, a British term) on them. Why use a British term when the restaurant has a French-American vibe? Who knows—but I quibble.

The food is, in a word, heavenly. The avocado toast (with poached eggs) was a bit light on the vegetable, but was delicious and the corned-beef hash (with fried eggs and hollandaise) could make Scrooge smile. My personal favorite was the challah French toast (with crispy crust), served with strawberries and whipped cream; I’ll definitely be getting that again soon.

Other items are enticing as well. A stack of large buttermilk pancakes was like the warmth of an old friend, while the oatmeal brûlée (with, yes, a crispy top) was sinfully good. Ditto for the pastrami Reuben.

However, other dishes warrant a return visit. For example, I didn’t try the roasted vegetable shakshuka (baked farm eggs, roasted local vegetables, gruyere cheese and tomato sofrito, with grilled sourdough), but I’m not likely to pass on it twice. There are also other offerings such as Belgian waffles, the steak sandwich a la Frankie and many more.

By the way, yes, the jazz music is pretty cool. Various acts are slated to perform each Saturday, so go there to hear some vibrant tunes—and have some amazing food. Francois Frankie is certainly worth walking a couple extra blocks in the Loop.

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

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**PERFORMER OF THE WEEK**

**::EDNA MASCARÁ::**

BEHIND THE NAME

“Edna D. Mascarā—because I’m a classy housewife from Edina, Minnesota, dontcha know, and Mascara is a monthly drag show in San Francisco that helped me find my voice.”

MY MUSE

“Maria Bamford—her comedic style is just so silly and off the wall, and she does amazing voices. I giggle every time I watch one of her standup specials. I even created an award-winning talent number based off of her.”

MOST PEOPLE DON’T KNOW THAT I ...

“...have a Master’s degree in Public Health and work in HIV prevention at the Center on Halsted.”

WHEN I NEED A PICK-ME-UP, I ...

“...love to drink the tears of sad, sad clowns ... or grab a coffee, whichever is easier.”

GO-TO NUMBER TO SLAY A CROWD

“I have a number that I call ‘Lost Dick.’ It’s a mix all about the favorite subject of many a man and woman: penises. Who doesn’t love a good penis joke, am I right?”

WHERE CAN WE CATCH YOU

“I am the host of Dragtavio Brunch at Octavio in Andersonville every Sunday, noon – 3.”

SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram: @EdnaDMascara

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100012997543483

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**Oatmeal brulee at Francois Frankie’s.**

Heather Talbert Photography

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**Feeling appreciative at the Holiday Customer Appreciation Party.**

Photos by Jed Dulanas

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**Feeling appreciative at the Holiday Customer Appreciation Party.**

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Rapinoe named SI Sportswoman of the Year
Sports Illustrated magazine has named lesbian soccer player Megan Rapinoe as its Sportswoman of the Year.
On July 7 in Lyon, France, the United States claimed a fourth Women’s World Cup triumph with a 2-0 victory over European champions Netherlands in the final. Rapinoe and Rose Lavelle scored goals for the U.S. team.
However, Rapinoe has been known for being an advocate as well as an athlete. “I’m not going to the f**king White House,” she said earlier this year when asked about the possibility of visiting President Trump. Also, Rapinoe and her teammates sued the U.S. Soccer Federation regarding the pay gap between women’s and men’s squads. She also has shown solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, taking a knee while the national anthem was played.
Rapinoe also recently accepted Glamour’s Woman of the Year award.

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CONDO FOR SALE

REAL ESTATE

INSURANCE
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BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Youth Empowerment Performance Project (YEPP) held its second annual Rise Up: A Celebration of Resilience recently at Chicago Theater Works.

YEPP Board Member and Co-Chair La Tony welcomed the more than 200 people in attendance and called attention to the upcoming Nov. 20 Transgender Day of Remembrance and Resilience. They also recognized Youth Homelessness Awareness month and made note of the high percentage of LGBTQ youth who are experiencing homelessness.

A video showcasing the Forging From Fire performance from YEPP’s 2017 theater production was played ahead of remarks by YEPP member Angel Nordstrom.

YEPP member Sticky Bunz did her signature drag performance while YEPP leader Antonio Gray told his story in spoken word and noted that 40 percent of LGBTQ youth experience homelessness and are twice as likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual/cisgender peers.

Other speakers included YEPP Youth Programs Coordinator Black Pruitt and YEPP Board Member and Treasurer Joy Messinger. Nordstrom also invited attendees to bring offerings to the TDOR remembrance table that named and honored the 25 known transgender people who had died in the United States at that point this year—Dana Martin (who died at 31), Ellie Marie Washtock (38), Jazzaline Ware, Ashanti Carmon (27), Claire Legato (21), Muhlaysia Booker (23), Michelle ‘Tamika’ Washington (40), Paris Cameron (20), Chynal Lindsey (26), Johana ‘Jo’ Medina Leon (25), Chanel Scurlock (23), Brooklyn Lindsey (32), Denali Berries Stuckey (29), Tracy Single (22), Bubba Walker (55), Kiki Fantroy (21), Pebbles LaDime Doe (24), Jordan Cofer (22), Bailey Reeves (17), Bee Love Slater (23), Ja’Leyah Jamago Jamar Berryman, Elisha Chanel Stanley (46), Itali Marlowe (29), Zoe Spears (23) and Brianna ‘BB’ Hill (30).

The night also featured DJ Stephen Raskauskas, food courtesy of Premiere Catering and Events of Chicago’s Chef Scott Lloyd, a raffle, photo booth and cash bar.

YEPP is a safe space in Chicago for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness to heal from trauma through artistic expression, exploration, storytelling and performance. See https://www.we-sayyep.com/ for more information.
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