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Wedding Guide

FIFTH EDITION
Winter/Spring 2016



A SURPRISE WEDDING

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What's hot and what's not: Wedding trends for 2016

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Wow, with each installment of this guide (this being the fifth), we've seen a drastic shift in the marriage equality movement. In the first installment, same-sex marriage had been passed in Illinois, but was not yet the law of the state. By issue number two, that had changed and Illinoisans we're getting married-married all over the state (even in the downstate counties). The third issue saw this change in Illinois as another ripple in the growing wave of change sweeping the nation. How fitting, then, that in this fifth issue, marriage has just become—simply—marriage. No more "same-sex marriage." No more state-to-state uncertainty. No more backseat. Marriage equality is the law of the land!

But even though our covenants are now given equal legal standing, the LGBT clientele still boasts a vibrant, unique attitude and it's important that those businesses you employ in planning your special day get that. Here's hoping this guide helps.

Congratulations!

—*Kirk Williamson, editor*

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FIFTH EDITION Winter/Spring 2016

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COVER PHOTO

Philip Maziarz (left) and Kevin Romero.

*Photo by
Tres Jolie Photo
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We asked readers to send in photos of their weddings to share with the community. What we received was a collection of beautiful stories of love and commitment. All photos courtesy of subjects except where otherwise indicated.



Shayna X Kramer and Larissa Sims (now **Shayna X Sims** [in white] and **Larissa X Sims** [in black]) met at Berlin more than 15 years ago, and they recently held a fabulous wedding for family and friends.

"Larissa and I fought for marriage equality for Illinois," Shayna said. "We never thought we would get married, but certainly thought everyone should! And then, I proposed to her at the finish line of the Tough Mudder race. After 15 years together, we loved our family and friends coming together to celebrate. It was the first time our families met only because everyone lives in different states. It was love at first sight with our families."

"Larissa's dad passed away, but we are happy to have his partner, Scottie, in our life. He is truly part of our lives. As he walked Larissa down the aisle, he wore a beautiful picture of Marvin (Larissa's dad) by his heart. Our gay married friends told us they cried more at our wedding than their own."

The wedding was a mix of nightclub, wedding traditions and craziness, including the artsy hosts passing tissues in the middle of the ceremony. "It was absolutely unforgettable," Shayna said.

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FRANKLY SPEAKING ...

What's hot and what's not: Wedding trends for 2016

BY FRANK J. ANDONOPLAS, MBC

As a wedding consultant, every wedding that I design and coordinate is totally inspired by that couple's style, so the details are completely unique to each wedding.

Here are the latest trends that I see in weddings for this year. Remember that these are trends, not the rules. So the first thing I do with every couple is ask a lot of questions about their style, likes and—even more importantly—dislikes. I strongly feel your wedding should reflect your style. That's where I come in and make it unique to both of you, "marrying" your style to what is trending. For me, it is all about creating a unique event experience for the couple and their family and friends.

—**Food:** I'm seeing a return to a sit-down plated meal. This can be a lavish 12-course tasting menu that is also complete with wine pairings to a Downton Abbey-inspired European-style meal complete with French service.

For those on a budget and who don't want to spend a lot of their reception time eating, keep it simple with a salad or appetizer course (I love doing a duet of soup and salad at the same time) and then an entree course followed by wedding cake for dessert. This way, you have the seated meal experience with minimal cost. Keep in mind that when doing a lavish dinner, keep your cocktail hour food to just passed hors d'oeuvres so that they can enjoy the meal they are not expecting.

—**Wedding cake:** Couples are opting for smaller cakes for the traditional cake cut. Fun desserts are on trend. From make-your-own doughnuts to pie bars, dessert, in itself, is an event of the evening. Coffee stations, complete with baristas, are still very popular.

—**Libations:** Signature cocktails are still the rage. Instead of the usual martini or Manhattan, I love to have my clients meet with a mixologist and create cocktails all their own. Also, a dedicated bar for tasting of different varieties of

scotch, sparkling wines or craft beers can be fun and great source of conversation.

—**Floral:** You can spend a little, or you can spend a lot. I'm finding that in my centerpieces are becoming more unique. Instead of just one large one, multiple smaller arrangements can make real statements on the tables.

—**Lighting:** Pin-spotting tables, textured dance floors, walls, ceilings and perimeter LED lighting (that can change color—great for dancing) are all great options. Video mapping—where changing 3D images can light a wedding cake, dance floor or a whole building—is the new trend.

—**Seating for guests:** If you're doing a sit-down meal, you must have seating for everyone. But think outside the box. Using rented couches, ottomans and banquettes make it much more interesting than just chairs. Also, think beyond the round banquet table: Rectangles, squares and even serpentine shapes can mix up things.

—**Entertainment:** In addition to your orchestra or DJ, think of other things to keep the guests entertained. Photo ops, live oil paintings of the weddings, tarot card readers and butt (yes, as in your rear end) sketch and Etch-a-Sketch portrait artists can add that extra pizzazz to your reception.

—**Invitations and stationery:** Much more simple designs are being used. Layered papers are still popular but are very fussy, with ribbons and bows not being used much anymore. Use of your custom wedding brand still adorns save-the-date cards, invitations, programs and menus.

—**Late-night fun:** Whether it be sweet or savory, it's great to surprise guests with something being passed on the dance floor. Root-beer floats, milkshakes or miniature gyros as well as traditional Chicago sliders, hot dogs or pizza—guests love all of these. You can also do this where they are getting the items as they are exiting, as a final good night. A food truck

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Philip Maziarz (left) and Kevin Romero.

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SHHH, IT'S A SURPRISE WEDDING

BY ROSS FORMAN

When Kevin Romero and Philip Maziarz got engaged, it wasn't very exciting or even a truly memorable moment.

"Illinois had just legalized gay marriage before Christmas 2013 and both of our families were wondering when we would make it official," Romero said. "Around that time, while sitting at dinner, we decided that getting married made sense.

"Then after Christmas, we went to Puerto Vallarta with friends and we ended up getting engaged while sitting on a couch next to each other."

Maziarz was browsing wedding venues and their friends asked if they were engaged. They looked at each other and said, "No"—because neither had proposed.

So right then and there Maziarz asked Romero if he wanted to get married.

Romero replied, "Sure."

"It's not a very exciting story," Romero admitted.

But their wedding, wow, it was an amazing story, an unbelievable tale, one worth Hollywood writers.

"We had lots of varied plans [for a wedding]—some were extravagant destination weddings, such as Puerto Rico, Yellowstone or Napa; some were super practical, [such as just] getting

married at the courthouse when the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage; and some were crazy, [like being a part of a] bulk gay wedding, married by Art Smith on the [TV] show *Top Chef*," Romero said. "The plans kept changing because, in many ways, we already felt like we were married—we had a condo, cars, and dogs together.

"We talked about lots of different scenarios, but the overarching theme was that Philip wanted a small wedding and I wanted something over-the-top."

Romero won—and, boy, did he go over-the-top.

He conceived, planned and executed a surprise wedding.

Yep, on Dec. 19, the two were married at Firehouse Chicago, with 58 guests attending, including family from London, Long Island, Florida, Seattle, Denver, Phoenix, and Santa Fe; plus friends from Miami, New York City, Madison, Scottsdale and, of course, Chicago.

Maziarz didn't know that morning that he'd be married that evening.

Romero, 34, works as a director of healthcare information technology at NorthShore University HealthSystems. He also boasts the glamorous title of "Miss Andersonville 2015" and is a cast member with pH Comedy Theater. So Romero told Maziarz that he was hosting the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce's

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Maziarz believed he was being “forced” to attend.

“I had also planned our going-away party on Facebook, so he thought that was occurring later that evening,” Romero said. (The two are moving to New York City this winter for two years.)

“The reality was, we were getting married, having dinner, and then having a combined wedding reception/going-away party.”

Romero opted for Vincent since that is Maziarz’ favorite restaurant. Then he had to determine the venue for the ceremony and the reception, and he chose the Firehouse Chicago in Andersonville.

Then it was a lot of lies—for months—by Romero, he admitted with a smile.

“I misled Philip about a few things,” Romero said. “If people know me, they know that I am a talker and I love to share, so this was perhaps

the biggest challenge of my life.

“My [then]-soon-to-be sister-in-law helped out a ton with the wedding planning. She helped pick out photographers and decorations and vendors, and she did it all from London. So I would speak with her nearly every day to and from work to talk about what needed to be accomplished and by when. One benefit of Philip traveling for work was that I could work on components of the wedding while he was away.”

There certainly were challenges along the way, Romero admitted. Such as, who knew what.

“The biggest internal challenge I had was that I couldn’t share accomplishments with Philip,” Romero said. “I had to remind myself that keeping the secret would be worth the outcome.”

And yes, the secret was nearly leaked several times, such as the time their mailman tried to deliver a box which had their seating assignment cards, even though it was addressed to a friend down the street.

“He was being helpful in that the box had my name on it and he was confused that it had a different address,” Romero said. “The funny thing about [that delivery issue] was that Philip told me that our friend must have bought me a Christmas present and that the mailman was trying to deliver the package to us.”

Their surprise-wedding even survived Facebook. Romero had to ask out-of-towners to not share their travel plans on social media. More so, “everyone helped out by throwing Philip off,” Romero said.

So, why do it?

Why not, Romero replied.

“After purchasing our condo, Philip and I had to pick out tile, paint colors, and cabinet styles. I saw how much Philip would put pressure on himself to make the best choice for those things,” Romero said. “Keeping that in mind, I thought preparing for a regular wedding would take a lot out of Philip to get all of the pieces just right. So when I solidified the plan with his sister, we thought that in many ways, this would take a huge burden off of his shoulders.”

When Maziarz arrived at what he thought was a holiday party, Romero, who had arrived earlier and already changed into his wedding attire, took Maziarz’ hand, told him how much



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SHARING THEIR WORLD

**Binational gay couple
talk health scare,
sharing at OUTspoken!**

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Tyler Greene and Ziwu Zhou's love story has had many twists and turns, and it all started on a snowy, cold January night in 2012.

Greene, who was house sitting for a friend, decided to check out his OK Cupid account and he happened to see Zhou's profile. Greene messaged Zhou, who had just left Jackhammer and was heading home, and a short time later Zhou had taken Greene up on his offer to come over and meet him.

"That night he read to me and told me all this personal information about himself and we made out a little bit, but didn't take it any further," said Zhou. "I was texting a friend on the way home the next day and told them I met someone, and for me that's unusual since it takes me longer than one sort-of date to realize if this is the right person."

"We were dating for a month and on Valentine's Day we went to Hopleaf, and after that we were outside of Hamburger Mary's and that's when I told him that I loved him," said Greene. "Ziwu said it back to me but he doesn't remember saying it that night. I remember that night being very romantic. I thought he was someone who was very different from me and could test me in many different ways."

Before moving to Chicago to attend graduate school at the School of the Art Institute of

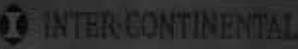
Chicago (MFA in Visual Communication), Zhou lived in China. He was born in a small town in the Hubei Province and moved a couple of times within the province with his parents before attending Tsinghua University where he received a BA in Information Arts and Design. Zhou now works as an interactive graphic design engineer at HP Software.

"I came out after grad school to my best friend Jinyoung and a year later I met Tyler," said Zhou. "I decided that if I was in a relationship with someone important then I would tell my parents and get their blessing. Tyler and I had been dating for about a year so I decided that I was going to come out to my parents during my annual visit for the Chinese New Year. I came out to my mom the night before I returned to the states while we were staying on the 28th floor of a hotel in Beijing. She told me that if it weren't for her parents, she would jump out of the hotel room window. I told her that if she jumped, I would jump too. She couldn't believe it and thought it was a choice. We didn't say anything to my dad at the time but my mom told my dad three days after I left China. I told my mom that I was dating Tyler but she didn't want to hear anything about my relationship and told me to break up with him. China is very different because there isn't much infrastructure for families of LGBT people. My mom finally told her parents and two brothers



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WEDDINGS WITHOUT RULES

BY HEATHER VICKERY



Many people have preconceived notions about what must be done for a wedding or what must *never* be done for a wedding. When a couple walks into my office, the very first thing I tell them is that, as a wedding planner, I only have one rule—there are no rules. There are no rules! Let's say it again, it is your wedding and there are no rules!

Let's face it: we are talking about gay weddings. We are creating new traditions all the time. We are writing our own rules (and we can change them if we want to!). There is no nothing that requires you to fall prey to heteronormative wedding traditions. If there are some traditions you like, keep them, but they don't govern the wedding planning process.

This is not your grandmother's wedding and you can make it anything you want. It can be as big or as small as you want it to be. You can invite everyone you've ever met or you can invite only those people you hold most dear. You can have lawn games before the ceremony and acrobats performing during dinner. You can have a mixologist creating custom cocktails before the ceremony or a glass blowing lesson during the cocktail hour. The possibilities are simply endless. That is the best part about planning such a special occasion: taking the time to curate the event and make it as special as you are as a couple.

If you have little birds chirping in your ear, telling you, "This must be done," let me be the first to tell you not to listen. Here's list of things that you absolutely have complete control over. Don't let anyone tell you differently:

- The date and time.
- Location.
- The number of people invited.
- How grand (or simple) your decor is.

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- Who you have involved in your wedding ceremony and to what extent.

- Who walks down an aisle and with whom.

- What type of event you will have. There are so many options: breakfast; brunch; lunch; cocktail and hors d'oeuvres; fancy dinner or a late night dessert reception. Indoors, outdoors, on the beach or inside a museum—be creative and think outside the box!

- The style of bar: A full open bar; just specialty cocktails or something else.

- What kind of entertainment you have, if any.

- Dancing or no dancing.

This list should get you started. Go forth and plan the wedding that makes you giddy with excitement. Celebrate a life well loved with those that mean the most to you and always remember this is your celebration. It should represent you as a couple. It should look and feel authentic to your guests. There are no rules.

Heather Vickery is the owner and event director of Greatest Expectations Special Events & Weddings, Inc. Contact her at heather@greatestexpectations.com



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SHARING

from page 16

and they were really supportive of me being gay and that helped my mom a lot."

Shortly after his visit to Beijing, Zhou's doctors found a tumor in his spinal cord that required immediate surgery. Zhou had chronic shoulder and back pain for years. A chiropractor recommended that he get an X-ray since nothing she did was helping to alleviate his pain. The X-ray didn't show any irregularities, but his chiropractor wasn't convinced and got him an appointment to get an MRI. That's when the doctors found the mass in his spinal cord.

It took Zhou three months to recover and, while he was in the hospital, Greene stayed with him every night. Zhou's parents were still coming to terms with his being gay, so he had to hide the fact that he was in the hospital recovering from surgery; they would ask who was taking care of him and he couldn't say it was his boyfriend. Earlier this year, Zhou finally told his family about the surgery and revealed that he'd been living with Greene all along. Greene explained that Zhou's parents have accepted him into their lives and thanked him for being there for their son. Now when Zhou Skypes his parents, Greene is right by his side.

"Ziwu's grandma, who is almost 90 and has been a part of nearly every social strata within China, was the one who was the most accepting," said Greene. "She really wants me to visit China."

Greene—who is the Assistant House Manager for Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me, Events Coordinator for all of WBEZ's live events and Producer for The Moth-Chicago StorySLAM—grew up in the small town of Galesburg, Michigan. He graduated from Kalamazoo College with a BA in Theatre Arts-Media Studies. While attending college, Greene did an internship in New York City and worked as a production assistant on an off-Broadway play directed by Terry Kinney (one of the original founders of Steppenwolf Theatre). He also spent a year in the study abroad program at University of London, Goldsmiths College.

After graduating from college, Greene spent a year teaching English in South Korea and,

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Grooms Lynn Burnside Smith II (the taller of the two) and Michael Durnil, Ph.D., eloped to New York City last Thanksgiving and had a private ceremony in Central Park on the Bethesda Terrace Arcade.

Photos by Sascha Reinking



Chef Shiane Wilcoxon (left, in below photo) and nurse Brandi Stephenson became engaged September 21, 2015.

Shiane is a private chef from Aurora and the founder of the non-profit Team 101 Chicago, which serves, mentors and hosts events for LGBT youth.

Brandi is a nurse from St. Louis specializing in long-term care with elderly and rehab patients.

The couple will wed Sunday, September 25, 2016, at Center on Halsted and will make their home in Bensenville, Ill.

Photos by Sascha Reinking



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he loved him and that he couldn't imagine life without him. Romero then got down on one knee and asked if Maziarz would marry him ... and if he would marry him in 15 minutes.

With tears in his eyes, Maziarz agreed.

Maziarz was then sent to a dressing room to change, as Romero had already even planned his change-of-clothes for the wedding.

Ultimately, Maziarz' parents walked him down the aisle while a guitarist and violinist played Adele's *When We Were Young*.

Ryan Ruskin and Michael Andrews, who introduced Romero and Maziarz back in 2008, officiated the ceremony.

"Rather than doing traditional readings, I had friends perform funny and emotional/poignant lines from our favorite movies, *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *The Birdcage*," Romero said. "The ceremony was designed to express our love for one another, and to also show that weddings can be fun, emotional and surprising. While weddings are intended to celebrate the couple, weddings are also a celebration of families and of friendships. Having people witness the re-proposal, participate and witness the ceremony, and celebrate with us throughout the evening was an honor."

And yes, Maziarz was truly surprised.

"Kevin's desire to create the wedding I always wanted was a completely selfless act of love," Maziarz said. "He made me feel unconditional love, made me cry, made me laugh, and made me feel the way I felt when I knew he was the one."

"There were things that came up over the week [leading up to the wedding] that I thought were strange, but none of them together would have led to me to believe I was going to get married that day. I was surprised that one of Kevin's best friend's from New York City was coming into town, but it was not uncommon for him and his husband to visit to see old friends. I also thought it was strange that some of my friends didn't want to go out to dinner with us after our friend's master's program graduation the night before. They had good reasons why they couldn't go, but they are usually the ones that want to go out."

Maziarz said he wouldn't have changed a thing.

"I must have said 'This is crazy' and 'You're crazy' a thousand times the night of our wedding. It was crazy because I never imagined so many people would go out of their way to make Kevin and me so happy. I thought Kevin was crazy because he made so many of my dreams come true and made me so happy to have found the person that I want to spend the rest of my life. I always knew Kevin was the one and the events of that night showed all the most important people in our lives the same."

Maziarz is now responsible for their honeymoon, the two agreed—and there's pretty much no chance Romero will know anything about it beforehand. "I feel that I need to keep up with the theme and make the location and events of our honeymoon a surprise," Maziarz said.

And do you plan to get even with Kevin?

"I don't think I could ever top this," said Maziarz, 35, who is a managing director with Protiviti. "There are only a few events in our lives that are truly special, so I'm limited in my options ... but who knows ... I might be able to get back at him one day."



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LGBT

Wedding Guide

SNAPSHOTS OF LOVE



The Blossom Boys, Steve English (left in photo to the left) and Ryan Steinbach, tied the knot recently at This Wayside Chapel in Palos Park.

Photos by Maplewood Photography



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FRANKLY

from page 10

parked outside as guests leave is another great way of ending the night.

I also found providing some sort of a breakfast item is a big hit. A cereal bar—as guests wait for the valet to get their cars—is an unexpected surprise.

Last word of advice: Don't be pressured by trends. Your wedding should be what you want it to be, and what you can afford. From simple to spectacular, it's your day—and it's your way. Long may you love!

Frank J Andonoplas has designed social and corporate events all over the country since 1992. Frank is an active member of the Association of Bridal Consultants and is one of only 73 Master Wedding Consultants worldwide. Frank was named Event planner of the year in 2012. His expertise has been featured in wedding magazines on as well as local television segments in addition to the Early Show, and 20/20. For more information www.frankeventdesign.com

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SHARING

from page 21



Greene (left) surprises Zhou with an on-stage proposal at Sidetrack.

Photo from the *OUTspoken LGBTQ Stories* Facebook page

since he already knew people in Chicago, he decided to move here when that assignment was finished. His first job was as About Face Theatre's social media coordinator before moving on to the Steppenwolf Theatre as a call center representative.

With Greene's experience in the storytelling realm, it was only natural for him to eventually tell his own story. When he was asked to participate in Sidetrack's storytelling series *OUTspoken!* he decided to recount Zhou's surgery story and how that brought them even closer together. Right after Greene finished his story, Zhou proposed to him in front of everyone and Greene immediately said yes.

"It was the right moment because he was telling my surgery story to an audience," said Zhou. "While Tyler was telling the story, I was reliving that experience and got so emotional and was shaking. At the last moment it occurred to me that I had to propose right then, because there wasn't going to be a better moment than that moment. We'd already planned on getting married but no one had officially proposed. Tyler told me that if anyone was going to propose it would have to be me because he'd be too nervous to do it."

"Never in a bazillion years did I ever imagine that he would propose that night," said Greene.

The couple were married on Oct. 11 at Mayne Stage in Rogers Park where Greene produces many of WBEZ's live events.

The couple is looking forward to sharing their special day with family and friends although Zhou's family won't be able to attend the ceremony. Both Greene and Zhou think it's kismet that their upcoming wedding is intertwined with the *OUTspoken!* storytelling series.

"There's something about *OUTspoken!* which has been captured by many people's sentiments. The feeling is when you walk in the room you're comfortable right away," said Greene. "Art [Johnston], David [Fink] and Kim [Hunt] and the Midwestern way that they start the show makes everyone feel welcome. Everyone leans forward and listens to the storytellers in a way that I don't see in other venues. You can feel that everyone is leaning forward while you are on stage. I was very nervous. I've heard hundreds and hundreds of stories because of *The Moth*. What I love is when people are vulnerable, honest and raw as well as prepared and when I listen back to my performance that's what I heard."

Greene's story was also featured on Kevin Allison's *RISK!* podcast under the title "Like Lovers Do."

"I was getting tweets from people who've listened to my story thanking me for sharing part of my life," said Greene. "Because of Kevin's popularity it's in the top ten of the storytelling section on iTunes. Of course everyone was coming to hear Margaret Cho but they stayed and listened to my story afterward."

To listen to Greene's *OUTspoken!* story, visit www.risk-show.com/podcast/meant-for-each-other and go to the 52:45 mark.

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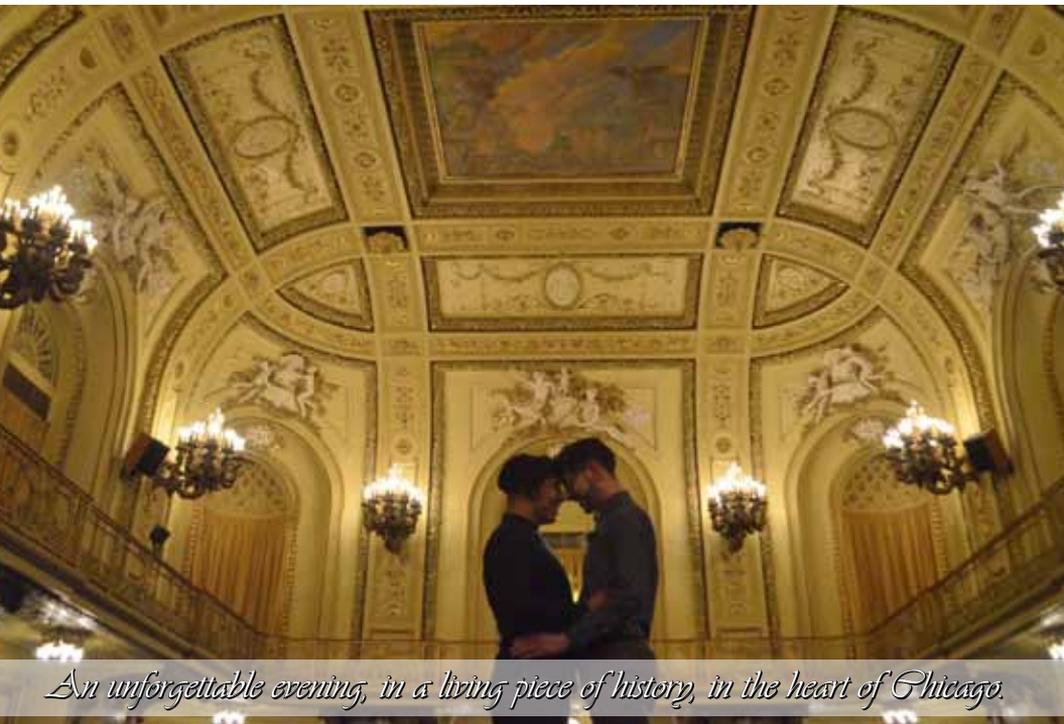
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