

RIGHT ON

Chicago marks 30 years since passage of the Human Rights Ordinance

RADIO DAYS
 WBEZ's Tony Sarabia signs off.
 Photo by Jason Marck



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LOVE AND HATE
 WCT unveils its best and worst films of the year.
 STX Entertainment



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WINDY CITY TIMES ARTS & THEATER WEEKLY



'LA RUTA'
 PLAYWRIGHT ISAAC GOMEZ GIVES VOICE TO JUAREZ'S MURDERED WOMEN
 PAGE 16

EXPANDED ARTS COVERAGE EVERY WEEK

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In a fight that started in the early 1970s and ended 30 years ago this month, Chicagoans fought against bigotry and ignorance inside and outside of City Hall to eventually pass a law covering anti-gay bias. These Windy City Times covers from July 1986 illustrate the big push the LGBT community made in the summer of 1986 to finally get aldermen and alderwomen on the record—so they could be held accountable. The bill lost that summer, but after two more years of lobbying behind the scenes and in front of the cameras, the HRO finally passed under Mayor Eugene Sawyer. See inside for details on the anniversary. Coverage begins on page 6.

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A SPECIAL TEN-PART SERIES FROM AUTHOR MARK ZUBRO
 SEE PAGE 22





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WINDY CITY TIMES

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PHILLY STAKE

The City of Brotherly Love offers a whole lot more than historical items.
Photo of Patti LaBelle mural by Andrew Davis

RAGE LEFT



WCT reviews concerts by Bev Rage and the Drinks, John Grant, and Two Medicine.
Photo of Bev Rage by Vern Hester

FIVE ALIVE

Five Worth Finding offers last-minute holiday-gift suggestions.

THAT'S SHOW BIZ

Find out the latest about Christian Bale, Cher and Miley Cyrus.

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The top LGBT news stories of 2018

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

Openly gay Republican Richard Grenell was having trouble getting confirmed ambassador to Germany last year; this year, his name was floated as a possible choice for White House chief of staff. In 2017, the LGBT community shuddered as President Trump appointed Jeff Sessions as U.S. attorney general. This year, Trump fired him, but the community still had reason to shudder.

Add to these the long-dreaded retirement of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, the sudden fall and hospitalization of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the strained and studied avoidance by Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in answering questions about legal protections for LGBT people. Then consider the Trump administration's relentless pursuit of policies to exclude transgender people—from the military, from the Affordable Care Act, and from protections in education and medical care. It was a rough year for the community.

It was a rough year for the nation, too. Several of President Trump's closest advisors were convicted of lying to Congress and the FBI during investigations of whether the Trump campaign may have actively worked with Russian operatives to win Trump's election in 2016. The investigation continues and seems to be drawing a tighter and tighter circle around the president himself. One of those convicted advisors, Trump's personal attorney Michael Cohen, fingered the president as having directed him to violate federal campaign finance laws to cover up Trump's extramarital affairs during the last weeks of the 2016 election. Trump's erratic foreign policy schemes have caused the U.S.'s image and role in global affairs to plummet, and his outspoken affection for Russia President Vladimir Putin, North Korea leader Kim Jong Un, Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and other authoritarian figures has both baffled and worried many people. Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman said Trump has formed a "new axis of evil" with Russia and Saudi Arabia in thwarting efforts to address global warming.

So, 2018 has not been the U.S.'s "finest hour" or the LGBT community's "golden age." It's hard to believe that, just three years ago, the LGBT community could make a good argument for a golden age. The federal Defense of Marriage Act was gone; same-sex couples could marry in all 50 states; LGBT people could serve in the military; and the administration of then President Barack Obama made it clear, through its actions and words, that it would fight for equal protection and opportunity for LGBT people.

Not all that has changed, and there have been some moments that, if not golden, were bright and shiny. Thanks to an enormous amount of work by legal and political activists, the community can arguably boast that it held its ground.

Here are the 10 stories that illustrate some of

the LGBT community's biggest gains and pains from 2018:

1. Democrats won back the U.S. House: It is hard to overstate the importance of having Democrats win enough seats Nov. 6 become the majority party in the House starting Jan. 3.

First, a Democratic majority in the House stops attempts by anti-LGBT Republicans to pass anti-LGBT legislation. Among other things, they tried to ban medical transition treatment for transgender service members with gender dysphoria, restrict help for LGBT people under the Affordable Care Act, and allow religious-oriented adoption services to discriminate against same-sex couples. Having a Democratic-controlled House will mean that such legislation is unlikely to see any movement, and it means pro-LGBT legislation has a chance. It also means that there is now at least a fighting chance that the House will provide a check on President Trump's erratic, unconstitutional and, many suspect, illegal activities as the nation's leader.

2. Justice Anthony Kennedy retired: Kennedy did not have the best LGBT voting record on the U.S. Supreme Court (that honor goes to Ruth Bader Ginsburg), but he provided the crucial fifth vote for and wrote eloquently the most historic and significant decisions in support of equal rights for LGBT people in the past two decades. Think *Romer* (anti-gay initiatives), *Lawrence* (sodomy bans), *Windsor* (DOMA) and *Obergefell* (marriage). He was 82 and he retired. That not only meant the loss of Kennedy, it meant turning his seat over to an ultraconservative replacement and tipping the balance decidedly away from the trend of progressive attitudes toward LGBT people as equal citizens.

Just weeks after that ultraconservative took his seat, 85-year-old Ginsburg fell and was hospitalized, alarming progressives everywhere that President Trump might get to name a third right-wing conservative to the court. Ginsburg's back at work and attended the premiere December 12 of a new feature film about her work to establish equal protection for women, *On the Basis of Sex*.

3. Kavanaugh confirmed to Supreme Court: There were plenty of reasons for the LGBT community to be skeptical of federal Judge Brett Kavanaugh going into his confirmation hearings. During the hearings, things only got worse. Set aside (if it's possible) the allegations from three women that, as a student, Kavanaugh sexually assaulted them. He studiously evaded questions about whether he would discriminate against someone because they were gay and said he couldn't remember "specifics" about his involvement in anti-LGBT actions he took in the administration of President George W. Bush. The Human Rights Campaign and others assessed Kavanaugh as a "direct threat to the constitutional rights" of LGBT Americans. The Republican-controlled Senate confirmed him in October by a vote of 50 to 48.

4. Historic electoral victories for LGBT can-



U.S. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema.
Photo by Carrie Maxwell

didates: It wasn't just the record number of openly LGBT candidates that were elected Nov. 6 that impressed, it was the extraordinary number of "firsts": The first openly bisexual member and second openly LGBT member of the U.S. Senate (Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona), the first openly gay man to be elected governor (Jared Polis of Colorado), and the first openly LGBT members of Congress from Minnesota (Angie Craig), New Hampshire (Chris Pappas) and Kansas (Sharice Davids). By the time the votes in most of the states were counted, the U.S. House and Senate boasted their largest number ever of openly LGBT members (two in the Senate and eight in the House). The eight victories in the House represented 20 percent of the 40 seats the Democrats won to secure the majority control in that chamber.

5. Republicans keep control of the Senate: The Republican Party's long game of taking over state legislatures so it could gerrymander some security for its members at the Congressional level continued to pay off dividends this year. There are a lot of problems with that for the LGBT community.

Number one among those problems is that the Republican-controlled Senate has been eager to rubber stamp Republican President Trump's ultraconservative nominees to the Supreme Court. Number two is that the Republican-controlled Senate has showed no stomach for providing a check on President Trump's un-presidential activities. Republican leaders appear willing to let Trump shut down the government to fund a wall along the Mexican border, cozy up to the nation's long-standing global adversaries and lie repeatedly to the public.

6. Administration steps up attacks on transgender people: One of President Trump's campaign promises, repeated on several occasions, was to "protect" the LGBT community. Apparently, he meant that in the same way he meant Mexico was going to pay for his border wall.

Instead of protecting LGBT people, the Trump administration has taken every opportunity to

oppose protections for LGBT people and has created its own opportunities to injure transgender people. Trump has continued to push for banning transgender people from the military, declared that federal law prohibiting discrimination based on "sex" in employment does not prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, and even banned the use of the word "transgender" in budget documents from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It also announced it would no longer interpret the Affordable Care Act to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. And the beat goes on.

7. Supreme Court dodges *Masterpiece* issue: The key conflict between LGBT people and businesses which would like to refuse them service is a growing concern, and many thought it would be settled last June when the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado*. It wasn't. The high court dodged the central issue of the case: Can a vendor claim a religious belief in order to circumvent a law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations?

In a seven-to-two decision, the majority ruled only that the record of this particular dispute reflected there had been significant hostility shown by the Colorado Commission on Human Rights for a baker's religious views against marriage for same-sex couples. The baker was absolved of his original human rights law violation and went home to discriminate another day. But what impressed many LGBT legal activists was the statement in the decision, written by Kennedy, that said, "Our society has come to the recognition that gay persons and gay couples cannot be treated as social outcasts or as inferior in dignity and worth. For that reason, the laws and the Constitution can, and in some instances must, protect them in the exercise of their civil rights. The exercise of their freedom on terms equal to others must be given great weight and respect by the courts." It was an important sentiment to hear from the court and, in addition to Kennedy and the court's more progressive justices, Chief Justice John Roberts and conservative Justices Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch signed on.

8. Massachusetts votes to keep trans protections: The LGBT community doesn't often win ballot battles, and this year saw the first ever statewide ballot measure specific to protections for transgender people. Anti-LGBT activists tried in three states this year to put such a measure on the ballot but only in Massachusetts did they succeed in forcing a vote. The measure, known as Question 3, asked voters whether they wanted to keep a two-year-old law that requires all places of public accommodation (restrooms, hotels, restaurants, etc.) to provide access to people "consistent with the person's gender identity." Voters said "yes" 68 percent to 32 percent.

9. Ric Grenell confirmed as ambassador to Germany: Given the Trump administration's actions against the LGBT community, it was probably a surprise to some that the president nominated an openly gay person to become ambassador to one of the U.S.'s largest allies, Germany. But Grenell supported Trump during the primaries and they share a fondness for frequent caustic Twitter posts. After stalling for seven



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NEWS

Chicago Rights Ordinance passes 28-17

by Tracy Baim

Fifteen years after a gay rights ordinance was first introduced in Chicago's City Council, a newer, more comprehensive version was passed 28-17 Dec. 21 amid loud cheers from supporters.

The comprehensive Human Rights Ordinance, which outlaws discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, will protect not only gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but also bans discrimination against people based on disability, age, gender, and several other categories.

The City Council chambers were filled with great anticipation the morning of the historic vote. Many of the activists who time and again have showed up for Council hearings were there again—this time with a feeling of excitement, believing that "this time was it."

However, it was also clear that the vote could go either way. During the aldermanic debate, as each crucial alderman stood and voiced support, the crowd cheered. The aldermen getting the loudest response were those who were strongest in their opposition in past months: Ald. Marlene Carter, Ald. Bernie Stone, and Ald. Keith Caldwell. Also a surprise 'yes' vote: Ald. Sheneather Butler.

Another crucial vote change was Ald. Eugene Schuler, who was the subject of extensive constituent lobbying. [In fact, the vote could have been 29-17—Ald. Mell was in Hong Kong—he voted 'yes' in a previous vote.]

Strangely quiet during the Ordinance vote were the fundamentalist opponents who in past years could be counted on to preach that "God Created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" outside City Hall—including Rev. Hiram Crawford, who said little during the Council session. Even the aldermanic opposition was relatively quiet—unlike the Sept. 14 vote, when Ald. Hagopian called gays "animals" and Ald. Carter referred to gays as "sissies." While there were statements against the Ordinance Dec. 21, those comments (primarily based on religious opposition) were certainly timid compared to Sept. 14.

The Primary Influence

The Ordinance victory was attributed to several factors, including, most significantly, the upcoming Mayoral election. While the Ordinance probably would have passed eventually, the election sped up the clock. Every major Mayoral candidate has announced his support for gay rights, and Dec. 21 was the "show and tell" vote for several candidates.

The candidate with the most to lose—and the most to gain—Dec. 21 was Mayor Eugene Sawyer. According to Town Meeting activists

working closely on the issue, Sawyer was by far the winner on the Ordinance, having converted the most 'no' to 'yes' votes.

"I don't think the Ordinance would have passed without the upcoming Mayor's race. I know that the Mayor was very much committed to this Ordinance, and desperately needed this win. I don't think we would have gotten the [State's Attorney and Mayoral candidate Richard] Daley votes," Town Meeting activist Rick Garcia said.

As the Council victory became evident, gays and lesbians in the audience seemed to let out a collective sigh of relief, in addition to loud applause, for each 'yes' vote. Council members who had worked for many months on the Ordinance—including Bernie Hansen, Kathy Osterman, and Helen Shiller—also didn't hold back their relief. Ald. Anna Langford was so excited at Ald. Carter's vote switch that she jumped up and hugged her.

After gay rights protections were defeated in 1986 and earlier in 1988, the victory was well appreciated Dec. 21—and politicians were quick to capitalize on it. That evening, hundreds of gay rights supporters were joined by several mayoral hopefuls at a victory party at Ann Sather's restaurant on Belmont.

Pulling from every 'bloc'

The Ordinance votes came from every political "bloc" of the City Council but only the women and Hispanics voted entirely for the Ordinance.

"I looked at independents, progressives, and regular machine Democrats," Garcia said. "And I knew that we could not do it at all without white ethnics, without some of the more regular types. We knew we would have the progressives...it was also very hard. You had regular Dems for us, independents/progressives against us—there were so many unholy alliances in this whole thing."

"I think that it translates very well politically. I think it's dangerous for our community to be identified with one political ideology, or even a certain political party. Those of us who worked on the Ordinance, it is our feeling that our issues are primary, our community is primary. We must persuade legislators, whoever they are, to address our issues and remedy that through legislation."

"We had a good strategy to know what battles to pick, to have a low-key media coverage to eliminate religious opposition," Town Meeting's Laurie Dittman said. "All the aldermen were possible votes until we heard otherwise. Moving away from partisan politics opened up the vote."

Town Meeting's role

Town Meeting, founded after the 1986 Ordinance defeat, and which will now disband when the Ordinance officially becomes law next month, was made up of primarily two groups: a core group of four activists who essentially "quarterbacked" the Ordinance; a second, larger, flexible group of about 20 people who met on a regular basis to discuss strategy and the "next step" to take.

Garcia, Jon-Henri Damski, Dittman, and Arthur Johnston were the four activists in charge of day to day strategy. The larger group included Carole Powell, Vince Samar, Vern Huls and Al Wardell from the Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Sue Purrington and Alison Brill from the National Organization for Women, progressive political activist Ron Sable, Peggy Baker [at the time the Mayor's Coordinator of Gay and Lesbian Issues], Chris Cochran and Larry Rolla [who are on the Mayor's Committee on Gay and Lesbian Issues but who acted as individuals on the Ordinance effort], and Donna Quinz of Chicago Catholic Women.

A week before the vote, with constituent



One Ordinance 'yes' vote being attributed to heavy constituent pressure is that of 47th Ward Ald. Eugene Schuler (seated, left), who twice before voted against the Ordinance. Schuler is pictured here with gay/lesbian rights activists just a few days before the Council vote. Seated with Schuler is Ald. Kathy Osterman. Town Meeting activists Jon-Henri Damski (left), Laurie Dittman, Rick Garcia, and Arthur Johnston were at the lobbying session, as was 47th Ward resident Tim Eannarino (right). Photo by Lisa Ebricht

lobbying nearly complete, activists met with Mayoral candidates Ald. Timothy Evans, State's Attorney Richard Daley, and Mayor Sawyer to convince them of the significance of the Dec. 21 vote.

According to Garcia, Evans was asked to work on converting Jesse Evans and Ed Smith. Both aldermen voted 'no.' Daley was asked to influence Huels, Fairy, and Kotlarz. While Kotlarz abstained and Huels and Fairy voted 'yes,' Daley has said he did not influence their vote. While Daley may have distanced himself from the votes, "I know his emissaries—Hansen and Osterman—worked on them," Garcia said.

Sawyer was told to pressure Carter, Henry, Austin, Butler, Caldwell, and Beavers. Beavers was the only one who didn't switch to a 'yes,' and Butler's switch was a big shock even to the mayor. Assistant to the Mayor, Nancy Bellew, heavily lobbied Ald. Stone, her own alderman.

Garcia and Dittman said Sawyer was the most successful in converting 'no' votes to 'yes.'

"Sawyer was the clear winner," said Dittman, who since the vote has declared her support for Sawyer's mayoral candidacy. Garcia, too, was so impressed with Sawyer's Ordinance efforts that he will also support Sawyer in the Democratic primary Feb. 28.

"The thing that stands out for me about the Ordinance is that it was a very empowering experience for us as a community," Garcia said. "We learned how to use the system to make sure our issues are addressed. Literally hundreds of people have called aldermen for the very first time in their lives...The best part is that the gay community has controlled the process from the beginning of drafting until the vote. That's very important for us—we are the ones who controlled this the whole way. We didn't have to rely on any politician or political party. We did it. No candidate, no mayor, no one else delivered for us."

Two additions to the new Ordinance are credited with convincing some aldermen to vote 'yes.' Both, however, were dismissed as minor changes by Town Meeting activists. The first was a limited religious exemption, the second a statement that says the Ordinance does not advocate any particular "lifestyle of religious view."

Impact of Ordinance

"People will now have recourse if they are discriminated against. They have a tool to

fight back," said Garcia. "But the other thing the Ordinance does is much more important—the psychological effect. People are viewing themselves as full citizens. They have been affirmed, they've been empowered. It's as much a symbolic victory as it is a practical victory, maybe even more so."

"The victory itself tells us...we know how to use the system for our issues, and that we are part of the city. While we were delayed all those times, it was at times frustrating. But the reality is, it only took two years, for a brand new piece of legislation, from drafting it to passing it. In a sense, that's a very short time. We followed this through the whole process, from drafting it to bringing it to the community, selling it to legislators."

"We thought we had the votes in September [when the Ordinance fell a few votes short]...I was confident that it would pass. I watched the vote disintegrate before my eyes. The reasons? We relied in September very heavily on the Mayor and other Council members to tell us who were 'yes' or 'no' votes. We did not, I believe, put sufficient pressure on the Mayor's Office. I think he thought all he had to do is ask his votes to do it. He didn't put pressure in September. Those people had nothing to lose or gain."

"I think that vote was necessary. There was always a tension between those of us who wanted to bring it up, even if we didn't have the votes. We realized [the September vote] was a positive thing. It identified who are supporters were. We could identify who we needed to lobby—a smaller group of people."

"The [September vote] had a lot to do with the Ordinance passing [Dec. 21]," Peggy Baker said. "The administration didn't want to bring it up [in September], because they knew they didn't have the votes. And the decision had to be made [two days before]. I was told they weren't going to notice it up because they didn't have the votes. I [told administration officials] that it's got to be called up whether you have the votes or not, because nobody's going to understand what's involved in passing this thing. The community's ready, we've got all the votes we're going to get, unless something changes, and it's got to be brought to a vote...."

"There was a vote. There was the whole circus that happened in Council," Baker said. "I don't think Sawyer knew what was to be gained by passing the Ordinance until he went through that experience. A lot of people had to have that experience."

The Outlines January 1989 coverage of the Dec. 21, 1988 passage of the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance. Outlines was a gay newspaper published by Tracy Baim and Lambda Publications, which later merged it with Windy City Times in 2000.

See continued coverage on next page.

The Council Vote:

Yes
Bobbi Rush (2nd), Dorothy Tillman (3rd), Timothy Evans (4th), Lawrence Evans (6th), Ronald Robinson (8th), Keith Caldwell (9th), Patrick Huels (11th), Mark Perry (12th), Edward M. Burke (14th), Marlene Carter (15th), Anna Langford (16th), Jesus Gomez (23rd), William Henry (24th), Juan Soliz (25th), Luis Gutierrez (26th), Sheneather Butler (27th), Denny K. Davis (28th), Ray Figueroa (31st), Percy Giles (37th), Patrick O'Connor (40th), Burton F. Natanson (42nd), Edwin Eisenbach (43rd), Bernard Hansen (44th), Helen Shiller (46th), Eugene Schuler (47th), Kathy Osterman (48th), David Orr (49th), and Bernard Stone (56th).

No
Fred B. Holt (1st), Williams Beavers (7th), Robert Shaw (9th), Victor Vydalyak (10th), John Madryk (13th), Alvin Steiner (17th), Michael Sheahan (19th), Ernest Jones (20th), William Krystyniak (22nd), Ed Smith (28th), George Hagopian (30th), Lemuel Austin (34th), William Banks (36th), Thomas Collieron (38th), Anthony Lantieri (39th), Roman Patocki (41st), and Patrick Lever (45th).

Abstaining

Joseph Kotlarz (35th)

Absent

Robert Kellam (18th), Jesse Evans (21st), Terry Gabisnik (22nd), and Richard Mell (32nd).

Activists reflect on 30-year anniversary of Chicago Human Rights Ordinance

BY MATT SIMONETTE

On Nov. 28, 2018, the Chicago City Council Committee on Human Relations advanced a resolution condemning the Trump administration's decree the month before that defined gender-identity as a category determined by one's genitalia at birth.

Though the resolution will likely lack teeth in determining federal policy, the drama-free passage of the resolution—the only opposition voiced that morning were in rambling, incoherent comments from an audience member who's a frequent speaker at city meetings—is especially notable now that the city's Human Rights Ordinance will be in place for 30 years as of Dec. 21.

The fight for that Human Rights Ordinance represented a formidable challenge for the city's LGBT community; many elected officials were not yet ready to discuss challenges that their LGBT constituents faced, all as city government contended with progressive Mayor Harold Washington, a gay-rights supporter, in ongoing struggles against machine politicians who were committed to blocking his policies.

Four activists, often colloquially referred to as "the Gang of Four," drove the fight: Laurie Dittman, who at the time was executive director of IVI-IPO (Independent Voters of Illinois-Independ-

dent Precinct organization); Rick Garcia, whose LGBT activism largely focused on issues pertaining to the Catholic Church; Sidetrack bar proprietor Arthur Johnston; and the late activist and writer Jon-Henri Damski.

"I don't think any of us were able to look into the future and know its overall impact," Dittman said.

The Gang of Four were working under the auspices of a local coalition of activists, Gay and Lesbian Town Meeting. It had formed in 1986, after Cardinal Joseph Bernardin intervened last minute in a vote on the ordinance, resulting in its loss when many Catholic alderman balked. The first attempt at passage of such legislation took place in 1973, with additional attempts throughout the 1970s.

But it was not until the '80s, when the community began to enjoy support from Mayor Washington, that passage seemed viable. The 1986 vote, while frustrating, invigorated the ordinance's supporters, who adopted multiple strategies to get buy-in from City Hall and the community.

Johnston first got involved in gay-rights issues when he was asked by Albert Williams, an activist who was then an editor at Windy City Times, to get involved when previous supporters considered demanding gay bar owners close to compel

community members to attend a gay-rights rally. "On his advice, I went to that meeting and outlined why I thought it was a bad idea," said Johnston. "Of course, then you have to do something."

Johnston eventually suggested keeping bars open and using them as gathering points for the rally, with bar-owners paying for busses. That rally, at which Mayor Washington spoke, was a "turning point," according to Williams.

"We had a new progressive mayor, and [Mayor Washington's gay and lesbian Community Liaison] Kit Duffy was his right hand, and was really carrying his agenda into the community in a practical way," Williams said. "We operated under the understanding that, Mayor Washington was in office and he was our supporter, and we were supporting him in his battle against the Democratic machine. We worked under these circumstances, from 1984 through 1986, when the bill came up the first time and was shot down by the Chicago archdiocese."

A key question, one that accompanies any potentially game-changing legislation, is when to call for a vote. While many politicians and activists are reluctant to bring legislation to a full-vote before a winning number of votes is certain—political insiders often pronounce failed



Windy City Times, July 31, 1986, covering the defeat of the gay/lesbian rights bill, which led to the eventual passage of the Human Rights Ordinance in 1988.

Turn to page 8

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CHICAGO HRO from page 7

legislation dead on arrival, thus weakening its momentum—others believe that less assured votes by legislators are important as well, getting politicians on record for where they stand and letting advocates know “who their friends are.”

The Gang of Four were in the latter camp. “It was about keeping our eyes on the prize,” Garcia said. “We were not going to rely on ‘friends,’ like when the mayor wants to do it, or aldermen friends. We were not building a campaign for somebody to run for office. We only had one goal: to pass a strong human rights ordinance for the city of Chicago.”

“Part of our message was, ‘Again and again and again,’” said Johnston.

Damski knew several “machine” aldermen thanks to his column, and linked the coalition with his City Hall connections. Among them was Ald. Kathy Osterman, who told the advocates that their goal was “all about numbers and knowing how to count,” he further recalled. “She told us, ‘If you’re going to be effective, you need to know where your votes are and who your votes are.’”

Dittman added, “Every alderman isn’t just a single entity. There’s often someone else that they listen to, someone else’s personal values, that guide them. What was important for us was to break that down.”

The activists leveraged Garcia’s connections in Catholic activism, arranging meetings between Catholic aldermen and nuns who were supportive of the ordinance.

Garcia said, “We had Dominican sisters go in and say, ‘We’re here to talk about the gay-rights ordinance; we’re here from the School of St. Pius.’ The response would be, ‘Oh, that’s where my kids go.’ ... We’d make some kind of connection between the nuns and the alderman, be it a school or a parish.”

Damski meanwhile continued working to bring aldermen to their cause; especially important to him was powerful Ald. Ed Burke (14th Ward). Dittman additionally credited efforts by activist

Norm Sloan to drum up additional voter-registrations in the gay and lesbian community. “That was kind of an overarching point of influence for every single person on that council,” she said.

Sloan “was registering people under the Belmont L on his ironing board,” Garcia added.

Mayor Washington’s death in 1987 and the forthcoming 1989 mayoral election significantly impacted the coalition’s tactics. Acting Mayor Eugene Sawyer, hoping to be officially elected to the office, supported the ordinance, as did other candidates, among them then-Cook County State’s Attorney Richard M. Daley, who’d eventually win the contest.

Another vote was set to take place Sept. 14, 1988, and it was surely a moment when the coalition again found out who their friends were. The hearing featured charged anti-gay rhetoric, much from the 30th Ward’s Ald. George Hagopian, who, according to the Chicago Reader’s account, said to the mainly LGBT audience, who sat in relative silence, “Go ahead, animals.”

The coalition had braced themselves for such comments, and the ordinance failed 21-26. But some said Hagopian ultimately won supporters—many disgusted by the alderman’s remarks—for the ordinance.

“It exposed the purpose of the ordinance to a wider audience,” explained Dittman. “We thought, ‘Wow, we’ve got to get this done if people think this way.’”

Garcia recalled that he and his colleagues went out to commiserate after that failed vote. There were soon joined by Osterman—who was soon notably joined by Burke, who had voted in their favor that day.

“I knew that we had won,” said Garcia, who credited Damski with winning Burke’s support. “Jon-Henri was always reflective of the little gay boy, or the lesbian who was thrown out of her house, or the maid who cleaned at his hotel. When he talked to the aldermen, he had an uncanny insight into real people, and that really resonated with them.”

“We made it clear that we were coming back,”

Johnston said. “I think they just got tired of seeing us. ... You don’t want to see us any more? You don’t want us in meetings? You don’t want us in your offices? Easy—cast a ‘yes’ vote and we’re gone.”

The measure finally passed in December 1988, to collective cheers from the City Council chamber.

“It was just relief and this sense of happiness, and a sense of accomplishment,” recalled Dittman. “We had been on a long journey, and we didn’t know how any of it would end.”

In a Dec. 6, 2018 statement, Chicago Commission on Human Relations Commissioner Mona Noriega, herself openly gay and an activist since the 1970s, reflected on the impact of the ordinance for city residents, noting that, “The Human Rights ordinance gave the CCHR the power of enforcement and was groundbreaking in that it enumerated 11 protected categories in which discrimination was prohibited. ... Today the protected categories total 16. On behalf of the more than 10,000 complainants who have had the opportunity to seek a remedy when confronted by discrimination and on behalf of their families, and loved ones forced to suffer the burden of discrimination—we say thank you to the advocates who fought to bring the Human Rights Ordinance

into being.”

Williams said the ordinance “was not just a final victory for a campaign for LGBT-rights movement, a campaign that had gone on for 15 years. It was also a victory, albeit posthumous, for Harold Washington, and the message that Harold Washington conveyed—community empowerment, fairness and taking power away from a self-selected few leaders to make everybody both empowered and accountable.”

Johnston noted yet another legacy of the ordinance, beyond just offering anti-discrimination protections and protocols. It also gave gay and lesbian professionals a freer hand to concentrate their own work on LGBT issues.

“When you think of the people in the community who are the best known [in activism], you think of lawyers with Lambda Legal and people who work for organizations like Equality Illinois, and the amazing work of various health organizations,” he said. “None of that was possible before the Human Rights Ordinance. It was enormous in that there was an increase in the number of LGBTQ people who felt they could be out.”

“We all understood that it was important to do the ordinance first, so that other things could follow,” Dittman said.

Gay Chicagoan killed in Missouri

D’Angelo Bratton-Bland—a Lincoln University Student Government Association president who graduated from Chicago’s Perspectives Math and Science Academy Academy and hoped to return there to teach—was shot in Jefferson City, Missouri, and died Dec. 12, according to CBS 2 Chicago.

His former principal and second mother, Tiffany L. Harston, said Bratton-Bland, 23, was openly gay, and often spoke out for justice and well as helped students at his alma mater.

People said they don’t know if his sexual orientation was a factor in his killing.

A vigil/balloon launch/fundraiser was held Dec. 17 at Perspectives for Bratton-Bland, WGNTV.com added. The money raised at the fundraiser will be used to help offset the cost of his funeral. In addition, a GoFundMe page has been established at <https://www.gofundme.com/dangelo-bratton-funeral-expenses>.

The CBS article is at <https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2018/12/14/shooting-jefferson-city-dangelo-bratton-bland-college-student/>. The WGN piece is at <https://wgntv.com/2018/12/17/vigil-held-for-23-year-old-chicago-student-slain-in-missouri/>.



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WBEZ's 'The Morning Shift' host steps away

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

After six years serving as WBEZ 91.5FM's "The Morning Shift" host, Tony Sarabia is signing off and exploring his story's next chapter.

Sarabia, who is openly gay, grew up in Oak Park and has been living in Rogers Park for about eight years, and he graduated early from Oak Park and River Forest High School. He recalled that during his time in high school, student teachers came in to teach classes they themselves had gone to school for or that they had experienced working in that field. One, he said, was an employee of NBC television and radio. It was in that class Sarabia caught the radio bug.

"I was always a lover of music and current events," said Sarabia, who initially wanted to become a music DJ.

Putting together his love of current events, writing skills and curious nature, he realized he could be a radio journalist, and pursued it. He also credited a few supportive teachers who motivated him.

After graduating high school, he signed up for a six-week DJ school. Upon receiving a rejection letter, he decided to attend Columbia College. Taking a break from college for a few years, Sarabia held a number of different jobs ranging from bank teller to pastry chef to drywall worker.

Eventually, he decided to return to Columbia College, claiming he knew what he wanted to do and knew he needed to pursue it. He earned a B.A. in radio/journalism in 1992.

In 1990, he started at WBEZ as an intern.

"Once I got into 'BEZ, I made myself available for anything and everything and just started learning the ropes," said Sarabia. "I was pretty green when it came to the mechanic—not so much the mechanics of radio because I had done some of that in college, but just learning and perfecting journalism itself. Doing it in the real world was all new to me, but I took advantage of every opportunity."

Beginning with his intern position, Sarabia has had numerous roles at the station, including reporter, arts editor, the first midday anchor and the local host of "Morning Edition."

"The Morning Shift" that Sarabia hosts is a live talk show that airs weekdays at 9-10 a.m. The show features a mix of news, culture and music that relies on authentic engagement with listeners on-air and through social media. Sarabia also hosts the weekly music program "Radio M," where he brings his skills to create locally impactful and universally relevant conversations.

"It is grueling," said Sarabia of being "The Morning Shift" host. "It's a daily live show. We only tape when we have to; typically a politician who can't make it in or can't call in when we want them to, so before the show. So, we don't have to do very much if any editing. I think for the last six years 97% of the books that I've read have been for the show, probably 100% of the plays I've gone to have been for the show. It's just day in and day out."

"I wouldn't be able to do this if it weren't for the team, but it is me in front of the microphone, it is me in front of the audience; if I make a mistake it's all on me, which is totally understandable, but I love the high wire act of live radio," Sarabia added about his role. "I thrive on that. Anchoring and hosting has been a good chunk of my career here, a good chunk of my overall responsibilities, but this show has certainly been a grind and I'm really glad to be getting off the hamster wheel, that's for sure."

Sarabia said his curiosity and love of talking to people are what drive him. He explained WBEZ has been a welcoming place that "encourages innovation and creativity, it encourages risk taking," which he feels made it an easy fit.

Sarabia's last air date is Dec. 21. Jennifer White has been named the new host and will be live starting Jan. 7, 2019.

"Jen is so talented," Sarabia said. "She's been in the business for about 20 years in different roles herself and she's got a great personality, she's very curious and I think she'll do a fantastic job."

Sarabia hopes he walks away from his radio career with people thinking of him as a fair-minded host.

"I hope people come away saying, 'He was a fair-minded host, he was open to new ideas, he was tough when he had to be with guests, but was respectful and that his personality and his curiosity really came through,'" Sarabia said. "I don't see myself as an expert. I have to know a lot about a lot of things and I'm constantly researching and studying and reading just so I can curate a conversation and carry on a conversation. So, those are the things that I hope people take away that when they think of my time here, they say 'Oh, yeah—he was a pretty fair-minded guy and I also loved listening to him because he was personable and he wasn't afraid to let his own personality come through.'

Along with his time at WBEZ, Sarabia has also participated in three fellowship programs at NPR in Washington and worked at NPR's Cultural Desk, producing pieces for the network's national news programs.

Among his journalistic work and the multiple awards he has received, Sarabia was the force behind the documentary *Unlocking the Closet: Stories of Coming Out Later in Life*.

Sarabia shared that he was about 33 when he came out as gay. He had been married for almost nine years to his high-school sweetheart and has three adult sons. Sarabia's own experience and curiosity about how other people in his situation dealt with the process led him to creating "Unlocking the Closet."

"It was a combination of trying to reach out personally, to connect, but also to tell listeners and to inform an audience that you may have a picture of the community, but there's more to it and here's a slice of this part of the community," said Sarabia of the purpose of the documentary. "All of their stories were so different from each



Tony Sarabia.

Photo by Jason Marck

others', but each one touched on my own experience as well—being married, having to hide it, being glad and happy once it was out. So that was sort of a freeing experience."

"That was a way, without forcing me onto people or without using it out of context, that I would be able to put my own experience, my own sexuality, in that context," Sarabia said, never wanting to insert himself into the story, unless people ask him directly. "This was about sharing

and wanting other people to hear what one part of the gay community goes through or had gone through and what they experience. That was freeing and that was organic."

In his next chapter, he and his partner of almost nine years are moving to rural Iowa. The couple will be raising meat goats and free-range chickens and establishing a sizeable garden for themselves and maybe will start a community-supported agriculture (CSA) operation to sell to other people locally. Down the road, Sarabia said, the ideal plan is to open the farm to the public to give them a living-farm experience.

After the move, Sarabia will also work part time at a day-care facility, working with kids. During the downtime he will have on the farm, he also plans on training to be a certified nursing assistant, adding he hopes to eventually join the chamber of commerce.

"For me, it's just all about trying something new," he said.

He enthusiastically added his new guiding philosophy is a quote from Helen Keller: Life is a daring adventure or nothing."

"I'm ready for something new," Sarabia said of changing paths. "I'm really looking forward to working outside. I'm stuck in the office all day, it's not a complaint, it's just a reality, but I love being in the outdoors. I'm sort of an outdoorsy type person anyway, so to be working outdoors in all the elements fascinates me. I'm really looking forward to it. If you don't take those risks or dreams, then you have regrets and I don't want to have regrets."

To learn more about "The Morning Shift," visit WBEZ.org.

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Brave Space celebrates with Unicorn Ball

BY VERNON HESTER

On Dec. 15, Brave Space Alliance, in partnership with the Trans Liberation Collective, held the Second Annual Unicorn Ball, a fundraising and year-end social event.

This year, the ball took place at The Shapiro Ballroom, and featured a raffle, live performances, a streaming slide show of some of the events and actions by Brave Space Alliance, several DJs and a short segment where individuals were acknowledged for their behind-the-scenes community work.

After Brave Space Alliance Executive Director LaSaia Wade was joined by Stephanie Skora (director of policy and operations) and other officers from the Alliance, honorees received their awards. Recipient Tatyana Moaton said, "I have

heard, 'We should not be, we should have never been, and we will never be,' so many times, but I will fight for our [trans] community until the end, regardless of what anybody says." The other two awardees were health outreach director Channyn Lynde Parker and performer/educator/activist Vita E. Cleveland.

For the performance section of the evening, things got off to an energetic start when Naje Chatman presented her self-penned trans-positive song entitled "Good Morning." Girasol Flores inspired another kind of energy with an intensely moving reading of her self-written "Say My Name," while drag king Khalil Love generated catcalls and squeals from the packed room. Emcee and leather daddy Juju Minxxx closed the show with a rousing rap singalong.



Above: Channyn Lynne Parker. Blow: Tatyana Moaton (left) and LaSaia Wade. Photos by Vern Hester



Gerber/Hart unveils AIDS-awareness stamps

BY JOHN STADELMAN

On Dec. 13, Gerber/Hart Library and Archives unveiled a new exhibit among its collection of LGBTQ historical records: Red Ribbon for AIDS awareness stamps. This marked the 25th anniversary of the stamps' circulation in the United States Postal Service in an effort to increase AIDS awareness.

The exhibit features stamps and other AIDS-awareness memorabilia including pins, license plates and Scout Badges, as well as other objects bearing the Red Ribbon on various materials from the United States and around the world.



Norman Sandfield with AIDS-awareness items. Photo by John Stadelman

These materials are part of a significant collection brought together by art collector, author and organizer Norman Sandfield, who opened the exhibit with a presentation on the history of the stamps and their importance in raising AIDS awareness within the broader history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Sandfield discussed facts about the stamps' circulation in the United States, including how it was the first to use the Red Ribbon image, how proceeds from the stamps went to funding AIDS research and how other countries, particularly European countries, designed and circulated their own stamps.

The Red Ribbon for AIDS Awareness exhibit has also been featured in Anchorage, Alaska and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and will run here in Chicago through February. It can be viewed for free at in the Gerber/Hart Library in Rogers Park, along with exhibits for pins and other memorabilia in the Atrium and Gerber/Hart's Walgreen's Pharmacy (this latter including Red Ribbon pins from Hard Rock Café). A similar exhibit—The City That Werqs: A History of Chicago's Drag Revolutionaries—is in the Norman Sandfield Gallery and will run until April.

For more information on the Red Ribbon for AIDS Awareness Stamps as well as for other Gerber/Hart exhibits and collections, visit <http://www.gerberhart.org/empowerment>.

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THE AMAZON TRAIL 'Not a creature was stirring— not even a mouse'

That was true when we brought home our Christmas tree back in 2009 and a poor dead mouse fell onto our living room floor. We've made do with a little artificial tree ever since. But this year we're going all Santa Claus and supporting the local 4H Club which is selling trees at the fairgrounds.

Christmas is such a multi-featured concept. As an atheist, I celebrate for the sake of lighting the darkness. As a feminist, I'm aware of the pre-Christian pagan winter rituals that make sense to me: Yule logs. The tree itself. Gifting one another. Celebrations to liven up the doldrums of winter.

Here in our community, the clubhouse is already decorated, thanks to volunteers who might be teens—not seniors—with their mirthful high energy. Some years a local choral group in red bow ties comes to serenade our holiday potluck. Not everyone is up to decorating, but if they have an extra fifteen dollars they'll hire a handyperson to string outdoor lights. Every year there's a light show as we walk our mile of roads, calling out good wishes, and swaddled, like our neighbors, in layers that protect us from the ocean winds.

You'd think peace was real and love the prevalent emotion in America. Sigh.

Surrounded as we are by a number of frail people in their nineties, this can be a sad season. Most often when we hear sirens, a resident has fallen and needs assistance getting back up, which involves a lot of fear, but seldom injuries. My sweetheart was reminded of the old poem quoted above and ad-libbed,



Beastie in Christmas clothes.

Photo by Elaine Lynch

"When out on the street there arose such a clatter, I sprang from the bed to listen to my scanner." It's true, I have a scanner, emergency vehicles drive by our house, and we can run to help or at least send a card later if there is a patient. We're wishing good health to our community this year.

Last Sunday, by the gas fireplace, my sweetheart was contentedly loading her iPod with seasonal tunes. When "Baby It's Cold Outside" came up and the male singer cooed enticements to the woman singer, I made a crack that it was a date-rape song. My ever-patient, loving wife gave me a suffering

look. I immediately realized I'd ruined that song for her forever and spent the rest of the day figuratively on my knees. After 11 years, I'm still learning that being a cynical old curmudgeon at Christmastime is not exactly loving.

But then, my sweetheart asked me what my favorite Christmas gift had been when I was a little kid. She suggested the cowgirl outfit with its mini-skirt, fringed vest, western blouse and six-shooter, which I remember only through a family photo. I was so disappointed: the mini skirt ruined the whole gift, ungrateful mini butch that I was. No, I said, it was the trucks, a whole small fleet of them, and the upside down cardboard box in which my brother cut holes to make a terminal.

We don't go hog-wild on gifts. I'm happy with my new flannel shirt and my sweetheart likes to select work clothes. Even so, when I came across last year's turkey wishbone the other day, we, like the ancient polytheistic Etruscans, closed our eyes, made our wishes and pulled it apart. I can't share what we wished, but our friend the Midnight Texter posted her wish: "I have two front teeth, so all I want for Christmas is a job for your sweetheart."

This gig economy is not kind to mature job-seekers. The Labor Department used to define older workers as people over forty. Now it seems to be people over 55. But, never mind, 'tis the holiday season, we'll worry about that next year when Robert Mueller, Liz Warren, Kamala Harris, Nancy Pelosi, Rachel Maddow, and RBG rescue us from the Grinch and his greedy comrades. Oh, America, let's make our country merrier next year.

Christmas day the only mouse in our house will be a new one filled with catnip for Bolo the Magnificent. As always, we'll miss dressing our late dog Bea in her Christmas clothes. (Bolo won't put up with such nonsense.) My sweetheart will be stirring the gravy and I'll be recycling the Christmas wrap. We'll call friends and relatives, be grateful for what we have, and dry a new wishbone for next year.

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

Copyright Lee Lynch 2018
December 2018

letters

Season of wonder

Dear brothers and sisters:

First and foremost, I wish to say, "Merry Christmas."

We live in a social environment that values spiritual worldliness. That simply means making your wants and fantasies the center of the universe. In this respect, gay and straight people have commonality. That simply means putting yourself at the center of the universe. As Pope Francis pointed out in his book, "My people are poor and I am one of them."

As a member of the Roman Catholic community, I am taught to believe, like the pope, that "trampling on a person's dignity is a grave sin." This season is

an amazing opportunity to reflect on this and our human dignity.

Pope Francis gives us much to think about when he says, "Mercy is a journey that passes from our hearts to hands."

I realize there is much frustration with the organization of the Church. Some LGBTQA Catholics in our Community are frustrated at the pace of change in the Church, while at the same time appearing not to understand the changes that are happening within the Church around the death penalty. This change in teaching will have a ripple effect on the place of women in the Church, clericalism, racism and homophobic nonsense. This is very significant because if you can change one teaching, you will be able to

change other teachings. This will open the windows in the Church, and will eventually bring reform.

This is the season of wonder, miracles and love—when the impossible becomes possible. We are all human beings with all our gifts and faults. The child that was born in a manger is God's response to hate. Let us pause and meditate on that event, and thank God for all that God does for us every day of our lives.

Merry Christmas!!!!

Joe Murray
Executive Director
Rainbow Sash Movement
(LGBTQA Roman Catholics)

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'LA RUTA'

PLAYWRIGHT
ISAAC GOMEZ
GIVES VOICE
TO JUAREZ'S
MURDERED
WOMEN

PAGE 16

Playwright Isaac Gomez.
Photos by Joel Moorman

THEATER REVIEW

The Winter Wolf

Playwright: Joseph Zettelmaier

At: Otherworld Theatre, 3914 N. Clark St.

Tickets: OtherworldTheatre.org;

\$20 suggested donation

Runs through: Jan. 6

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Introducing children to the concept of death is a slippery proposition: Consider the shock of discovering that the security engendered by long games of peek-a-boo promising infants that losing sight of a parent's face is only a temporary condition was a falsehood from the beginning.

The science fiction/fantasy literary genre offers a modicum of respite from the immediacy of our emotional response to descriptions of irrevocable loss, but the necessary analogies of its universe to our own can unleash crippling real-life dread, all the same.

So how does a writer coax audiences into relinquishing the defenses they have adopted to conceal their existential disquietude beneath a veneer of laconic bravado and stoical disengagement? Joseph Zettelmaier's prolific canon evidences the playwright's intuitive grasp on exactly the right blend of curiosity and caution generating in youngsters engrossed with putting aside childish things, and the willingness to suspend disbelief without risk to new-found dignity.

Zettelmaier's latest play may be designated a "fairy tale," but the story forged by tween Cora and her grandfather emerges the saga of a questing heroine seeking to vanquish the predator of mortals in the "winter" of their lives, its narrative imagery steeped in totemic myth. This being precisely the kind of yarn constituting Otherworld Theatre's stock-in-trade, from the minute we enter the tiny "Alchemist's Lab" studio, we find ourselves, literally, surrounded by forest, co-

nifer trees flanking the rows of seats both side and behind while still allowing room for moonlit romps. The fireside parlor at center stage likewise reflects a timeless coziness in furnishings encompassing a 1930s-vintage console radio alongside modern cocoa mugs.

These fanciful elements serve to pique our imaginations in preparation for a thrilling allegory, directed at brisk pace by Lauren Nicole Fields and narrated with the assistance of a shadow-puppet scroll (called a "crankie" in the trade), a richly textured soundscape, and a title character

represented by a Bunraku wolf mannequin operated and voiced by Shariba Rivers with menacing authority and wry humor matching that of our intrepid opponent, played with resolute audacity by Molly Southgate. When you applaud at the end of the performance, don't forget to howl, too.



Shariba Rivers and Molly Southgate in *The Winter Wolf*.

Photo by Steven Townshend

THEATER REVIEW

The Old Woman Broods

Playwright: Tadeusz Rozewicz

At: Trap Door Theatre, 1655 W. Cortland Ave.

Tickets: TrapdoorTheatre.com;

773-384-0494; \$20-\$25

Runs through: Jan. 19

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Early in our play, the Old Woman referenced in the title complains about the "dregs" muddying the bottom of her teacup. On the page, Polish playwright Tadeusz Rozewicz' splenetic 1969 diatribe—translated in 2004 by Chris Rzonca and Krystyna Illakowicz—comes off as the dregs of Absurdist Theater, the post-World War II literary movement once much-imitated, but nowadays a quaint relic of midcentury irreverence.

The criticism invoked by Rozewicz begins hopelessly enough, its premise based in a pun on "brood"—wordplay explaining the Old Woman's lament for females of her generation whose sole activities, like those of biddy hens, were restricted to "eating and having babies" but who now find their status usurped by youthful "whores" luxuriating in the childlessness provided by contraceptive devices. The story's setting in a society oblivious to creeping ecological decay also reso-



Manuela Rentea and Michael Mejia in *The Old Woman Broods*.

Photo by Chris Popio

nates in 2018. Before long, however, the targets of Rozewicz's rancor give way to the familiar mid-20th-century villains—war, bureaucracy, quack

medicine, police brutality, bourgeois complacency and self-conscious vulgar language.

Fortunately, Trap Door director Nicole Weisner and her ensemble know better than to rely on these threadbare grumbles to pique their audiences' curiosity. Instead, they augment their performance energy levels with generous infusions of kinetic, musical and slam-style poetic motifs designed to render its spectacle entertaining, if past enlightening.

For starters, the elaborate stage directions in the trimmed-down text are recited by an earnest young writer (a stand-in for the author, perhaps), while a trio of gender-fluid damsels whose identity, in the original script, is not revealed until the final moments, are now seen plying their weird-sister trade as we enter the auditorium. When the Old Woman proclaims men to be "stupid as bulls," she and her swains re-enact a skirmish in a corrida, and an interlude conceived as a chaotic collage of overlapping commentary includes a confessional soliloquy silenced by a scornful "This isn't Steppenwolf!"

Manuela Rentea commands the room in the role of the Old Woman, who charms us with her candor, exuberance and tropical-hued fiesta gown, along with a company of actors well-versed in non-representational expression, enabling them to remain always in full control of their relative positions throughout Trap Door's barnlike interior. The results transform what could have emerged a desiccated academic exercise into a vibrant carnival of swirling colors and textures.

CRITICS' PICKS

Familiar, Steppenwolf Theatre, through Jan. 13. Even if the powerhouse trio of Ora Jones, Jacqueline Williams and Cheryl Lynn Bruce weren't reason enough to get out to Danai Gurira's smart new stereotype-free play, how often do you see the words "Africa" and "comedy" in the same sentence? MSB

Buttcracker: A Nutcracker Burlesque, (Sub) version Productions at Reggie's Music Joint, through Dec. 26. It may be cold outside this holiday season, but the gender-fluid body-positive spoof of the classic ballet in the South Loop features sizzling jazz and costumes to match. MSB

Gypsy, Porchlight Music Theatre, through Dec. 29. E. Faye Butler is ferocious yet tender in this exceptional production of a legendary musical. Butler was born to play Mama Rose. JA

The Q Brothers Christmas Carol, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, through Dec. 30. Even in Year Six, this 90-minute rap/hip-hop version of the holiday classic still is a cheeky, edgy, mile-a-minute delight. You'll smile and tap your toes. JA

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Sullivan



T.R. Knight and Alexandra Silber in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
Photo by Liz Lauren

THEATER REVIEW A Midsummer Night's Dream

Playwright: William Shakespeare
At: Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Navy Pier, Chicago
Tickets: ChicagoShakes.com;
Runs through: Jan. 27

BY KAREN TOPHAM

One of Shakespeare's most endearing plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, tells the story of the collision of two worlds—the rigid, imperial realm of Athens, in which a young woman (Hermia, played by Melisa Soledad Pereyra) can be put to death for disobeying her father's word on a choice of husbands; and the wild, magical, unruly world of the fairy kingdom.

The fairy realm is having problems: King Oberon (Edward O'Brien) and Queen Titania (Alexandra Silber) are at odds, and this spills out into the real world as well, mixing up seasons and confusing mortals. (Global climate change here is the fault of the fairies, not the humans—a pleasant thought for those who still don't want to believe in it.)

The confusion is not limited to the climate, though. Hermia and her true love, Lysander (Tyronne Phillips), take to the woods in an effort to escape the death her father, Egeus (William Dick), has imposed on her for disobedience, and they

are quickly followed by Helena (Cristina Panfilio) and the man she loves, Demetrius (Eric Schabla), who has dumped her for the prospect of marrying Hermia and is Egeus's choice for his daughter. As if that's not confusing enough, the four potential lovers are met in the forest by the mischievous fairy Puck (Sam Kebede) who, through magic, mixes up their affections, leading to much merriment for the fairies who stand invisibly watching the mess he has made.

Also in the woods is a group of amateur players Puck dubs "rude mechanicals," led by former Grey's Anatomy star T.R. Knight as Bottom, a man with little talent but loads of confidence. They are in the woods practicing a play for the nuptials of Theseus and Hippolyta. In perfect symmetry with the rest of the play, they are performing a love story, albeit a tragic one: the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. However, they get caught up in fairy pranks when Puck replaces Bottom's head with that of an ass (brilliant work by make-up artist Richard Jarvie) and sees to it that the Fairy Queen falls in love with him. Mischief managed, the stage is set for loads of fun as the various lovers play out their magic-induced roles.

Director Joe Dowling's vision (at times aided by Joe Chvala's brilliantly frenetic choreography) makes this dream one to remember. From flown-on fairy settings to the mechanicals' crude efforts at creating a wall and moonshine (and a marvelous costume for Dick's Lion), this is a play that renders fantasy visible. The tech side of things, as one would expect from Chicago Shakespeare Theatre (CST), is perfect.

Todd Rosenthal's scenic design is outstanding. Several scene changes are completely surprising and wonderful, as the mystical forest looms just outside of rigid Athens. Fabio Toblini's costumes are also great, especially those worn by the fairies, which contain wilderness echoes of the militaristic outfits of Athenian soldiers. Original music by Keith Thomas and outstanding sound design by Christopher M. LaPorte surround us in the fairy presence, and the lighting by Greg Hofmann and Jesse Klug is stunning.

It is never easy to tackle a show as well-known as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and make it yours, but Dowling and CST simply own this play, and have since he directed it for the very first CST season on Navy Pier in 2000. This incarnation of the Shakespeare classic is simply brilliant in every way, and audiences are going to love it.

SPOTLIGHT

Ethel, Schmethyl: E. Faye Butler's turn as Mama Rose in *Gypsy* is definitive. Porchlight's staging of the ultimate show-biz musical captures the seediness the tale's Great Depression setting and the glitz of burlesque. Stripper Gypsy Rose Lee shows more skin. But with barn-burners including "Rose's Turn" and "Everything's Coming Up Roses," Butler's Mama Rose is the show's heart. Let her entertain you. *Gypsy* runs through Dec. 29 at the Porchlight Theatre at the Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1016 N. Dearborn St. Tickets are \$61-\$74 each; visit <https://porchlightmusictheatre.org>.



Photo by Michael Courier

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The Joffrey Ballet. | Photo by Cheryl Mann.

With 'La Ruta,' Isaac Gomez gives voice to Juarez's murdered women

BY YASMIN ZACARIA MIKHAIEL

When Isaac Gomez first workshopped his play *The Women of Juarez* as an undergraduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, the faculty strongly advised him against it. They believed a myth that continues to plague the Chicago theater scene—that there weren't enough people of color to cast his ensemble. Gomez knew differently.

When the play—now called *La Ruta*—opens at the Steppenwolf this week, it features a plethora of Latina talent, many of them making their Steppenwolf debut. The stories of *las desaparecidas*—the missing women of Juarez, will finally be heard.

That story is brutal. Since the early '90s, hundreds (perhaps thousands—nobody has an accu-



Alice Da Cunha and Mari Marroquin in rehearsal for *La Ruta*.

Photos by Joel Moorman

rate count) of women have disappeared or been found murdered in the liminal borderlands along sister cities Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. The dead and missing women are mostly poor or working-class. Many vanished or were killed while going to or from work in area factories. Nobody has found the killer or killers. Few have even tried to.

Inspired primarily by interviews with the mothers of the missing women, *La Ruta* leans toward docudrama. Each character is based on a true story or a person Gomez interviewed.

Gomez grew up on the U.S.-Mexico border of El Paso and Juarez, unaware of the ongoing femicide. As a kid, he and his family would cross the border to visit family. Gomez became cognizant of his own privilege slowly: He was instructed to accompany his female cousins wherever they ventured, be it to grab groceries or throw out the trash. "I had the privilege and ability to go and do whatever I wanted. I just didn't know that at the time," he said.

This ignorance followed him to college until a friend studying Chicana history confronted him on his ties to Juarez. Gomez remembered the friend asking, "Isaac, you're from here. Why haven't you told me about this?" His confused

response was, "What do you mean?"

"Women. Juarez. They're missing. They're being murdered, left in the deserts," the friend said.

Gomez had no idea what she was talking about. In a distressed panic he called his mother, thinking this dark chisme couldn't be based in fact. She told him that it was.

"I was embarrassed," he said. "And so, the more I researched, the more I read, the more I became obsessed and I knew I needed to go back to Juarez." So he did, thinking it'd be a quick trip to the memorial site, a cotton field watered with tears and littered with pink crosses representing *las desaparecidas*.

But with the wisdom of Mexican women who accompanied him in both body and mind, Gomez soon found himself seeking out the mothers of the missing daughters. He found grieving mothers coping in a variety of ways. Some turned activists, others prayed for the safe return of their daughters.

"These were different women with different journeys of grief and loss and resilience and resistance. And so, in my head I thought: what would happen if they were friends?" The question helped form the spine of *La Ruta*.

Growing up—and even into college—Gomez didn't consider himself a writer, but he relished the moments he spent journaling, often detailing the tragic events of his childhood. "They were very short entries, like, 'Dear journal, today we had a test. I didn't do great. I'm hungry. Love, Isaac,'" he recalled.

As a teenager, he adapted a book into a play for his church. And then, in the darkness surrounding the suicide of a close friend in college, *La Ruta* began to take shape. Even then, "I had an aversion to calling myself a writer," Gomez said. "I didn't feel like I was worthy of that title."

But when he arrived in Chicago to intern at the Goodman, Gomez felt that he could be whoever he wanted. The city made an impression on him. "I had no idea the kind of family community, rigor, guttural heart informed creation that was happening in this city. I love Chicago," he told *Windy City Times*.

Gomez didn't arrive alone. His best friend (and newest Steppenwolf ensemble member) Karen Rodriguez traveled north with him from the Texas border. They were young, poor and unfamiliar with anybody in Chicago, but late nights in their little apartment are among Gomez's favorite memories.

"Karen would be reading my plays in our kitchen at like 1 a.m. because she wasn't really booking anything at the time. No one knew I was writing, but it was in those private moments, hearing her voice in my words that really allowed me to sit with the reality that, 'Oh, my gosh. I can do this,'" Gomez said.

Gomez swiftly worked his way up from a literary internship at the Goodman to director of new play development at Victory Gardens Theater. "If you were to ask me seven years ago if I thought

THEATER

Steppenwolf would be the place to premiere *La Ruta*, I would laugh and say you're crazy. It is still very surreal for me," he said.

Within the last two years, Gomez has cranked out five new plays: *Wally World* (Sideshow Theater Company); *PerKup Elkhorn* (developed at Northlight Theatre and Chicago Dramatists); *The Way She Spoke: A Docu-mythologia* (Greenhouse Theater Center); *Ofrenda* (Albany Park Theatre Project); and, most recently, *The Displaced* (Haven Theatre). He also is a steering committee member of the Latinx Theatre Commons while teaching at The Theatre School at DePaul University.

Despite being Gomez's most developed play (with five workshops spanning coast to coast), *La*

Ruta struggled to find its home on the mainstage, just like the Latinas of its first workshop in Texas.

"In the larger American regional landscape, I think theater companies are afraid sometimes to take a risk," Gomez said. "It's sad to believe this 'risk' includes parts of the play that are not risks at all. They are very much a part of my everyday life. I owe my entire existence to Mexican women. They're my blood and spirit. They're my saviors; they're my best friends. They're my soulmates."

Of all the plays, Gomez said *La Ruta* is the closest to his heart and home.

At the Steppenwolf, Gomez has found another place to call home, a place that also makes room for joy. He said, "It's beautiful because being around these brilliant, fierce talented and hilarious women, Latinas, mostly Mexican, is just a completely ruckus experience. We laugh a lot. To be in a room like this one, that's all femme, all brown, pretty much, is so gratifying. It's incredibly joyous."

La Ruta runs through Jan. 27 at Steppenwolf's Upstairs Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted. For more information, visit Steppenwolf.org.



Playwright Isaac Gomez.

THEATER REVIEW

The Full Monty

Playwright: Terrence McNally (book),
David Yazbek (music and lyrics)
At: Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre,
721 N. Howard St., Evanston
Tickets: \$39-44 (optional dinner \$25);
theo-u.com
Runs through: Jan. 27

BY LAUREN EMILY WHALEN

There's something off about Theo Ubique's *The Full Monty*.

By all accounts, the first production in the cabaret theater's new and expanded space in Evanston should hit all the right notes. The musical—adapted from the cult British comedy by award-winning writers Terrence McNally and David Yazbek—features a memorable, snarky score and laugh-out-loud dialogue. With the exception of a miscast lead, the principal actors work hard and are adept at song, comedy and stripping. And Theo Ubique's Fred Anzevino and Jeremy Ramey are a director-music director dream team, having established the company as a treasure trove of intimately staged theater.

So what's wrong with this *Full Monty*? Basically, it lacks heart.

That's a huge problem, because the story is chock full of emotion: Unemployed steel workers in Buffalo, New York, decide to support themselves and their families by staging a one-night-

Joe Giovannetti and Neil Stratman in *The Full Monty*.
Photo by Austin D. Oie



only strip show. And of course, they all have personal stakes: Jerry (Matt Frye) owes child support for his beloved tween son Nathan (Sean Zielinski). Overweight Dave (Nick Druzbanski) longs to contribute to the household his wife Georgie (Molly LeCaptain) is keeping afloat. And closeted Malcolm (Joe Giovannetti) just wants friends that aren't his elderly mother.

Can six men raise \$50,000 in one night, using only their imperfect bodies? *The Full Monty* is a classic underdog story, only with G-strings and dirty dancing. Fun and surprisingly touching, right?

Usually.

Chicago's Kokandy Productions staged a glorious *Full Monty* in 2015, striking just the right balance of raunch and soul. Perhaps its company is a better fit for a show that uses profanity from the first lyric, ends with a strip show and is full of sex jokes than Theo Ubique, which offers dinner service and whose clientele tends to skew older.

It doesn't help that Anzevino and Ramey appear to still be adjusting to the spacing and acoustics of the new space, resulting in clumsy staging and vocals out of sync with the orchestra. Also, James Kolditz's lighting design is ambitious and sometimes innovative, but more often than sacrifices the visibility of the actors' faces. Sawyer

Smith's choreography is well-suited for the stripper sequences—especially that of John Cardone's professional hustler Keno—but is otherwise strangely tentative.

Despite less-than-ideal guidance, a few performances stand out. Giovannetti's Malcolm is heartbreakingly vulnerable, and the actor has an angel's voice. His camaraderie with Neil Stratman's sweetly dopey Ethan, who just wants to dance like Donald O'Connor, is the production's true highlight. Jonathan Schwartz is nebbishly hilarious as in-debt former supervisor Harold, and Marc Prince showcases impressive moves and soaring vocals as Horse, who wants to be seen as more than a fantastical "big Black man." Although LeCaptain sings beautifully as always, she appears about 10 years too young to play blue-collar Georgie, and Frye's Jerry carries none of the charm of Patrick Wilson, who debuted the role on Broadway. Although Jerry is rough around the edges and often misguided, Frye and Anzevino make the character so aggressive and antagonistic, it's borderline impossible to root for him—even when he begins to change.

Theo Ubique's *Full Monty* had all the ingredients to be great. Instead, it's merely ... fine. Panning a show can be difficult when it's obvious the actors are trying their hardest and the company just wants the production to work. Perhaps Theo Ubique's upcoming *Bridges of Madison County* will be more successful. Just like in stripping—when a dancer can have all the moves and sequins, but none of it counts if they're dead behind the eyes—very underdog story must have hope.

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Sam Kelshe, photo by Jeff Spicertino

Best and worst movies of 2018

BY JERRY NUNN

This year, the LGBT community made strides in strong cinematic features featuring LGBT subject matter and characters, but still has a way to go.

There were two movies this year about conversion therapy with *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, taken from a lesbian perspective, and *Boy Erased*, from a gay perspective. The AIDS epidemic was depicted several times in 2018 with feature films *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* and *Bohemian Rhapsody*. New musicals debuted that were successful, such as *The Greatest Showman* and *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again!*

There was a vast spectrum of powerful women characters celebrated this year, from the young

actress in *The Hate U Give* to the experienced actresses in *Book Club*. *The Wife* showed there are two sides to every marriage, while new motherhood and postpartum depression were treated seriously in *Tully*. Movies have come a long way from *Three Men and a Baby*, folks! Women-driven pictures continue to rise in popularity, with *Ocean's 8* and *Halloween* in the top 20 sales in 2018.

Throughout the year there were heartfelt adoption movies, like the funny *Instant Family* and the mystery documentary *Three Identical Strangers*. There were two vastly different stories that had Black men making fools of white men via telephone, with *BlackKKlansman* and *Sorry to Bother You*.



Rachel Weisz in *The Favourite*.
Photo by Yorgos Lanthimos

—Outstanding movies with queer content:

10. **Widows:** Chicagoans will enjoy the scenery as Viola Davis chews it up in scene after scene. The characters were rich and there's a lesbian in the midst who's understated and real.

9. **Love, Simon:** This is a touching coming-of-age story set in the real world where a 17-year-old closeted gay fella simply looked for love.

8. **Instant Family:** Director Sean Anders used muse Mark Wahlberg to tell a personal story of adoption with several gay characters and out comedian Tag Notaro.

7. **Crazy Rich Asians:** Nico Santos played gay family member Oliver T'sien in the first major Hollywood studio movie with an all-Asian cast in 25 years.

6. **Boy Erased:** Several out cast members battle their demons in a religious conversion-therapy camp.

5. **Can You Ever Forgive Me?:** Cat lady, lesbian and celebrity forger Lee Israel was realistically portrayed by Melissa McCarthy in an unforget-

table performance. Richard E. Grant deserves accolades as her gay bestie in a movie that doesn't shy away from the ugly side of life.

4. **Green Book:** The true story of closeted pianist Don Shirley, played by *Moonlight*'s Mahershala Ali, being transported by Viggo Mortensen as Tony Lip in racist parts of the country rang true.

3. **Won't You Be My Neighbor?:** From a gay mailman to war in a far-off land, the Mister Rogers documentary showed us why he is sorely still needed in times like these.

2. **The Favourite:** Throw *The Lobster* back in the ocean. Director Yorgos Lanthimos gets it right this time in a story of a lesbian love triangle with players Emma Stone and Rachel Weisz vying for Olivia Colman's attention as Queen Anne. Were they really that catty in 18th-century England?

1. **A Star Is Born:** Lady Gaga surprised and Bradley Cooper harmonized with his directorial debut bringing the masses to a gay bar in the process.

MOVIES

Superheroes kicked butt, with *Black Panther* ruling the number-one spot and *Avengers: Infinity War* right after it. Audiences then had *Incred-*

ibles 2, *Deadpool 2*, and *Ant-Man and the Wasp* all busting out with successful sequels in the top 10.

The comic-book world continues to expand, minorities are becoming the majority, and the LGBT community is evolving in new and unexpected ways, cinematically.



Theodore Pellerin and Lucas Hedges in *Boy Erased*.
Photo by Focus Features

—Movies that should have stayed in the closet:

10. **Fantastic Beasts:** The Crimes of Grindelwald: This fantasy film should be arrested for wasting Johnny Depp and squeezing more dollars out of the Harry Potter fan base.

9. **The Happytime Murders:** A movie that made ticket holders unhappy and pissed off the puppets of *Sesame Street*. Melissa McCarthy makes both good and bad lists in the same year.

8. **Pacific Rim: Uprising:** The robots crashed down at the box office in a franchise that continues to overwhelm the eyeballs. *Bumblebee* is currently trying to fly and redeem the genre before the year is out.

7. **Slender Man:** A skinny story tried to make more of an urban legend but ran out of material.

6. **The Spy Who Dumped Me:** Two wacky

friends couldn't save this stinker in the laugh department.

5. **Breaking In:** Gabrielle Union didn't break any box-office records in a home invasion story with weak characters.

4. **Proud Mary:** No one is proud of how this movie fared, but Taraji P. Henson made up for it by voicing Ralph Breaks the Internet the same year.

3. **The Nun:** Taissa Farmiga did her best to keep alive a storyline that was full of bad habits.

2. **Death Wish:** Bruce Willis couldn't make this stinker live long at the cinema, even with Chicago as a backdrop. Some movies shouldn't be remade.

1. **Fifty Shades Freed:** Christian Grey finally tied up the badly written film franchise—but the third time was not a charm.



Melissa McCarthy in *The Happytime Murders*.
Photo by STX Entertainment

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Thom Bierdz talks about sex—and a lot more—in ‘Young, Gay & Restless’

BY ANDREW DAVIS

In *Young, Gay & Restless: My Scandalous On-Screen & Off-Screen Sexual Liberations*, Thom Bierdz—an actor/artist/advocate who is probably best known for portraying heir Phillip Chancellor III on the daytime drama *The Young and the Restless*—literally lets it all hang out, as the saying goes.

Yes, Bierdz talks about everything from past relationships to even his thoughts about his parents in detail that is sometimes sexually graphic, and he even includes nude photos of himself. (This writer has never seen so many euphemisms for genitalia, by the way; it was a lesson in linguistics.) However, it's also the journey of someone who has found his way to sexual liberation—and the book might impart lessons to readers about losing their own restrictions, whether imposed by self and/or society.

Windy City Times: So, congratulations on the book.

Thom Bierdz: Thanks! You can see how much freedom comes from that, right?

WCT: Yes. I was thinking it had to be very cathartic to write it.

TB: Yeah. But to get to that point, it was like, “I’m not trying to fit into Hollywood anymore.” Few people can live alone in the woods and not be concerned about what their partners are going to say or what their kids are going to say.

WCT: Why did you feel you had to write this now?

TB: Good question. I didn’t feel I had to write it now; it just happened. A couple years ago, people were really talking if Trump committed sexual assault and I wrote on Facebook that I thought I had been sexually assaulted several times [by others], and other men wrote about their experiences—and I was compiling a book on sexual assaults of men, which I also have.

So that’s how this started. I started writing more about myself and going back to childhood—and it turned out to be 400 pages. It wasn’t planned; it just organically happened.

WCT: Have you gotten feedback from people who are mentioned in this book?

TB: I tried to reach out to the people I mention by name, and I couldn’t find them all. What’s interesting, though, is that not everyone has the same memories. For instance, there’s the photographer Greg Gorman; I pretty much say nice things about him. But when I say that my manager told me that Greg said [of me], “T.J.’s no mental giant,” he was offended, [adding,] “I never said that.” But this was so long ago.

I tried to avoid hurting people’s feelings, so the people I had to speak negatively about, I changed their names.

WCT: Like the photographer “L”... [In the book, Bierdz says that L may have sexually as-

BOOKS

saulted him.]

TB: Yes.

WCT: When I thought I couldn’t be any more surprised, there would be another. But the book isn’t just sex; you talk about your family [and other very personal aspects]. What was the most difficult part of this book for you to write?

TB: Well, I think the chronology always gets me. But there were no parts that had me crying as I was writing them. Regarding sex, I think it was more amusing than anything else. I hope people stop pointing fingers and saying, “You’re naughty, and you’re naughty. You shouldn’t have had that sexual fantasy.” I think we should just stay away from hurting people.

WCT: I agree. And the reader sees your maturation throughout the book. What would you tell 20-year-old Thom about life?

TB: Hmm... Probably not to push as much and to look for balance—which I still have to learn. I had problems with Amazon KDP [Kindle Direct Publishing] publishing another book of mine. I’m not the type to stop after calling for four hours and being put on hold; I can’t sleep. But you don’t get answers that way, so [stop pushing] is what I’d tell young Thom.

WCT: And would 20-year-old Thom listen?

TB: [Laughs] Probably not... Other people tried to tell me that. And what would you tell 20-year-old Andrew?

WCT: I would tell him to just roll with the punches, and that everything works out eventually. Moving on, what do you think your mother’s reaction to this book would be? [Note: Bierdz’s mother was killed in 1989.]

TB: I never thought about that, but I don’t think she’d have a problem with it. I don’t know. She didn’t seem too puritanical way back then, but I don’t think she’d want to read it. My dad and my sister don’t want to read it.

WCT: Your mother didn’t seem that [puritanical]. In the book, you said she went with you to a few gay bars.

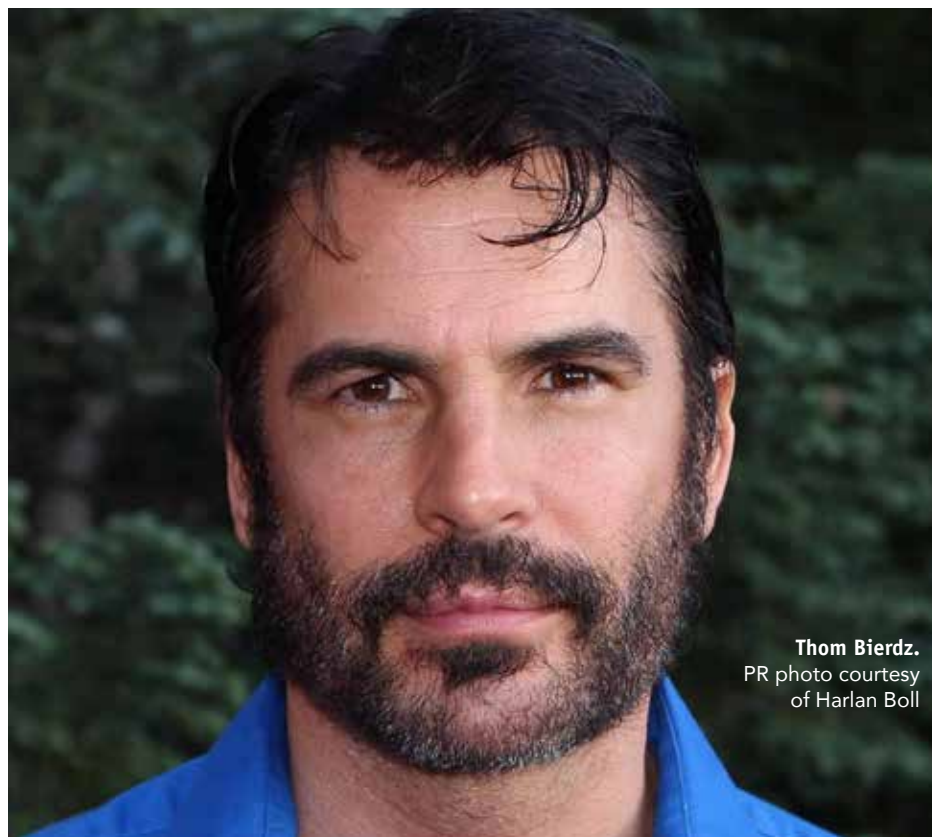
TB: Yeah.

WCT: It was eye-opening when you said in the book that you bumped into someone at a bar who turned out to be [serial killer] Jeffrey Dahmer.

TB: Right. You’re from the area, right?

WCT: I’m strictly Chicago. [Bierdz grew up in Wisconsin.] However, a friend and I were at the L&L Tavern a little while ago; we looked up its history, and it turned out that Jeffrey Dahmer and John Wayne Gacy supposedly frequented this spot.

TB: Wow... You never know how many serial killers we pass.



Thom Bierdz.
PR photo courtesy
of Harlan Boll

And it shows my character back then, because... Well, I joke about it, but I went home with a lot of guys—not just for sex, but also for career [networking], like the guy I mentioned who I played pool with for hours; there was nothing untoward about that. And there was the guy I went home with from the grocery store who invited me to join his sex family. I was 21 at the time, and I considered it. And there was the gym sex—this is stuff that actors don’t share.

WCT: That’s true. Are you worried that you’ve burned any bridges with this book?

TB: I don’t think so. I don’t know. Again, my intent is to live artist and pay rent and do what I do. I have several books and paintings going, so it’s not like I’m trying to fit in. For so long, I tried to fit in; I tried to be that Don Diamont or any of a number of other soap stars.

WCT: Let’s talk about your [current] neighbor Mary, an older woman. Why did you include her in your book?

TB: I just let the book happen. She just turned out to be someone I’ve interacted with for the past couple years. Mary is a way to show how Thom has interacted with people. Also, I’m a mental hoarder while she’s a literal one.

WCT: We get to know Mary well. She said she was also a victim of sexual assault.

TB: Right. Her parents weren’t nice to her, and I see she’s still dealing with stuff.

WCT: This book is refreshingly candid...

TB: I’m pleased that you got that.

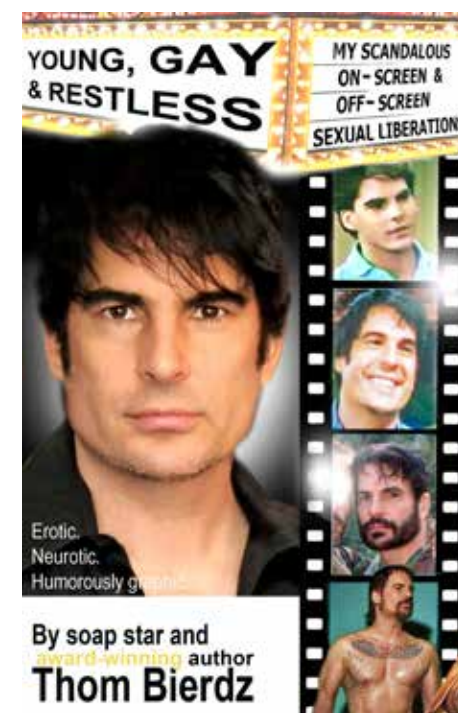
WCT: ...and I think there are some people who might have Thom confused with Phillip Chancellor III [who was also revealed to be gay].

TB: Right. I got a horrible book review from one of my Facebook friends because of that. He went on and on and on, and expected me to be Phillip Chancellor. Oh, well. It’s really not my problem.

WCT: With everything that’s in the book, what do you want readers to take away?

TB: I’d like them to stop repressing others for their sexual thoughts—which is why I brought up incest. I’m not around my relatives; it’s not an uncomfortable issue. I think repression is awful—not just in the personal arena, but in the political one as well, and everywhere. It’s silly to attack people because they’re naughty.

Young, Gay & Restless: My Scandalous On-Screen & Off-Screen Sexual Liberations is available on Amazon.



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A Cradle Song: Part Ten

WRITTEN BY MARK ZUBRO; ILLUSTRATED BY W.S. REED

A Cradle Song, written by Mark Zubro and illustrated by W.S. Reed, debuts in the Windy City Times as the new holiday classic. Filled with travail and woe, warmth and great joy, it is a story for the ages. It will appear in ten installments from Octo-

ber 17 to December 19 and will also be available for gift giving as an e-book and as a paperback. For the true joy and meaning of the season, this is the book you want to read.

Today **A Cradle Song: Part Ten**.

Chapter Thirteen: Luke Part Two

Luke had to trudge halfway across the city to get to the nearest hospital. The poor parts of town didn't have many medical facilities. One of the things he'd hoped his medical training at the local college and in the military would do was make him qualified to help the people who needed him most in his own neighborhood.

The waiting room was crammed with people wearing woolen scarves, bulky hats, and heavy coats. Their sad eyes told of distress that must have brought them here on Christmas Eve. A baby's squalls seemed to echo for an eternity before he and his parents were taken back to be examined. Every noise complaint the baby made sounded like music to Luke's ears. He'd give anything to hear his own child make such a cranky, joyous noise.

Luke had to wait in a long line. His sturdy boots helped him stand. He was tired from the trip and the lengthy walk across the city. He stood stoically and waited his turn.

When he got to the front of the line, before he could say anything, the receptionist demanded his phone number. Luke didn't understand why. He said so.

The receptionist had a pencil behind her ear, a beehive hairdo, and wore too much rouge. She sniffled and dabbed a tissue to her face.

Luke said, "I'm not here to see the doctor."

"This is a hospital," the woman said. "What did you think went on here?"

Luke swallowed any anger. It was Christmas Eve and this receptionist might have been working all day, facing all these ill and cranky people, and maybe she just wanted to take her runny nose and go home to her own family.

A woman stood a few steps behind the receptionist. She heard them and moved closer. Luke saw that her name tag said her name was Ruth and that she was a nurse.

Ruth asked, "How can I help you?"

Luke said, "I'm looking for my wife and

children." He gave his name and a brief explanation.

Ruth checked the hospital's records.

His wife was at the hospital.

As he heard the news, Luke's heart leapt. He rushed to take the elevator to her floor.

He hurried down the corridor to her room. In her bed, she was hooked up by innumerable tubes to blinking and buzzing machines. He rushed to the bed and knelt on the floor next to her. He took her hand.

His wife opened her eyes and gazed at him. At first, she looked confused and disoriented, but after a few moments, she smiled. Tears started down her face. Luke leaned over and hugged her. She felt weak and frail.

Next to the bed was a bassinet with their baby girl.

Luke asked, "Where's Matthew?"

"I don't know." More tears streamed down her face. "I only woke up this morning. They claim they're looking."

"He's been gone?"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

"I'm the one who's sorry."

"Find him," she whispered.

Luke held his daughter, comforted his wife, spoke to the staff, and knew he had to find his son.

Luke went out into the cold. He didn't know which way to go or where to start searching.

He took the long walk back to his neighborhood. He asked everyone in his building, people he met on the street, and those in the closest buildings. No one had seen his son.

Luke found people that might have seen him, but they weren't sure. They pointed in every direction.

As the hours passed, his shoulders slumped, his head bent, his feet felt as if they were encased in lead, but his heart still hoped.

Luke began the long trek back to the hospital. He thought and thought. Where would Matthew go?

Filled with despair, the tired, worn, and wounded soldier, trudged on. He wasn't sure on what street or what alley his weary

steps took him. All he wanted to do was find his little son. He'd followed every rumor and whisper, and he'd found nothing.

The wound in his leg began to ache again. Almost as much as when he'd first been hit.

Luke hoped Matthew didn't live down these awful streets. He feared what he might find. The bells of the churches stopped their midnight tolling. For a moment, the clouds broke and stars burst forth.

Then he saw ahead of him a man in a wheelchair with his great golden dog at his side. They approached slowly then stopped at a low curb in front of a dark alley.

As they stood there, Tawny, the dog, seemed to look at Luke. With his cane, the man in the wheelchair thumped the cold ground once. Tawny approached carefully, lowered his head, and sniffed Luke's ankle. Luke touched the golden fur. For a brief moment, his heart ached less.

He began to step around man and dog. Tawny shifted slightly so that Luke had to ease his way farther around, toward the opening in what Luke thought was an evil and forbidding alley.

Then Luke heard it. Faint and dim, a song echoed in the night. He lifted up his head. Someone was playing a harmonica. He wanted to find whoever made such a beautiful and plaintive music on this night of the year.

Luke lifted his head. His eyes tried to pierce the darkness. His ears strained to listen. He entered the alley and stepped toward the sound. He hesitated briefly, looked back at man and dog who were now gone.

He glanced ahead and continued to follow the soft, plaintive notes. At first, he tiptoed to make less noise. As best he could, he shut out all the racket and clamor of the city. The more he moved forward, the less the clatter and din mattered. He let the sound draw him forward.

Chapter Fourteen: A Cradle Song

The little harmonica felt the boy's joy. Felt the song in Matthew's heart, and Erik was glad he was home at last. The little harmonica felt perfect in the darkness and closeness.

The little boy played with soft gasps of despair. His poor, tired, spent body doing as much as it could. And the notes became louder, each one seemed to give him new strength. The Isle of Misfit Toys had given him hope. With each note, Matthew felt an enveloping peace and joy. As his breaths grew stronger and the song soared, he knew he would never give up.

Matthew's tiny hands clutched him with all their strength of mind and will. The music swelled with each breath the boy took.



And the little harmonica trilled with all of his heart and all of his might. He took the boy's breaths and played so hard he thought he might burst all that held him together. He didn't care. He would give all that he was and all that he had to give the slightest moments of comfort to the poor little boy.

It wasn't a song that had been written before. It was a song from Erik's heart. To bring comfort to the boy's soul. To soothe the boy's mind. To relieve all his sorrows.

And Erik sang with all of his heart. And he took each breath the boy breathed into him and made it into a symphony of joy

and peace. All the gentleness of every cradle song, all the power of an Ode to Joy or any Hallelujah chorus, all in a few simple notes.

Erik got his wish. The world seemed to echo and re-echo with all the music he could make.

He didn't have the power of great sweep and majesty, of harps and trumpets and sounds mixed with profound joy. He had the power of gentle peace.

Erik didn't care that the boy who held him didn't know real songs. He didn't care that it wasn't a cradle song that he remembered. Nor did it matter that every note wasn't perfect. He cared that it was their cradle song. Something that they made together that came from the purity of both their hearts. The purity of longing, being together, and hope. For now, Erik was part of this child's life. He was part of soothing a boy's heart and soul. Erik helped with a song of comfort and joy.

The music rose up so high, it touched the stars. Greater than all the symphonies ever written, brighter than the stars in the firmament. More powerful than vast sweeping armies.

And still the little harmonica willed the little boy to hold on. To breathe again and make any kind of music, any kind of noise that the little harmonica could transform to light and warmth and gentleness.

The song trilled in the little harmonica's heart. And the little boy played with all his might. But it was a tiny sound that barely disturbed the oceans of night around them.

But it was enough.

Chapter Fifteen: Luke

Luke followed the tiny little notes, which spoke of warmth and comfort. Notes that wanted to break your heart. Each sound reached his soldier's heart. Down dark passages, through cobwebs, past dark corners. He squeezed through narrow openings. Always following the cradle song, trying to find its origin.

And the notes became clearer as he neared.

Far above Luke, the clouds in the night sky parted for another brief moment. The light from a single star smote his heart. He moved toward the old hovel from which the music came. He thrust past barriers and shoved through the darkness.

Louder now, the music drifted to his ears. The soldier moved the last thin wooden barrier and then pushed aside a shabby blanket. He could see an almost spent candle sputtering in a tiny cup. And the little boy crouched and bent over with his tiny musical instrument, taking each desperate breath and making them magic.



He saw the boy clutching the harmonica and himself for these moments of warmth and song.

It was Matthew.

Forgetting all pain and weariness and wounds, Luke called Matthew's name and rushed forward. He pulled the shivering boy to him and enveloped him in all the warmth of the universe.

He held him so tight, he thought his heart might burst.

Matthew smiled and cried and held on tight. The boy felt the rough stubble on Luke's face that the boy remembered, and his daddy's smell of work and sweat. His memory rushed forward.

At the same time, in one hand, Matthew clutched the harmonica with all his might.

Chapter Sixteen: Erik, Matthew, and Luke

The little harmonica nestled himself into the boy's clamped fist. Now crushed between soldier and son.

He'd played his song.

He belonged here.

His little harmonica heart nearly burst as the tiny boy clutched onto his daddy. All the warmth of the universe flooding over all of them.

With his son in his arms, Luke rushed back to the hospital. In the room, Matthew's heart almost burst at the sight of his mom and his sister.

After tears and hugs and greetings, Matthew sat on the side of the bed. He brought out his gifts. He put the doll next to his sister and nestled it into her blankets. He gave his mom the rose, and she smiled through her tears. He handed Luke the little car. His dad folded it carefully into his big hands.

Matthew took out his harmonica. And the little boy's lips found him, and they played what became their own cradle song. The song they made was the most wonderful Christmas music of all time. Greater than all the choruses and carols ever written or sung. Softer than an angel's wings. More pure than ice-crystalled snow. Mightier than any army.

Matthew and Erik sang together in great joy and happiness.

And the Christmas star glowed in the night, showering the world with joy.

The end.



"A Cradle Song is my very favorite of Mark Zubro's books. Tender, full of insight and love, it made me cry—but they were happy tears."

—**Jeanne M. Dams**,
author of the *Dorothy Martin*
mysteries

"A Cradle Song is a wonderful, heartwarming story, and just right for Christmas. Open this present and enjoy!"

—**Barbara D'Amato**,
author of the *Cat Marsala*
series and the recent
Other Eyes

A Cradle Song is available now in paperback from **Unabridged Bookstore** in Chicago, **Outwords Books** in Milwaukee and also as an ebook or a paperback online at **Amazon.com**

Mark Zubro is the author of thirty-six books and seven short stories. He has won the Lambda Literary award for *A Simple Suburban Murder* and been nominated eight other times. All are available as ebooks and most as paperbacks online or at **Unabridged Bookstore** in Chicago and **Outwords Books** in Milwaukee.

Christine Hallquist talks about 'Denial' documentary

BY DANIELLE SOLZMAN

A few weeks ago, Windy City Times had talked with former Vermont gubernatorial candidate Christine D. Hallquist about a new documentary, *Denial*.

The film covers Hallquist's energy work while also confronting her gender transition, all the while serving as the CEO of Vermont Electric Cooperative. In coming out as transgender, Hallquist became the first major U.S. CEO of any company to do so.

Denial is currently available to rent or buy on VOD platforms.

Windy City Times: When your son announced plans to start filming you for *Denial*, did you ever think that he would also be filming you as you started your public transition?

Christine Hallquist: In fact in the beginning, we didn't have this public transition actually in the schedule.

WCT: When did you come out to your family and when did filming start?

CH: He started fooling around 2010 and I came out to the family in late 2012.

WCT: Your story is fascinating since you're the first major American CEO to come out as transgender while holding that office. What led you to ultimately do so in 2015?

CH: What happened was when I reached my late 40s, I started to feel really, really guilty and my children didn't know the most important truth about me, and I decided at that time I would transition. I didn't have a time schedule in mind, but I knew before I leave the earth that I wanted to tell the truth. I'd spent several years in counseling with my spouse and then I came out to the children. I also started my own counseling with a transgender counselor in 2010.

The real thing that set the schedule in 2010, I said to my counselor—she asked me what my goal was. I told her, "Well, as a man, I'm a strong leader with a level of confidence." Anyway, I was really confident as a male leader but Christine was kind of kryptonite to David, because as a female, I lacked confidence and was full of shame. We spent five years working on it and it was 2015 when I felt ready to transition—which is why I transitioned that year. I was pretty amazed that all that work paid off, that ultimately I felt a very competent strong leader in Christine.

WCT: This film covers quite a bit of your work on the energy front. Where are we going right now and what still needs to change?

CH: Well, we still have to solve climate change, that's for sure. That was my pas-



Christine Hallquist.
Photo courtesy of
Mosaic Pictures

sion and continues to be my passion, but the events of November 9, 2016, really changed everything for me. And of course, I went into political depression and in the following year—2017—I did a lot of marching. I marched at the Women's March down in Washington and the Climate March down in Washington. Ultimately, things weren't changing. On January 20, 2018, I was down at the youth march in Montpelier, our state capital, where I listened to four young women—they were high school seniors—who called themselves Muslim Girls Making Change. They were doing slam poetry on what it was like to live abroad and face the harassment they face every day in schools in their community. That's when I decided—and kind of made the irrational decision—to run for governor.

WCT: Now that the gubernatorial campaign is over, what are you looking forward to doing going forward?

CH: I have to make a living, so I'm in the process of figuring that out.

WCT: What's the most important thing that you want people to take away from watching the documentary?

CH: I want people to walk away from that knowing that we can solve these big problems. I'm hoping people can walk away with hope about the future.

WCT: If you had a time machine, what would you tell your younger self?

CH: I'm not sure I would tell my younger self anything. It's one of those things where—as I said in the movie—you can't really change history. You make your decisions based on what you know at the time. I guess I wouldn't change anything.

WCT: What message—if any—do you have for transgender youth?

CH: My message is to do whatever you can to become your authentic self and make sure you get help in doing it. I just can't imagine how I made this transition. I don't

Turn to page 25

'Dada Woof' cast announced

About Face Theatre has announced casting for its Chicago premiere of *Dada Woof Papa Hot*, by Peter Parnell (*The Cider House Rules*) and directed by Artistic Associate Keira Fromm.

This comedy about gay parenting and modern families will feature AFT Artistic Associate Benjamin Sprunger with Jos N. Banks, Shane Kenyon, Keith Kupferer, Lily Mojekwu, Bruch Reed and Rachel Sullivan.

The production will run Jan. 10-Feb. 16, 2019 at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave. Tickets (\$15-\$38 each) are available at AboutFaceTheatre.com, 773-975-8150 or at the Theater Wit box office.

Digital lottery, rush tickets for 'Fiddler'

Broadway In Chicago announced that there will be a digital lottery and rush tickets for the Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, which will run at the Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W. Randolph St., through Jan. 6, 2019.

The lottery will happen online only the day before each performance, and 26 tickets will be sold for every performance at \$25 each.

Visit <http://www.broadwayinchicago.com/show/fiddler-on-the-roof/> to enter the lottery.

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Kevin Hart in *Night School*.
Image from Universal Pictures
Home Entertainment

VIEWPOINT

Words matter

*They have the power to heal or to hurt.
We should all use them responsibly.*

BY DAVID J. JOHNS

As a kindergarten teacher, I found myself frequently reminding my students, who I also call “my babies,” of simple truths that endure over time.

Chief among them: Words have power—use them wisely. With the opposite retort, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” I tried to teach them that words have the power to hurt and heal. I also supported them with ways to be responsible for their actions and the words to which they gave life.

Recent events prove that not everyone learned this lesson—but the best lessons bear repeating.

In case you missed it, comedian/entertainer Kevin Hart announced and then rescinded his invitation to host the upcoming Oscars. At the center of the public discussion was Hart’s reason for not hosting. He refused to apologize for homophobic comments and other public displays of insensitivity. Ironically, he ended up offering something of an apology when explaining why he refused to do so.

Nobody won in this situation. Hart lost out on a dream and hard conversations were shut down about intolerance, oppression, and the work required to demonstrate contrition and growth.

I do not want the outcries from the LGBTQ/SGL community and our supporters to be reduced to “oversensitive people demanding meaningless



David J. Johns.

apologies.”

Instead, we should use this opportunity to push conversations forward, heal existing wounds, and ensure we can all get free from oppressive language and reflexive postures that enable bigotry.

In a series of personal Instagram posts (view posts here and here) regarding Hart, I shared some perspective on demonstrating growth, packaging harmful words and lies as jokes, and the importance of context, and public accountability. Here are some thoughts:

1. When Hart announced that he would no longer host the Oscars, then released comments saying, “I’ve said who I am now versus who I was then,” I wondered how Kevin would demonstrate the growth he’s talked about experiencing. There was an opportunity to demonstrate growth and facilitate much needed dialogue.

2. This is NOT about anything Hart said that

to face cancer, but frankly facing transition was harder than that.

WCT: When you did tell your family—were you afraid of losing them?

CH: I was afraid of losing everything but the truth was more important. I was afraid of losing my job. I was afraid of losing my home, my family and ending up homeless. But on the contrary, just the opposite happened. That was certainly my fear.

one time he was being funny, nor is it about how “sensitive” people are making unfounded demands. Hart has a history of saying offensive and mean-spirited things and acting on ignorance. Consider these incidents:

—Who has a cowboys-and Indians-themed kids’ birthday party? Hart. So much has been written about how colonization has blamed Native Americans for the genocide they continued to experience. Defending himself, Hart said, “This isn’t a racial slur that people are doing and being malicious with. This is a game that’s been played for years,” Hart also foolishly said you’d be an idiot to think that white people don’t already play games like “slave owner and slave,” because we should definitely be looking to white people as examples for shit to do.” No one can defend ignorance.

—Words matter. Consider how Black girls struggle to accept their brilliance and beauty because they live in an anti-Black society where lies are designed to strip them of their super powers. These harmful lies are packaged as “jokes” in far too many ways. Now remember how Hart talked about Black women in extremely problematic ways before he broke into mainstream fame: “Light-skinned women usually have better credit than dark-skinned women...broke a** dark h*** LOL,” Hart posted in 2010.

3. The importance of this opportunity to create a meaningful dialogue about harmful words should not be drowned out by requests for an apology. For me, this isn’t about an apology. It’s about taking advantage of opportunities to increase competence in meaningful and measurable ways.

4. Context matters. As a Black man in America, it is vexing to see another brother forced, compelled or cajoled into requests made by white people in positions of power. I do NOT think it was appropriate that the Oscar producers demanded an apology. I DO believe the producers and Kevin should have identified meaningful ways to facilitate conversations rather than shutting them down.

5. Nobody wins when we shut down or silence people. As someone personally aware of how language is used to trigger and terrorize, I know there is so much more to do with regards to encouraging better dialogues. No one knows everything. We all make mistakes. We should all be supported in learning and growing.

6. On public accountability: Celebrities, public figures, really anyone with a platform offers themselves up to be celebrated and criticized as a result of their words and actions. Regardless of time frame, the same question will be asked and answered.

I hope we can all learn from this and grow towards better understanding rather than simply naming the offense. To Hart: You don’t get to be tired of apologizing, especially when your actions suggest that you were not sincere.

As my friend, comedian Amanda Seales, reminded me, every tier you elevate to you will have to re-establish boundaries and replenish apologies.

David J. Johns is executive director of The National Black Justice Coalition, a civil-rights organization dedicated to the empowerment of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and same gender loving (LGBTQ/SGL) people, including people living with HIV/AIDS.

HALLQUIST from page 24

think I could have done it on my own. So you know whatever help you can find. I was fortunately in a position that I was able to afford and pay for counseling. But even if you can’t afford counseling, find your nearest private center and get help—get support groups. I just don’t see how you can make this kind of a transition without help. For me, it was harder than facing my own death. As you saw in the movie, I did have

Jingle Ball Tour: Bright lights and kinky boots

BY JERRY NUNN

The national iHeartRadio Jingle Ball Tour 2018 stopped at Rosemont's Allstate Arena on Dec. 12, courtesy of radio station 103.5 KISS FM and a unique lineup of music.

This was the ninth stop on the tour presented by Capital One with a rotation of artists along the route. A dollar from each ticket was donated to the Ryan Seacrest Foundation, a non-profit organization named after the host/entertainer that is dedicated to inspiring youth through entertainment and education.

Budding young pop star Sabrina Carpenter kicked off the night with a tight set and chatted with Windy City Times on the red carpet afterward. She stepped out in tall boots similar to the statuesque Dua Lipa earlier in the evening, saying, "This literally covers my entire leg!" Carpenter spoke of her role this year in the film *The*



Left: Dua Lipa. Right: Bebe Rexha.
Photos by Jerry Nunn

Hate U Give, describing it as difficult playing Hailey who had some dramatic moments in the film: "It showed me in a light that I don't even like myself in. It can be hard as an actress because I had to accept the fact that I was not the likable one. My job was to get the message across. The

cast and crew were amazing and told me I wasn't a terrible person. My fanbase, luckily, knows who I am." She confessed that she wants to have a more positive look on things for 2019, saying she's grateful for what she has.

Michigan-born singer Bazzi performed his hit song "Beautiful" after Carpenter. Bebe Rexha followed that with her strong mix of her catalog that she has performed at various festivals, including *Pride in LA*. "Meant to Be," with Florida Georgia Line, has been a huge crossover hit for the artist and a staple in her repertoire.

Shawn Mendes chose to go earlier in the evening, preferring not to headline. The Canadian singer continues to break records keeping his fans in "Stitches." His live performance made the young girls scream to the tune of his popular singles "Treat You Better" and "In My Blood."

English chart topper Dua Lipa also entertained the minions with dancers who strutted around the stage to her catchy songs. "IDGAF" may not have been the best song choice for a very young crowd who liked to sing along to the adult lyrics, but she concluded with "New Rules" that was certainly more appropriate.

Another Canadian singer at the show was Alesia Cara, who really stood out from the pack by not being caught up in the glitz and glamour. She

MUSIC

dressed very casual at the carpet, then wore an oversized men's suit with a tie for the stage. She stopped to speak about how so many of her fans are in the LGBT community: "I have seen them grow and come out over the years. We have been like a little family and it is so amazing. I feel like they are growing into powerful, strong people. I hope my music can make them feel comfortable with who they are because they deserve it. I am so proud of them and who they are." Cara then performed her new album, *Growing Pains*. The Best New Artist Grammy Award winner put her money where her mouth was by projecting a video for "Scars to Your Beautiful" that represented the queer community and celebrated unique individuals in an artistic light.

Speaking of lights, DJ Calvin Harris closed the night with a spectacular light show to accompany his tunes. While it was a misstep not to have Dua Lipa come out and sing "One Kiss," he gained points for the new Sam Smith collaboration "Promises," with a video depicting voguing and the ball scene. From fiery explosions to a dazzling light display, Harris showed why his career is not stopping anytime soon.

THE SPORTING LIFE: Kenny Johnson

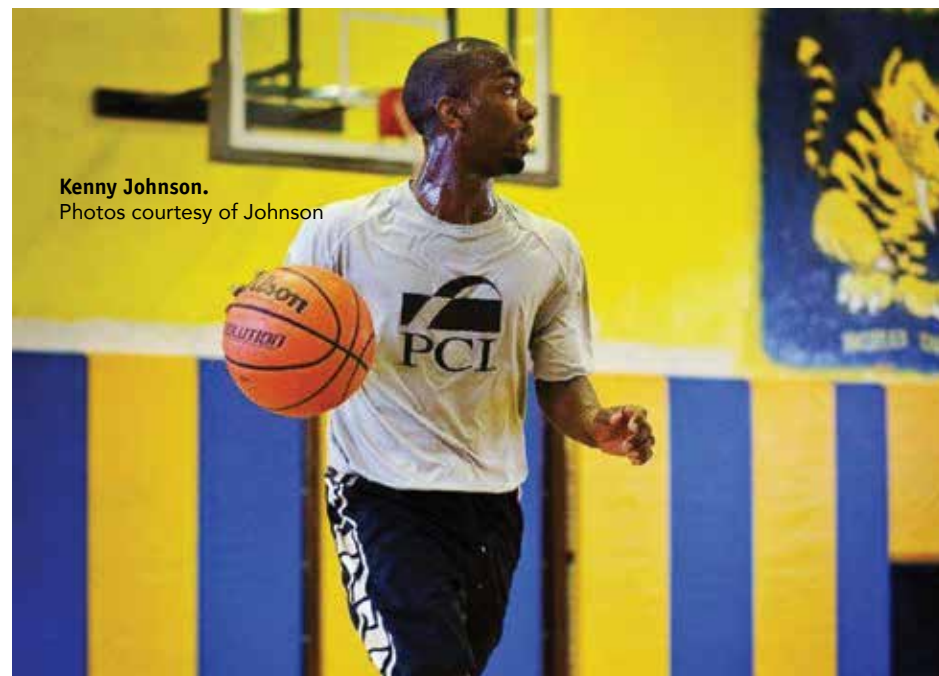
BY ROSS FORMAN

Kenny Johnson has played almost every gay sport over the past four years, after moving to Chicago five years ago from Elkhart, Indiana.

Johnson has scored many basketball memories. "My most memorable gay sports highlight was when my parents attended their first gay sports event—my basketball championship game [for the Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association, CMSA] and they drove three hours to support me," said Johnson, 32, who lives in Chicago's

Rogers Park and works as a product service associate for Lowes home improvement.

In his first year playing gay sports in Chicago, Johnson was on a basketball championship team, then, during the post-season awards ceremony, he was named the Rookie of the Year award-winner, as voted by fellow league players. "I [felt] accepted and celebrated by my [then-] new family," Johnson said. [That first year playing gay sports], I thought it was fun and a great way to get a sense of community. I instantly met a lot of new people and it helped me create a social life



Kenny Johnson.
Photos courtesy of Johnson

in my new city.

"[Over the past four years, gay sports have] become more inclusive to different groups of people around the city as it has grown in popularity. I've seen people of all ages, various races, and more straight allies participating."

Johnson has played basketball, football, beach volleyball, indoor volleyball, ultimate Frisbee, kickball, and dodgeball. He now still plays basketball, beach and indoor volleyball, and kickball.

"I like the sense of community [in gay sports], the physicality of it, and the fact that it provides frequent social activities outside of work," said Johnson, who tagged basketball as his best, flag football as his worst sport.

SPORTS

"Gay sports have allowed me to be more accepting of my own sexuality. Gay sports have allowed me to come out of my shell and meet new people," Johnson said. "I would like to try [playing] badminton. I was introduced to it in high school and would love to play it competitively."

Johnson added: "I truly have a love for gay sports. It provides a safe space for individuals who may not have safe spaces to call their own. It provides a loving environment and family atmosphere. I have made many lifelong friends [through] gay sports."

Extra innings with ... Kenny Johnson

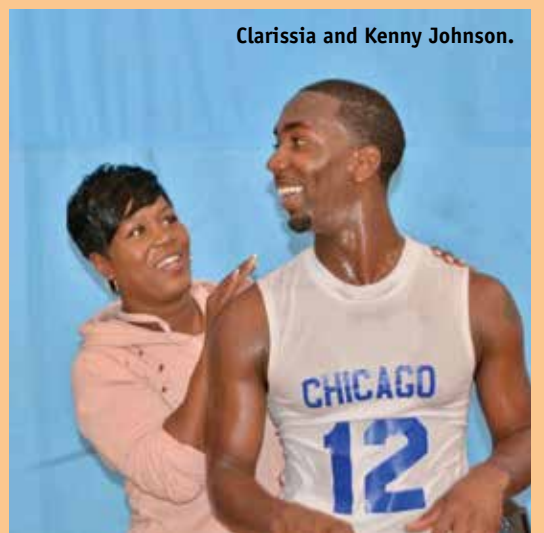
—Favorite pro sports team: 2002 Sacramento Kings

—Favorite pro athlete: Michael Jordan

—Favorite pro sports stadium: United Center

—One pro athlete who you'd like to meet: Paul George of the Oklahoma City Thunder

—If you could attend any pro sports event/game, what would it be?: "U.S. Open Championship Game, [but] only if Serena Williams or Novak Djokovic are playing."



Clarissa and Kenny Johnson.



BILLY Masters

"That's about the gayest thing I have ever heard. You and **Viggo Mortensen** should get a hotel room and suck each other's dicks!"—Judge John Hallett in LeRay Town Court, New York, responds to an attorney who was promoting a film festival honoring Mortensen. A formal complaint was filed against the judge, who resigned in exchange for all charges being dropped.

I've got way too much to share with you this week, so I'm gonna dive right in. I must make a confession—I've loved **Arnetia Walker** since I saw her getting screwed doggie-style by Ray Sharkey in *Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills*. I know—that's a lot to take in. (That's what she said!) So when the prolific Stan Zimmerman told me she was starring in his and Christian McLaughlin's play *Yes, Virginia at The Complex in Hollywood*, I had to go. Problem was, I had no free time. I couldn't go to a preview—I had to bake lemon bars for a holiday party. I couldn't go to the opening night because I had my **Well-Strung** boys in their Christmas Show at the LA Gay & Lesbian Center. (It was great, it was fabulous; we'll come back to them in the "Gift Giving" section.)

The only possible time I could go was the Sunday matinee. But it was gonna be tight since I was escorting **Jenifer Lewis** to "Divas Simply Singing" at 5 p.m. The play was at 3 p.m., and it was 90 minutes long. So I'd have time to meet and greet and do whatever else one does when meeting someone who you've seen getting screwed doggie-style. (In addition to the sexual act, what makes that moment particularly memorable is Arnetia's comedic timing ... as you'll see on BillyMasters.com.) I loved the play, and Arnetia was a dream. In fact, she holds the distinction of having played virtually every part in *Dreamgirls*—possibly including James "Thunder" Early! She is a versatile powerhouse who honed her skills in the theatre and took them to the big and small screen. She stars alongside Mindy Sterling, who I also love but I never saw get fucked in any position. (Why do I keep harping on this?) It was a privilege to see them both in this terrific play and in an intimate theater. It runs through Dec. 30.

I then zipped over to "Divas" where, child, it was just pandemonium. Those people want their Jenifer Lewis, and they want her now. But, if they wanted a photo, they had to buy the book. (The purple paperback of "The Mother of Black Hollywood" makes a GREAT Christmas gift.) Jenifer sang. She carried on. She did some high kicks. She did everything you'd expect her to do ... and more. We had a blast. And **Sheryl Lee Ralph**—well, what can one say? She pulls it all off so gorgeously and glamorously and generously. It was a great night, on every level.

I then zipped to NYC and saw some fabulous Broadway plays—including **Michael Urie** in *Torch Song*—all of which I'll review on BillyMasters.com. From there, I dashed back to Boston long



Viggo Mortensen was the subject of an interesting quote from a judge, Billy says.

Photo of Mortensen from Magnolia Pictures

enough to drop my luggage off at the ancestral Masters Manor and sprint four blocks to see **Darlene Love** perform at Medford's Chevalier Theatre. And what a show it was. The 77-year-old legend has a voice which is quite simply a gift from God. And it's a gift that keeps on giving, particularly around the holidays. Not satisfied with singing Christmas carols (including her signature "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)"), we also got many of Love's classic and newer hits—a great way to get into the holiday spirit.

Remember a couple of weeks ago I told you the president of Grindr said he believes marriage is between a man and a woman? I predicted heads would roll—and they did. Landon Rafe Zumwait, the head of communications for the company, resigned in protest, saying, "As an out and proud gay man madly in love with a man I don't deserve, I refused to compromise my own values or professional integrity to defend a statement that goes against everything I am and everything I believe in." BTW, Landon is really hot. Kinda makes you wanna see a photo of his beau.

I also recently told you that **Antoni Porowski**, from *Queer Eye*, was whispered to be dating **Trace Lehnhoff**, formerly of *Flipping Out*. Well, they just made their liaison official with a social-media post. Around the same time, we got word that the ridiculously hot Antoni had shot a potential photo spread (so to speak) for Calvin Klein underwear. Some of the photos briefly surfaced on the photographer's Instagram page, but then were yanked. Happily, you can yank away to your heart's content 'cause we've got the snaps on BillyMasters.com.

Little **Cheyenne Jackson** has had a holiday release. No, we're not talking about his infamous yanking video. This is a single called "Plans," and he's joined by Catey Shaw. (I don't know, so don't ask me.) If you're so inclined, you can listen to it on our website—where you can still see the video of him being a ho-ho-ho.

That leads us to the final installment of "*Billy's Holiday Gift Giving Suggestions*." This week—you guessed it—we're focusing on music. Since I mentioned them earlier, one of my favorite collections comes from **Well-Strung**. The singing string quartet recently released *Under the Covers*, which I believe is some of their best work. It is a collection of pop songs fused with well-known classical pieces. Definitely check them out at Well-Strung.com.

If you want holiday music, my Broadway buddies **Julia Murney** and **Max von Essen** (who I told you will be headlining the upcoming nation-

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al tour of "Falsettos") recorded "O Holy Night" last year as a benefit for Covenant House. It's really gorgeous, and I believe the money still goes to the organization. So grab it on Amazon for \$0.99.

And since I mentioned Darlene Love earlier, here's something I didn't know—in addition to the legendary The Phil Spector Christmas Album, she also recorded *It's Christmas, Of Course a few years back*. This isn't your typical holiday CD—you won't find a classic carol here. These are all rock songs from people like James Brown, Stevie Wonder and Tom Petty. It's a rockin' Christmas collection—definitely worth picking up.

When I'm dreaming of divas and dicks, it's definitely time to end yet another column. With the holidays fast upon us, you could find yourself needing a last-minute gift. Might I suggest a membership to BillyMasters.com—the site that'll keep you yanking all year long. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Santa stuffs your stocking—doggie-style. So, until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

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the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in
WINDY CITY TIMES

SAVOR

The Ruin Daily; 'Charlie Brown'; Piccolo Sogno

BY ANDREW DAVIS

The Ruin Daily (328 S. Jefferson St.; <https://www.theruindaily.com>) has a few unusual aspects to it—starting with its name.

The name actually pays tribute to U.S. President Martin Van Buren, the inspiration behind the cross street of the restaurant. However, Van Buren was widely blamed for “ruining” the financial system through the economic depression in 1837, and was often referred to throughout history as “Marty Van Ruin.”

History lesson aside, The Ruin Daily is also different in what it offers. It's an airy deli that allows people to do everything from socialize to work on their laptops to hold business meetings—and it offers alcohol. My dining companion really enjoyed his Aviator (sloe gin, lemon, maraschino and cherry liqueurs) while I happily sipped my Green Thang (probably the most healthful cocktail one can have, as it contains vodka, cucumber, matcha, kale, honey and lemon). In addition, my friend also had a shot of Malort (which is not on the menu, but



Nachos (above) and the Jack'd Skellington at The Ruin Daily.

Above: PR photo. Below: Photo by Andrew Davis



which The Ruin certainly has).

Even though it was a little early (as dinner items aren't usually served until 3 p.m.), the manager allowed us to try The Ruin Daily's



Carolers at Headquarters Beercade's 'Charlie Brown' event.

Photo by Andrew Davis

nachos—an incredible concoction that ranked among the best that I've had. It was a little spicy in spots, but I thoroughly enjoyed it.

In fact, the nachos were so good that they overshadowed the sandwiches (and this place's tagline—"There's no room in your life for sh*tty sandwiches"—is also a bit off the beaten path). The tuna melt and chicken Alfredo items definitely weren't sh*tty—but they didn't shine, either, unfortunately. However, things did end on a high note, courtesy of silky chocolate-chip cookies courtesy of Revival Food Hall.

Overall, though, I recommend this spot—and there are a host of other sandwiches I'd like to try. This place certainly won't “ruin” your day.

Headquarters Beercade's 'Charlie Brown Christmas'

On Dec. 9, the River North spot **Headquarters Beercade** (think a restaurant/bar/arcade) held a “Charlie Brown Christmas” brunch.

Besides culinary items such as cheesy potatoes, French toast and much more, there were beverages offerings such as The Naughty List, Pumpkin-Spiced Toddy and the Jack'd Skellington—the last one a mix of cranberry-infused gin, lime and simple syrup, served with a gingerbread cookie.

Other delights included live performances by the Tim Stine Quartet playing Vince Guaraldi's timeless Christmas album, carolers and screenings of Charlie Brown holiday movies.

Props to prosciutto

Prosciutto di Parma is taken very seriously—especially at Italian restaurants, naturally.

The Italian meat took center stage at a recent class at the spot **Piccolo Sogno** that Chef Tony Priolo led.

Attendees learned several interesting things about the meat, such as the fact that prosciutto di Parma can only be produced from the hind legs of selected pigs raised in certain regions of Italy and fed certain items (acorns, barley, etc.)—and they must meet the highest standards. The tags on the meat tell much about it, such as how it's cured. In addition, there are two types of prosciutto restaurants use: pressed and rotondo.

And attendees' stomachs were sated as well as their brains, with guests being treated to prosciutto-themed dishes ranging from pizza to ricotta dumplings to white-bean soup.

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



NORTH END

Has it been 35 years already?!
Joseph Stevens Photography



Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga
in *A Star Is Born*.
Image by Warner Bros.

SAG nominees include 'A Star Is Born,' 'Maisel'

Awkwafina and Laverne Cox announced the 25th annual Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards nominees Dec. 12—and *A Star Is Born* and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* led the way in the film and television categories, respectively.

A Star Is Born received several nods, including Lady Gaga (Female Actor in a Leading Role in a Motion Picture), Sam Elliott (Male Actor in a Supporting Role in a Motion Picture), Bradley Cooper (Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Motion Picture) and best cast. Gaga will face off against Emily Blunt, Gleen Close, Olivia Colman and Melissa McCarthy, while the other cast nominees include those of *Black Panther*, *BlacKkKlansman*, *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Also, Rami Malek (portraying Freddie Mercury in *Bohemian Rhapsody*) will compete against Cooper, Christian Bale, Viggo Mortensen and John David Washington (the son of Denzel).

The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel's multiple nominations included two for female Actor in a Comedy Series (Rachel Brosnahan and Alex Borstein), Male Actor in a Comedy Series (Tony Shalhoub) and Ensemble in a Comedy Series. "Maisel" tied *Ozark* for the most nominations, with four.

The Assassination of Gianni Versace: *American Crime Story* also received two nods: for Penelope Cruz (Female Actor in a TV Movie/Limited Series) and Darren Criss (Male Actor in a TV Movie/Limited Series).

The 25th annual SAG Awards air live Jan. 27, 2019, on both TBS and TNT. Alan Alda will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award.



Cory Jobe.
PR photo from Navy Pier

Jobe named to post at Navy Pier

Navy Pier announced the appointment of Cory Jobe to the newly-established position of vice president of communications, effective Monday, Jan. 7.

In his new role, Jobe will be charged with leading the Pier's marketing, branding and communications initiatives, and ultimately, helping draw more locals and tourists to experience the reimagined Navy Pier.

Jobe comes to Navy Pier with much experience in the tourism and hospitality industry—most recently serving as the director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, where he has been responsible for leading the state's tourism marketing and development efforts.

Tanner releases new holiday song

Local singer Jeannie Tanner, with the Jeannie Tanner Quartet, has released the new holiday song "Santa's in the Chimney (I Think He Might Be Stuck)."

Tanner sings and plays trumpet on this original Christmas song that she composed that features her quartet: Lisa McQueen on piano, Cory Biggerstaff on bass, and Darren Scorza on drums. This upbeat New Orleans-style track was mixed, mastered and produced by Darren Scorza at his Mather Point Studios.

The song can be downloaded for \$1.29 at <http://store.cdbaby.com/cd/jeannietanner14>. In addition, Tanner has recorded two full-length albums of songs of the season that include more of her original songs and Christmas favorites: *Joyful Season* and *A Little Bit of Christmas* (both available on CD Baby, I-tunes, Amazon and other digital outlets).



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NEWS STORIES from page 4

months, the U.S. Senate in April finally confirmed Grenell by a 56-to-42 vote. Grenell has represented Trump's politics vigorously in Germany, saying he wants to "empower other conservatives" in Europe, and expressing particular interest in Austria's new far-right chancellor Sebastian Kurz, which Time magazine says brought "a movement that was founded by neo-Nazis back into a position of power." Some media reports say Trump has been very pleased with Grenell and might be considering him for chief of staff, if Trump decides to let go his new acting chief of staff.

10. Attorney General Jeff Sessions fired: Everyone saw it coming and, sure enough, the day after the November 6 elections, President Trump fired his attorney general, Jeff Sessions. Trump had expressed a litany of complaints with Sessions, going back to almost the same month he

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named the former U.S. senator and prominent campaign supporter to the post. Sessions' had a well-established reputation of opposing equal rights for LGBT people before he took over the top spot at the Department of Justice and, during his brief tenure there, he managed to extend that reputation. But there was nothing to celebrate. President Trump replaced him with Matthew Whitaker, a right-wing evangelical activist who waged a "politically motivated witch hunt" in Iowa against politicians who supported marriage for same-sex couples. Now, Trump has replaced Whitaker with William Barr, who served as attorney general under President George H.W. Bush. Legal activists say the LGBT community can expect Barr to continue with much the same hostility to LGBT civil rights as Sessions showed.

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WINDY CITY TIMES COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Wed., Dec. 19

AIDS Foundation of Chicago report on HIV epidemic in Illinois Webinar on the status of HIV/AIDS. Register online 2:00pm - 3:00pm Online <http://register.gotowebinar.com/register/8547554311627031051>

Holiday Hootenanny Radio Hour Present A Cricket on the Mantle John and Dot are expecting a child, Tim and Mae are getting married, and almost everyone is home for the holidays. All seems calm and bright, until a mysterious drifter wanders into town, changing the course of everyone's Christmas plans. Pre-performance caroling begins at 7 p.m. 7:30pm Den Theatre, 1331 N. Milwaukee Ave.; <http://anarchistfolk.wixsite.com/cricket>.

Thursday, Dec. 20

Happy HoliGays Customer Appreciation Party Complimentary bites from Yoshi's Cafe Chicago and Amazing Edibles Gourmet Catering. GlitterGuts photobooth. Dixie Lynn Cartwright with prize drawings. No cover. Bring a donation for Heartland Alliance: paper products, coffee, cleaning supplies, grooming items or cash donation at door. 6:00pm - 2:00am Sidetrack 3349 N Halsted St Chicago <http://www.sidetrackchicago.com>

Our Abortions, Our Stories, Our Lives panel and speakout Starts with a panel discussion including youth from the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, fol-



'JAM' DANDY Thursday, Dec. 20

Kristen Kaza will lead "Slo Mo, Slo Jams for the Queer Fam."

Photo by Miss Meadows

lowed by an opportunity for attendees to share their own experiences with abortion. Immediately following, reception with refreshments and free portraits by artist Ally Almore. No cost to attend. 6:00pm Arts + Public Life, Green Line Performing Arts Center, 329 E Garfield Blvd, Chicago <http://www.chicagoabortionfund.org>

The WOMB Open Mic Nite Open mic poetry event. Affinity Community Services is a social justice organization serving the needs of the Black LGBTQ community of Chicago with a particular focus on Black women. 7:00pm Affinity Community Services 2850 S. Wabash Ave. #108 Chicago <http://affinity95.org>

It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago American Blues Theater presents It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago! from Frank Capra's film with Foley sound effects, an original score and holiday carols through Jan. 5, 2019 7:30pm Stage 773 1225 W Belmont Chicago <http://AmericanBluesTheater.com>

Slo Mo, Slow Jams for the Queer Fam Chicago's award-winning party for lovers is here again with a holiday-themed twist. Join Kristen Kaza and groove to music spun by DJ Audio Jack. Welcomes all identities 9:00pm The Whistler 2421 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago http://db2.windycitymediagroup.com/webup/000_CAL_INSERT.php#

Dueling Pianos Music videos and VJ Bobby Marley 10:00pm Roscoe's Tavern 3356 N Halsted St Chicago <http://roscoes.com>

Friday, Dec. 21

BTQ Book Group Meet at the library each third Friday 7:00pm - 9:00pm Gerber Hart Library and Archives 6500 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.gerberhart.org>

Late Night Andersonville More than 70 businesses participating with deals, seasonal refreshments, free trolley rides, more. Women & Children First offering 20 percent off 2019 calendars and boxed holiday cards 7:00pm - 9:00pm Women & Children First Bookstore 5233 N Clark St Chicago <http://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com>

Barney the Elf Queerfully delicious holiday show with musical satire, which incorporates Renaud and Schmidt's parody lyrics to popular songs, 7:30pm Pride Arts Center, 4147 N. Broadway <http://www.pridefilmsandplays.com>

Dark Side of the Yule Christmas meets classic rock with music by Pink Floyd,

The Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, Joni Mitchell, Moody Blues, Metallica, Evanescence, and others, mashed with Christmas classics, medieval carols, and original holiday songs. 8:00pm The Acorn Theater 107 Generations Dr. Three Oaks, MI 49107; AcornTheater.org

TransMasculine Alliance Chicago T-MAC meets on the 1st, 3rd and 5th (if applicable) Fridays of each month and is a peer-led discussion group for anyone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as male, masculine of center, or questioning their gender. 8:30pm - 8:45pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.centeronhalsted.org/newevents-details.cfm?ID=14816>

Saturday, Dec. 22

Frontrunners/Frontwalkers Chicago Weekly run/walk. Followed by brunch. 9:00am Kwagulth Totem Pole Addison & Lakeshore Dr. <http://frontrunnerschicago.com>

Bi Discussion Group Bisexual Queer Alliance Chicago Meetup 2:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://www.centeronhalsted.org>

Sunday, Dec. 23

Into the Woods Music Theater Works formerly Light Opera Works presents with full original orchestrations. Through Dec. 31. \$34. Ages 25 and younger half price 2:00pm Cahn Auditorium Northwestern University 600 Emerson St Evanston, IL 60208 <http://www.MusicTheaterWorks.com>

Wed., Dec. 26

The L Lounge The L Lounge is a Lesbian community support group that meets the last Wednesday of every month at the Center On Halsted. Snacks and drinks included. Find The L Lounge on Facebook 6:00pm - 9:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted St., Chicago

Friday, Dec. 28

Trans/Gender Affirming Name Change Mobilization Hosted by Transformative Justice Law Project. Volunteers will assist Cook County residents with filling out the documents required for a name change. Last Friday of every month in room 1202. 9:00am - 3:00am Daley Center Plaza 50 W Washington St Chicago <http://www.facebook.com/transformativejusticelawproject/>

SexuWellness For women and TGNC individuals, a wide variety of sexual and reproductive health-related services like chest/breast exams, mammogram referrals, pap tests including HPV screening and pelvic exams, STI testing, birth control prescription, IUD placements. Fourth Friday of every month. whs@howardbrown.org 5:00pm - 8:00pm Howard Brown, 6500 N. Clark, Chicago 773-572-8359 <http://howardbrown.org/womens-health/>

Singer Macy Gray Gray—whose signature raspy voice is featured in "I Try," one of the biggest singles of 1999—will perform. \$55-\$75 7:00pm City Winery Chicago 1200 W Randolph St., Chicago <http://CityWinery.com>

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