

READER

THE PRIDE ISSUE



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IN THIS ISSUE



FOOD & DRINK

04 Sula | Feature *Gemma Foods is Chicago's next pasta juggernaut.*



NEWS & POLITICS

06 Joravsky | Politics *Republicans sob with self-pity as Pritzker hoists them with their own petard.*

08 Isaacs | Culture *Amid other changes, Chicago Philharmonic adds a new executive director.*

10 Essay *On suicide, grief, and the Thompson Center*

PRIDE

12 Healing *At Casa Al-Fatiha, two local musicians built a sanctuary for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers.*

14 Rhodes | Boystown *After a much-delayed name change of*

the neighborhood, the fight for inclusion in Northalsted is not over.



16 History *Queer to the Left rejected the mainstream gay rights movement and kept alive the spirit of radical LGBTQ+ activism.*

20 Rhodes | Bondage *Leather Archives & Museum's dirty 30*



22 Collo-Julín | Edibles *Drag superstar Bambi Banks-Couleé is decolonizing weed "from the kitchen to the couch" with her new webseries.*

23 Guide *Pride returns with celebrations outside and online.*

24 Dance *Dee Alaba talks about being transfemme in dance.*

25 Next Generation *As About Face turns 25, its evolution toward*

telling stories of the entire alphabet rainbow is unmistakable.



28 Galil | Feature *Thirty years ago, Black queer zine Thing captured the scene that birthed house.*

FILM

26 Review *The vibrant film adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical In the Heights couldn't be more welcome.*

27 Movies of Note *Changing the Game lets trans athletes speak for themselves, The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It is a love story, and Two Gods is a singular document of three ordinary lives.*

MUSIC & NIGHTLIFE

34 Records of Note *This week the Reader reviews current releases by Thomas Comerford, Japanese Breakfast, Georgia Anne Muldrow, Colleen, the Lincoln Trio, and more.*

37 Early Warnings *Rescheduled concerts and other updated listings*

37 Gossip Wolf *Cosmic Country star Andrew Sa drops a high lonesome covers collection, Dave Rempis releases a double album*

of live performances that COVID couldn't stop, and pop-up shop Miyagi throws a Record Store Day party at the Silver Room.



38 Chicagoans of Note *Alison Chesley, cellist and composer, aka Helen Money*

OPINION

40 National Politics *The Squad's collapse shows change won't come from within the Democratic Party.*

44 Savage Love *Dan Savage offers some simple advice: Dump him. Run. Never look back.*

CLASSIFIEDS

45 Jobs

46 Apartments & Spaces

46 Marketplace

ON THE COVER: PHOTO COLLAGE BY KIRK WILLIAMSON



TO CONTACT ANY READER EMPLOYEE, E-MAIL: (FIRST INITIAL)(LAST NAME) @CHICAGOREADER.COM

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A NOTE ON THIS WEEK'S COVER

THIS WEEK'S COLLAGE portrays the spectrum of our Pride coverage this year. Featured in this illustrious rainbow are local performer Bambi Banks-Couleé and her cooking webseries, *Bambi Bakes*; the history of the Queer to the Left movement of the late 90s/early 00s; transfemme dancer Dee Alaba; Chicago's own Leather Museum & Archives, boasting the iconic art of Etienne and more; and a feature on the groundbreaking Black

queer zine, *Thing*. As a designer, this is my first Pride issue with the *Reader*, following 20 consecutive years of Pride issues with *Windy City Times* (which is inserted into this issue, and which I also designed). Pride doesn't even begin to describe my feelings on being lucky enough to have been (and to still be) shining a spotlight on this vibrant community.

—KIRK WILLIAMSON

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FOOD FEATURE

Gemma Foods is Chicago's next pasta juggernaut

Former Formento's chef Tony Quartaro's fresh handmade and extruded shapes aren't just for his neighbors anymore.

By **MIKE SULA**

Tony Quartaro has an impeccable pasta pedigree going all the way back to all-day suppers at his Grandma Joyce's house in upstate New York, where he learned to shape gnocchi for the Sunday gravy.

"She showed me the difference between sinkers and swimmers, as she called them," says the 37-year-old chef behind the Beverly-born fresh pasta delivery start-up Gemma Foods. "And how you can make something transcendent from something as simple as potatoes."

Quartaro has made fresh pasta in innumerable shapes and sizes in nearly every restaurant he's worked at over the last 16 years, starting

with his first kitchen job during his senior year at the University of Kansas. After graduation he headed straight for San Francisco and found work at the Chez Panisse-Zuni Café Cal-Med torchbearer Nopa, and later A16, where he came in on his off hours to learn how the sous chefs hand-rolled cavatelli and the Campanian regional obscurity maccaronara. Not long after chef Nate Appleman won his James Beard Award, he brought Quartaro along with him to open Pulino's in Manhattan.

A few years later he found a new mentor in Chris Pandel at the Bristol. "We had about three to four pastas on the menu there," he says. "Everything made by hand in the base-

ment. That place was a juggernaut as far as production and manpower was concerned."

Quartaro stepped up at the Bristol as Pandel stepped away to open Balena, which became its own pasta powerhouse, and where he moved over a year later to work under Joe Frillman, now of Daisies (another juggernaut). The pasta program was "98 percent" his when he opened Formento's as executive chef, but for the last seven years pasta took a back seat, first when he turned south and helped open Dixie, and then a year later when he left to join a school lunch delivery start-up.

He created a fresh pasta program at Limelight Catering when he was hired as its

executive chef three summers ago, but that all ended last spring when he and his staff of 90 chefs were furloughed. "I remember hearing in early April, 'Oh, we could be back by June,'" he says. "Laughable now, but I reached the stage where creatively I was like 'I've done all the yard work I could do.'"

By then Quartaro was an established Beverly transplant. "My wife is from here," he says. "Which is what a lot of the guys around here say." And he was itching to make pasta again. "I reached out to 12 people in my neighborhood just to see. 'Hey, I'm gonna make some pasta if you're interested. I'll take whatever you feel it's worth, and send me any feedback.'" That

Tony Quartaro has been handcrafting cappelletti, canestri, ravioli, sorpresine, and more for delivery in Beverly since last year.

JEFF MARINI FOR CHICAGO READER

week he made 20 orders of rigatoni Bolognese and bucatini cacio e pepe with a KitchenAid extruder attachment near the beginning of the Great Bucatini Shortage of 2020.

Quartaro started a mailing list that jumped from 30 neighbors to 500 within the span of eight months. He made menu changes with the season, and while there was usually something hearty, rib-sticking, and family friendly, other pasta-sauce pairings grew more refined; from ricotta gnocchi with vodka sauce and pasta amatriciana; to saffron fusilli with creamy Lombardian Luganega sausage sauce and squid ink tortellini, stuffed with “summer sofrito of corn, zucchini, tomato, and tropea onions with Sungold tomato sugo.”

“When I realized there was a demand for it and people were literally craving that restau-

rant experience in the comfort of their own homes, that was when I was like ‘I know I can deliver that.’” Sauces, pastas, and garnishes were packaged separately, each pairing designed to be table-ready in 15 minutes.

As he bumped up production, first in the idle Limelight kitchen, then at Kitchen Chicago, he’s upgraded extruders twice, and his shapes have become more colorful and esoteric: emerald green broccoli leaf rigatoni; saffron fusilli; green and white pleated teardrop-shaped culurgiones stuffed with fried sunchokes, ricotta, and mint; candy-wrapper caramelle stuffed with shrimp mousseline in lobster sauce.

Until recently, deliveries from Gemma Foods (named for Quartaro’s young daughter—“the best eater I know”) were only available to Beverly residents. But recently he’s been popping up for Friday afternoon pickups at Kimski (Chef Won Kim is a Beverlian). It was there that I picked up two generous orders of wide, ribbon pappardelle with a duck ragu, fragrant with cinnamon; and two-tone spinach-basil sorpresine—delicate “little

surprises,” with a bright buttery San Marzano sauce and a side of mozzarella di bufala meant to melt into the matrix when sauce meets pasta. Quartaro followed the next week with burrata and Tempesta n’duja paprika-striped ravioli with a butter green garlic sauce, and cappelletti (“little hats”) with lamb pancetta and fava cream.


These pickup pop-ups will spread to different neighborhoods over the summer, part of a larger expansion that’s well under way. Quartaro is close to inking a lease on an undisclosed storefront that can meet the ballooning demand, with a pickup point and window display. “If you look into the window you’re going to be seeing multiple hands making shapes,” he says. “Our machine will be running. I want it to be this spectacle of production and energy so people walk by and say, ‘What is going on in that place?’”

Delivery was key to Gemma’s success, and Quartaro’s planning to keep that option alive, along with shipping.

“This was not in the plan whatsoever,” he says. “But everything I’ve done has kind of

primed me for this next step. Just looking back on the years as a whole it’s all just surreal. Even the school lunches, like, ‘What’s this guy doing working for a kids’ food company?’ I wouldn’t be able to do what I’ve done without that, just in terms of order fulfillment and how we’re making sure our production numbers are accurate.”

Chicago’s been through a fresh pasta renaissance since the Bristol opened in 2008, one that’s expanded and persisted in the retail market with outfits like Tortello and Flour Power. But until there’s a fresh pastificio in every neighborhood, it isn’t complete.

“It was instilled in me at a really young age the importance of how a full day could be centered around a meal,” says Quartaro. “That sounds crazy in this day and age, but that’s still a way of life for so many families. And I think it’s really important to continue it. It’s not realistic to do it daily anymore but my grandma would do it. We’re doing the heavy lifting for you.” 

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Did Illinois Republicans object when Scott Walker was taking his gerrymandering journey across the midwest? Nope. GAGE SKIDMORE

POLITICS

Cry, babies

Republicans sob with self-pity as Pritzker hoists them with their own petard.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

I woke up Sunday to the sounds of sobbing. Also, weeping, wailing, and bleating. No, it wasn't LeBron James or Luka Dončić complaining about a referee's call. On a tangent—has any basketball player ever fessed up to committing a foul, no matter how egregious?

No, the sobs didn't come from the playoff games I've been watching. They came from Illinois Republicans, weeping over the allegedly low-down treachery of Governor Pritzker for having signed legislative maps that, in the vernacular of mapmakers, "ratfucked" the GOP.

I read about it in a *Tribune* story filled with self-pitying Republican quotes from . . .

Senator Dan McConchie: "How can we trust him [Pritzker]?"

And Senator Jason Barickman: "He joins the all-too-long list of Illinois politicians who promise one thing and then do another."

And state representative Jim Durkin . . .

Ah, that's enough Republican sob stories for

the day.

Having read the article, I had a decision to make. Did I feel even a teeny-tiny tidbit of pity for these Republicans? Or did I write them off as a bunch of self-serving hypocrites?

Before I answer those questions, let me answer these.

Is Pritzker, as the Republicans contend, a promise breaker? I suppose. As a gubernatorial candidate, he promised not to approve legislative maps unless they were approved by at least some members of both parties.

Does breaking that promise make him a hypocrite?

Tough question. It requires me to travel into the soul of Governor Pritzker to determine whether he meant what he said when he said it, or whether he was just saying it 'cause it seemed like the right thing to say at the time.

Like Mayor Lightfoot on the elected school board, which she wholeheartedly supported as candidate Lightfoot—only to vociferously

oppose as Mayor Lightfoot.

By the way, curious silence from the Republicans on Mayor Lightfoot's elected-school-board flip-flop. Most of them voted against the elected-school-board bill in large part because the Chicago Teachers Union favored it. One thing Chicago mayors and Republicans agree on is that they hate the CTU.

Back to the sobbing Republicans . . .

The issue has to do with redistricting, which happens every ten years after the census to make sure that all districts have roughly the same number of people.

Is the map that Pritzker signed fair? I think we'll all agree it is not.

It's classic gerrymandering—intended in this case to help Democrats and hurt Republicans.

Mapmakers have a word for what this map does to Illinois Republicans. It "wastes" Republican votes by packing them into super Republican districts. The more voters of a party you "waste," the less power that party wields. Maximizing the influence of your voters while minimizing the influence of your opponent is the whole point of gerrymandering.

Is that fair? No. Should it be tolerated? Of course not. Does it lead to partisanship, and rancor, and make it easier to elect extremists, like—just to pick one example from downstate Illinois—Congresswoman Mary Miller, the Republican who declared that "Hitler was right"? Unfortunately, yes.

By the way, Miller "apologized" for declaring "Hitler was right." Though, as I've previously discussed, her "apology" was in some respects as offensive as her original statement. Judge for yourself.

So, yes, Illinois Republicans—and their allies in the nonpartisan do-gooder community—make a good point when they say gerrymandering is potentially corrosive to democracy.

But are they consistent when they make this point? Do they raise opposition when Republicans do the gerrymandering? For instance, did they denounce Wisconsin governor Scott Walker, a Republican, when he ratfucked the hell out of Democrats in 2011?

Walker and his legislative allies passed a map that was so beneficial to the GOP that

they wound up winning 61 percent of assembly seats even though they got less than 50 percent of the statewide vote in legislative elections.

That enabled Walker to further empower his party by passing anti-union laws, paving the way for Donald Trump to win Wisconsin over Hillary Clinton.

And yet, not one word of opposition from any Republicans in Illinois.

It gets even worse. In Michigan, voters said enough with the gerrymandering after Republicans in that state gerrymandered Democrats, proposing a referendum to take mapmaking away from elected officials and put it under the control of a nonpartisan commission.

That referendum passed with about 61 percent of the vote.

Did Republicans go along with the will of the people? Of course not. A bunch of Republicans—aligned with Scott Walker—sued to overturn the referendum on the grounds that it was unconstitutional.

And what was the response from Durkin, Barickman, McConchie, and other Illinois Republicans to Walker's suit?

You know the answer. More silence.

Wait, wait—there's more. In 2016, legislators in Nebraska passed a law turning mapmaking over to a nonpartisan commission. Republican governor Pete Ricketts vetoed it. (Yes, he's part of the same Ricketts family that makes it so hard for any Democrat to root for the Cubs.)

And, of course, there's the congressional For the People Act, which would limit gerrymandering throughout the country. It has no Republican support. For the obvious reason—if you fairly drew legislative maps, Republicans would lose control of legislatures all over the country.

All in all, it's pretty obvious that Illinois Republicans couldn't care less about abusive mapmaking. And they're only looking for excuses to bash Pritzker in the hopes of replacing him in the 2022 election with a right-winger who will, among other things, declare Trump the winner of the last election, abolish abortion, eradicate collective bargaining rights, and do away with environmental protection laws.

In conclusion, do I feel even the teeny-tiniest tidbit of pity for the sobbing Republicans?

Hell, no. They're shedding tears of the crocodile persuasion. In contrast, LeBron and Luka seem sincere.

@bennyjshow



Terell M. Johnson  COURTESY CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC

CULTURE

Facing the music

Amid other changes, Chicago Philharmonic adds a new executive director.

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

Last week the Chicago Philharmonic Society announced the appointment of a new executive director, Terell M. Johnson. A classically trained musician as well as an administrator, he'll succeed another musician-turned-administrator, Donna Milanovich, who's retiring after ten years in that job—and more as a Chi Phil flutist and board member.

They were both in the limited audience at the Harris Theater Saturday night for a revelatory recording session that combined the Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra, under guest conductor Adrian Dunn, with the Adrian Dunn Singers. Johnson told me the resulting symphonic/gospel mashup is the kind of in-

novative programming that'll carry Chicago Philharmonic into the future.

But he's stepping in at what looks like a challenging moment. Besides the gloomy outlook for classical music in general and the wreckage of the pandemic, which shut down the live performance that's Chicago Philharmonic's lifeblood and reduced its seven-person full-time staff to four, the group recently lost its long-standing major gig as official orchestra to the Joffrey Ballet.

Not to worry, says Milanovich: the staff reduction will be temporary, and the loss of the Joffrey—incurred when the ballet company moved from the Auditorium Theatre to the

Lyric Opera House, where only the Lyric Opera Orchestra is allowed to play—will be negligible. The move was announced three years in advance, and “we planned for it,” she says.

“We love the Joffrey, we have a wonderful relationship still. We were sad we couldn't follow them into the Opera House, but we understand that the rules of the Opera House are what they are,” Milanovich says.

As for the problems now facing classical musicians in general, they're not so different from the problems that gave birth to this orchestra and made it unique.

Chicago Philharmonic celebrated an official 30th anniversary last year, but its roots go back to 1979, when members of the Lyric Opera Orchestra, trying to figure out how to make a living when the Lyric season was only four months long, formed the Orchestra of Illinois. It was a vehicle that would allow the musicians to perform together outside the Opera House, in its own programs or as an orchestra for hire. But it also had a disruptive structure: it was to be a self-governing organization. The musicians would be in charge.

A little background on that: In the 1990s, an international study of job satisfaction among symphony orchestra players came to the jarring conclusion that they were not all that happy. According to the study, these extremely talented, highly trained, extraordinarily dedicated people, making some of the most exquisite sounds ever heard for deeply appreciative audiences, ranked between factory workers and prison guards in their regard for their own positions.

But it shouldn't have been surprising. Classical musicians, like professional athletes, train intensely from an early age to stand out in a highly competitive environment and then, unless they're among the rare soloists, spend their career as a cog in a complicated machine, under constant pressure to perform flawlessly and exactly as dictated by someone else. In the typical symphony orchestra, the musicians have no control over what they play or how they play it.

The Orchestra of Illinois flipped the control to the players. The group has since been disbanded, reincarnated, and gone through a couple of name changes but, Milanovich says, especially since a 2012 “restart,” has been

true to the idea of a “fully musician-governed organization, with a musician majority on our board.”

The Chicago Philharmonic—its name since 2004—is unique in a couple of other ways as well: it operates without a union collective bargaining agreement (unnecessary, Milanovich says, since it's run by musicians), and without formal auditions. No longer so closely tied to the Lyric orchestra, it maintains a list of about 200 professional “performing members.” Newcomers are evaluated in the course of playing a few events with them, Milanovich says, rather than going through the typical audition process. Since 2013, Scott Speck has been artistic director and principal conductor.

The Philharmonic produces its own orchestral and chamber concerts, and has a robust community engagement program that includes mentoring music students in Chicago schools. But the major share of its revenue still comes from contract work at venues like the Auditorium Theatre and the Harris Theater (where it's a resident company), and its long-standing relationship with the Ravinia Festival. It'll be making the music when the Joffrey performs there in September.

Johnson, the new executive director, lived in Chicago from 2010 to 2015, when he moved to Miami for a job with the New World Symphony, winding up as director of both business development and community engagement. He said Saturday's recording session, which included composer-in-residence Marcus Norris's violin concerto “Glory,” stunningly performed by guest soloist Njioma Grevious, followed by Adrian Dunn's also stunning *Redemption* (reimagined spirituals and gospel songs in memory of Eric Garner, George Floyd, and other Black men killed in encounters with police), is “exactly the kind of project that I want to be bringing.” It'll be available for free streaming starting June 29 on the Harris Theater's website (virtualstage.harristheater.org). 

The Chicago Philharmonic performs a free “Side by Side” event in person June 21 at Ping Tom Memorial Park (part of the Chicago Park District's “Night Out in the Parks” initiative). Anyone who plays an instrument is invited to join them for this same-day rehearsal and play-along performance. Definitely no auditions required. Info, registration, and reservations at chicagophilharmonic.org/side-by-side-with-the-Chicago-philharmonic.

 @Deannaisaacs

POETRY CORNER

ars poetica for early morning

By Devyn Mañibo

I am always rumbling, wide toward fullness, to thrill the mouth, my meds make me nauseous these days and when I can't eat, I find another way, into my Saturday produce tumbles out of my hands, blackberries stain the bottom of my bag, my breakfast warm bread, za'atar and olive oil, slicks my chin, when I've scalded the coffee, mellow the bitter, a hand clutches itself, when kindness feels less possible, turn space into space, from open palms placed on red hot cheeks (mine or yours), the same photograph over and over (again), that's how I was taught to smile, to build homes for my loves, comfortable homes where we love in wildness and hold promises to keep each other alive, these promises alive.

Devyn Mañibo is a maker, feeder, and organizer. Through poems, art objects, and gesture, she thinks intimately about the language and texture of death & desire, fullness & loss. She makes and breaks bread between Brooklyn & Chicago.

Poem curated by Xandria Phillips: Xandria Phillips is the author of *HULL* (Nightboat Books, 2019), and the recipient of a Whiting Award. They have received fellowships from Brown University, Oberlin College, and The Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and are the 2021-2023 Poetry Fellow at the Center For African American Poetry and Poetics.

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📷 DAN O'HALLORAN

ESSAY

The 15th floor

On suicide, grief, and the Thompson Center

By DAN O'HALLORAN

The Thompson Center cost \$172 million to construct. Helmut Jahn, who died in a bike accident last month, began designing the 17-story building in 1979. Located on the corner of State and Lake, it was originally known as the State of Illinois Center, and named after its keeper, then-Illinois Governor James R. Thompson. After Thompson left office, he contributed to Illinois's long-standing history of political corruption by having his firm represent Governor George Ryan pro bono. The Thompson Center serves as a train station and

a state office building; it boasts retail shopping on the ground level and a food court in the basement.

The building has recently gone for sale and, in time, may see demolition as state employees move to 555 West Monroe, saving the city millions in upkeep and real estate costs each year. Many Chicagoans have offered their stories and opinions on the structure over the years. Some consider the vast interior atrium as a thing of beauty, while others claim the outside to be a typewriter-esque eyesore.

I have a rather intimate relationship with the Thompson Center, one that I'm finally able to write about. On October 11, 2011, my Aunt Eileen jumped off the 15th floor inside the atrium and fell to the building's bulls-eye-like basement in a successful attempt at taking her own life. She was the fifth person to commit suicide since the building opened in 1985.

My aunt worked in the building during the 80s and 90s and had been present when people had jumped from various floors before. She told me about how hot the building

would get in the summer months, and how cold it got in the brutal winters. My aunt was my best friend. My sister and I couldn't pronounce her name as children, so we called her Ah-Leen. She was my mother's twin and she struggled with her mental health and addiction for most of her life.

Growing up, she was over every weekend, providing respite to my mother. She'd have us recite prayers for safety before we went on drives, she would witness to people in the grocery store who she deemed were sinners and told us about the powers of Alcoholics Anonymous. As a born-again Christian, it was her job to provide people the tools to get into the kingdom of heaven. Ultimately, her belief in a kingdom trumped her will to live as she stated several times in a 13-page goodbye letter to my sister and me. She ended her own pain and suffering by suicide because she'd get to God sooner, because she was leaving us here for a better place.

In October 2011 I returned to Chicago after working as a White House intern in Washington. I was in transition, and had just begun my final year of college at a school downtown. I pulled into my mother's driveway on a Friday afternoon.

Our mailman was new. The mail had been arriving later and later in the day since his start some months before, according to my mother. It was a warm evening and the sun had just begun to turn orange as I walked down our cracked asphalt driveway to cross the street to the mailbox.

Bank statement, bank statement, credit card ad, Valpak savings booklet, and a padded envelope from my aunt. Her beautiful penmanship was warm and easy to recognize. I passed it to my mother and carried on with unpacking and reorganizing my belongings, out of my car and into a bedroom in the house.

Several minutes later my mother shouted my name. "Read it!" she yelled, shoving the letter and envelope in my hand. The envelope contained a car key, the address to a U-Haul storage facility, and a short letter. The letter read something along the lines of "Dear Maureen, I've decided to go to heaven. I love you and I'll miss you. Tell Danny and Meghan I love them. Take care."

My mother's face twisted in knots. She had been on edge for the past year after finding



The author with Aunt Eileen ■ COURTESY DAN O'HALLORAN

her husband, my father, dead in the basement of the same house. My aunt wasn't answering her phone and we agreed that we needed to go to her apartment. We rushed towards Jefferson Park. It felt like a scene from a movie.

Each stoplight was an eternity. We pulled up to the three-flat apartment and Eileen's car was nowhere in sight. We went to the front door and buzzed. No answer. We banged on the door. No answer. A downstairs neighbor appeared and asked what the noise was about. I watched my mother explode into tears.

Was my aunt hanging from the ceiling fan? Had she taken too many pills? It felt like there

was a bomb in the room. We were racing against time.

The neighbor let us through the first-floor door. I climbed the stairs to the second-floor unit where my aunt lived. The door was locked. My uncle arrived—my mother must have called him. Two Chicago police officers arrived just after him.

As the story expanded to fit more characters, I wondered where and when I might see my aunt again. The police explained they couldn't open the door without the proper paperwork. Growing more upset by the minute, my mother frantically dialed my aunt on my flip phone. My aunt and I had a cell phone

plan together, just us.

One of the police officers clicked their radio. *"There has been a report of a jumper at the Thompson Center."* My mother wailed.

We were ushered into the back of a police SUV. My mother sat in front, my six-foot-four, 250-pound uncle and I squeezed into the back. Our knees pressed against the hard plastic bench as the officer pulled away from my aunt's building.

We sped to the I-90 expressway. The weather was great, but the Kennedy was a parking lot. The police officer flipped on the sirens and we rode the shoulder of the highway some 15 miles downtown.

As the skyline grew closer, a tire popped. The front right of the vehicle dipped, but the officer drove on. The sky's orange began to darken as we pulled off the highway onto Washington. The shiny glass-paneled Thompson Center grew closer and closer as we passed underneath the el tracks.

Yellow caution tape flapped in the wind around the east side of the building. Two state troopers with wide-brimmed hats stood in wait for our arrival. By the time we climbed out of the back of the car it was maybe 7 PM.

We were coldly informed there was a suicide. The person who jumped made their way up to the 15th floor via the elevators that connected the building's basement to the subway station. They climbed over a barrier and jumped to the bottom of the atrium floor. Fifteen floors plus another 30 or so feet down into the marble floor of the food court in the building's basement. I asked if we could enter to see the aftermath. "No," the state trooper replied.

They informed us it was in fact my aunt who jumped. They passed along another yellow Scotch bubble mailer envelope. It read "To: Danny and Meghan O'Halloran" on the front and "My sister's cell -" on the back, with her number neatly written below.

One of the police officers handed me a plastic bag which contained my aunt's identification cards and shattered bloodstained glasses. Some of her hair was dried on near the hinges.

We were consoled and ushered into a state building across the street. There was a report that needed to be completed, and we had to be present to do so. The state trooper was factual and to the point. He shared with us that he had to drive from Wheaton to downtown, that he hadn't been to the city in quite some time, and what a long night he had ahead of him.

My uncle spurted curse words and the trooper retaliated by trying to "calm" the situation. There was a threat of arrest and it turned into some strange macho shouting match. It was evident that the trooper had never encountered something like this before. Nothing made sense at this point.

It was well into the night now, and we exited the building across from the still taped-off Thompson Center. Police officers stood guard at the entranceways.

I don't remember if the police or a friend of my uncle drove us back to my aunt's apartment. I do remember being westbound on the Kennedy, passing the still packed eastbound traffic into the city.

We bid farewell to my uncle when we arrived at the apartment. My mother and I got into our car; it was nearly one in the morning when I pulled into our driveway. My mother slinked up the stairs. Her face was bright red and full of sorrow. She went to sleep.

I paid a visit to the Thompson Center this January. I reached out to the building manager to ask if I could take photos for this story. They asked if I could provide the \$125 dollar leasing fee for access to the building's atrium, basement, and second floors for one hour. Looking up from the basement of the building, I felt as if I were standing at the bottom of a grave. It was easy to get lost in the red-lattice ceiling and rectangular glass panels reflecting light in all directions. Standing on the polished marble, I imagined how this intricate pattern could seem inviting from above.

I felt compelled to share this story before the building possibly disappears. I have avoided talking about this outside of suicide support groups for a decade. It's still very confusing, something I'll never make sense of. My experience as a survivor has changed my own mental well-being. But after having gone through the collective trauma of the pandemic, I've felt comfort in sharing hardships with others.

If you think someone you know is struggling, just listen to them. Hear what they are willing to share. The trauma that comes with suicide is far, far more painful than a hard conversation. These days, I try to remind myself to pause and watch the flowers bloom, to savor each sip of water. Take a deep breath as the car stops at a traffic light. See the buildings around me and know that I'm not alone. ■

🐦 @danohal

PRIDE



Clockwise from top: Violeta, Tayjah, Mah Nu, and Lyn Rye SAMANTHA CABRERA FRIEND

HEALING

A DIY MUSIC SPACE TRANSFORMS INTO A HOME FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

At Casa Al-Fatiha in Logan Square, two local musicians built a sanctuary for LGBTQ asylum seekers.

By **ALEXANDRA ARRIAGA** AND **CITY BUREAU**

This story was originally published in City Bureau and is part of the How a Community Heals series.

Each Saturday outside a squat Logan Square bungalow, people in the community know they can come by for items like milk, eggs, fruit, and clothing. Some neighbors come prepared with carts to take home a whole box.

This weekly food distribution began last spring as the small house transitioned from a hostel, garden, and interdisciplinary arts space for local artists to a sanctuary for LGBTQ asylum seekers released from immigration detention, calling it Casa Al-Fatiha. Here they could find a place to rest their heads and a community to rely on.

The house, formerly known as Earphoria, once kept a schedule abundant with open mikes, potlucks, and weekly shows. When

in-person gatherings became impossible, two musicians decided to transform the space's art and music legacy into a new one.

Rooted in the same sense of community and belonging, at Casa Al-Fatiha immigrants find free community housing and support where they can process, rest, and heal from their experiences in immigration detention centers.

"We're not caseworkers; we're not social workers. We're here to be peers, we're here to be a community, we're here to be roommates," says Lyn Rye, one of the cofounders of Casa Al-Fatiha. "We're here as equals and I think that's a real plus in some ways."

Finding housing is a significant hurdle for asylum seekers who can't access government assistance and aren't allowed to work for a year or often longer. There is a growing need for housing specifically for asylum seekers who identify as LGBTQ in the U.S.

"The special need for housing for this com-

munity in particular is incredibly great and Casa Al-Fatiha is responding to this growing need by providing room and board . . . I can't stress enough how desperately needed this sort of housing is," explains Ryan Smith of Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants in an Instagram video. ICDI partners with Casa Al-Fatiha to offer mentorship and case management for those living in the house.

One of the asylum seekers is Luis Martinez. After spending time in Otay Mesa Detention Center in California, Martinez, a political exile from Honduras, found a home this spring at the colorful, plant- and music-filled house.

Martinez, the first of three asylum seekers to have stayed at Casa Al-Fatiha, left Honduras after being threatened as a student activist for his advocacy and journalism against narcotics trafficking and killings. A scar across the right side of his head is a reminder of the violence that would meet him if he returned.

"Yo no puedo regresar a mi país por toda mi vida," Martinez says, meaning, "I can never return to my country for the rest of my life."

When he arrived at Casa Al-Fatiha, he wasn't expecting to have his bed made up and a room labeled with his name. The entire house is welcoming and communal; Martinez remembers making himself at home in the shared kitchen, where he cooked up Honduran tapado using ingredients from Mexican groceries nearby. A deep orange living room facing the street welcomes visitors, full with shelves of plants and a piano. A disco ball hangs over a large wooden picnic table where residents gather to eat and chat.

That feeling of welcome is central to this house. "Al-Fatiha means 'the opening' in Arabic, it's the first chapter of the Quran, it's also the Lord's prayer in Islam," says Rye, who is Muslim and moved into the house as it transitioned to Casa Al-Fatiha. "You say it five times a day, it's the name of a prayer and also the word for opening. This space is a form of accompaniment, the openheartedness that we feel, so that's why we named it Casa Al-Fatiha."

Rye says they got the idea to create a sanctuary space from their work at Masjid Al-Rabia, a BIPOC-led and LGBTQ-affirming Islamic community center focused on spiritual support for marginalized Muslims. "So

much of my role there was about facilitating the space as a sanctuary and giving the space for marginalized people," Rye says. They suggested creating this same sense of community at Earphoria for LGBTQ asylum seekers.

Casa Al-Fatiha is working with different immigrant and refugee support groups such as ICDI and Organized Communities Against Deportations to connect asylum seekers with a sponsor and a place to stay.

"That way we can make sure that people landing here have the resources and space [they need]," says Mah Nu, a musician, resident, and cofounder. "My priority is to make sure that there is space that is comfortable and conducive and deserving of the people that are going to be here."

Nu ensures each newcomer has a room prepared especially for them. There's an open invitation to join in cooking, gardening, and sitting at a large table with others. Anyone can tend, harvest, and share in community space however they want to participate.

It goes back to the name of the house, Rye says. "Like the 'opening,' it's like an empty space, a form of accompaniment . . . it's a room that we're guarding for someone. [Sometimes I sit] in the living room or kitchen with a chair that's empty, if someone needs to come and talk, there's an opening."

Though Martinez has moved on to California, he continues to advocate for Honduras and against immigration detention, and stays connected with those he met at Casa Al-Fatiha. He says he felt at home in the space. He aligned with residents over political issues, coalition building, and even joined in protest outside the Chicago Spotify office to support the Chicago chapter of the Union of Musicians and Allied Workers who feel exploited by the streaming platform.

Since Martinez has gone on his way from the house, new asylum seekers and a formerly incarcerated LGBTQ person are beginning to find a home there. Currently, there are three rooms available and organizers plan to offer more housing in the future. A newcomer from Mexico has been staying there and already feels at ease. Rye said she told them "it didn't feel new, but like a home she's been away from for a long time."

Casa Al-Fatiha is fundraising on Patreon and accepts donations on Cash App at \$casaalfatiha to support rent for LGBTQ asylum seekers and people released from detention.

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PRIDE

QUEER COMMUNITY

THE FIGHT FOR INCLUSION IN NORTHALSTED IS NOT OVER

After a much-delayed name change of the neighborhood, there is still work to be done.

By ADAM M. RHODES

More than six months after the Northalsted Business Alliance said it would abandon the name Boystown for the city's principal queer enclave, business leaders in the community have made few changes and continue using the moniker that many have called misogynistic and transphobic.

The NHBA, the chamber of commerce in the neighborhood, in late September 2020 released the results of a survey about the community name after a petition calling for the Boystown name to be changed, led by local queer activist Devlyn Camp (also a past *Reader* contributor), made national headlines. The petition offered up the name Legacy Walk instead, in recognition of the outdoor queer history exhibit of the same name in the neighborhood.

In response, even though the chamber said at the time that survey takers mostly supported keeping the Boystown name, it would be using "Northalsted" to refer to the neighborhood, though any official change would have to come from city officials.

"To acknowledge and welcome all members of the LGBTQ+ community, the chamber will discontinue using the name Boystown in marketing and revert to the long-standing name Northalsted," NHBA said at the time.

But banners bearing the Boystown name were removed from light poles throughout the neighborhood only days ago. Businesses still use the name in marketing materials, even those seemingly disseminated by the chamber. Some critics also told the *Reader* that the group has privately encouraged businesses to continue using the purportedly retired moniker.

And when the chamber announced this year's PrideFest celebration, slated for October due to the ongoing pandemic, NHBA called it "a love-filled celebration of diversity, equality, and the Chicago LGBTQ+ community... in the Boystown neighborhood."

The PrideFest website lists the NHBA as a

beneficiary, rather than a sponsor or corporate partner.

Camp tells the *Reader* that the decision to continue to use the Boystown name is "disappointing" but "not at all surprising."

"They clearly don't have an interest in having a radical change of heart," Camp says. "I don't think they even fully understand that the problem that we are speaking about is that they need to change their hearts and their minds."

But in response to criticism from Camp and others, Northalsted Business Alliance President Ramesh Ariyanayakam, who runs the Kit Kat Lounge in the neighborhood, tells the *Reader* that the chamber was focused on weathering the pandemic rather than scrubbing Boystown from the streets and its websites as quickly as possible.

"Our focus was on maintaining and keeping communications intact for the 100 or so businesses that we have as members, and they rely on us for as much information, as much guidance as possible as to how to pivot in their particular industry," Ariyanayakam says.

He adds that the aforementioned website is also from 2019, and just wasn't updated before the launch in order to save money and because the PrideFest particulars are still being worked out with the city.

But Camp and others still harshly criticized the decision to keep using the name, particularly in light of past promises.

"It's understandable that COVID issues would keep them from making these changes quickly," Camp says. "However, one of the things many activists are asking for is just a list of what actions they're going to take."

Camp also says the decision to change the neighborhood's nickname isn't separate from the ongoing struggle with racial equity and misogyny in the mostly white neighborhood.

A spate of racist incidents shook the community in 2019, after a local bar said it

planned to ban rap music and the owner of local costume shop Beatnix called the police on a Black man who complained about Confederate flag merchandise. The Center on Halsted also came under fire around that time over its now-scraped contract with a security firm owned by a local police officer with a racist and violent past in the community.

After the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, local Black and Brown entertainers took to the streets in the queer enclave to lead the massive Drag March for Change, which drew thousands to the neighborhood. During the event, speakers including celebrated drag performers Lucy Stoole, Shea Couleé, and Jo MaMa repeatedly blasted ongoing racism in the neighborhood's nightlife scene.

Stoole tells the *Reader* that the board's inactivity merely exemplifies their true focus, profit over people.

"It just reinforces some of the ideas that I already had about them, which is that they couldn't really care less about the actual community involved in this community," Stoole says. "And all they really care about is the money."

Camp and other critics say that while they are upset by the board's decision, it's not surprising given the makeup of the mostly white board, and its own struggles with diversity. Out of 11 members of the NHBA board, only one is a woman, who is also one of only two people of color.


Last summer, the board hired Jes Scheinpflug, of Praxis Group, to facilitate diversity training for the board and business leaders. But in a recording of a training obtained by the *Reader*, board members can be heard making numerous transphobic and otherwise offensive comments that call into question the body's ability to represent the spectrum of the queer community.

Additionally, in June 2020, the Black, trans-led south side LGBTQ+ community center Brave Space Alliance accused the chamber of tokenizing the group and its leadership "for clout" as part of a NHBA-sponsored Black Trans Lives Matter protest that was eventually canceled.

Ariyanayakam tells the *Reader* that since then, the board engaged with another consultant and has had several diversity training sessions and seminars for the board and its members. But without more meaningful efforts, Camp says the training does little good.


"It's not about just sitting down for an hour of training, they need to do a lot of introspection and reflection and growing," Camp says. "Maybe they do realize that it's going to be a lot of work. And that's why they don't want to do it."

Despite what activists have called the board's refusal to reform, many say the neighborhood can be a place for every member of the queer community. It's just going to take serious, and tough, work. And it's not work that will be done in a matter of months.

"When we started doing this shit, we knew that we were committing ourselves to a lifetime of doing this work and that it was going to take more than a few months or a few years to actually see some lasting change in the community," Stoole says. "So, I am very hopeful for it, but I'm also not letting myself get too happy or forget about the work that is yet to be done and the people who are still disenfranchised and not receiving the help and the support that they need." 

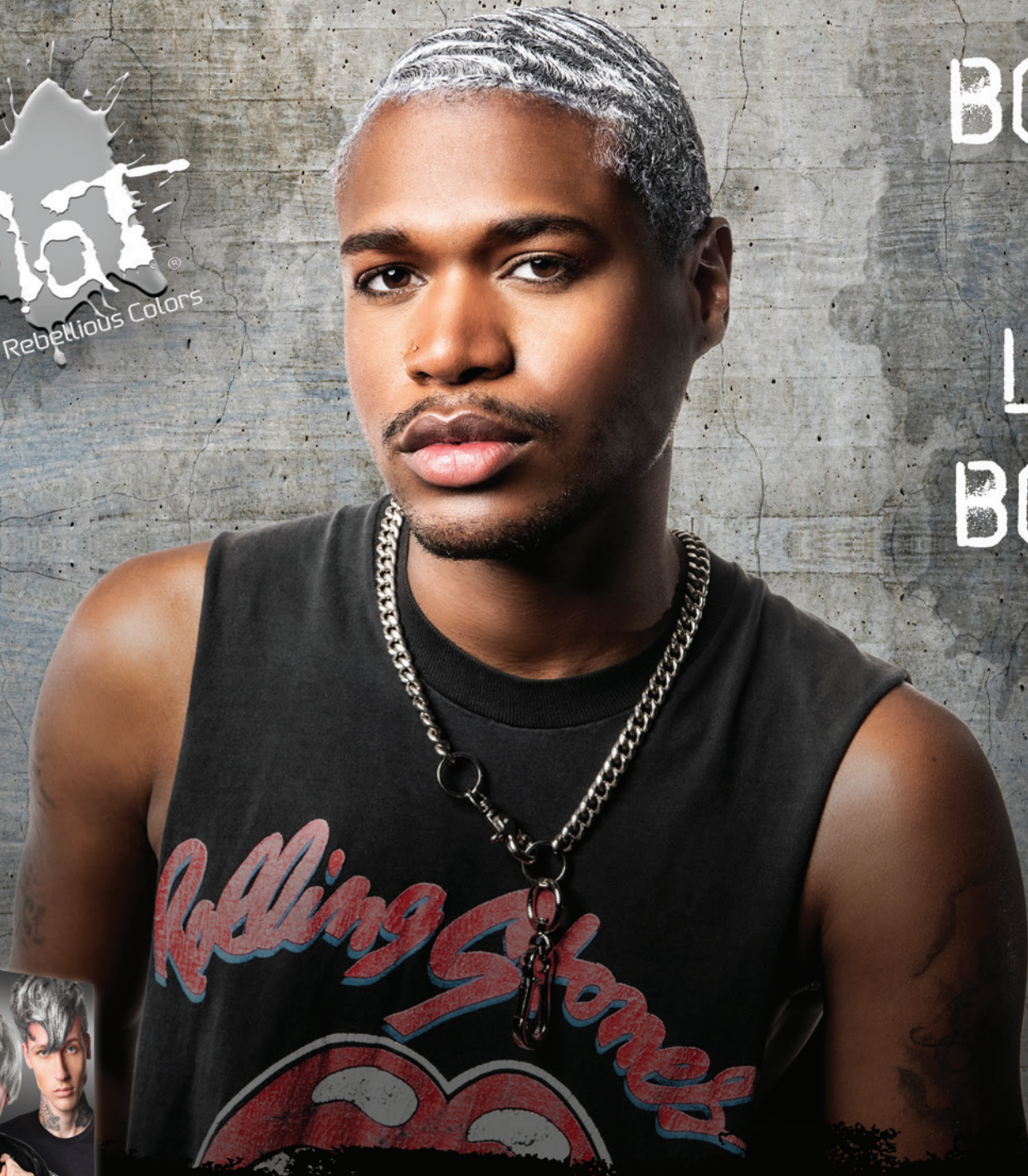
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New signs replace the "Boystown" banners in the north side neighborhood.  ADAM M. RHODES



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PRIDE



Queer to the Left was active from the late 90s through 2005. © COURTESY THERESE QUINN

known as Queer to the Left (Q2L), a small but lively group of like-minded organizers who, over the course of the late 1990s and early 2000s, would raise hell against gentrification, the death penalty, homonormativity, and plenty more. Though their impact is less obvious and more localized than forebears like ACT UP, which many Q2L members were involved in a few years before, the group nevertheless sustained defiantly radical queer politics in the face of increasing conservatism, all carried out on a neighborhood level.

“At one point, the *Chicago Free Press* described us as some ragtag group, and I got really upset. I thought they were trying to be dismissive of us,” says Joey Mogul, a lawyer with People’s Law Office and Q2L member. “But then I realized we really just were a ragtag group, and in the age of the nonprofit-industrial complex, I’m sort of proud of that.”

“It’s Time To End The Gay Rights Movement As We Know It” set to words sentiments that were increasingly prevalent amongst a particular queer activist milieu in the mid-90s. Although AIDS continued to shape queer people’s lives, the gradual introduction of antiretroviral treatments was enough for many wealthier community members who could afford treatment to shift their focus toward other ends like gay marriage. Andrew Sullivan’s moratorium on the AIDS epidemic, “When Plagues End,” was published in November 1996, coincidentally the same year that ACT UP’s Chicago chapter stopped organizing.

“Before it was Queer to the Left, it was a nameless coalition of queer women who were sick of queer white men running everything,” says Dawne Moon, now an associate professor of social and cultural sciences at Marquette University. “There were ten or 12 of us who had been in ACT UP and Queer Nation who just decided that we were going to do something different.”

But if Sullivan could argue that AIDS was over in a year in which the disease claimed nearly 34,000 lives in the U.S. and more than 1 million globally, other queer activists refused to let the disease’s legacy slip away so easily. Although AIDS was no longer the primary motivating factor in post-ACT UP organizing spaces, the sense that mainstream gay groups were ready to bottle up the group’s more radical impulses kept many in the fight as the 20th

HISTORY

QUEER TO THE LEFT CAME TO RAISE HELL

The group rejected the mainstream gay rights movement and kept alive the spirit of radical LGBTQ+ activism.

By ANNIE HOWARD

Heading into the 21st century, queer activism was at a crossroads. While the AIDS epidemic was far from over for the millions of people who lacked access to adequate health care and could not afford expensive antiretroviral therapy—which cost thousands of dollars a year even with insurance—many larger gay organizations had moved on from the issue. With gay marriage and access to military services held up as preeminent issues by groups like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the more radical im-

pulses of groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) shifted from center stage and into the margins of the community.

This split came to a head with planning for the Millennium March on Washington, held in 2000. While radical groups wanted the event to emphasize universal health care as the focal point of the rally, HRC, one of the event’s main organizers, instead focused on faith, family, and the ability to serve in the military as key themes for the march. That conservative sensibility incensed a group of radical queers,

who gathered at a conference for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (now known as the National LGBTQ Task Force) in 1998 to discuss counterstrategies. That meeting in turn sparked the writing of “It’s Time To End The Gay Rights Movement As We Know It,” a broadside full of rage against the increasing normativity of the wider movement.

The opening lines of the provocation set the tone:

“Gay conservatives. Gay credit cards. Stonewall commemorative neckties. Mass obsession with gay marriage. Clinton as ‘our best hope.’ Diamond-studded red ribbons for sale at Tiffany’s. Professional lesbian and gay ‘leaders’ charging exorbitant speakers fees. Proclamations of the ‘end of the AIDS epidemic.’ If this is the ‘gay rights movement,’ it’s way beyond reform.”

This salvo was the opening cry for a group of queers unwilling to cede their radical politics to the mainstreaming impulses of HRC and the like. Soon thereafter, they would become

century shaded into the 21st, unappeased by a vision of assimilation that gained steam in this period.

As remembered by Q2L member Jeff Edwards, now a union organizer at the University of Illinois at Chicago, ACT UP's early years were uniquely embraced by various factions of the gay community. In its heyday, Edwards recounts marching with the group at each year's Pride Parade, feeling like "total rock stars" as the crowds embraced their commitment to effective AIDS treatment—the group could draw in those who otherwise shunned radical politics, animated by the fundamental desire to stay alive.

"We even had a guy who was a millionaire Republican who went to college with William Buckley who took to the streets," Edwards remembers. "He's a guy who could normally call the senator or call the president and have a conversation, but when it came to AIDS, it didn't work out that way—he was temporarily on the outside."

All of that changed when effective treatment came into the picture. With the acute fear of death no longer as present for wealthier members of the community, a growing dissensus returned to the gay rights movement, with more conservative elements ready to once more distance themselves from the insurgent proposals made by groups like Queer Nation, a direct action group known for its brash messaging, and the Lesbian Avengers, a group of queer women who split from ACT UP, best known for founding the Dyke March.

"Now we're in a situation where I don't think we're going to see that kind of broad coalition within the community because there isn't that kind of galvanizing issue that cuts across these differences," Edwards said in an interview with Chicago-based zine *Punk Planet* in 2000. "Right now, I think there are many people who if we went back ten or 15 years would have been prone to supporting Act Up [sic] who are now writing checks to HRC."

ACT UP's radicalism in many ways mirrored the Gay Liberation era of queer politics. After years of "homophile" organizing in the 50s and 60s sought to show white gay men as polite and unassuming, gay organizing in the late 60s and 70s snapped back, no doubt aided by a broader climate of left-wing militancy. But before AIDS once again sharpened the focus of gay militants and galvanized the uncommitted now afraid for their lives, another era of increasing conservatism crept up in the 70s and early 80s. Gay newspapers like Chicago's *Windy City Times*, in between regular news

coverage, worked to depict the community—especially relatively privileged gay men—as sophisticated and financially successful. They suggested that many queers were prepared to assimilate into straight society with just a few key legal rights extended their way, using reader surveys to show advertisers and the straight public that the community sought little more than the trappings of a well-to-do consumer lifestyle.

If ACT UP temporarily recentered more militant strategies within the gay rights sphere in the late 80s and early 90s, such approaches were viewed as increasingly gauche amongst the 90s gay elite, whose increasing access to the halls of power seemed poised (or not) to push gay rights forward in as-yet-unrealized ways. Left-wing queer organizers regained a more subaltern edge, a stance no doubt enhanced by a general right-wing drift in American culture that made explicitly leftist perspectives even more unwelcome. The impulse to hew closer and closer to traditional forms and sources of political power grew increasingly normalized in this period, especially with Bill Clinton's 1997 address at a HRC dinner, the first presidential speech made to a gay audience.

The endless push-and-pull between competing political persuasions within the community set the stage for the more localized interactions which guided much of Q2L's work. Uptown would prove a potent terrain for Q2L's activism.

"Die yuppie faggot," the graffiti sneered.

First spotted in Ravenswood, the ugly epithet expressed a growing sentiment amongst some long time neighborhood residents in the early 2000s: gay gentrifiers were making the neighborhood unlivable for others, particularly the community's diverse body of low-income renters who were increasingly being priced out of the north side.

The graffiti was likely targeted at members of the 46th Ward Gay and Lesbian Organization, a group of well-heeled homebuyers who had begun buying properties in the area. As Edwards characterized the group: "Their only purpose was to organize to go to CAPS meetings to tell the police which buildings to go after, and to show up at meetings to promote development that would be more high-end, calling anything addressing affordable housing as dangerous to the neighborhood."

Although it's unclear if he was a member of the organization, current 46th Ward alderman

James Cappleman was among the group of gay gentrifiers who were opposed to Q2L's affordable housing campaigning. In a *Windy City Times* letter to the editor written in 2001, Cappleman criticized the group for wanting to maintain concentrated poverty in the area, tut-tutting: "No one is liberating the poor when they are kept concentrated in one particular area. Didn't we learn that lesson with Cabrini Green?"

As people like Cappleman and members of 46th Ward Gay and Lesbian Organization had the time and resources to promote new luxury development in the area, those in Q2L were ready to make clear that not all gay people were down with gentrifying Uptown. These local battles gave Q2L an inroad to challenge both the gay pro-growth sentiment and the homophobic backlash it inspired, putting the group in coalition with other community-based organizations.

One of the group's pamphlets, "Gentrification: Keywords," was modeled off a similar pamphlet, "AIDS: Keywords," written by ACT UP member Jan Zita Grover in 1987. The pamphlet argued that the homophobic graffiti came from residents who "were identifying gay men's supposed privilege as the explanation for the displacement of longtime working-class residents from the neighborhood." While the pamphlet is clear that such discriminatory language remains dangerous, it notes two key bits of missing information: most queers weren't the well-to-do gentrifiers that nonetheless played a part in changing the neighborhood, and that most new residents involved in gentrification were not queer.

Indeed, as the group noted, queer people had been living in cities long before the visible effects of gentrification began, seeking out community together in districts that were quickly noted for their supposed deviance. Before Boystown became the de facto gay district in Chicago, the near north side was a popular area for queer sociality, pushed out by the development of the Carl Sandburg Village, located near Clark and Division, in 1962. (For quite some time, the intersection at Dearborn and Division was known in the community as Quearborn and Perversion, in recognition of a near half-century of gay activity nearby that only waned with rising housing costs and the onset of the Sandburg Village.) For lesbians, Andersonville became "Girlstown" in the 90s (and perhaps even earlier), with more women lured to the community after bookstore Women and Children First was displaced from Boystown due to increasing rents. Across his-

tory, economic and social marginality left the queer community largely at the whims of homophobic landlords, employers, and society at large, forces still clearly at play.

This long-term struggle for affordable housing animated another pamphlet handed out by the group at the Pride Parade in 2002. With "Housing is a Queer Issue," the group invoked *The Wizard of Oz* in proclaiming, "There is no place like home (if you can afford one)." While condemning the consequences of increasing costs for all poor people, the pamphlet noted its specific impact felt within the queer community. "One-half of Chicago's PWAs [People with AIDS] live below the federal government's poverty level. One third have been homeless at some point," the sheet noted, drawing upon research conducted by AIDS Foundation Chicago. "Housing is a Queer Issue" staked Q2L to an anti-gentrification perspective in marked contrast with its surroundings, as it argued: "Vibrant 'gay residential neighborhoods' cannot survive gentrification—Lakeview is proof of that. Most lgbt [sic] folk cannot afford to live within walking distance of the Pride Parade route."

Q2L wasn't just committed to reshaping conversations around housing issues through these kinds of pamphlets and broadsides. By joining in a coalition called Community of Uptown Residents for Affordability and Justice (COURAJ) starting in 1999, the group partnered with an eclectic mix of other neighborhood groups to advocate for much-needed new affordable development in the community. Within this wider coalition, Q2L won a significant victory for affordable housing in the neighborhood through the planned Wilson Yards complex, even as their impact was limited by ward boundaries and divergent political goals.

In the 46th Ward, residents had the ear of six-term alderwoman Helen Shiller, whose deep ties to Uptown's considerable base of community activists limited the extent of gentrification throughout her near quarter-century in office. COURAJ and Shiller's work on Wilson Yards, first introduced in 1998, was emblematic of this partnership. Through COURAJ organizing, Shiller's support, and the eventual approval of Mayor Richard M. Daley, activists ensured that the \$151 million, TIF-funded site would include a 98-unit senior housing facility and an 80-unit, family-friendly apartment building, paired with the construction of a new Target and Aldi next to the Wilson Red Line station.

The coalition found less success just a few

PRIDE

continued from 17

blocks north at the redeveloped Goldblatt's building, located just south of Broadway and Lawrence. With the building just beyond Shiller's jurisdiction, it fell under the control of then-48th Ward alderwoman Mary Ann Smith, who did not share Shiller's activist bent. Despite that hurdle, the group still managed some limited victories at the site, securing a handful of additional affordable units as well as a \$1 million earmark for a nearby single room occupancy building. The building was eventually occupied by Borders Bookstore in 2004, which closed just eight years later as the chain went belly-up.

"Cities and urban neighborhoods have been central to making queerness visible in our society, enabling many kinds of LGBTQ folks to be open about their lives and to find lovers and friends in an otherwise hostile and violent society," Edwards said in a 2001 *Windy City Times* article. "Today, 30 years after gay neighborhood-building that was concerned about creating a vibrant public life became so central to our movement, some more privileged individuals take this work for granted, or even look with disdain upon what they call 'gay ghettos,' such as Lakeview, unable to see that these spaces still make their lives possible."

Acting in coalition through COURAJ put Q2L in a strange position: being asked to organize with the religious group Jesus People USA, a group with many who opposed both abortion and homosexuality. Deborah Gould, now an associate professor of sociology at the University of California-Santa Cruz, wrote an article about the partnership, "Becoming Coalitional: The Perverse Encounter of Queer to the Left and the Jesus People USA," which examined the ways in which the partnership within this wider umbrella challenged both groups. Writing in 2017, more than a decade after Q2L was last active, Gould reflected on the ways that the coalition created space for members of both groups to encounter one another in new and unexpected formations, the kind of encounter only available in the joyful heterogeneity of a still-affordable-enough urban neighborhood.

"It was more in retrospect that I realized how strange and wonderful that encounter was," Gould said in an interview. "In the moment, I wanted to find belonging through politics, with other people who I might not agree with but who, by being in proximity to them, we would affect one another, and something

Signage from Queer to the Left demonstrations
COURTESY THERESE QUINN

surprising might happen. A lot of us had been so involved in challenging establishment-oriented gay organizations that we weren't surprised by what would happen, and we felt open toward what might happen with people who we didn't know and who we could be in relation to."

Another significant issue that Q2L took up concerned the carceral system and the death penalty, fighting against racism and homophobia in the state's punitive practices.

The group's work on the death penalty wasn't entirely unrelated to its anti-gentrification organizing; as it highlighted in events like "LGBT People, Police Brutality, and the Death Penalty," the kinds of everyday repression meted out by the police were integral to changing the neighborhood and criminalizing queer people, people of color, and the poor. By organizing against the death penalty, the group pushed the wider queer movement to pay attention to these interlocking violent forces.

The group's first foray into police violence work came during the Pride Parade in 2001, when it targeted Cook County state's attorney Richard Devine. Though their campy slogan "This Dick is not Devine" humorously poked fun at the county's top prosecutor, the reason for their frustration was far from funny: Devine had resisted efforts to appoint a special council to investigate Jon Burge, eventually found to have tortured more than 200 Black men while serving as a Chicago police detective from 1972 to 1991. The protests emphasized Devine's clear conflicts of interest in the case, as he'd previously worked at the law firm, Phelan, Pope & John, which had represented Burge during the initial investigations. Q2L was only one of many groups that organized around the case, which took decades of litigation and investigation before the city's 2015 decision to award \$5.5 million in reparations to Burge's victims. Still, their involvement at that critical juncture, just a few months before Devine began offering Death Row inmates the possibility of clemency in exchange for dropping their torture claims, was essential in keeping the case alive.

The focus on Burge and Devine then pushed the group to build a chorus of voices calling upon Illinois governor George Ryan to end the death penalty in Illinois. As the Burge torture investigation helped reveal, the death penalty had repeatedly been used to kill many

people later found innocent; according to Mogul, the People's Law Project found that of the 25 people executed in Illinois, 13 were later found to be innocent. In numerous cases, homophobia amplified the clear racism at play in deciding to deploy the death penalty; they found that "40% of the women on death row have had an allegation of lesbianism used against them during their trials." Q2L began organizing other statewide and national queer organizations to oppose the state's use of the death penalty, eventually placing an ad in the October 16, 2002, issue of *Windy City Times* calling on other queers to "Come Out against the Death Penalty and in Support of Justice." Thanks to this pressure campaign, Ryan announced in January 2003 that the state would commute the death sentences of 164 inmates to life in prison without parole, before the state abolished the practice for good in 2011.

Q2L's leadership on ending the use of the death penalty then drew them into a high-profile, out-of-state case. Local organizers asked Q2L to assist in an ongoing campaign to free Edward Hartman, a bisexual white man who had been charged with murder in North Carolina. As Mogul remembers it, the group had gained enough attention from their anti-death penalty work in Illinois to make them an important coalition partner in the campaign, calling upon larger national organizations to condemn the execution and devote specific resources to the issue.

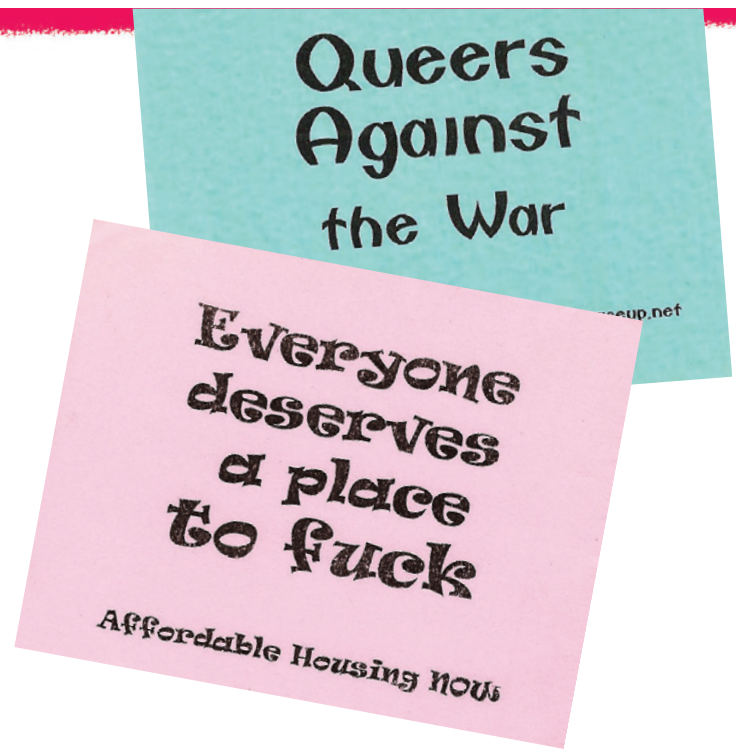
"Essentially, they told us we were the only group that was doing that work," Mogul said. "At the time, people were so big on hate crimes and hate crimes laws, and we were saying, 'We don't want more prosecutors, we don't want

more policing, we don't want more prisons.' We were trying to highlight not only are these systems inherently racist and unjust, but that they disproportionately affect members of the queer and trans community, particularly its Black queer trans members."

Unfortunately, Hartman was eventually executed by the North Carolina government, his unsuccessful appeal to take the case to the Supreme Court not enough to prevent his death. Still, Q2L's involvement in the case solidified its reputation as an organization willing to stand up against injustice, and to push larger mainstream gay groups to increase their commitment as well.

As Gould wrote in her article on Q2L and its coalitional efforts, "The unrealized potentialities of the past—what we might call the not-yet of politics—provide a storehouse of live possibilities for the now." Revisiting Q2L today, and recognizing its blend of queer campiness, trenchant radicalism, and an openness to work with unexpected coalition partners, is a revivifying experience, providing wisdom for the many battles yet to be won by organizers following in the group's footsteps. At the same time, understanding Q2L's demise is also instructive for radical organizing today, reminding us of the persistent influence more mainstream tendencies can have in leftist spaces.

"With the movement towards marriage and what was happening in the mainstream gay movement at the time, it seemed very individualistic," Moon says. "For me as a 25-year-old, it felt new and radical to organize in the context of being queer, understanding the



importance of paying attention to these things that don't just affect us individually."

The group also brought a particularly queer sense of play to their demonstrations that shines through in photographs and pamphlets from the era. At one point, individuals loosely affiliated with the group created a puppet to mock 47th Ward alderman Eugene Schuler, tied to a fake newspaper inserted into the newsstands called "Alderpuppet Schuler Purports." The pale-faced, khaki-wearing puppet was repurposed by Q2L, holding a comically large hammer threatening passersby to "Look Normal!" while demanding them to "Send \$" in the other hand. At another demonstration, the group targeted the Legacy Walk installation in Boystown, which the group saw as an attempt to commodify a gay identity in a neighborhood increasingly unaffordable for many of its queer residents. By tying pink, money-festooned ribbons to the pylons, Q2L showed it wasn't afraid to stir up dissent within the gay community.

The group carried on into the 21st century,

scoring several of its largest victories in its later years, but it would fall apart by 2005. In 2001, some members of the group were eager to participate in a citywide coalition against Mayor Richard M. Daley, wanting to push beyond the neighborhood-specific TIF project work. A slate of actions, scheduled to kick off in mid-September, was derailed by 9/11, and the coalition never recovered.

By 2004, many of the group's busiest members, including many of the women involved at its founding, were drawn away by other commitments, sapping it of momentum. The post-9/11 era proved more difficult for the group, as its major projects wrapped up without an obvious next step to take.

"Our most consistent work was around urban development and criminal justice reform," Edwards says. "Once the Wilson Yards project was finalized and the [Hartman] execution happened, there was nothing to ground us."


According to Yasmin Nair, a writer, activist, and academic who has continued to organize

around a queer critique of capitalism through the group Against Equality, the group was also increasingly influenced by the mainstreaming impulses it had originally repudiated; near the end of its lifespan, a newer group of white, gay men pushed the group closer to the gay marriage battles they'd previously rejected. After years of playfully teasing mainstream gay organizations, the decision to protest a bridal shower event by dressing up as SpongeBob Squarepants and asking attendees "Am I a threat to your marriage?" was a far cry from the group's earlier efforts, lacking the kind of clarity that had previously made it so successful.

For Nair, the burden of being "the only woman, the only Brown person, and the only lesbian" left in the organization by early 2005 was enough to finally push her out, as she felt increasingly racist and sexist hostility from some of the group's newer members. The group ended sometime later that year.

Although Q2L's demise came with a healthy dose of personal acrimony, the fact that most

of its members remain committed to queer activism and academic work today is a testament to its impact. It's clear in interviews how much the group shaped those who called it home, full of lessons and memories both joyful and messy, experiences that can carry forth and shape the work of fighting for a better world today. Profane and profound, Q2L embodied and was eventually undone by the contradictions of the era, articulating a radical perspective that could not outrun the conservatizing forces of 9/11 and the broader gay rights movement.

"Queer to the Left was, in its own way and for its time, a short and even beautiful moment in queer history, unique and deeply necessary and also fated to not last because the definition of what we consider radical politics evolved swiftly and went past it," Nair says. "I'm glad I was a part of it—a part some in it would deny—and that it ever happened at all." 

 @t_annie_howard



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PRIDE



The Last Supper In A Gay Leather Bar With Judas Giving Christ The Finger by Steven Brown
ADAM M. RHODES

DECADES OF BONDAGE

LA&M'S DIRTY 30

A reflection on the museum's storied past and more inclusive future

By ADAM M. RHODES

What do you get when a leather daddy and a librarian walk into a synagogue? Well, apparently, a museum. The now 30-years-old Leather Archives & Museum to be exact.

Three decades ago, Chuck Renslow and Tony DeBlase dreamt up a way to collect and preserve queer, mostly kink, art and culture for generations to come. They were each famous leathermen in their own right, and a powerful duo together. Renslow was the owner and operator of the Man's Country bathhouse in Chicago, and founded the International Mr. Leather contest that still brings thousands to the city every year. DeBlase, the one-time publisher of kink-focused magazine *Drummer*, created the Leather Pride flag—a symbol that is used to this day to celebrate leather and kink sexuality.

Originally the National Gay and Lesbian Archives, LA&M incorporated in May 1991, a month before the passing of Renslow's partner of 40 years, Dom Orejudos, the world-

owned homoerotic artist known as Etienne. The name officially changed to LA&M in May 1992.

Now, decades later, leatherfolk and lookie-loos alike acknowledge the museum's role in preserving an important history. The museum has a troupe of eager volunteers who staff rummage sales and do landscaping work, and donations make up the lion's share of the museum's collection. LA&M was also inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame in 2017.

"Chicago is probably the only place that this could exist, because we're right there on the street front in Andersonville like, 'Hey, look at us,'" says Gary Wasdin, LA&M's executive director and resident Daddy. "We're not ashamed or shy."

Wasdin joined the museum as its new executive director in January 2018.

The Leather Archives and Museum, in its current form, occupies what was once a synagogue, just steps away from Devon Market, tucked gently between a gas station and rows

of two- and three-flats on an otherwise residential Rogers Park street.

But as unassuming as the facade may be, its interior holds an unvarnished and hedonistic history few others, if any, are collecting in any meaningful way.

"These are community-based institutions that have tried to fill the gaps in acquiring and preserving and making available primary source materials for populations that were largely neglected by major research institutions," says Gayle Rubin, LA&M board member and celebrated gender and sexuality scholar. Rubin has spent her career researching and writing about queer sexuality, particularly leather and kink.

The museum's auditorium is lined with enormous murals of men painted by Etienne. Its lobby boasts a display case of kink-themed parody tchotchkes like a "BOND-AID" box and a trio of S&M-themed Lego pieces, across from a standard display of museum T-shirts and mugs. Intricately adorned and well-worn

leather vests hang in reverence in an adjoining room.

But among the smut and sex is an important collection of the evolution of American sexuality. The museum's early pieces chronicle the underground bar scene that characterized much of queer male sexuality in the 50s and 60s before Stonewall. Many of the pieces in its collection of materials from the 1980s are all that's left of a generation of men who died—from equal parts AIDS and the homophobia that let it run rampant.

"It was this sort of counter act to the gay plague fears that were everywhere," Wasdin says. "It's hard for any of us to even think or describe what that would be like, because it's mind-boggling."

Wasdin also credits Renslow himself, his business acumen, and his political connections with the early survival of the museum.

And now, in an era where pop stars like Lil Nas X can wear chaps and a chest harness while doing a striptease on *Saturday Night Live* to whoops and hollers, Wasdin and others say the museum is still an important resource, both for a historical understanding of kink, and as a place for the newly initiated to explore.

Other than its actual founding, few moments stand out among the museum's history more than the 1999 move to its current home, the former synagogue. The only milestone that might upstage that is the capital fundraising effort to pay off the building's mortgage, which *Windy City Times* reports raised more than \$400,000 and allowed the museum to buy the space.

And as the museum has grown and evolved, it's been able to hire staff to more particularly care for its collection. LA&M's archivist, Mel Leverich, has the important task of managing the rows and rows of metal shelves that hold artwork, posters, leather, and other kink accoutrements.

Leslie Anderson has the equally important job of preserving those accoutrements. Leather sashes, shirts, pants, shorts, harnesses, and gear of all kinds hang in a corner that reminds more of a tightly packed thrift store than a museum. Armed with a cart overflowing with paintbrushes of various sizes and a litany of balms and polishes, Anderson makes sure the leather pieces acquired by the museum stand the test of time.



The Leather Archives collects art as well as materials from leather bars and clubs, and gear donated by patrons. © ADAM M. RHODES

“For years, I lobbied them to do something with me, and I made myself just so annoying, eventually, I think they just gave up and decided,” Anderson says. By her own admission, though, Anderson has been involved in the museum in some fashion since its founding.

As the museum expands, so does its collection. And Wasdin says that diversifying that collection to include folks left out of what can only paradoxically be called “mainstream kink culture—meaning people of color, women, and trans people to name a few—is crucial if the museum is going to survive for the next 30 years.

“You have to actively go out and seek people of color or women or trans leather and kink folks, reach out to them and put in the work and time to build that trust and relationship to get these kinds of collections,” Wasdin says.

And to the LA&M’s credit, its downstairs gallery has specific spaces to acknowledge the kink history of those communities. But as Wasdin says, it’s not just about putting people from these communities on display, it’s about ensuring that they have an equitable role in the museum.

And for some kinksters, previous iterations of the museum, even under Renslow’s leader-

ship, have been less than equitable.

Joey McDonald, a Black man who has been heavily involved in the museum since it was founded, says he has had to push some of the older, white men on the museum’s board to better serve marginalized populations, namely people of color and women.

“There is a serious commitment to address and move forward with racial equity, but it’s a hard drive because there’s so much white, patriarchal bullshit that has been embedded in the archives since its inception, you know, including my daddy, Chuck Renslow,” McDonald says.

Alexandra St. James, a Black transgender woman who won the Ms. Iowa Leather 2017 contest, recalls hearing transphobic comments from people at leather and kink events who didn’t know she was trans. And Choc Trei, at one time the only person of color on the board, says she received significant pushback and accusations of tokenism when another board member, Catherine Gross, brought her to the board for consideration four years ago.

Trei says that since then, she has recruited another woman of color and hopes St. James will join the board as well.

But the trio all agreed that under current

leadership, particularly Wasdin, the museum has made incredible progress.

“There has been a more dedicated push in the last five years than I saw ever before, and I’m sure part of that has to do with the fact that they have had women—active, vibrant, powerful women—that have come on to the board,” McDonald says.

And Wasdin readily admits that the museum may have previously “fallen short” in its mission of equity and inclusion, particularly as a predominantly minority-serving institution. But realigning in that mission to better serve the full spectrum of the kink community is part of how the museum survives for the next 30 years and beyond, he says.

“Now, what’s the work look like to actually be equitable?” Wasdin says. “That’s where we’ve been for the last several years, trying to look at things differently.”

It’s also under Wasdin’s leadership that the museum has weathered a challenge unlike any other, the COVID-19 pandemic, one that marks the second pandemic that has gripped the museum, following the AIDS crisis.

Alongside the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19, Wasdin says there have been some points of relief. The Paycheck Protection Pro-

gram loans the museum received were its first federal funding, something Wasdin says bodes well for its future.

And now that spaces are slowly beginning to let guests return, Wasdin says he hopes people will support the museum in person.

“The story we tell everybody today is we exist because the community wants us to exist,” Wasdin says.

After all that, you might be surprised to hear that the museum has only been protested once, by Wasdin’s count. But that single protest speaks volumes about the museum and its place in the community, he says.

The protestors, who Wasdin says came from out of state, arrived on the otherwise quiet Rogers Park block to protest a kink-themed *Last Supper*-style painting that hangs in a hallway at the museum. But instead of ignoring the protestors, Wasdin says the community rallied around the museum, even calling the local alderman and staging a counterprotest.

“There’s been really wide acceptance,” Wasdin says, “and people always say that something like this probably could not have existed anywhere except Chicago.”

🐦 @byadamrhodes



Bambi Banks-Couleé FREDDIE COLLIER

EDIBLE DELIGHTS

GET BAKED WITH BAMBI BANKS-COULEÉ

The drag superstar is decolonizing weed “from the kitchen to the couch” with her new cooking webseries.

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Bambi Banks-Couleé is resplendent in a bridal-white jumpsuit with spaghetti straps festooned with fringe as she introduces the episode. In case you didn’t catch the drift of the chyron in the bottom left corner that announces her as “the HBC

of THC,” she tells you outright: “I’m not just baking—I’m *baking baking*.”

Welcome to the cannabis-infused world of *Bambi Bakes*, an online series now in season two following a three-episode “pilot season” that debuted in December. *Bambi Bakes*

features Chicago performer and host Banks-Couleé sharing her kitchen with cannabis home bakers who provide cooking demonstrations of marijuana-infused fare (cosponsored by Dispensary 33), followed by living room talk show time with special dining guests (who often have just polished off some of the episode’s highlighted recipes). Banks-Couleé produces the show, uploaded each Tuesday to YouTube under the banner Moving Standard, a queer-owned digital content production team she built with working partner and friend Jacob Stanton, who also directs the episodes. The guests on *Bambi Bakes* thus far have included fellow members of Banks-Couleé’s performance community: Banks-Couleé’s drag mom Shea Couleé and superstars Dida Ritz and the Vixen are featured on season two’s first episode, which first posted at the end of May.

Stanton describes the show as much more than just a drag talk show or a series of cooking videos. When I asked him about the show and Moving Standard’s mission last month, he said “[Last year] I asked myself, how do we pivot in a COVID era and also what have I really been wanting to do? And that’s making unapologetic media that is political; that incites positive action and sort of tricks people into conversation. Maybe teaching a few adults to learn isn’t a bad thing.” Banks-Couleé ends many of the episodes with the tagline “Join us for more guests next week as we decolonize weed from the kitchen to the couch,” which hopefully gives most viewers an idea of the politics and intention behind what they’re seeing.

Banks-Couleé’s journey as a performer started in Houston, where she trained in musical theater as a high school student, and then continued on in Chicago after she moved here to study at the Theatre School at DePaul University. She was part of a crowd there that included both fellow alums Stanton and the actress and comedian Asia Martin, whose credits include Second City and an episode of *The Chi*, and who recently participated in Viacom/CBS’s competitive comedy showcase fellowship program. Martin helped craft and script the segment format of *Bambi Bakes* and both Stanton and Banks-Couleé consider her contribution invaluable to the newer episodes.

Banks-Couleé points to a conversation during her time in theater school that shaped

her view about creating art: “Even in my young state of drag, I always knew that I wanted to produce my own creations. I met this amazing professor in my senior year who gave me this advice that stuck with me. He said, ‘You are going to be so much happier when you can produce your own thing, when you can produce your own art.’” And Banks-Couleé’s drag career has followed suit: she is often responsible for both creating and hosting the nightclub shows she hosts at bars like Lakeview’s Hydrate, and she was a driving force behind Chicago’s first drag festival, Chicago Is a Drag, which made its debut in June 2019 in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the riots at the Stonewall Inn, and continued in a digital format for 2020.

“I think the best thing that came out of quarantine was finding my passion for producing media digitally and I’m excited that we’re finding ways to incorporate the digital side into how we’re all producing live shows,” Banks-Couleé says. “Work like ours and the work of companies like TransIt Productions [who film and edit *Bambi Bakes*] and other queer media companies are going to keep digital drag alive and I’m very excited about that. We need more of this content especially outside of the mainstream venues.” In fact, “She Did That” (one of the segments of the “couch” portion of *Bambi Bakes* episodes) helps to clue in viewers to digital content that they may not be aware of from episode guests, as Banks-Couleé watches favorite stage performances of her guests while they talk about their favorite memories from those events. These are often shorter videos that are available online, like Dida Ritz performing at a *Black Girl Magic* show, but it’s a treat to hear from performers about their process and see them review their own dance moves.

Episodes of *Bambi Bakes* live on Moving Standard’s YouTube channel, and include recipes from Lorraine Nguyen of Cãn Sa micro-bakery (a savory serving of infused buns with baked cheese) and mushroom tarts with sauteed red onion by performer and host Lucy Stoole. Stanton is especially excited about an upcoming episode featuring performer Ramona Slick’s Pink Lemonade Bars (“they’re just incredible,” he says).

@hollo

PRIDE



PRIDE GUIDE

NO NEED TO WAIT FOR THE PARADE

Pride 2021 returns with celebrations both outside and online.

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN AND KERRY REID

Last year, Pride events were mostly limited to online celebrations. But with half of the adults in the state now fully vaccinated, this year looks different, even though the parade won't happen till October. There are still plenty of streaming performances if you're crowd-hesitant, but you can also fly your flag at some outdoor events as well.

Pride in the Park Chicago brings two days of music acts, drag performance, speakers, food and drink vendors, and more to Butler Field in Grant Park. Chaka Khan headlines on Sunday. The entire affair is open to all ages, but youth 14 and under must be accompanied by a ticket-holding adult. *Sat 6/26, 2-10 PM and Sun 6/27, 3-10 PM, prideintheparkchicago.com, \$45-\$225*

Chicago Urban Pride Picnic hosted by Otis

Mack and featuring DJ Superman, DJ First Lady, DJ Chifeel, DJ Rae Chardonay, DJ Tru, DJ Darryl, and MC Trina Tru Luv. A free, family-friendly picnic event featuring free food and games. Organizers will set up in Jackson Park near the basketball courts at 6300 East Hayes Drive. Chicago Urban Pride is also hosting a rooftop afterparty at the Promontory in Hyde Park later that evening; doors open at 10 PM for those 21 and over (tickets to the afterparty are currently sold out). *Sun 6/27, noon-8 PM, facebook.com/ChicagoUrbanPride, FREE*

Rainbow Races, the LGBTQ+-focused sailing organization, hosts a Pride Flotilla sailing event for area boating enthusiasts. Rainbow flag-festooned boats will parade from 12th Street Beach at the Museum Campus north toward North Avenue Beach, and landlubbers are welcome to watch and take photos from spots

Pride in the Park 2019 © JERRY NUNN

along the route, including Navy Pier. *Sat 6/26, 2 PM, rainbowracesinc.org/pride-flotilla-3, FREE*

Kickback, About Face Theatre's anthology of digital performances about the intersection of queer and Black lives (inspired in part by the Rebuild Foundation's collection of African American art and cultural artifacts), continues streaming online. *Through 8/31, aboutfacetheatre.com, FREE*

Power in Pride at Home is a series of short digital pieces created by artists of color in the About Face ensemble for their education and outreach program in 2020. *Streaming in an open run, aboutfacetheatre.com, FREE*

Whodunnit? A Groovy Queer Murder Mystery at Camp Forest Woods is this year's production by About Face Youth Theatre. It's 1971, and ten people receive invitations to a summer camp reunion at a remote mountain resort. Does it have anything to do with the mysterious death that happened when they were campers? *Streaming through 6/30, aboutfacetheatre.com, FREE*

Romeo and Juliet gets a queer-focused take in Iris Sowlat's episodic production (one for each act) through Accidental Shakespeare. The last act drops via Facebook (Facebook.com/AxShakes) this Saturday, but all the episodes are online via YouTube. *Through July 31, accidentalshakespeare.org, FREE*

A Midsummer Night's Dream with PrideArts also offers a queer vision of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy, set in ancient Greece, in this live Zoom reading. *Tue 6/22, 7 PM CDT, pridearts.org, \$10*

ComedySportz Chicago fields a variety of online queer-themed programming, including LGBTQ+ ensembles competing against each other in the company's signature improv games show; *CSz D&I Talks* with Luis Cortes, director of diversity and inclusion for CSz Chicago; *Queers the Question*, a queer-themed trivia show hosted by Cortes; and *Rainbow-A-Go-Go*, a queer variety show. On June 25-26, the company hosts the *CSz Virtual Pride Festival*. *Complete schedule and ticketing information at cszchicago.com 📺*

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THE DANCE OF IDENTITY

‘THE CELEBRATION OF AUTHENTIC SELF IS PRIDE ITSELF’

Dee Alaba talks about being transfemme in dance.

As told to IRENE HSIAO

Born in Davao in the Philippines and raised in Des Plaines, Dee Alaba began dancing at the age of four. A graduate of Columbia College, she currently performs with the Seldoms, Loud Bodies, and Erin Kilmurray. She has also appeared in New Dances with Thodos Dance Chicago and DanceWorks Chicago, and with the Cambrians. Here, Alaba reflects on her experiences as a transfemme dancer in Chicago.

My mom was a dancer. She used to ask me to practice ballroom dance with her while she waited for her partner—that was before I was even in school.

My mom cofounded [USP Dance Theater Davao, now known as Pangkat Silayan], a dance company at the University of Southeast-

ern Philippines. They toured to a lot of places. The U.S. was her last tour, and she stayed. Seven years later, she brought me and my two brothers. My father is still in the Philippines. I went back in 2019, 12 years after we moved. I still remembered everything, but everything was different.

We were separated from 1999 to 2007. I remember her hugging me and crying and saying, “It’s going to be a while until I see you.” I think I was in kindergarten when this happened. I remember being in first grade and thinking, “My mom still hasn’t been home. Where is she?” Next thing I knew, years and years had passed. The only time she came home was when my grandma passed away. All the family members from the states came.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ

My mom walked in, and I was like, “What?!” It took a while to process that it was her. I was like, “That’s my mom. That’s my mom!”

Before she moved, I was always with her because I was the youngest. I would go to rehearsal with her, and during city festivals in the Philippines, I would be on my mom’s float, running around and throwing candies at people. It was like a big old Pride Parade for the entire city!

[Once] my mom made me take a ballroom workshop. The guy who was leading the workshop was like, “You should compete!” But I wanted to be my mom: I wanted to do all the fancy twirls, and I wanted to be lifted. The male counterpart was so boring, you just hold onto her, spin her, dip her—when I saw that, I was like, “No, this is not for me.”

To this day my mom won’t tell me why she quit dancing. It was a weird transition when I told my mom I was going to dance. Asian families are like, “Be in the health industry, be a nurse, be a doctor, be a psychologist, whatever.” I asked her during my first solo competition for dance team my senior year in high school. That was the first time she saw me dance since I was a toddler. I won first place, and she was like, “I’m so proud of you. I’m OK with you pursuing dance for college.”

After I graduated from high school, I let my hair grow. My mom gave me my very first skirt, which gave me the confidence to wear women’s clothing full time. I never wore men’s clothes when I was in college—except in ballet classes. You know how ballet is: women go first; men go last. Women do this; men do that. It felt wrong to my body. And when I did West African, one of the teachers wouldn’t let me wear lapa, which is what women wear, because I didn’t have a vagina. He would ask, “What do you have in there—let me see!” and chase me around the class every time I wanted to do the women’s part.

When I started college, I had already transitioned, but I didn’t identify as trans. As a freshman, I was like, “I’m a gay man with long hair who wears women’s clothing.” I thought “trans” meant you had transitioned fully—you’re on hormones, you got your boobs done, you’ve done the gender confirmation surgery. I didn’t know you could be transfemme, trans-masc, transsexual, transgender. I was like, “Oh, that’s where I am. I’m transfeminine. I want to do women’s roles, because that’s who I am. I’m a woman.”

Back then, I was just Dwighth—that was my name. People would be like, “What are you?” I would be like, “I’m Dwighth. I’m me. I’m feminine, but as long as you respect me for who I am, I don’t care if you use he; I don’t care if you use she.” I did not care about pronouns until Columbia professors started asking, “What’s your preferred pronoun?” my junior year. One of the things I realized was that I was doing it for people’s comfort. People would be like, “I don’t want to offend you if I call you ‘he.’” I realized, No, I need to own this. I need to fully accept that this is my identity. That’s when it started. I announced on Facebook, “I go by she/her now, I go by Dee now.”

After graduation, a lot of auditions I saw were looking for male or female dancers. That was discouraging, because I identify as female, but will a company looking for dancers respect me as such? For New Dances 2018 with Thodos and DanceWorks Chicago, they didn’t say they were looking for male or female dancers, just dance artists. I saw J’Sun Howard and Katlin Michael Bourgeois on the choreographers list, and I was like, “OK, I can do this. There are things for me out there.”

Especially working with Erin Kilmurray, I get to express my authentic movement and my identity. For her workshop for *Search Party*, [the notice] said, “female or female-identifying dancers.” Seeing “female-identifying,” I was like, “Oh, this is for me.” Working with Erin really kickstarted my dance career. She was like, “Take the jobs that will respect you. Do the jobs that will celebrate you.” That was when my whole perspective changed. I don’t have to audition for dance companies because they’re looking for male or female dancers; I can create work, I can collaborate, I can work with people who are looking for artists and not just male or female bodies. It’s an ownership of my authenticity.

I have had conversations with other trans dancers in the community. I give the same advice: look for the people who will celebrate you and respect your identity, not just a job. That’s toxic! I don’t know how they’re going to perceive or use my body. I still see audition notices looking for male and female dancers. If that’s their thing, that’s their thing. At least I know not to work for them.

The celebration of authentic self is Pride itself. You owning your identity, your celebration of yourself. We’re an evolving community. I’m truly pleased to see a lot of non-gender binary and trans dancers coming out now. **✎**

[@IreneCHsiao](#)

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SPECIAL QUARTERLY INSERT IN THE CHICAGO READER, PRODUCED BY WINDY CITY TIMES. SEE WINDYCITYTIMES.COM FOR MORE LGBTQ NEWS AND CULTURAL COVERAGE.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI

on the early days of another pandemic

4

ON THE MOVE

The shifting of Chicago's 'gayborhoods'

20

HIV CRIMINALIZATION

Activists work to change law they claim is racist and homophobic

8

JODY WATLEY

Conversation with a musical icon

22

NEVO ZISIN

demystifies terminology ... so you don't have to

24



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WINDY CITY TIMES

VOL 36, NO. 3

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WHAT'S HERE

HIV AT 40: Dr. Anthony Fauci on the early days of another pandemic



HIV AT 40: Erie Family Health Center: focused on helping at-risk communities

HIV Criminalization: When crime goes viral



Howard Brown Health looks ahead to post-pandemic Chicago

Pride journey: Palm Springs

Essential tips for your COVID-free travel

On the move: How Chicago's 'gayborhoods' have shifted since 1965

Jody Watley: Conversation with a musical icon



Nevo Zisin is taking the mystery out of terminology

Mayor Lightfoot helps break ground at AIDS Garden Chicago



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PUBLISHER Terri Klinsky
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ART DIRECTOR Kirk Williamson
BUSINESS MANAGER Ripley Caine
SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES

Terri Klinsky, Leni Manaa-Hoppenworth,
Amy Matheny, Lisa Solomon Mann

CONTRIBUTORS

Joey Amato, Brandon Brachter, Jeff Guaracino, Adam Rhodes, Angelique Smith, Melissa Wasserman

WEB HOSTING LoveYourWebsite.com

(lead programmer: Martie Marro)
(773) 871-7610 FAX (773) 871-7609

Editorial: andrew@windycitymediagroup.com

Sales: terri@windycitymediagroup.com

Art/ad copy: kirk@windycitymediagroup.com

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HIV AT 40

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI

on the early days of another pandemic

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Dr. Anthony Fauci has been called “America’s doctor”—and with good reason. His face and advice regarding COVID have seemingly been omnipresent since the virus affected the masses early in 2020.

However, decades before the word “coronavirus” became known to the public, the current director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)/chief medical advisor to the president was on the forefront in the scientific battle against another emerging pandemic: HIV/AIDS. (In fact, it was because of HIV/AIDS that Fauci has advised every president since Ronald Reagan, who was chief executive when this disease devastated so many in the 1980s.)

Windy City Times talked with Fauci about the early days of the HIV/AIDS pandemic—but the conversation started with a question about his current condition.

Windy City Times: After seemingly being the face of COVID medical advice for the past year, how are you physically and mentally?

Dr. Anthony Fauci: You know, it’s been interesting, Andrew. It’s been a surrealistic year. I have not had a day off in 15 months, and it’s almost like you’re in a zone. You know how basketball players make all those shots and they say you’re in a zone—like with Michael Jordan?

WCT: Yeah. They also called it being “unconscious.”

Fauci: Exactly. That’s the way it is now with me. The work we’re doing is so important and there’s so much suffering that you don’t think about anything else than doing something about it. You don’t dwell on the fact that you’re tired or need sleep—you just do it.

When this is over—and that will happen at some point—we’re going to look back and ask, “How the hell did we do that?”

WCT: Regarding HIV, take me back to when you first heard about AIDS, in 1981.

Fauci: It’s totally embedded in my mind because I’ve thought about it and lived it over and over again.

I was sitting in my office at the NIH [National Institutes of Health] clinical center, where my laboratory was at the time. It was the first week of June in 1981, and I saw the MMWR [The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report], which described this extraordinary and interesting report of fine young men—and, curiously, all gay men—who were previously well but developed this condition called pneumocystis pneumonia.

Now, at the time, I had been at the NIH for nine years and I had been board-certified in infectious diseases, clinical immunology and internal medicine. I was the infection-diseases consultant, with several of my colleagues, at the clinic. We used to see cancer patients who were immunosuppressed with chemotherapy, and several of them would get pneumocystis, so right away I knew that [those with AIDS] had to be severely immunosuppressed. I thought that it had to be a fluke or maybe some drug they were taking, like poppers.

One month later, in the first week of July, what I believe was the transforming event in my career happened—when I got the second MMWR. That one described 26 young men who were all gay. They weren’t just from Los Angeles; they were also from San Francisco and New York [City], and they presented pneumocystis as well as other opportunistic infections. That’s when I got goosebumps because I realized this was a new disease and it was sexually transmitted. Then I thought

about it for a while: I’m an immunologist, and this is an infectious disease without a name or etiology—because it’s 1981—but if what I think is going to happen actually happens, it’s going to explode not just in the gay community, but throughout the world.

I decided to change the direction of my career later that summer, and I was on a pretty steep pathway toward a very successful career in immunology and infectious diseases. I remember that my mentors asked, “What are you doing? You’re throwing away this incredibly promising career. Why are you studying this disease that’s a fluke? It’s going to go away.” And I said, “It’s not going to go away.” I even wrote a paper at the end of 1981 (and it was published in 1982). I said, “Anyone who thinks this disease is automatically going to disappear doesn’t really know what they’re talking about.” Unfortunately, that was one of the most prophetic things I’ve ever [stated].

Then, as the years went by, things got worse and worse—and my career got enveloped in studying this strange disease. In 1984, when the position of NIAID director became available—a job I still have, 37 years later—I realized the impact I could have because I could put a major emphasis on AIDS.

WCT: But you, and President Reagan, did get some blowback from the LGBTQ community.

Fauci: Oh, yeah—and it was pretty clear why. I was one of the few people who was out there and very visible, talking about increasing support. I would go into the community and was on TV and the radio. So I became the face of the federal government. So activists said, “We’re not part of the dialogue. We want our concerns addressed.”

Nobody in the scientific community was paying attention to them. So in order to get atten-

tion—in what I thought was a smart move—[the activists] became very confrontational and provocative, and made me a target because I was a federal person. Larry Kramer called me a murderer and an incompetent idiot—and they certainly got my attention.

What I did was get past the theatrics and confrontations, and start to listen to what they said. And once I started to listen, it made perfect sense. I’m talking with you on the phone and I’m almost at the conference room where I first invited them in, in the late ‘80s. They went gradually from totally attacking me to developing a cordial relationship to having a collaboration. Now, 37 years later, some of those activists are my best friends. [Laughs] It’s been an interesting evolution.

WCT: Did you think the world would be marking the 40th anniversary of HIV/AIDS with no cure or vaccine?

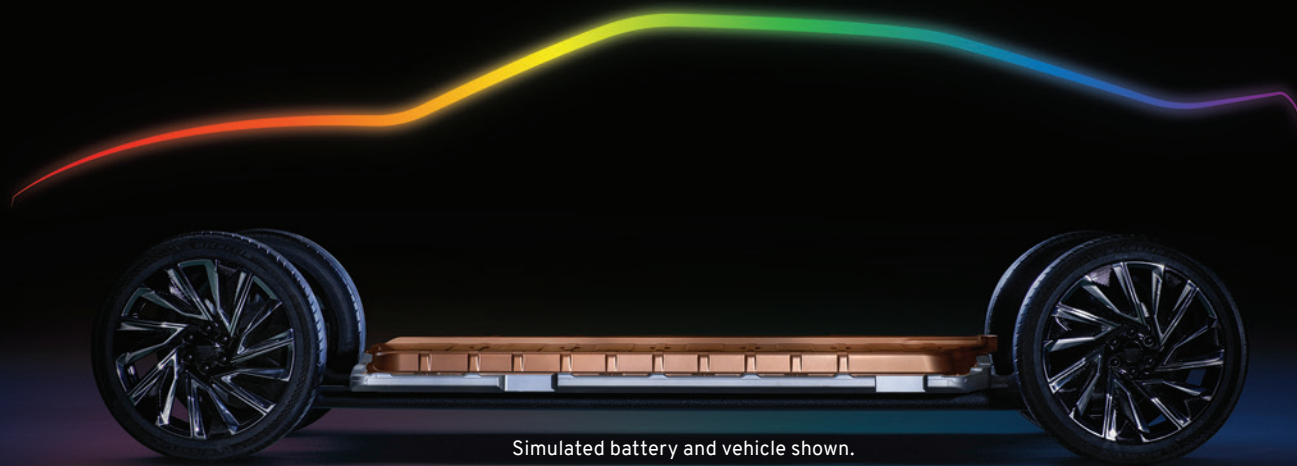
Fauci: I erred in my estimation in two ways. I thought we’d have a vaccine much sooner. But I never thought we’d have such spectacular therapies, where you could treat somebody with a single pill for the rest of their lives. Not only can levels be brought so low that they’re undetectable and people can live lives that are practically normal, but it can be practically impossible for them to transmit the virus to someone else.

So I underestimated how well we would do with therapy, but I overestimated the situation with the vaccine because, at that time, we didn’t realize the virus has this spectacular ability to integrate itself into the genome of the cell. Once it does that, you can’t get rid of it. When the body doesn’t want to make a good response against HIV, it’s hard to make a vaccine against it. So, it’s been very interesting.



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ERIE FAMILY HEALTH CENTER:

Focused on helping at-risk communities

BY ANDREW DAVIS

HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects Black communities—with Black gay and bisexual Black men and Black trans women being the most affected population than any other group in the country. More specifically, one in two Black MSM (men who have sex with men) will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime, as compared to one in four Latino MSM and one in 11 white MSM.

Recognizing these racial differences, especially among Black communities, Erie Family Health Centers view the HIV epidemic as a social issue as well as a healthcare issue. Among other things, Erie Family has employed the Lending Hands for Life (LHL) program to help those living with HIV/AIDS—or those who are at risk—live healthy lives and reduce the number of transmissions in Chicago..

Windy City Times talked with the center's Dr. Santina Wheat and LHL case manager Christian Biggers about the program and HIV/AIDS, in general.

Windy City Times: I wanted to start with something general. Did you think HIV/AIDS would be around for 40 years—and there would be no cure or vaccine?

Dr. Santina Wheat: I think not. I thought that we would have a vaccine or cure by now. That being said, I have been pleasantly surprised—from

my time from medical school until now, caring for patients with HIV—that we have is much better [than before]. It's much more manageable.

I feel like I have conversations with people who say, "It's not like what you saw in the movies, or when we were younger." I do wish we were further along, though, and had a cure or vaccine. Christian Biggers: I can agree with what Dr. Wheat said. I do know, from stories I've heard from people doing ART [antiretroviral therapy], that what they have today is a lot better than what they had. You don't hear about side effects any more. Then, when you have the time and resources to truly educate people, you can see the difference.

WCT: Have you noticed a more casual attitude about HIV/AIDS, as compared to a few years ago, in part because new treatments are available?

CB: For me, with the clients I encounter, I don't see people have a more nonchalant attitude about it. That's partially due to stigmas. There are more commercials that educate people, but there still are stigmas associated with the virus.

DSW: I would add that when someone is diagnosed, that person takes it very seriously. However, I would say [regarding] my patients who are not living with HIV, I am somewhat surprised



Erie Family Health Centers' Lending Hands for Life team. Courtesy of Erie Family Health Centers

that they are a little bit more casual than I would like them to be. I do feel like I've seen a rise in a lack of concern with [HIV-negative] people.

WCT: It's definitely disconcerting that minorities are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS.

CB: It is pretty sad, just because of the poor access to care, especially in Black and Brown communities.

DSW: The CDC says that one in two Black men who have sex with men will be diagnosed in their lifetime, so it's a huge distinction. It certainly hurts my heart, as a Black woman, to see the differences.

WCT: Stigma and healthcare access are major factors, as you've mentioned. Are there any others that account for the disparities in the numbers?

CB: I would say overall resources, which tie into education and food resources. There are theories that people face that could put them in vulnerable conditions.

DSW: I don't think that it could be said enough that there is systemic racism, and that systemic injustices occur. Those make things much more challenging for some communities than others. And it's just impossible to talk about any sort of health inequity without talking about things like access to healthcare, access to education. Getting information on how to protect one's self is different because of how our society is set up.

WCT: Lending Hands for Life has been around since 1989. What does the program entail?

CB: Our program is actually broken down in various ways. We focus on HIV, hep C and PrEP. I'm able to do the rapid HIV test, so I'm able to educate clients who come in. We can educate on PrEP if they're negative as well as the necessary steps if they are positive—and they should know they're going to have a support system, regardless of the result.

As well as education, outreach is very important, even if the client doesn't belong to one case manager. We want to make sure they know that we care, and that they take their medication and get to their medical appointments as well. We take a deep dive to access any barriers they may face, such as housing disparities; if you're homeless and sleeping on the [subway], the last thing you're going to worry about is your medication—so we try to provide proper resources.

We listen to clients so they feel supported, and sometimes they feel so comfortable they call us to see how we're doing. Sometimes they check on us more than we check on them.

DSW: All of the things Christian said are spot-on. Another aspect is that we are primary care-focused, so when patients or clients come to us I tell them that I can take care of them—and their families. That way, they don't have to feel like they're going someplace different than their friends or families. And we're able to provide care for patients with and without insurance. But I feel the most important thing is that, although HIV is manageable, there are patients with other conditions, such as high blood pressure. This place focuses on their entire health.

WCT: And how has the program had to pivot during the COVID pandemic?

DSW: I think the most obvious way has been with the way we provide care. For patients who did not need to come in, we changed to telehealth; for some of them, that was great because they didn't have to drive for results. Our teams had shifted a little bit: Initially, at some sites we were trying to separate patients who potentially had COVID from those who didn't—but that was earlier; now, we're able to provide more flexibility.

We've really looked at what we're able to do virtually—what doesn't require patients to come in.

CB: To piggyback on what Dr. Wheat said, the telehealth appointments have made things so much easier for clients. Before COVID, it was hard to get certain people in because of their work schedules; the telehealth appointments made things easier. Case managers also were willing to come on site to help clients who had certain needs.

WCT: What do you feel are key similarities between the COVID and HIV/AIDS pandemics?

CB: Touching on what Dr. Wheat said earlier, I'd say racial disparities and racial inequity in healthcare are [common to both]. Looking at the numbers of those who've received the vaccine and the numbers of those with HIV, I'd say there's a correlation.

DSW: I agree. I feel like the COVID pandemic was not as easy to potentially push aside, as the HIV/AIDS pandemic might have been. Because of

that, I think we've seen a different groundswell of movement with COVID. You asked me about not having a vaccine for HIV/AIDS—but, on the flip side, how is it that we have a vaccine for COVID already?

I struggle with this one. I agree with Christian in that we've seen the disparities hold true. We've seen some positives, like people coming together to fight COVID.

I think it's interesting how information has changed. We used to say certain things about HIV that we don't now. That evolution is the same with COVID—although, obviously, on a much more rapid basis.

WCT: Also, with HIV/AIDS back in the '80s, there was a much slower reaction. It took [then-President] Ronald Reagan years to even say the word "AIDS."

DSW: Yes—and it was about who it touched [gay men] in the beginning. Of course, COVID hit everybody so quickly.

WCT: Is there anything you wanted to add?

DSW: We're really trying to look at ways to change health inequities. We're trying to make sure we reach everyone. We want everyone to live their healthiest life possible.

CB: I agree. Just seeing how efficiently providers and case managers communicate with one another is just mind-blowing. I was definitely not expecting the relationships to be as strong as they are. You can see the passion people have here when it comes to serving their clients.

For more on Erie Family Health Centers, visit ErieFamilyHealth.org.



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WHEN CRIME GOES VIRAL



Activists say Illinois's law that makes it illegal to expose others to HIV is racist and homophobic. Now they're close to changing it.

BY ADAM RHODES

In early 2016, Jimmy Amutavi had what he considered a happy life.

More than a decade had passed since he first emigrated to the U.S. from Kenya with dreams of being a personal trainer. Amutavi had settled

down with his wife and young son in Evanston and was renting space at a nearby gym where the lifelong fitness fanatic gave private lessons.

But Amutavi's ties to the gym went beyond business.

Amutavi says he got a voicemail message from a Skokie police detective in 2016 saying there

was a warrant out for his arrest. The detective alleged the personal trainer had exposed three women he had sex with to HIV without their knowledge. One of them was a woman he'd met at the gym with whom he'd had a relationship.

Amutavi remembers feeling like his life was over.

"I was just floating there," Amutavi says. "I didn't know anything. It was as if someone had drugged me, and I was a zombie."

He surrendered to police custody in October 2016, but maintained his innocence.

Amutavi claims that when he ended his relationship with the woman, she retaliated by contacting his clients and disclosing his HIV status. Two other women, who Amutavi had also slept with, then agreed to press charges as well, he says. In addition, his lawyer tells the Reader and Injustice Watch that Amutavi's principal accuser allegedly violated health privacy laws to obtain Amutavi's private medical information through her job at a local hospital, which gave her access to those records. Phone calls and e-mails to the woman were not returned.

The Cook County State's Attorney's Office charged Amutavi with three counts of criminal transmission of HIV, each count punishable by up to seven years in prison. Prosecutors alleged Amutavi had intentionally hidden his HIV status from the three women, and through condomless sex, had put them at risk of contracting the virus themselves.

Prosecutors dropped the charges in April 2017 under then-newly elected Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx's office.

"Jon saved my life," Amutavi says of his attorney, Jon F. Erickson. "He gave me a lot of peace, and he assured me that we were gonna beat this."

One of the problems with the state's case against Amutavi was that there was virtually no way for him to transmit the virus because he takes medicine to treat and suppress the HIV in his body.

Illinois's HIV criminalization law makes it illegal for a person living with HIV to have condomless sex without first disclosing their HIV status to their sexual partners. The law also makes it illegal for someone to donate blood, semen, tissue, or organs, or to share non-sterile drug paraphernalia, such as needles, if they have HIV and don't first disclose that to the recipient. The law can and has been applied even if transmission of HIV does not occur.

Amutavi is one of the dozens of people charged in Cook County under the controversial law that Illinois lawmakers passed in the late 1980s at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Scores of critics say policies like Illinois's are a dangerous and misguided attempt at stopping the spread of HIV and punish people for merely living with the virus while potentially allowing vengeful lovers to weaponize the law against people living with HIV. Activists pushing to repeal the law say it's a product of the overwhelmingly homophobic panic of that era and disproportionately impacts Black and Brown people.

A 2020 Chicago HIV surveillance report found that non-Hispanic Black people accounted for half of all people living with HIV, as well as the most frequently diagnosed population, in Chicago in 2019. Black men who have sex with men are also most at risk for contracting HIV.

"You can't really legislate around stigma," says Aisha Davis, director of policy at AIDS Foundation Chicago. "Then, when you add to that the implications around race, around gender, identi-

ty, around just the perception of someone when they've been charged with this, it means that Black and Latinx folks are going to be targeted even more."

Cook County hasn't prosecuted anyone under the statute since 2016. Still, the law remains on the books and within prosecutors' discretion.

Critics are also quick to point out that the law ignores the proliferation of pre-exposure prophylaxis, landmark HIV prevention drugs commonly known as PrEP, which have been found to be almost 99 percent effective. Activists and public health officials alike say the law also ignores the fact that, as the CDC states, people like Amutavi who are living with HIV and have been regularly taking treatment have virtually no risk of transmitting the virus, even without a condom. And like when the law was first up for debate, many today say the law punishes people for living with an incurable virus.

The law targets people "with the specific intent" to withhold their HIV status and spread the virus to their partners. But critics say that intent is difficult if not impossible to prove, and can be easily fabricated.

In June 2017, Amutavi obtained an order of protection for his family against the woman who allegedly accessed Amutavi's medical records. The petition alleges that over a yearlong period beginning in June 2016, the woman keyed Amutavi's car and verbally harassed him, his wife, and young son. However, Amutavi and his family declined to press charges, prioritizing fighting the charges against him.

But even after the county dropped the HIV charges against Amutavi, they still followed him, at least briefly. He applied to clear his record of the charges, but that application was denied in June 2018 by then-Cook County Assistant State's Attorney Michael Falagario. The form-letter denial states that "the people's interest in maintaining the records outweigh petitioner's need for expungement." Falagario wrote "multiple charges involving criminal transmission of HIV" as additional reasoning to deny the expungement petition before signing his name.

Court officials later expunged Amutavi's record in late July 2018 after, Erickson says, they were "educated" about his case.

But Amutavi, now in his 50s, says he still bears the emotional and psychological scars and the real-world consequences from his case. After news organizations like the Chicago Tribune, Seattle Times, and the Associated Press publicized the allegations against him, Amutavi says he lost all of his clients. He left his passion for personal training behind as a result. (He asked the Reader and Injustice Watch not to name his current employer out of fear of harassment from his principal accuser, which he says continues.)

He gets emotional talking about the case and is fiercely private about his personal information out of fear that the woman he broke up with will continue to harass him and his family. Therapy has helped him deal with the anxiety, depression, and PTSD he says he carries from the ordeal. There are good days, he says, when his shame and guilt subside, "but the bad days are still there."

"Every once in a while, I'm reminded of, you know, all of this," he says.

He also says he worries about how the charges, or news coverage about them, will impact his son, now ten years old. Internet searches of Amutavi's name call up his mugshot and the numerous articles about the allegations against him. But news about his exoneration nearly a year later is scant.

"I struggle with this thought, you know, my son googling me," Amutavi says. "And I worry how this might affect him one day."

Amutavi's case, and the damage it caused him and his family, are far from unique.

The Chicago Reader and Injustice Watch examined the law's origins in Illinois, how prosecutors have leveraged it in Cook County, and its impacts on people charged. Our investigation is part of The Circuit, a courts data project led by Injustice Watch and the Better Government Association, in partnership with civic tech consulting firm DataMade.

Early charges under the law indeed reflect critics' concerns about racism and homophobic AIDS panic, but so do recent prosecutions. As part of this investigation, we reviewed court records and used news clippings to dig up charges and track down attorneys, activists, and people charged.

An analysis of Cook County court data by The Circuit shows that Black men make up more than two-thirds of the people charged under this law; and across gender lines 75 percent of those charged are Black.

Court data shows that between 1990 and 2016, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office charged at least 60 people with criminal transmission of HIV. Prosecutors themselves put that number closer to 80 people during that time frame, and the discrepancy could come from myriad places. In our analysis, we eliminated names and cases that appeared to be related or duplicates. Some cases, like the one against Amutavi, could have been expunged or sealed.

The data also shows that prosecutors added HIV transmission charges in nearly 30 cases alleging criminal or aggravated sexual abuse or assault, almost half of the HIV transmission charges we found. Prosecutors have charged 15 people solely with criminal transmission of HIV, half of whom have pleaded guilty. And though prosecutors dropped roughly a third of all HIV-related charges, at least 20 people in the county have been convicted of criminal transmission of HIV since 1989.

The first Cook County State's Attorney to charge someone with criminal transmission of HIV after the law passed in 1989 was Cecil A. Partee, a Democrat who was appointed to replace Richard M. Daley after Daley was elected mayor of Chicago. Partee was the first Black person to serve as the county's top prosecutor, and Cook County wouldn't elect a second until Kim Foxx, another Democrat, won the post in 2016. Partee's tenure was short-lived though, ended by Republican Jack O'Malley in a November 1990 special election.

Court data shows that Partee prosecuted two people under the law. One was a Black man charged in 1990 with criminal sexual assault, criminal HIV transmission, and unlawful restraint. He pled guilty to the latter charge while prosecutors dropped the sex-related claims against him.

Circuit Court judge Margaret Stanton McBride, now an Illinois appellate judge, sentenced the man to one year in prison in 1991. We couldn't find out much more than that; privacy laws restrict access to the case file, and we couldn't find contact info for the defendant or any news stories about the case.

However, Partee's other prosecution made more headlines—and stoked critics' fears about the HIV law's disparate application. The case began with the March 1990 arrest of Olivia St. John, a Black transgender woman who an August 1990 Chicago Tribune article reported as the defendant in the county's "first AIDS biting case."

Prosecutors alleged that St. John bit and scratched two police officers as they tried locking her up at a north-side police station after cops found her breaking car windows, according to the article. A representative for the state's attorney's office at the time told the newspaper that prosecutors approved the charges before conferring with medical experts but dropped the charges after they couldn't prove that HIV can be transmitted through saliva.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that possible HIV transmission from a bite is almost impossible.

Court records about the case show that St. John was initially charged with two counts of criminal transmission of HIV and four counts of aggravated battery. St. John pleaded guilty to a single aggravated battery count in October 1990, and Judge Howard T. Savage sentenced her to three years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Court records use male gender markers for St. John, who the Tribune reports identifies as a woman, though the article used male gender markers as well.

It's all but certain that St. John was sent to a men's prison in the state, despite being a woman. The American Civil Liberties Union is currently suing the state's department of corrections, alleging the agency fails to properly care for trans people in its custody.

The 1990 Tribune article about St. John's case also uses offensive, outdated, transphobic language to describe her.

Bill McMillan, a member of the Chicago chapter of ACT UP, the historic HIV/AIDS-focused activist group, is quoted in the 1990 article as saying St. John's arrest was "based on racism, homophobia and AIDS panic." ACT UP famously forced the government, and the public, to confront the reality of the virus in the early days of the AIDS crisis under President Ronald Reagan. The grassroots group was founded in New York City in 1987, two years before Illinois passed its HIV criminalization law.

McMillan told the Reader and Injustice Watch that cases like St. John's were all too common. He says he doesn't blame St. John for biting and scratching the officers.

"They were pretty brutal with us, pretty brutal with a lot of people," he says. "She was probably fighting for her life."

McMillan, who now lives in Palm Springs, says he was diagnosed with HIV in 1983, when the virus was known as GRID, or Gay Related Immune Deficiency. He says Illinois's HIV criminalization law, and others like it around the country, came

at a particularly difficult time in the AIDS crisis when thousands were dying due in large part to a federal government that sought to let them perish.

"I was afraid," McMillan says. "I think we were all afraid. And we were outraged. It just was another attack on us, you know?"

"When they passed that law, it added insult to injury. And it just really affected my self-esteem, affected my mental health, affected my emotional feelings."

Prosecutors couldn't prove that St. John could have even transmitted the virus through scratching and spitting in 1990. But that didn't stop Cook County from bringing charges against other people based on similarly bad science.

In one case, from December 2000, a man living with HIV was charged under the law after allegedly spitting blood at officers while being arrested during a domestic disturbance, records show. In November 2011, police in Oak Park charged a man with criminal transmission of HIV after he allegedly bit an officer on the thumb during an arrest and broke the skin.

Many cases also center on ex-lovers who call the police alleging that their partners hid their HIV status.

In one 1993 case, a woman was charged with attempted murder and criminal transmission of HIV after she didn't tell her husband she was living with the virus. Prosecutors explained the attempted murder charge in court documents by alleging that exposing her husband to HIV was "a substantial step toward the commission of first degree murder."

In a motion to dismiss, the woman and her attorneys argued that the law was vague and violated her due process rights. Her motion was eventually denied and she pleaded guilty to criminal transmission of HIV. In 1994, Cook County judge Richard E. Neville barred her from having unprotected sex of any kind for four years as part of her probation.

She was later found to have violated her probation after she gave birth to a child.

More recently, in 2013, Cicero police officer John Savage was charged by Cook County prosecutors after a sexual partner learned he had HIV and called the police, according to news reports of his arrest. But, like Amutavi, Savage posed virtually no risk of transmitting the virus, leaders from groups including Lambda Legal, AIDS Foundation Chicago, and the ACLU of Illinois say.

Savage ultimately pleaded guilty to a lesser charge the following year; activists say prosecutors routinely stack charges in order to secure convictions, while HIV-specific charges often go unchallenged. The Chicago Tribune recently reported that Savage eventually left law enforcement and the state of Illinois after his case was over. He could not be reached for comment.

But even amid a wave of progressive district attorneys being elected across the country, prosecutors still have little incentive to speak out against these laws or stop prosecuting these charges outright, says Kenyon Farrow, co-executive director of Partners for Dignity & Rights, previously known as the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative.

Turn to page 10

“District attorneys often have bigger political ambitions, and how they make their mark to run for mayors, governors, federal offices is by their record of how many people they prosecuted,” he says.

In Cook County, prosecutors varied in how frequently they brought HIV-related charges. Former state’s attorney O’Malley prosecuted 19 cases from 1992 to 1996, an average of nearly five cases a year. His successor, Dick Devine, initiated 24 cases from 1997 to 2008, an average of about two cases a year. Anita Alvarez prosecuted 16 cases from 2010 until 2016, about three cases a year and closer to O’Malley’s rate.

O’Malley, Devine, and Alvarez did not respond to multiple requests for comment by presstime.

Roughly five months before Amutavi was charged, Alvarez told the Windy City Times in what was considered a landmark statement at the time that the state’s HIV criminalization law “makes no sense and is clearly out of date and out of line with modern science.” But that didn’t deter her office from filing charges under the law.

Alvarez’s office filed charges under the HIV criminalization law in May 2016, two months after her comments, and again the following November, according to court data.

Amutavi was arrested that October. Erickson, his attorney, alleges that Alvarez’s office conducted a sloppy investigation into the allegations against Amutavi before the arrest.

Amutavi and his attorney both claim the principal woman who had accused him was well aware of his HIV status when she reported him to the police, and only found two other accusers after she went through his phone.

Amutavi was one of the last people Cook County officials say they have charged under the law. The origins of the measure, which was passed in 1989 during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States and the panic that ensued, is crucial, and is reflected in the law itself.

Just two years before former Illinois state representative Penny Pullen, a Republican from Park Ridge, introduced the state’s HIV criminalization bill in 1989, President Ronald Reagan tapped her for a spot on his Presidential Commission on HIV/AIDS.

Pullen was first elected in 1977 to represent the 55th District, which at the time comprised suburbs north and west of Chicago, including Des Plaines, Park Ridge, and part of Niles. She spent 16 years in the Illinois House, eventually rising to the rank of assistant minority leader, and made a name for herself in Springfield sponsoring many controversial HIV/AIDS-related bills.

One such bill became a short-lived law, passed in 1987, requiring people to be tested for HIV before getting marriage licenses. The law earned national criticism and lasted for 21 months before being repealed by the state legislature in September 1989.

Illinois’s HIV criminalization law came during a particularly critical time of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the U.S. Just two years before House Bill 1871 was passed by the state legislature, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the toxic drug azidothymidine, originally a failed attempt at

cancer treatment, as the first drug to fight HIV/AIDS. There were 100,000 reported AIDS cases in the country at the time Illinois’s law passed, according to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

The state legislature eventually passed both a House and Senate version of the HIV criminalization bill, though the latter was vetoed out of redundancy. Though the bills received significant support at the time, they also had some staunch critics, according to legislative transcripts. One of the most vocal critics was representative Ellis B. Levin, a Democrat.

“What we have here is a bill that basically says, let’s discriminate against people who are sick,” Levin said on the House floor in June 1989. “Let’s make it a crime to be sick . . . you know, at some point you need to say enough is enough.”

In support of the bill, however, state representative Ron Stephens, a Republican, called it “absolutely ridiculous” to oppose Pullen’s bill following Levin’s testimony.

“We’re not talking about a common cold here, representative,” Stephens said in response to Levin. “We’re talking about a disease that kills. Why don’t you just understand that once and for

“YOU CAN’T REALLY LEGISLATE AROUND STIGMA,” SAYS AISHA DAVIS, DIRECTOR OF POLICY AT AIDS FOUNDATION CHICAGO. “THEN, WHEN YOU ADD TO THAT THE IMPLICATIONS AROUND RACE, AROUND GENDER, IDENTITY, AROUND JUST THE PERCEPTION OF SOMEONE WHEN THEY’VE BEEN CHARGED WITH THIS, IT MEANS THAT BLACK AND LATINX FOLKS ARE GOING TO BE TARGETED EVEN MORE.”

all? Quit the demagoguery on the issue.”

Then-representative Ed Petka also testified in support of the Senate version. During his testimony, Petka conjured sensational images of gay men living with HIV biting officers during arrests, claims he said he heard from a Chicago police officer he was close friends with.

Pullen was also involved with the influential American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), an ultraconservative nonprofit of lawmakers and business leaders that sends model legislation to state governments across the country, alongside her state House seat and her role on Reagan’s AIDS commission. And as Trevor Hoppe wrote in his 2017 book *Punishing Disease: HIV and the Criminalization of Sickness*, Pullen used her role at ALEC in particular to spread her influence on AIDS policy.

“She’s not the end all be all, but she has this

really instrumental place in history,” says Hoppe, an assistant sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. “There’s no one else who really played a similar kind of role in specifically promoting HIV criminal statutes.”

Pullen did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The same year Pullen introduced House Bill 1871, ALEC released a report on AIDS policy, Hoppe wrote. The report included model legislation on topics including public education, partner notification, mandatory screening of incarcerated people, and HIV criminalization.

The organization’s version of an HIV criminalization statute was nearly identical to Pullen’s bill in Illinois, and was first proposed by Pullen during testimony before ALEC’s AIDS working group, Hoppe wrote.

But the influence of Illinois’s law didn’t just extend to ALEC. Hoppe wrote that lawmakers in Nevada turned to House Bill 1871 when drafting their own HIV criminalization statute. Alaska lawmakers similarly conferred with officials in Illinois when taking up their law.

The Illinois Supreme Court rejected a constitutional challenge to the law in early 1994. The

meaning or application.”

In 2012, the Illinois state legislature amended the HIV criminalization law to specifically require that the intent to transmit the virus be present, an effort to assuage activists pushing for reform. But critics like Davis, AIDS Foundation Chicago’s policy director, say the change does little to reform the law because of the difficulty in proving intent.

And now, more than 30 years after Pullen’s law was first passed in Illinois, prosecutors across the country continue to pursue cases under similar laws.

The Center for HIV Law and Policy reports that, as of last July, 28 states now have HIV-specific criminal laws and eight states have applicable sentencing enhancements. Additionally, 25 states have also used general criminal laws to prosecute people living with HIV.

Scott Schoettes, director of Lambda Legal’s HIV Project, has challenged a number of HIV-centered convictions across the country.

In 2012, he helped win a ruling from New York’s highest court that the saliva of a man living with HIV could not be considered a “dangerous instrument” under state law. The ruling vacated an aggravated assault conviction against David Plunkett over a 2006 incident in which he bit a police officer. At the time of his release, he had served half of a ten-year sentence.

In 2014, Schoettes helped exonerate Nick Rhoades, who had been sentenced to 25 years in Iowa prison in 2008 for not disclosing his HIV status to a sexual partner even though they had protected sex. As part of that sentence, he was also required to register as a sex offender. After Rhoades’s sentence was shortened to probation, Schoettes took over his case and successfully fought to have his conviction overturned.

Schoettes is quick to point out that alongside HIV-specific criminal statutes, people living with HIV are also frequently prosecuted under general criminal laws, including Plunkett. This, Schoettes says, makes the repeal of HIV-specific statutes less effective if those efforts don’t also address those general criminal laws.

Alongside the allegations themselves, Schoettes says the accompanying attention can be damaging as well. But unlike the era when these laws were passed, news coverage of contemporary allegations now live forever on the Internet, as do mugshots and oftentimes private medical information.

And as the news media cover these charges, defendants are often portrayed as malicious disease spreaders and not, as they often are, victims of stigma and circumstance, their once-private medical information now on display.

Farrow, of Partners for Dignity & Rights, says he sees such articles come up across the nation at least once a week.

“[These articles] are almost always framed around, ‘This person is a kind of pariah who is out here trying to infect other people,’” says Farrow, who also recently worked as a senior editor at HIV/AIDS-focused publication *The Body*.

Tami Haught is the managing director of Sero Project, which aims to repeal HIV criminalization bills nationwide. She says her late husband, who was diagnosed with AIDS in 1993, struggled sig-

nificantly with fear that her family would force her to file charges against him under Iowa's since-reformed HIV criminalization law. She says he eventually suffered a mental breakdown.

Haught has been living with HIV for more than 27 years, and says her late husband eventually died of pneumonia, kidney failure, and complications related to AIDS. But she says the other causes of his death—like stigma, shame, and fear—are much harder to diagnose.

Haught spoke before the Iowa state legislature in 2013 and 2014 and helped update the state's HIV statute. In 2014, Iowa updated its statute to scrap a 25-year prison sentence and to allow for a tiered sentencing system, including felonies and misdemeanors, depending on the situation.

Haught says she knows of situations in which HIV criminalization laws have been used to trap people living with HIV in abusive relationships.

"These laws were put on the books to protect women," Haught says. "And actually women are at the greatest risk of prosecution or domestic violence or manipulation because of these laws, and their partners using these laws to keep them trapped."

Alongside Iowa, a handful of other states have also updated their HIV-related criminal statutes in various ways.

Most recently, in early April, Virginia updated its HIV-specific laws to require a heavier burden of proof regarding intent and actual transmission of the virus. However, state law still makes it a felony to intentionally transmit HIV, dubbed "infected sexual battery."

In late 2018, Michigan updated its HIV disclosure law to exempt from prosecution people living with HIV who are on treatment and are virally suppressed. In 2017, California downgraded from a felony to a misdemeanor knowingly exposing a sexual partner to HIV and reduced the possible prison term from three to eight years to six months.

Colorado, in 2016, repealed two of its HIV criminalization laws and significantly modified a third.

Farrow, of Partners for Dignity & Rights, particularly criticized reforms that only exempt from prosecution people who are virally suppressed, pointing to significant health disparities in the United States.

"There's kind of this false notion that everybody has equal access to HIV care, and it's just not true," he says.

And here in Illinois, it's now in the governor's hands to repeal the state's HIV criminalization law.

Until recently, Amutavi's mugshot was the first thing that appeared when searching his name on the Internet. But some news organizations, including the Chicago Tribune, have begun to offer ways for people to apply to have their mugshots taken down—finally understanding the harms caused by publishing mugshots without context.

After I heard that the Tribune offered this, I urged Amutavi to reach out. His mugshot has since been scrubbed from the Trib's website. But articles about the charges against him remain, again limiting his ability to move on completely.

If a group of state legislators has their way, however, there won't be any more charges under

the law ever again.

In February 2021, Illinois state senator Sen. Robert Peters sponsored a bill to amend the 2012 criminal code to completely repeal the HIV criminalization statute and amend other HIV-related statutes. The bill recently passed both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly and awaits the governor's signature.

In an interview with the Reader and Injustice Watch, Peters says he was motivated to introduce the bill after activists approached him from the Illinois HIV Action Alliance, a coalition launched in June 2019 to end HIV criminalization in the state. He called the law and others like it the intersection of anti-Black racism and "gay panic."

"When you combine those sort of systemic prejudices with a system of incarceration that's built on top of that, you get laws like these that don't do anything for anybody," Peters says.

Just months before Illinois HIV Action Alliance went public, members sent a letter to Attorney General Kwame Raoul in March 2019 asking him to issue a formal written opinion interpreting the statute to require specific intent to transmit HIV.

"During your campaign, you spoke passionately of your long-standing commitment to criminal justice reform," the letter states. "As part of that promise, we urge you to prioritize ending unjust prosecutions of people living with HIV."

Since Peters's bill was introduced, nearly three dozen legislators, including the recently appointed Mike Simmons, Illinois's first openly gay state senator, signed on as co-sponsors. Peters says he's hopeful the bill will get the governor's signature, crediting in particular the Black, queer organizers who led the charge against the original HIV criminalization law. But he admits that even now, decades into the fight against HIV/AIDS, progress has its limits.

"When we have floor debates, I would not be surprised if we hear some similar statements that were made in the past, brought up again," Peters says, referring to the inflammatory remarks by 86th General Assembly members who debated the original law in 1989. "And I think that it's gonna be disgusting, and nasty, but that is not the majority of voices, I believe, in our chamber and under the dome."

But even if Peters's law passes, relief for people previously charged under the law, like Amutavi, is limited. He left a fulfilling career, had his name, face, and HIV status spread all across the country. The ordeal had irreversible impacts on him, and his family.

And despite all he has endured, maybe even in spite of it all, Amutavi looks ahead with purpose. I asked him if had anything to say to the woman who led the allegations against him.

"She didn't bury me," he says. "She planted me."

Additional reporting and research by Adeshina Emmanuel, Injustice Watch.

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HOWARD BROWN HEALTH

looks ahead to post-pandemic Chicago

BY MATT SIMONETTE

As more Chicagoans get vaccinated against the COVID-19 infection, officials at Howard Brown Health (Howard Brown) are preparing their responses to a health landscape that will likely be much different from what it was before the pandemic.

"We were able to form a pretty urgent response to the pandemic, one that was informed by decades of responding to HIV," said Howard Brown President and CEO David Munar. "We're proud to have contributed to the epidemiology, COVID-testing, contact-tracing and now vaccinations and education."

Like many health providers, Howard Brown saw a surge of interest from patients eager to receive their COVID vaccinations earlier this year.

"A lot of vaccination efforts are going to be integrated into primary care, and it will be a struggle to persuade the half of the population who

hasn't received one to accept it," Munar said. "But I think we're going to see more 'normalized' delivery of vaccines. ... We're also going to start attending to the health needs in our health portfolios in a more robust way."

Munar speculated that a timeframe lasting as long as the pandemic itself—about 18-24 months—would likely be necessary to return healthcare service-delivery to "baseline 2019 levels."

He added, "We have evidence that a number of our patients who were on PrEP in 2019 are not on PrEP now. As for STIs, testing rates have declined and positivity rates have increased. The pandemic is directly affecting health equity by the disparities it's driving among some populations. It's also having a negative effect on good health. We're going to be recovering from COVID for a while, but the recovery from the crisis is also going to take a while to get back to where we were responding to HIV and [chronic conditions] like hypertension, diabetes, asthma and other chronic conditions."

Howard Brown officials have also noted an uptick in mental-health issues among its clientele, including anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation, thanks to the isolation and economic devastation many patients experienced.

"In a crisis such as the pandemic, nothing else can flourish," Munar said.

But the forced restructuring during the pandemic has at least raised possibilities for improvements to health care delivery in numerous realms. Telehealth visits, for example eased burdens on patients for whom making a trip to a doctor's office is difficult.

"[Telehealth] has allowed us to make care more convenient for those with cyber-access," Munar said. Howard Brown also mailed clients safer-sex kits, as well as kits to screen for HIV. Staff members were available via telehealth connections to walk clients through the HIV screening process.

But for patients lacking online resources, telehealth communication is a moot point and service-delivery to them remains an issue.

"The pace of change has really been a lot to assume," said Munar. "I know we're not alone, and a lot of organizations are going through that, but we're really been feeling it."

He also suspects that the pandemic will set back the state's Getting to Zero efforts, in which Howard Brown participates, in "very dramatic ways."

The Getting to Zero initiative would reduce new HIV transmissions in Illinois through a combination of strategies, among them easing PrEP

and PEP access as well as access to treatments that reduce viral loads for persons living with HIV.

"A lot of people have not been back to the clinic who are living with HIV, so we think [the pandemic] has affected adherence," Munar said. "Treatment has been more difficult for some people, and it has probably been widening disparities."

Howard Brown Health was founded in 1974, ostensibly as a resource for education, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases among gay men. That mission evolved dramatically as the organization began serving individuals with HIV/AIDS in the '80s. The organization

became a Federally Qualified Health Center in 2014 and began expanding its geographic reach in subsequent years.

Even as the pandemic raged through much of 2020, Howard Brown proceeded with new projects, among them a standalone facility that will allow its Broadway Youth Center agency to have its own building for the first time (see sidebar) and a community center on the South Side for which state Rep. Lamont Robinson (D-Chicago) has been a prominent advocate. Munar said to expect more details on the South Side facility in the months ahead.

Munar said, "We've been working with Pride Action Tank on a needs assessment, which is complete, and the reports will soon be released. We've really mined the assessment, which was driven by responses from some 400 LGBTQ South Siders to determine priorities and programming. The rest of the year we will have a whole series of announcements."

The next steps will be determining a location and collaborating with other agencies to plan the building.

"We think that will be an opportunity to expand services directly and with partners," Munar said. "That project is still several years out, but we're going to be doing a lot of work on it this year."

New BYC being readied for 2021 opening

Work continues on Howard Brown Health's (Howard Brown) new 20,000 square-foot Broadway Youth Center (BYC) facility at 1053 W. Irving Park Rd.

BYC has spent years looking for a permanent home. After launching in Lake View, it encountered opposition from residents in various locations, ultimately settling in its longtime location at 4009 N. Broadway in 2014.

Construction on the building will be finalized in July and BYC will move in August, according to Howard Brown President and CEO David Munar.

"We're going to be phasing in services in the months of August and September, but we're still figuring out the timeline," said Munar.

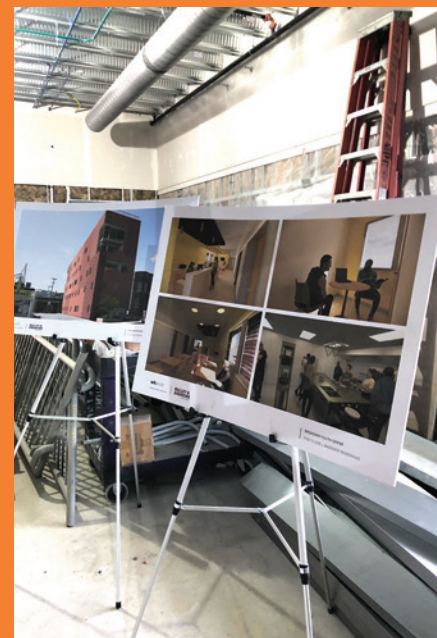
Howard Brown attempted a few years back to combine BYC facilities with its primary Sheridan Road location, but the logistics there also did not pan out. The new location has been in development for about four years, and will include primary-health services, among other features.

"We're very excited," Munar added. "It's a permanent home for the program, and it will afford two floors of clinical services for primary-care and walk-in STI services, and two floors for social-services."

The five-story facility will also have a dedicated floor for BYC staff, a first for the agency, and a commercial kitchen and shower facilities.

"It's going to expand our capacity," Munar said. "Right now, we're serving about 2,500 young people a year, and this will raise the cap to about 4,500. In the clinic it will be even more. ... Once the building opens, it will allow us to see more people and, through the service lines, we'll be expanding the work force by about 20 positions. It's a significant commitment to the needs of LGBTQ youth."

Photo by Tracy Baim



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PRIDE JOURNEY: PALM SPRINGS

BY JOEY AMATO

Palm Springs is my happy place. The city and the surrounding area provide me with the perfect mix of relaxation and entertainment. Having been to Palm Springs numerous times prior to this visit, I wanted to partake in things that I have never tried before, most notably a full body massage at El Morocco Inn & Spa, but we will get to that later.

After checking in to Triangle Inn, a lovely mid-century modern gay guesthouse located just one mile from the Arenas Road district, I decided to unwind from my flight and take it easy by the pool. I struck up a wonderful conversation with another guest from Los Angeles who was in town for the weekend. Apparently, Palm Springs is his happy place as well. Everyone I encountered at the clothing-optional resort was very friendly and eager to give advice on the hottest spots to visit during my stay.

I decided to head to Cathedral City for happy hour. Before Palm Springs became the gay mecca of today, Cathedral City was the epicenter of LGBTQ culture in the desert. The area is home to an array of nightlife establishments including The Barracks, AMP Sports Lounge and One Eleven Bar, a beautifully decorated space which on the evening of my visit was celebrating female voices of the 80s. I sipped a delicious Espresso Rum-tini while grooving to music from Whitney, Madonna and Tina.

The time change was hitting me hard, so I decided to retire early to my room at Triangle Inn and when I say room, I mean something closer to a 1-bedroom apartment. The suite contained a full living room, dining room and kitchen, in addition to a king size bed and large walk-in shower.

Triangle Inn usually offers a continental breakfast to guests but current COVID restrictions didn't allow them to provide that during my stay, so I grabbed breakfast the next morning at a cute LGBTQ-owned restaurant called Sunshine Café. I don't normally eat a heavy breakfast but when I saw the Banana Nut Pancakes on the menu, I knew I had to at least give them a try. The extra calories were definitely worth it.

Today was my Zen day in the desert and I heard about this wonderful shop creating organic skin care products called The Body Deli. The business uses raw and organic superfoods to create their products which range from facial moisturizers and scrubs to hair shampoo and conditioner. I sampled a few products while there and you can

actually smell the freshness of the foods they use to create the products. The store offers a variety of travel-size skincare kits that are perfect for those out-of-towners looking to bring home some product.

My next destination was El Morocco Inn & Spa, located in the town of Desert Hot Springs, known for the mineral properties in its water. I decided to indulge myself with a two-hour Moroccan Mystical Ritual, which begins with dry brushing to stimulate the lymphatic and circulatory system and provide exfoliation. My body was then covered in organic Rhassoul clay from the Atlas Mountains. As I lay on the massage table, the clay began to harden, and I felt like I was wrapped in a cocoon. At times it was a bit uncomfortable,

but I knew the end result would be wonderful. I was then asked to jump in the shower to rinse the clay off my body before the Moroccan Rain massage began. This is a process of using a raindrop technique to apply seven different essential oils along the spine, which all aid in detoxification.

Feeling refreshed, I was ready to enjoy a night on the town. I met up with my friend Brad Fuhr, who publishes the Gay Desert Guide, a one-stop-spot for everything you need to know about LGBTQ culture and nightlife in the Palm Springs area. We enjoyed dinner at Trio, one of my favorite restaurants in the city. I began my meal with the roasted beet salad and then ordered the fish special, while Brad went for the pesto crusted King salmon served over squash and angel hair pasta. Consistency is key and you can never go wrong with a meal at Trio.

No visit to Palm Springs would be complete without partying on Arenas Road, the LGBTQ cultural and nightlife hub of the city. Coincidentally, the owner of Hunter's was in town (there is also a Hunter's in Wilton Manors, Florida). Mark Hunter and I had met briefly in Florida many years ago and spent the evening reconnecting. We had such a good time chatting that before I knew it, midnight had rolled around, and it was time for bed. I know what you're thinking, midnight is early, but I was still suffering from jet lag and had a full schedule of activities to get to the following day.

I woke up early to visit multiple public art

exhibitions around the downtown area. The days were really starting to heat up and it topped 100 degrees the day prior, so I wanted to get to the art before the heat became unbearable. There are many art displays and murals around the Palm Springs Art Museum that are worth checking out.

If you happen to be in town on a Sunday evening, there is no better place to be than Oscar's for their world-famous T-Dance. The iconic party takes place every Sunday from 4-8pm and recently began again after almost a year-long hiatus. I was told people from around the world visit Palm Springs specifically to attend T-Dance at Oscar's.

Of course, dancing will make you hungry, so for your final meal in the desert, head to Roly China Fusion, a multi-level space which also hosts a weekly Drag Brunch on Sunday. While there, you must try the Lobster Dumplings, which are served in a delicious truffle butter broth with shitake mushrooms and napa cabbage. It was one of the best dishes I've had in Palm Springs.

Palm Springs Pride Festival is scheduled to take place this year on Nov. 6-7. After a year off, I'm sure it will be a very festive occasion. Start making plans early as reservations at Palm Springs' numerous guest houses tend to sell out during this time. If you have never been to Palm Springs, I'm sure you'll find it to be your happy place too. To learn more, visit www.visitgreaterpalmsprings.com and to book your Palm Springs gaycation, visit www.Orbitz.com/pride.



The historic Triangle Inn.
Joey Amato

Essential tips for your COVID-FREE TRAVEL

BY JEFF GUARACINO

COVID-19 will make travel a bit more complicated this summer. Going to Europe? Taking a cruise? Visiting Hawaii, San Juan or St. Lucia? Or maybe you are planning a road trip? The rules for traveling responsibly during COVID vary greatly. Be ready to encounter a patchwork of confusing rules and requirements this summer.

Depending on what you choose to do for your well-earned escape, it is going to be necessary to educate yourself on what to expect; how to travel by the rules; and be ready to prove you have a negative COVID-19 test (and it may cost you to prove it!). Trust, prepping for your trip in advance will pay off. Your health, safety, peace of mind and fun is an important part of the travel experience.

Here are five essential tips for to ensure you have a fabulous summer getaway:

—**Research before booking your trip.** Before you book your trip, be sure to understand how COVID-19 has changed the experience. Nearly everything about travel has changed due to COVID-19. Hotels, airplanes, trains, theme parks, destinations and resorts all have modified safety precautions in place. The good news is that you will likely find less crowds, more space and enhanced cleaning. You may also find limited services such as curfews with bars and restaurants closing early. A drive trip within the United States likely will find less restrictions compared to an island trip.

—**Make reservations and buy tickets in advance.** Before leaving for your trip, you should book your restaurant reservations and reserve your tickets to a museum or attraction. While you might not like having to plan out your vacation in advance, you will likely find it hard to do all the things you want to do by waiting. COVID-19 means capacity restrictions, so there is limited availability especially on weekends and during peak periods. You can always make changes when you are there.

—**When flying, give yourself extra time at the airport.** Many stores and food establishments may still be closed or have limited service, so it will take longer to buy food and drink. Most airlines have also eliminated beverage and snack service in coach, so be ready to “Bring Your Own.” If you are used to flying First Class, be ready for a curtailed (i.e. downgraded) experience as well.

—**Stay at a trusted hotel.** Staying at a hotel is perhaps one of the most important travel decisions you will make. Most hotels have developed

respected cleaning protocols to keep you and their employees safe. Among the hotel industry's leaders is The Four Seasons. The Four Seasons has developed “Lead With Care” that includes both obvious hotel guest protocols and enhanced procedures behind-the-scenes including employee trainings. The Four Seasons also developed an app that provides guests with the high-standard customer service the luxury chain is known for while providing guests with privacy and limiting interactions with the team. COVID-19 has increased the costs for many hotels so it is important to stay with a trusted brand that you can count on to deliver on the safety measures promised.

—**Provide proof of a negative COVID test.** The most complicated and expensive part of COVID-free travel will be meeting a requirement, if needed, to prove you have a negative COVID test. Hawaii, San Juan, cruise ships and other travel experiences are requiring that travelers prove their COVID negative upon arrival at the destination or before starting your trip. Some

destinations even require a mid-trip test to prove, again, that you are still COVID-negative. Hawaii implemented a program that requires travelers to the islands to use a ‘trusted partner’ (so you can’t use any test and vaccinations are not accepted). You must create an account at travel.hawaii.gov, download an app, and submit results upon arrival from a COVID test within 72 hours of arrival from a trust partner. Coming from Philadelphia through Chicago, that means I had to order an expensive test from American Airlines that was sent to me by UPS, The test included a virtual call to prove my identity and a virtual assistant to show me how to properly take the nasal smear. Within a day of sending my test back via UPS, I had my results. I printed out my negative test, uploaded my results and also downloaded the QR code to my phone. Aloha! Are you negative? Mahalo.

Jeff Guaracino is the author of two books on LGBT travel, a syndicated travel columnist and a tourism executive with more than two decades in the industry.



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BULL HORN



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Creating space for trans and nonbinary POC

As told to Jamie Ludwig

Bone Reader (Choya Webb): Molasses came to be because Zola saw many Black trans people not being visible in club space in Chicago, and more importantly, not taking care of themselves in terms of developing resources and arming themselves. She felt like there was potential for a group of Black, trans, and genderfluid people to come together and make that possible, and she saw figures in the nightlife scene that were able to do that. It coalesced one night at Berlin, but it really came together when Zola brought Lucy and I together to talk about having a club night. After that first night we recognized the power that we needed to tap into—namely Cae Monae—and now it's coalesced into several different modes of making this work possible beyond club nights.

Lucy Stoolie: At first we didn't actually know exactly which direction it was going to go or how we were going to do it, but we knew that we were very powerful together and that we could make a lasting change in the community by teaming up. We noticed that there weren't enough Black trans people in power or in control of nightlife. You see a lot of people being called in to work or entertain, but not being put into positions that would empower them, or let them control events they've been asked to put together. That was one of our biggest goals: to be able to celebrate Black and Brown trans people in a way that Northalsted doesn't usually do.

Zola Makeda: There's a feeling of home and belonging that you find with your kin that is unmistakable—a feeling of protection and of value. It's imperative that we have spaces that are led and run and predicated upon Black trans livelihood, preservation, and power, because the spaces that exist do not center us, and do not have us in their mindsets in terms of protecting us.

LS: Black trans women are being killed very often, more often than any other trans people. Here we stand as Black trans people in our community trying to figure out the best way we can go about keeping our sisters alive.

Cae Monae: It's as simple as this: How do you feel around your people? How do white men in suits feel around other white men in suits? Do you feel great? How do lesbian women feel in a room full of other lesbian women? It's almost as simple as like, A plus B equals C. Of course we feel more

empowered around ourselves. Of course when I'm able to look at someone like Zola or Lucy it makes me smile. I see myself and the people that I love within them. When it comes to 'Why is it important to understand the sacredness of protecting Black and Brown trans people?', it's as simple as: Do you not protect those who can't defend themselves? Do you not defend those who are not as easily able to survive?

LS: The self-defense courses sprung out of another tangible way for us to be able to empower our community. Everything kind of fell into place. Thorn Self-Defense Project, who is doing amazing work here, was able to team up with us, and we've had a pretty diverse mix of people show up. We have two different instructors this time around. One is Ms. Toto, who was a drag performer in the city. Her class goes over lots of strength training and simple ways that people can build strength at home, which is very important because a lot of trans people have some reservations about going to the gym, or don't have the resources for it. And our good friend G from Queer Kickboxing Club is teaching how to protect yourself in these awkward situations. G is so good at breaking down everything from your stance, to how to respond, to how loud you need to be, and what to do afterward—literally everything that could save someone's life, or get someone there to help them.

ZM: This summer we're going to be in the parks on the south side of Chicago, in the local community outdoors with Black trans people. We're finding funds for them to perform, and for their artistry. We'll also be collecting money to give back to others who are in need of mutual aid. We're also investigating ways to do more regular events, which will be more like what people are used to seeing in terms of social engagements. We also have a couple of collaboration events coming up that we're really excited to do.

BR: The self-defense series is continuing on through July. Cae Monae just designed some amazing merchandise for us. That's a great way people can support us if they're not comfortable with donating directly, which they should be. If not, we have gorgeous merch they can buy if they're interested in supporting Molasses and rocking that kind of identity.

Molasses is a collective of Chicago artists and activists who've come together to create space and platforms that create opportunity for local Black and Brown transgender and gender-nonconforming people. Through activities such as club nights, self-defense courses, and mutual aid initiatives, Molasses' organizers aim to empower Black and Brown trans people and build community while providing tools that protect and save lives. For more information, visit www.molasseschicago.com.

Bull Horn is an avenue to give wings to the stories that matter most. This series, from Red Bull in partnership with the Chicago Reader, invites guest writers, artists, activists, and community members to share their ideas and amplify timely, crucial topics they feel are important now.



ON THE MOVE

How Chicago's 'gayborhoods' have shifted since 1965

BY BRANDON BRACHTER

Chicago's gayborhoods (LGBTQ+ neighborhoods) and safe spaces have been important to the city's LGBTQ+ rights movement—and saving them post-COVID may be crucial. New research at Georgetown University highlights the importance of these inclusive havens as they've shifted through Chicago since 1965.

The analysis shows many things: the gentrification squeeze from Boystown (Northalsted) to Andersonville, the spread and importance of LGBTQ+ safe spaces post-Stonewall and even a historical tendency for gayborhoods to flourish on the North Side—in up-and-coming upper and middle-class areas boosted by gay-owned businesses.

It also shows gay physical safe spaces don't appear to be ceding to apps and social media.

The historical maps in the research tell a story from downtown to Boystown (Northalsted); Hyde Park to Andersonville; and beyond. They show patterns in the success and obstacles for Chicago's iconic gayborhoods. In both Boystown/Northalsted and Andersonville, for instance, local business owners banded together to form strong alliances.

Today, Chicago is a rare city supporting multiple thriving gayborhoods—but greater LGBTQ+ acceptance and gentrification is threatening to disperse these historical jewels.

First, it's important to spotlight the importance of gayborhoods. Yes, they host Pride Parades, happy hours and specific social services. But in U.S. politics, the research notes geographically-centered voting blocs like gayborhoods have more power. They support collective action and shared history. They promote belonging and visibility.

To map them, the Georgetown research sampled addresses in thousands of periodical listings at the Gerber-Hart Library and Archive in Chicago's Rogers Park—focusing on their stock of LGBTQ+ publications. That included alternative newspapers like Windy City Times, and magazines

with names like Blazing Star, Lavender Woman and Grab. In all, the archival research scanned editions of eleven different periodicals and found 1,085 usable addresses for safe spaces between 1965 and 2015.

The analysis found safe spaces take many forms—from church meeting spots to academic groups; gay-owned businesses and those after the "queer dollar." Bars and clubs, but also grocery stores, tattoo parlors, coffee houses, funeral homes, hardware stores, beauty salons, florists, travel agencies, veterinarians, real estate agents—and on and on.

The result is a set of six maps showing gayborhoods have migrated generally northward in Chicago from 1965 to 2015.



1975 edition of Chicago Gay Crusader at the Gerber-Hart Archive and Library. This was one of the dozens of periodicals researched for a Georgetown University study on Chicago's gayborhoods and safe spaces.

1960s

Chicago, and cities in general, started attracting a lot of single men after World War II. Suburbs started popping up that had zoning labeled “single-family,” with a focus on schools and the traditional nuclear household.

By 1965, the research shows many gay establishments had opened in Chicago. One periodical listed 33 different records, focusing largely on the Loop and stretching into Near North and nearby Towertown (also known as the Old Chicago Water Tower District).

An early incarnation of Boystown/Northalsted popped up at Clark Street and Diversey Parkway.

Andersonville and Rogers Park also showed early developments as LGBTQ+-inclusive areas, while the Hyde Park neighborhood around the University of Chicago represented one of few safe spaces on the South Side mapped in the research.

1970s

Historians document a “Great Gay Migration” into cities after Stonewall.

In Chicago, five periodicals listed 241 safe havens and businesses catering to the Chicago LGBT crowd in June 1975. It was five years after the city hosted its first Pride Parade, and six years

after the Stonewall riots. The early route was downtown—starting in Bughouse Square (which is now Washington Park) in the Near North community, then running down Michigan Avenue to the Civic Center in the Loop.

Perhaps no neighborhood emerges more in the ‘70s than what-would-become Boystown/Northalsted—though the heat map shows most of the activity south of the current gayborhood, and south of Belmont Avenue.

Around this time, urban planners note that gay districts became magnets. LGBTQ+ people flocked to marginal neighborhoods that, often, offered little opposition and cheap housing. Urban design literature pointed to gay neighborhoods as a way for cities to revitalize—along with other members of the creative class—in chic and artists’ neighborhoods.

It was, perhaps, the fuel for gentrification issues in gayborhoods.

1980s

The 1980s was a period of radical change in Chicago’s safe spaces. Many LGBT publications merged, changed or closed. One magazine—Chicago Gay Life—documented 182 LGBT havens in 1985. On the map, Boystown/Northalsted started to outshine downtown as the LGBT move north continued.

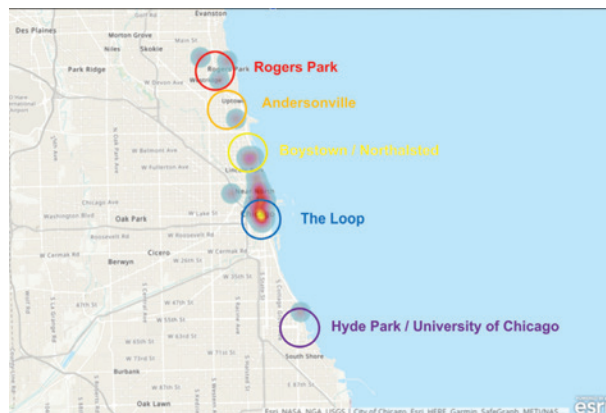
With the backdrop of the AIDS crisis, gayborhoods in other cities suffered, as leaders shuttered gay bath houses and bookstores in an effort to protect public health.

In the early part of the decade, many Chicago LGBT bars had no front-facing entrances—to keep customers safe and threats at bay. Owners discouraged patrons from displaying public affection.

When Sidetrack opened on North Halsted Street in 1982, owner Art Johnston said the average life of a gay bar was two-to-three years. He attributes Boystown/Northalsted’s success and longevity to a group effort by initial gay bars to attract similar businesses. Johnston said owning property there allowed LGBTQ+ businesses to establish a longer presence—while earlier gayborhoods were subject to leases and whims.

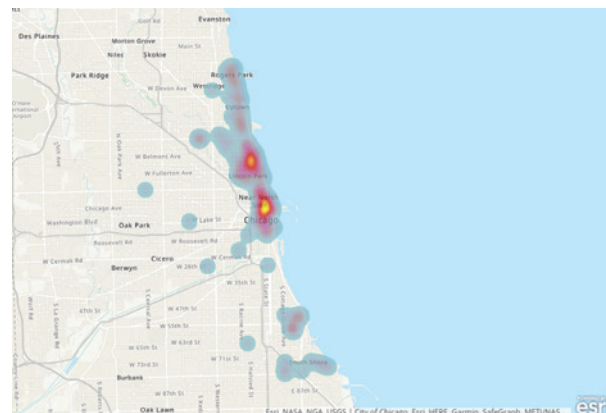
In 1988, the centralized Boystown/Northalsted voting bloc showed its clout when a group of LGBT activists successfully prodded the city to pass a human-rights ordinance. Mayor Richard M. Daley’s office later praised North Halsted Street businesses—and their merchant’s association—for revitalizing the neighborhood.

But, the research points out many gayborhoods become victims of their own gentrifying success. Johnston points out rental stock in Boystown/Northalsted largely converted to condos in the late-’80s—speeding the push of gay residents northward to establish other enclaves like Andersonville and Rogers Park.



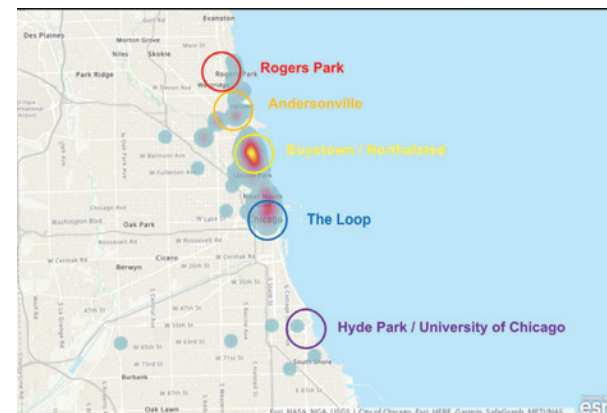
1965 LGBTQ+ Chicago - This map illustrates the prominence of downtown destinations among LGBT populations in 1965. The Georgetown research found 33 records in the 1965 Guild Guide. The Primary hotspot in the ‘60s centered around the Loop and stretched into Near North and nearby “Towertown.” Other blips show furtehr north in East Lakeview (which would later become Boystown/Northalsted), the Andersonville enclave, as well as Rogers Park, the city’s northernmost neighborhood.

Source: Guild Guide



1975 LGBTQ+ Chicago - Six years after New York’s Stonewall uprising, amidst the burgeoning “Great Gay Migration,” what would become Boystown/Northalsted emerges as a hotspot by 1975. The Loop and the stretch between the two neighborhoods remain active, but no Chicago gayborhood changes more between 1965 and 1975 than Boystown/Northalsted. An uptick in LGBT publications rendered a much greater and diverse number of records: 241 locations from June 1975 editions of five periodicals.

Sources: Blazing Star, Chicago Gay Crusader, Chicago Gay Life, The Chicago Gay Directory: Fourth Edition and Lavender Woman



1985 LGBTQ+ Chicago - Chicago’s gayborhood landscape showed a clear shift northward by 1985. Downtown areas like the Loop show less activity, while Boystown/Northalsted continues to grow. Andersonville and Rogers Park represent significant blips, while Hyde Park on the South Side shows resilience among largely non-business and educational activities. Between 1975 and 1985, many Chicago LGBT publications merged, changed or shuttered. The number of records goes down from 241 to 182.

Source: Chicago Gay Life

1990s

There’s a surge in safe space records in the ‘90s—with the 1995 survey mapping 538 records from just two periodicals. On the map, Boystown/Northalsted still dominates, but there’s a noticeable move northward toward Andersonville. The Loop gayborhood continues to fade.

Boystown/Northalsted became the first “officially recognized” gay village in 1997. Partnerships with the City of Chicago and local business guilds flourished to brand and market Boystown/Northalsted with a series of LGBTQ+-themed pylons. The city’s landmark designation report says the streetscape aims to “deliver an overall sense of place that is both safe and inclusive.”

2000s

Andersonville gains momentum on the 2005 map, as the research

plotted 304 records from three separate publications. Boystown/Northalsted remains prominent—if not migrating slightly northward.

The emergence of Andersonville shows a city can support multiple thriving gayborhoods. However, it also highlights the squeeze of gentrification.

The year 2015—perhaps more than any other—shows the contrast between 1965 downtown culture and the LGBT progression north over time.

2010s

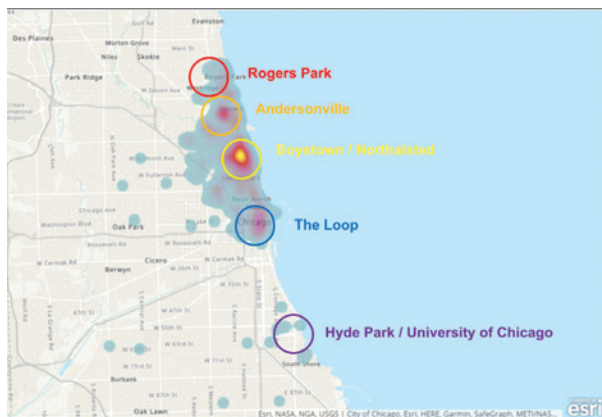
In the age of apps and social media, the research plotted 305 safe space records in 2015 (compared to 304 in 2005). This result may indicate that LGBTQ+ safe spaces aren’t actually closing, but dispersing.

Chicago still shows two prominent gayborhoods in 2015: Northalsted and Andersonville, although hot spots in both appear to fade. The research suggests assimilation bringing happy hours and LGBTQ+ folks to places farther north and west in neighborhoods like Wicker Park and Rogers Park.

The map also indicates Boystown/Northalsted—which once stretched toward Fullerton—now fades at Belmont, a shift a few blocks northward. Ald. Tom Tunney’s office noted, in the research, Northalsted’s shifting from a residential district to an entertainment destination.

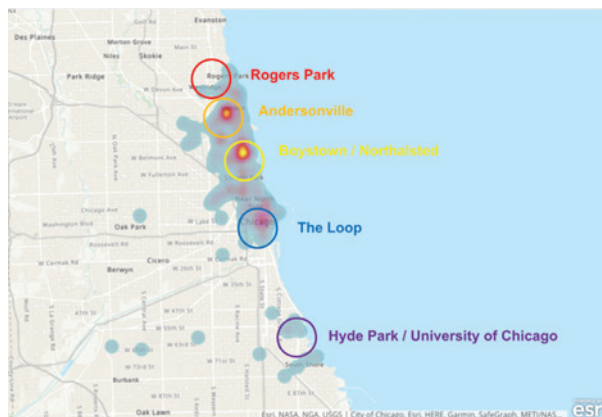
Several businesses have also moved from Northalsted to Andersonville—or opened second locations there.

Areas to the north, like Edgewater and Rogers Park, seem to be gaining, perhaps benefitting from LGBTQ+ folks displaced northward by housing prices.



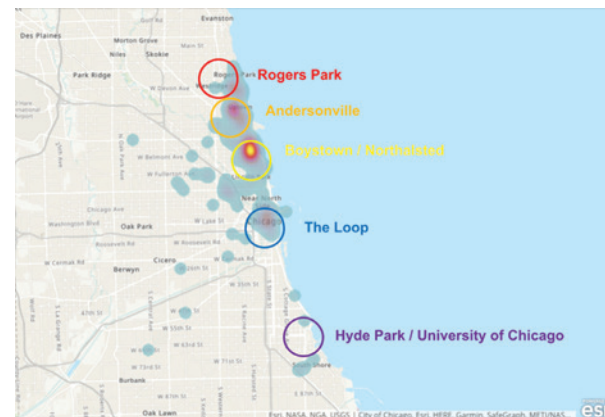
1995 LGBTQ+ Chicago - An astounding 538 records illustrate a surge in the “Gay Nineties.” Geographically, Boystown/Northalsted still dominates, but figures show a continued move northward, with Andersonville starting to emerge in the Edgewater and Uptown neighborhoods. Hyde Park and Rogers Park remain significant and largely consistent from 1965 through 1995. The Loop and other downtown locations continue to show less prominence compared to 1965.

Sources: Outlines, Windy City Times



2005 LGBTQ+ Chicago - The snapshot in 2005 shows Andersonville gaining heat, while Boystown/Northalsted remains prominent, if perhaps more geographically restricted. This year—perhaps more than any year—shows the contrast between 1965 Downtown culture and the LGBT progression north over time. The push northward, anecdotally shared among LGBT residents, illustrates perfectly by comparing 2005 to 1965. The 304 records from 2005 skew heavily further north than 1965’s downtown hotspot.

Sources: Identity, Nightspots, Windy City Times



2015 LGBTQ+ Chicago - Despite a similar number of records as 2005 (305), the LGBT heat map dims somewhat by 2015. Boystown/Northalsted and Andersonville remain clear activity centers and places like Rogers Park and Wicker Park see upticks, but one could theorize minor LGBT activity center dispersal. Social acceptance, assimilation and digital hangouts could be explanations. Northalsted’s hotspot largely blunts south of Belmont Avenue, a clear shift from 1995 where it extended toward Fullerton.

Sources: Grab, Nightspots, Windy City Times

The Georgetown research discusses a long history of gentrification impacting gayborhoods. And Chicago is a great example of it. Often, the analysis suggests, queer folks are first to revitalize, then get pushed out by less radical corporate interests.

Researchers also theorize gayborhoods are dispersing because of greater social acceptance and assimilation. Critics say LGBTQ+ individuals are losing their safe spaces to consumerism.

The folks who stay in these most commercial of gayborhoods tend to be upper and middle-class, white and partnered. This directly contrasts with the communities who need gayborhoods the most—the disenfranchised and marginalized, young folks, trans people and queer POC. In the 2000s there were several reports that some Boystown/Northalsted bars tried to detract people of color by requiring multiple forms of identification.

The important thing, research suggests, is to save local gayborhoods. They’re important, politically and socially—and they’re facing challenges from multiple fronts.

This research took place during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020, when gay bars and safe spaces closed for months. The impact of this lapse in nightlife and street culture will take years to measure.

Sidetrack’s Art Johnston says Chicago’s Northalsted and Andersonville hubs remain the most successful gay districts in the United States, and he has sharp optimism when asked if they’ll thrive in the future.

Given the past, the research suggests, losing their political clout and shared LGBTQ+ history may be detrimental to these neighborhoods and the LGBTQ+ community overall.

Brandon Brachter has 15 years’ experience as an urban, environmental and transportation planner. He currently serves with a federal agency in Washington, D.C., and conducted this research as part of Georgetown University’s Urban and Regional Planning program. Brachter attributes his love for LGBTQ+ safe spaces to growing up in a small Ohio Valley city. As a former resident of Andersonville, Chicago remains his favorite city.

blb97@georgetown.edu

For complete story maps, visit <https://georgetownuniv.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=2765ebc8b6ac471fac57d45da5a1b955>

WINDY CITY TIMES AT 35

By Tracy Baim and Kirk Williamson

A collection of covers from *Windy City Times*, *Outlines*, *Nightlines*, *BLACKlines*, *En La Vida* and more



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JODY WATLEY:

PR photo courtesy of Pamela Broussard



Conversation with a musical icon

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Singer Jody Watley has been many things during her illustrious career, including an activist, fashion plate—but, most certainly, a musician. Among her many achievements in that latter area are a Grammy win; a Lifetime Achievement Award from Billboard magazine; and numerous hits (on her own and as well as with group Shalamar), including “Looking for a New Love,” “Real Love” and “Still a Thrill.”

During a recent, wide-ranging talk with Windy City Times, Watley—who most recently came out with the dance hit “The Healing” last year—discussed everything (and everyone) from her new ambassador role to George Michael to the TV show *Soul Train* (which she once danced on, as a regular) to HIV/AIDS activism—but the conversation started with COVID vaccinations.

Windy City Times: We were supposed to talk recently, but things were postponed because you got a COVID vaccination. How are you doing, and how was the experience?

Jody Watley: Yeah, I got my first dose, and it was Moderna. Once I got the appointment, it was a pretty easy process. The only after-effect I had was a super-sore arm—like someone had punched me in it. I was warned, “Don’t get it in the arm you use,” and I’m right-handed. Plus, I’m a tosser and turner [when I sleep], so I had to protect that arm. Plus, I had a low-grade headache. Other than that, within the next two days, it was like I hadn’t even had it.

Tell your readers: Don’t be scared. [Laughs] Go get your vaccine. I haven’t even had a flu shot. Chris Rock said something: “People will take a Tylenol or Advil when they have a headache. When you read the ingredients, do you know what stuff is?”

I’m going to continue the masking for some time, “serving eyes,” with the lashes poking it.

WCT: I like that term—“serving eyes.” [Watley laughs.] I’m going to use that from now on!

JW: [Continues laughing] “Serving eyes!” But I haven’t traveled in a year and a half, but with this ambassadorship, I hope to take a trip soon. But with Chicago, you can drive to the lake and back, and that’s a trip. [Laughs]

But, going back to the masks, I’m going to continue to wear one. If you don’t want to, try Instacart. They come right to your door! [Interviewer and Watley laugh.]

WCT: As you mentioned, you’re now the ambassador of the National Museum of African American Music. Congratulations on that! What do your duties involve?

JW: Thank you—it’s an honor. My duties involve bringing attention to the museum in charming ways [laughs] and encouraging people to support the museum. It really is a museum for all ages. Even if you can’t get to Nashville, there are so many virtual experiences. There is another component, but I’m allowed to say what it is—yet—but it’s very exciting.

They chose me also because of my style that’s ongoing, with the rap/R&B collection and the streetwear. My impact on music made me a choice for this honor. Right now and, I believe, through the summer, there’s a digital Jumbotron with me on it—and I love it! [Laughs] I have to get this second shot so I can see it in person.

WCT: And you mentioned your style. Who are your style icons?

JW: My first style icons were actually my mother and father. My dad was always in a custom suit, and he was very flamboyant. He was probably the first person I saw who color-blocked, with his lime-green suit, shirt, shoes; he also had Nehru suits, importing fabric from India. My mom was the first person I saw in donut sleeves—before Diana Ross, it was my mother.

And my mom would always get Harper’s Bazaar. In addition to being studious, I loved fashion and models. Also, Diana Ross and the Supremes were very elegant to me—and I loved Grace Jones. She had and has her own thing. When I came out as a solo artist, I was very adamant with the label that I didn’t want to look like anyone else; I wanted to be Jody Watley. I was wearing Gaultier before Gaultier was famous; I was also wearing streetwear—although now it’s called “vintage” because it sounds nicer. You could be fly and fabulous, and you didn’t have to be rich.

To this day, people will mention to me the Chanel belt in the

“Some Kind of Lover” video—and I had that with a dress and Chucks [Chuck Taylor sneakers]. Nobody else was doing that. The first time I went to Japan, I was influenced by the kids there—and the fact that it’s cool to be different.

My male, female, gay and gender-fluid fans will say all types of things to me on social media, like, “You taught me that it’s okay to be different.” When I see things like that, it really means a lot that, to some people, I represent the freedom to be yourself. I’ve always been a big activist for my [LGBTQ+] fans. It’s about loving yourself and being your authentic self. And don’t worry about everyone liking you; as one of my best friends said, “Girl—not everyone loved Jesus.” It keeps things in perspective.

WCT: You have so many hits—but I discovered a new one: a cover of the Chic hit “I Want Your Love.”

JW: Oh, yeah! That’s from my album *The Makeover*. [Editor’s note: The first single from that album was a cover of Madonna’s “Borderline.”] At the time, I had done a show up in the Bay Area, and I called it “Songs in the Key of My Life.” I just did songs that I loved. “I Want Your Love” is one of my favorite Chic songs; it’s with [producer/musician/Chic member] Bernard Edwards, who produced “Don’t You Want Me and I’m still very friendly with [producer/musician/Chic member] Nile Rodgers, who gave me his blessing and played guitar on it. It was a number-one dance song here in America. I love performing it live.

WCT: You mentioned Bernard Edwards, and he produced a song you did with George Michael on your debut solo album called “Learn to Say No.” Could you tell our readers about that collaboration, and what George was like?

JW: George Michael and I met and became friends when I was living in London. I didn’t have a deal at the time but we had done the Band-Aid charity single (“Do They Know It’s Christmas?”). I asked him if he would do a duet with me if I got a deal, and he agreed. When I met with the labels in America, I wanted them to know that I knew who I was; I was like a ninja or assassin in terms of knowing my focus. George was such a superstar at the time—and no label believed he would do a duet with me. I said, “Trust me. He’s going to do it.”

He chose the song “Learn to Say No.” At the time, Bernard was with the group Power Station, with Robert Palmer, Duran Duran’s John Taylor and Andy Taylor, and Tony Thompson. Tony played drums on “Learn to Say No,” so it has this big sound. The downside was that George’s label wouldn’t allow it to be a single because he was about to drop his duet with Aretha Franklin, “I Knew You Were Waiting (for Me).” But I know it would’ve been a smash—and that video would’ve been so hot! [Laughs]

WCT: That song practically screamed for a video.

JW: Yes! I was so disappointed, and he was, too. It still sounds great, though. George is very missed, and he’s still one of my favorite artists/vocalists/writers. Just beautiful—and such a loss... His music is forever, though—and he is forever. I’m honored to be one of a small group of people who sang with him.

WCT: Windy City Times is doing a series on “HIV at 40.” You’ve been an activist for decades and you’re on the [1990 HIV/AIDS benefit] album *Red Hot + Blue*. Did you think we would be 40 years in and not have a cure/vaccine?

JW: No. It’s really astounding. So many have lost their lives, especially early on, and it was such a taboo subject. When I was asked to do the *Red Hot + Blue* project—which was the first one of its kind—my label didn’t want me to do it. They were worried that people would think I was gay—like that would be the end of the world. And they thought people would think I had AIDS, even though I was just talking about awareness. I could do a whole dissertation on how ridiculous it all was.

I’m not gay and I don’t have HIV—but I can speak about how it’s affecting everyone. I knew so many people who were dying from AIDS. I told them that I would do the album, anyway—and if they wanted to sue me, they’d just have to sue me. I stuck to my guns, and they gave me permission to do it.

Red Hot + Blue has raised millions of dollars, and there are other albums in that *Red Hot* series. The documentary that came out

of that is still worth looking up. And, still, it's a major problem in Third World countries, where they can't afford the medicine.

WCT: One of the people claimed by HIV/AIDS was singer Jermaine Stewart (the 1986 hit "We Don't Have to Take Your Clothes Off"), who died in 1997—and released a song about you, called "Jody." What do you remember about him?

JW: He was one of many I know who died of HIV/AIDS.

This is a little difficult for me because Jermaine and I weren't friends when he passed. Someone told me that because I wasn't friends with him, I shouldn't speak about him. So I'll just say that he was a great artist and everyone loves "Clothes Off," and he had one of the best blow-dry bob haircuts of all time. [Laughs] Jermaine was certainly a character in many ways. It was still a loss, even though we weren't friends.

WCT: Switching gears, in this age of reboots, should they bring back Soul Train? [Watley was a dancer on the show in the 1970s before finding success as a vocalist in the group Shalamar.]

JW: No! I'm not big on bringing stuff back. Some things should just be left in their eras. The show that Don Cornelius created was magical for its era because there was no other show that showcased R&B and hip-hop. It's like when Arsenio Hall had his show; I loved it because you could perform and you could interview. You go on TikTok; it's kinda like Soul Train for this generation. A new dance show would have to fit this era; Soul Train was for that era. Just because

you can bring something back doesn't mean you should. [Laughs]

WCT: So true. We talked about COVID at the start. With this year of COVID and the racial awakening some people have had, what have you learned about yourself?

JW: Interesting... Though I'm in the public eye, I've pretty much been a loner most of my life. I'm very comfortable being quarantined and on my own. [Both laugh.] I've learned how to keep myself busy, entrepreneurially, with my home line—I've loved candles since I was in junior-high school. I've learned that, no matter your circumstance, you have to take what you have; what we have now is what we make of life now. With everyone, I think that should be the takeaway.

I'm comfortable in my own skin and with my own company. Social connection is part of being human—but it's good to, as my mother would say, "go somewhere and sit down." [Both laugh.] Making the best of things is important, but I didn't need the pandemic to remind me of that, although some people did.

Also, I learned it's nice to have some social distance, so stay six feet back! [Laughs]

WCT: More, if possible...

JW: Exactly! You don't need to be up on me when I'm making a transaction. [Both laugh.]

WCT: Thank you for your time. You're the musical assassin who serves eyes.

JW: Yes—I love that!

Jody Watley's official website is <https://jodywatley.net/>.



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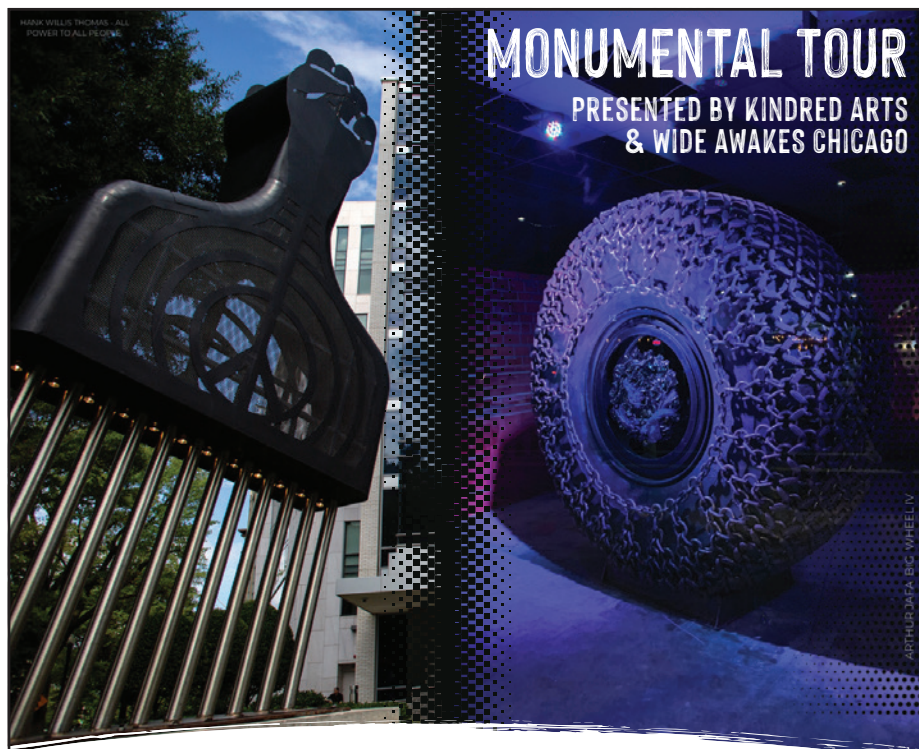
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While a simple “they/them” seems to mystify some and has been used as a cudgel by others, for those who want to better understand the importance of pronouns when it comes to gender expression, or for those who need support and are still figuring themselves out, and even those within the LGBTQIA community that might think they have the right terminology down pat, there is *The Pronoun Lowdown: Demystifying and Celebrating Gender Diversity* by Nevo Zisin.

Zisin, an Australian trans educator, activist and author, gives us a timely and delightful look at their journey to self-realization as a non-binary, queer person who presents as a combination of masculine and feminine. Their unapologetic exploration into pronouns is a laugh-out-loud, touching and culturally reverent educational experience, covering historical context, issues that impact the community, easy to understand guidance, a handy glossary and global resources.

WCT: What was it like first coming out as queer and trans, at the time, in your small, Jewish community in Melbourne?

Nevo Zisin: I would say that there was a big dissonance between my first coming out and my second one. I come out every couple of years to keep everyone interested.

WCT: Keep them on their toes.

NZ: Coming out as a lesbian in my small, Jewish community, I was definitely one of few, but I think people were a bit more switched on to what that version of queerness looked like. My mom said, “I’m fine with you being a lesbian as long as the girls that you date are Jewish.” Mostly just funny instances and some light adjustments.

WCT: What about in school where you started your activism?

NZ: My school was generally quite good. I went to a private Jewish school that happened to have a queer-straight alliance at the time. The year above me was pretty queer and pretty loud about it, which was amazing, and that kind of allowed me to come out more easily. I felt quite supported in my school in that sense, but I definitely earned myself a reputation as the angry lesbian feminist.

WCT: And when you came out as trans?

NZ: When I came out as trans, I think people thought it was an extension of that “angry lesbian feminism.” It’s so funny to talk about it now because, even though it was just in 2013, the cultural landscape was completely different. Like there was just no trans representation whatsoever.

WCT: Openly, not very much.

NZ: I didn’t see anything on TV, in books or movies. And the only ones I did, the trans person was sexually assaulted and murdered. That was the only imagining I had for my future, which is not exactly something to craft your life around. So, I have a lot of empathy, as much as it is difficult for me, for some of my family members and how they navigated that. Because they really just had no idea, they had no education.

WCT: So, the second coming out was harder.

NZ: Coming out as trans was just a very different experience than coming out as a lesbian. I experienced a lot of blaming and anger from my mom in particular. I think it’s less like disappointment in the person themselves but much

more mourning of the expectations that you had of them, which was never really true or legitimate either.

WCT: You do professional development workshops in both schools and companies around transgender identity. What kind of response do you generally receive?

NZ: For the most part there’s a positive response, because if a company is already to the point of booking me, then they’re already onside somewhat. You can tell straight away, because my educational principle goes primarily for humor. I think that when people are uncomfortable about a topic and then they get to laugh about it, then they get to just kind of breathe.

WCT: That’s a good way to connect.

NZ: People are very intimidated by these topics and very scared to get it wrong. Or it’s all just a bit too much for them. If people don’t laugh at my jokes in the beginning, then I know I’m in for a hard journey.

WCT: How do you protect yourself in instances where it can be negative?

NZ: It’s less what I do to protect myself in the space and more what I do to protect myself outside of it. When I walk into the space, I’m not on my high horse like, “Just Google it.” I’m there as an educator, I’m not there just as a trans or a marginalized person. I’m there to help them on their learning journey.

WCT: Right.

NZ: I think it’s really important to do that because I wasn’t assigned “woke” or didn’t understand intersectional politics at birth. In fact, it was a lot of the labor of Black trans women and

incredible thinkers that led me there. I am the amalgamation of many life-shaping experiences. Extending that patience to other people is something I can offer, especially if I can recuperate outside of work with the money I’ve earned to get therapy, to do yoga, and to do all of the other community care stuff that I require.

WCT: Yes, that’s important.

NZ: I just remind myself that the people who aren’t onside at all are not my demographic. I’m not actually there to convert bigots into allies, I’m there to get the people who are already onside to feel empowered to stand up further and the people who are part of the community to feel more supported. I’m not here to justify my existence and to beg people to be an ally.

WCT: What was the catalyst for writing this book?

NZ: I continued to get misgendered quite a lot after my first book [*Finding Nevo: How I Confused Everyone*] and it felt like a personal failing. So, I was like, guess we need another book that’s going to be just on pronouns. I got contacted by a publisher to write it, but it was something that I was thinking about. This is maybe more relevant for the Australian context, but it feels like pronouns are the next kind of Everest after marriage equality. I think pronouns, in a similar way, are a vehicle to more equal rights; but it’s certainly not the end point in any way.

WCT: Interesting thought.

NZ: At the end of the day, I don’t think homeless trans youth care so much about what pronouns are being used when they could be handed the keys to stable housing. There are much more

Continued from page 25

important issues we need to be working on, especially with all of the anti-trans legislation that's coming through the US at the moment. Pronouns are, in some way, the least of our worries. But it also seems like an easy fix.

WCT: One would think.

NZ: One would think, yeah. Being misgendered, and I speak about this in the book, is like a death by a thousand paper cuts. It's the epitome of microaggression, where every day this is happening fifty times. I hear it and I know this world doesn't exist for me, it's not built for me, I don't belong and I guess I should just leave. And that is why there is such high suicidality statistics within our community.

WCT: Right.

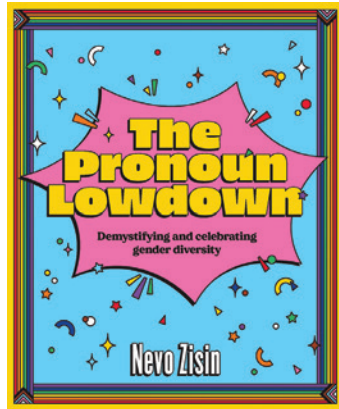
NZ: That's not incidental and this stuff isn't political correctness gone mad or a left-wing fad. It is like suicide prevention, community care and community nourishment. When you get gendered correctly every day, it has a profound impact on your sense of self and your place in the world.

WCT: Affirming, for sure.

NZ: What I was also really interested in was looking at a bit more of the historical, linguistic and social context in which pronouns have arrived. What I've also found—and this is not to give myself a pat on the back at all, because I'm sure there are lots of things I could have worked on more—I think a lot of the trans guide books I have seen are just incredibly whitewashed and don't have intersectional or even just nonbinary lenses.

WCT: That's crucial to recognize.

NZ: I read an incredible book that I owe a lot to called *Decolonizing Trans/gender 101* [by b. binaohan], and it's basically like a full length call out of another trans book and why it's colonized and white in its thinking. I learned so much from that book that really shook me. A real goal of



mine was to hold that in my heart because, obviously, I'm not a unique thinker on this topic and none of the things are unique thoughts: they have come from indigenous and First Nations populations around the world and from so many different understandings of gender embedded in our society.

WCT: In talking about the harmful anti-trans bills moving forward right now, with sports being the new bathroom "issue," what gives you hope in this space?

NZ: It's a kind of fluctuation that we're experiencing, because we're moving from a period of invisibility where trans people have been in the shadows into hypervisibility where everyone knows about us, where we are out, proud, loud and here, and the backlash is completely tsunami-like. Young people are growing up much more aware of how the world feels about trans people than they ever would have before. It's kind of this really interesting rock and a hard place situation where there's many pros, but also, this is deeply painful and difficult.

WCT: For sure.

NZ: I think what gives me a hope time and time again is young people. I don't believe that they are the future, I believe they are the present. I mean obviously they're the future as well, but I think we really invalidate the power of their voices and activism if we always say that they're future people because they're not adults. They're full people who have full beliefs, principles and activism; they're not completely jaded yet so they have a little bit more energy. And they're so politically engaged.

WCT: Agree.

NZ: I have a lot of hope around the visibility of trans politics and how much we've done in the last few years. When I watch *Disclosure* on Netflix, it just really blew me away how far we've come in the last few years, and how much I feel like I'm part of the last generation of trans people to grow up without trans representation. That feels so profound. You can't imagine your future if you can't see it anywhere.

WCT: What's next for you?

NZ: I love the work that I do, I feel very grateful and I think I'm good at it. I think I make people feel comfortable with something that they're not comfortable with. I do that for all of the trans people out there so that they don't have to do that educational work, you know? The idea that my books could be a resource and that young people who are still grappling with their gender don't have to be educators is absolutely the dream, because I would have really valued that.

WCT: Yes, being who you needed at the time.

NZ: I'd really love to continue doing that work and I would love to spread into an international context, as well. To come to the US and do some work and training there, and engage with other activists. I'm writing a middle grade novel at the moment with my creative partner. It's about two non-binary young people who have always felt different. Not because they're trans but because they have superpowers. So, it's very cute, very wholesome and I really enjoy doing that. I also run a free writing group for trans and gender-diverse young people every fortnight.

WCT: Where can we find you and where can we find your book?

NZ: You can find me on the Internet. I'm a millennial, so I have all the things...my website, NevoZisin.com, Facebook, Instagram. I'm very open to receiving questions or messages. The book is available in the US and all over the world now, which is very exciting. It should be at Barnes & Noble, and ideally at your local bookshop. And if it's not there, it would also be great if you requested it.



IMAGE CREDIT: Yannis Tsarouchis. *The Offering and Two Winged Men*. 1965. © Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation. This exhibition is organized by the Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation, Athens, and made possible by Alphawood Foundation Chicago.

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Mayor Lightfoot helps break ground at AIDS Garden Chicago

On June 2, various local officials, including Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, helped break ground at the AIDS Garden Chicago—the city's first public park to memorialize the early days of Chicago's HIV epidemic, and to honor those who continue to fight against the disease.

The event took place in front of the garden's anchor piece, the 30-foot Sculpture.

The 2.5-acre garden is situated on Lake Michigan at the original location of the historic Belmont Rocks, a space where the local gay community gathered between the 1960s and 1990s. The garden's first phase was completed in late 2019 with the installation of its anchor piece, "Self-Portrait."

The garden will include "unique areas designed for reflection, education, honor and pride," according to a press release. Visitors will be guided through a variety of collective garden spaces all providing a sensory nature experience, most notably a Ginkgo Reflection Grove. The Chicago Parks Foundation will soon launch the AIDS Garden Story Archive—a digital quilt of personal shared experiences to be posted on the AIDS Garden Chicago website.

AIDS Garden Chicago is expected to open this fall.

The Chicago Parks Foundation is leading the garden's fundraising and community conversations. Established in 2013 as the nonprofit partner of Chicago's parks, the Chicago Parks Foundation operates in a public-private partnership with the Chicago Park District to provide fiscal partnership to foundations, organizations, and individuals who wish to support their parks.

The garden's partners include Chicago Ald. Tom Tunney, Alphawood Foundation, TAWANI Foundation, Walgreens, Beaumier Donor Advised Family Fund, the Elizabeth Morse Trust and the Chicago Park District in addition to tireless advocacy by the State of Illinois, state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz, Illinois state Rep. Greg Harris, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, state Rep. Margaret Croke and former state Rep. Yoni Pizer.

Also involved are AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Center on Halsted, Design Workshop, Friends of the Parks, Howard Brown Health, Keith Haring Foundation, Legacy Project, Mariano's, The Moth and Rosenthal Fine Art, Inc.



From left: Illinois state Rep. Greg Harris; U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky; Illinois state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz; U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley.



From left: Chicago Alderman Tom Tunney greets Mayor Lori Lightfoot; among those pictured here are Lori Cannon and Victor Salvo.



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New book sets the record straight on **ACT UP NEW YORK**

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

Novelist, playwright, nonfiction writer, journalist, screenwriter, LGBTQ+ rights activist and AIDS historian Sarah Schulman preserves the power of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) while laying everything out about the in her new book, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993*.

Schulman, a native New Yorker, started writing at a young age and said it is something that comes naturally.

"I'm really like a natural," said Schulman. "I started when I was 6 years old and maybe because I read the diary of Anne Frank, which was very common in my generation and a lot of girls started writing diaries at that time, like diaries became very common as a result of that book."

Schulman, said it is hard to say when her first taste of activism actually happened.

"I grew up in a Holocaust family and I was raised at a time where children were not protected from information and I was raised with the knowledge that other people had stood by and allowed those events to occur," said Schulman. "I think that had a big impact on me from the beginning."

Schulman was active in the Women's Union when she was a student at University of Chicago from 1976 to 1978. She dropped out and ultimately got a Bachelor of Arts degree from Empire State College.

Her vast activism efforts include being a member of The Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) from 1979 to 1982; participating in an early direct action protest in which she and five others, called The Women's Liberation Zap Action Brigade, disrupted an anti-abortion hearing in Congress; being an active member of ACT UP from 1987 to 1992; attending actions at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Stop the Church; and even being arrested when ACT UP occupied Grand Central Station protesting the First Gulf War. Schulman, along with five other women, co-founded the direct action organization Lesbian Avengers in 1992.

At age 24, she first started observing and writing about AIDS in the early 1980s, working as a city hall reporter for the *New York Native*, a newspaper whose primary audience was gay men.

Having been writing about AIDS for about four years before joining the newly formed ACT UP in July 1987, Schulman was a rank-and-file member of ACT UP until 1992.

Schulman and filmmaker Jim Hubbard co-founded the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival, now called MIX NYC in 1987. Since 2001, the pair have been creating the ACT UP Oral History Project, interviewing 188 surviv-

ing members of ACT UP over a span of about 18 years about their experiences and what it meant to be in ACT UP.

In her 20th book *Let the Record Show*, Schulman wrote, "In recent years the representations of the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) and AIDS activism in popular culture have narrowed, almost to the level of caricature."

"We knew from the beginning somebody had to do it, we being Jim Hubbard and I; he's my collaborator, and we tried for years to find someone else to do it," said Schulman of writing *Let the Record Show*. "As time passed, a lot of misrepresentations are getting encased and it just became a desperate situation like somebody had to do it."

While ultimately there were 148 chapters of ACT UP around the world, each acted autonomously. *Let the Record Show* is a look at the individuals who created ACT UP New York, which Schulman said in the book was the "mothership." The study, she wrote, focused exclusively on that community, covering the years 1987 to 1993.

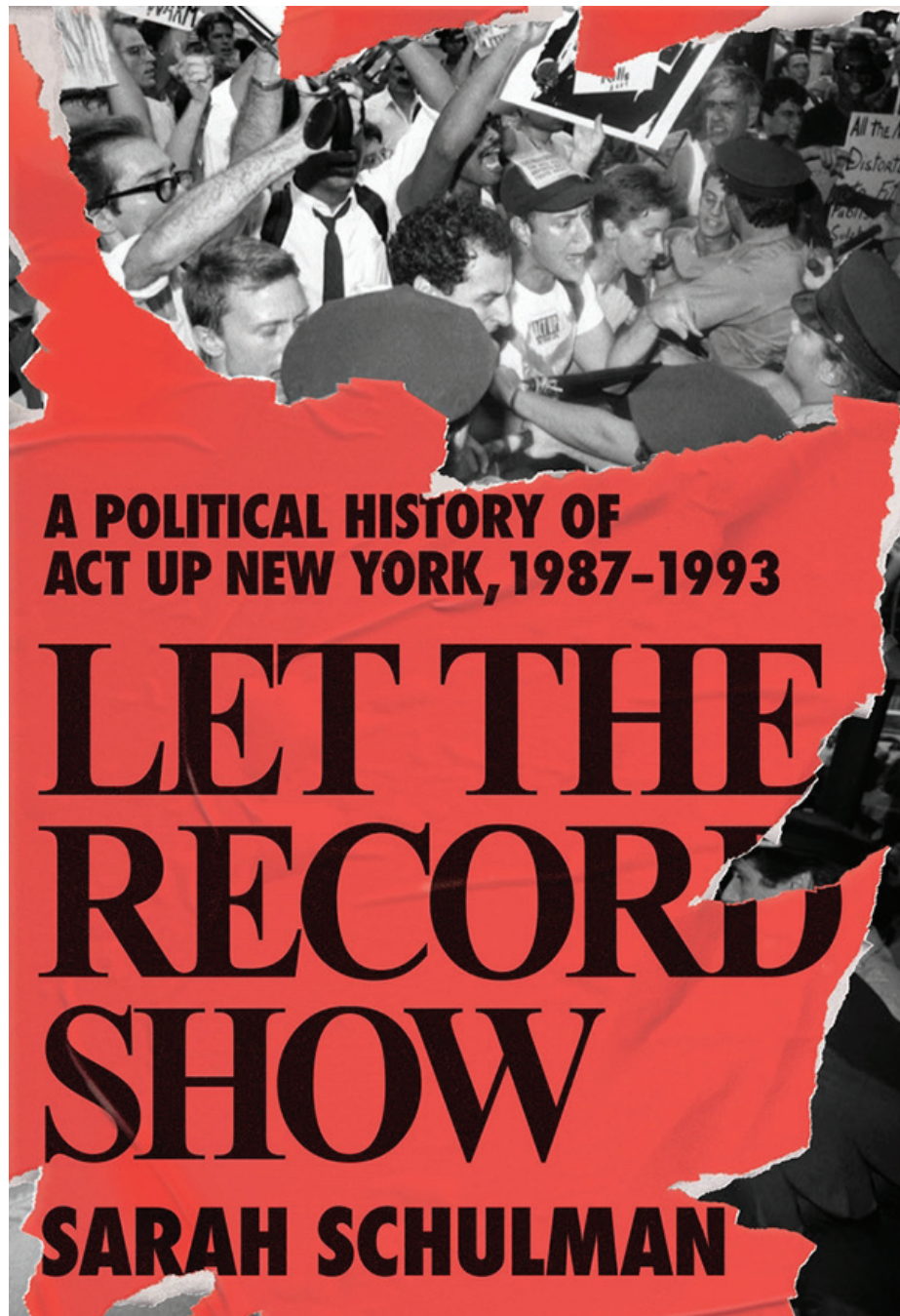
ACT UP New York, she explained in the book, is much larger than its Monday night meetings: "It is a political and emotional history of liaisons, associations, relationships, coalitions, and influences that cumulatively create a crucial reality of successfully transformative struggle under the most dire of circumstances."

Let the Record Show is made up of those interviews and gives readers an honest look at that period of time in history through the eyes of people who lived through it. Schulman said she conducted 188 interviews and tried to use as many as she could, emphasizing the history of ACT UP is the history of a group.

"Movements are actually made up of the people that are in them, not of the leaders," Schulman said. "It's a mistake to tell the history of the movement through individuals because that's not how they work. The purpose of this book is not nostalgia. It's to help activists today be effective and it's very important that people understand that despite the way that information has been misconstrued, the truth is the way you make change in America is through coalition. So I really wanted to get away from this false myth of the hero because it's not helpful for people who are actually trying to accomplish something."

While the book does not read in chronological order, Schulman does provide a timeline at the end of the book, so if people are want to find out more about a particular action or a person they read about, they can refer to the timeline and see what else was happening at the time of the thing that they are focusing on and have more surrounding context.

Schulman described the opening of the book as a type of handbook for today's activists, giving



them a sense of history and a push to think about some important strategies.

"Every movement has mistakes and errors as well as its victories and it doesn't help to cover them up because making mistakes is human," said Schulman. "It doesn't mean what you did was wrong or bad. So, if we get used to understanding that successful movements, heroic people make mistakes and that doesn't detract from who they are or what they've done. If we can accept the more mature and nuanced view of that, we're more likely to build movements that are successful."

Schulman names direct action as one of these important strategies. ACT UP, she said, was a "radical democracy and the only principle of unity was one sentence, which was 'direct action to end the AIDS crisis.'"

"So if what you were doing was direct action

to end the AIDS crisis you could pretty much do anything, but if other people didn't agree with you, they couldn't try to stop you from doing it," Schulman explained. "They just wouldn't do it. That's why there was so much simultaneity of different kinds of approaches going on at the same time. Today we have a tendency toward movements that try to control. They want everyone to have the same strategy or have the same analysis or there's even a culture move for everybody to use the same words. This does not work. Historically these types of movements have never worked, but real leadership allows people to recognize where they're at because people can only be where they're at and try to facilitate them having some kind of authentic and effective response."

Let the Record Show holds many sub-topics within four sections: Political Foundations, Art



Author Sarah Schulman.
Photo by Drew Stevens

theft reaching victory.”

Schulman also listed needle exchange in New York City as an important win—and it is featured in the book.

“ACT UP changed the focus,” said Schulman. “It forced the government and pharmaceutical companies to change the way they research.

“We all have an enduring relationship to AIDS,” Schulman said. “AIDS is with us forever and it changed us in so many different ways and the ways that we view death and the ways that we view illness and the ways we view health. All of that was impacted by aids. There’s an after-life.”

The audience for this book, Schulman said, is people who are interested in how change is made, people interested in history, people who are looking at the parallels between the current health crisis and the patterns of the past and people who are interested in a deep story about regular people who changed the world.

“I just want them to understand that one of the interesting things about ACT UP— because there were so many different kinds of people— is that different kinds of people had to use different strategies to create change because they had different levels of access,” Schulman explained. So, white men who went to Harvard, sit down at a table with white men in a pharmaceutical company and work out something, but women of color who needed to get the definition changes, it took them two years to even get a meeting. Drug users had to get arrested and have a test case to get their issue across...You have to use different social strategies based on who you are and what your access to power is, but anybody can make change. For some people it’s harder and it takes longer and it’s messier because you’re really going against the system, but you can still make change. We had drug addicts and homeless people and prisoners who made a tremendous change working in the AIDS coalition. That’s the message.”

For more information about Let the Record Show: A Political History of Act UP New York, 1987-1993, visit macmillan.com/books/9780374719951.

in the Service of Change, Creating the World You Need to Survive and Desperation. Effective action, members of different races, genders, sexualities, and backgrounds, leadership, battling and beating the Catholic Church and the pharmaceutical industry, art as expression, community, money, poverty, division, mass death among others are covered.

Serving as an example for today’s activists and providing an accurate history, Schulman said ACT UP won such fundamental changes, which are covered in the text.

“Most importantly was changing the government’s official definition of AIDS to include symptoms that only women had,” said Schulman. “This has had incredibly long lasting impacts because at the time women manifested different symptoms than men. The symptoms that women manifested were not listed in the official diagnosis. So, women got AIDS and died and they never got an AIDS diagnosis. So, they couldn’t get benefits, they couldn’t get health care, they couldn’t get anything they needed. They also couldn’t get experimental drugs. Keeping women out of experimental drug trials meant that not only did those women die, but drugs were not tested on women, so changing the definition meant that drugs would be tested on women. So today any woman in the world with HIV who takes an HIV medication benefits from that win by ACT UP because they’re now taking the medication that was tested on women. So that’s really like the far-

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From left: Kirsten Baity, Mikael Burke, Megan Carney, Sharon Pasia  KIRSTEN BAITY BY JABARI KHALIQ/
MIKAEL BURKE BY APRIL HARNISH/MEGAN CARNEY COURTESY ABOUT FACE
THEATRE/SHARON PASIA BY ALEXANDRA RICHARDSON

NEXT GENERATION

ABOUT FACE AT 25

Nurturing youth leadership—and a devised murder mystery

By CATEY SULLIVAN

Read from the scroll of off-Loop theaters making headlines and winning acclaim 25 years ago, and you'll find precious few that remain today. About Face sits in the pantheon of exceptions; the one-in-countless companies that have both the business acumen and artistic passion to sustain their idealism and their theater over the long, long haul.

Founders Kyle Hall and Eric Rosen had a radical-for-its-time mission of telling stories by, about, and for the LGBTQ+ community. The “G” part of that mission dominated for years. But as About Face celebrates 25 years and combs through its archives, its evolution toward telling stories of the entire alphabet rainbow is unmistakable.

This month, About Face launches the Green Room Collective, a program aimed at nurturing the next generation of artists. Inaugural Green Room cohorts Sharon Pasia and Kirsten Baity will be spending 20 hours a week for 20 weeks this summer working (at \$15 an hour) with About Face artists on everything from grant-writing to press-release writing to marketing to programming and casting a season.

“I feel like the Green Room levels the playing field by getting rid of some of those gate-keeping issues that young artists so often face, especially those that can’t afford to take unpaid internships,” says artistic director Megan

Carney. “There has been this really important cracking open of the arts sector since the pandemic. The importance of social justice, pay equity, diversity is something we’ve been thinking a lot about.

“Clearly we need to be much further along than we are. And as we all think about what we want to look like in the future, well, maybe those of us who have been doing this for a while might not be the people who should still be out in front all the time. With the Collective, we wanted to create a space where the next generation of leaders can learn,” she says.

About Face associate artistic director Mikael Burke intends to upend the ways of old-school internships.

“It was really important to me that the Green Room be different from the internship I had, which was basically a really, really low-paid staff position without a lot of feedback. One of those you-go-get-the-coffee internships,” he says.

“One of the big issues we’re dealing with institutionally is having a real, thorough discussion about pay equity,” he adds. “Paying a living wage, not just a stipend for a product. And trying to put people as opposed to product first.”

Baity graduated this year with a degree in theater from Columbia College. “I feel like

oftentimes that my knowledge of theater is incredibly white-straight-washed,” says Baity. “As a young, Black, queer creator, I think it’s important for queer people and global majority folk to start their own stuff—not wait for a seat at someone else’s table, but make our own,” they say.

In school, Baity says, they grew tired of being asked to justify the queer characters in their plays. “I had a professor who would ask, ‘Well, why are they queer?’ Didn’t ask why any character was straight,” they say.

“That’s one of the reasons the Collective is important. It’s our space,” Baity says. “And another part of this Collective that’s so important is that it’s one of the best-paid programs I’ve been a part of—it busts down the old-boys’-club model where only people who can afford to work for free can work full-time internships without having to also work another job to live.”

Pasia and Baity were selected for the program in part because of both artists’ work with About Face Youth Theatre, which students age out of in their early 20s. That, too, has been under scrutiny this year, Carney says.

“You participate in the youth ensemble and then what happens after you age out? You’ve gotten leadership development opportunities with ABYT, but where can you practice them,

take the next steps? That was very much on our mind when we created the concept for the Green Room Collective,” she says.


A key part of the GRC’s work this summer is centered on About Face’s voluminous archive of ephemera—production glossies from the days before digital cameras, marketing postcards from the days before e-mail, and reviews and features and photos from long-gone publications among its treasures.

Cataloguing the material and exploring the history is something both Pasia and Baity will work on in the first half of the Collective before branching into specific areas of their choosing for the latter half. “Documenting and celebrating how far we’ve come will help us figure out where we go next,” Baity says.

Carney has big plans for archives, including launching an interactive website this summer that contains both the history of About Face, and serves as a place for collecting stories from Chicago’s queer community.

For Burke, overseeing the Collective is part of a summer that also has another first for About Face: the Youth Theatre’s (gently) interactive murder mystery *Whodunnit? A Groovy Queer Murder Mystery at Camp Forest Woods*.

The fully-devised youth show, set in 1971, was born of quarantine, when lead teaching artists Breon Arzell and Lisa Siciliano began Zoom-meeting with About Face Youth Theatre in an attempt to connect over the long lockdown. Also on board: Spencer T. Olson, a therapist available to help young artists get through the galvanic upheavals of 2020.

“The world was very black back in December,” Burke recalls. “Everyone was coming off a full semester of online learning. Everyone hates Zoom. There’s no sugarcoating that. So we were like, if we’re going to ask these young artists to spend more time online, let’s do something low-impact and escapist because the stakes of the world are so high right now. Let’s build a world that lets us just get away for a few hours.” 

 @CateySullivan



In the Heights

REVIEW

It's officially summer with *In the Heights*

After a delayed release, the vibrant film adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical couldn't be more welcome.

By **TARYN ALLEN**

If you're vaxxed and eager to return to movie theaters, I can't imagine a better film to see this summer than *In the Heights*. Years before Lin-Manuel Miranda found earth-shattering success in *Hamilton*, he wrote and starred in *In the Heights*, the Tony Award-winning musical portraying New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood and the people who call it home. On June 11, director Jon M. Chu (*Crazy Rich Asians*) brings the simultaneously grand and intimate story to the big screen.

Usnavi (Anthony Ramos) opens the film with the titular song, introducing himself—a bodega owner with a dream of returning home to the Dominican Republic—and his customers, who are almost all neighbors, friends, and family. There's Vanessa (Melissa Barrera), Usnavi's love interest who dreams of moving downtown; Nina (Leslie Grace), newly back from Stanford; charming dispatcher Benny (Corey Hawkins); neighborhood grandmother Abuela Claudia (Olga Merediz); cousin Sonny (Gregory Diaz IV); the entire gaggle of salon ladies; and an array of others—including small roles for the original Benny and *Hamilton* star Christopher Jackson, as well as for Miranda himself.

Despite the massive cast, each of their stories is properly showcased in the course of the film, which spans a few days and a few blocks, an electricity blackout, a winning lottery ticket, the loss of a loved one, and the comings and goings of Washington Heights businesses and locals.

The enormous introductory number starts off strong, and the film continues well with Hawkins in "Benny's Dispatch," Grace's meandering "Breathe," and the wildly fun "No

Me Diga" at the hair salon. "96,000" is one of the biggest displays of dancing and color in the film, almost to an overwhelming point. Merediz's "Paciencia y Fe" was a surprise standout (honestly it's impressive in a musical when the Old Lady Song isn't an immediate skip), and later, "Carnaval del Barrio" has promise to become a crowd favorite.

The film has huge emotional range, at once a neighborhood block party, a celebration of community and home, but also an intimate invitation into the locals' resilience, and a memorial for the way life used to be, before gentrification and growing up and political conflicts around immigration seeped into the frame. It's not perfect, impeded by the use of multiple storytelling frameworks and occasionally lacking cohesion, but it's a blast, perfectly timed for this hopeful summer of reopening in the U.S.

Every member of the audience is made to feel like part of Washington Heights at times, but aspects like the clever shortage of subtitles, the dancing, the incredible food, and the overall cultural authenticity also highlight who the film is really for. It's a slightly different audience than *Hamilton*—consider why *In the Heights*, with the same creator and incredible musical prowess, didn't cause the same storm as the show about good old white American history. Minority stories don't hit the mainstream as easily, but hopefully this bright and impressive film adaptation gives *In the Heights* a big second wind to be appreciated by everyone, whether it's your story or not. **A**

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NOW PLAYING

RR *Changing the Game*

In recent years, the “moral” panic surrounding trans athletes has ballooned out of control. But the problem with the never-ending conversation about trans athletes has never been trans people—it’s the fact that we are constantly spoken over and invalidated by, at best, well-meaning cis people and, at worst, reactionary pundits and legislators. *Changing the Game* deviates from this repetitive and often unproductive cycle by giving trans athletes the mic and letting them speak for themselves. Director Michael Barnett follows three high school athletes—all accounting for different experiences with gender identity, race, location, and their chosen sport—and how they navigate an antiquated and binary sports world that puts all of its athletes at risk. *Changing the Game* makes a point to not put these teens on a pedestal for existing in a transphobic world. Instead, the film thoughtfully takes the audience into the fullness of their lives in addition to exposing the structural problems they face every day and busting myths used to discredit trans athletes. During a time when anti-trans bills are becoming law at an increasingly rapid rate—specifically in regards to high school athletes—documentaries like *Changing the Game* are more important than ever. —CODY CORRALL 88 min. Hulu

RR *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*

Filled with just as much devotion as dread, *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It* is ultimately a film about paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren’s undying love for one another. Played by Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga, respectively, the couple’s chemistry remains the strongest through line of the franchise, as

Changing the Game

the third installment’s tale of ancient evil takes a backseat to the Warrens’ own origin story. Even with director Michael Chaves replacing original series director James Wan, *The Devil Made Me Do It*, like its two predecessors, begins by alternating between jump scares and jams before unearthing the history of those aiming to cause harm. Based on the real-life murder of Alan Bono and billed as one of the “most sensational cases” from their files, the possession of a young boy ends up leading the Warrens to their most formidable opponent yet, which tests whether love can conquer all. —BECCA JAMES 111 min. HBO Max, AMC Theaters, Logan Theatre, Regal Webster Place, ShowPlace Icon

Domino: Battle of the Bones

A tough outing for all concerned, the directorial debut of retired basketball star Baron Davis is long on concept and short on execution. Plunked down in Compton while his mom and stepdad enjoy a trip to Baja, forlorn teenage math wiz Andy (Nathan Dana) strikes an unlikely bond with his Black sort-of grandpa Gerald (Lou Beatty Jr.) over the game of dominoes. A widower and a confirmed old-timer, Gerald’s tirades against this annoying white kid he’s got to look after take up most of the first act, but Andy’s skills win him over finally and the two enter a domino competition as partners, with Andy flashing signals to Gerald from the bleachers. How this isn’t cheating is something the movie goes out of its way to prove, even though all the other contestants seem to think it is cheating and so do we, probably. The rules of competitive domino play quickly become the least of the movie’s worries though. At a certain point the plot basically deteriorates into a mishmash of sketches. There’s David Arquette’s character Walter, a bundle of nerves and missed alimony payments, who does all the cringey white guy vulture stuff you would expect from a contest

promoter in Compton, but with the screen presence and motivation of a worn-out punching bag. Prominent YouTube talents like Bigg Jah, HaHa Davis, and Timothy Williams waste their abilities on one-note roles. Snoop Dogg’s cameo is lifeless. But it’s not a total wash. There is wild energy in the figure of inhumanly coked-up domino champion Tenspeed (Anthony “Scrunchy” McKinley), and Davis himself is very good as the miserable Pastor Steele, a smooth-talking grifter. All the performances have their moments, really, but sadly the movie fails to translate them into anything coherent. —MAX MALLER 110 min. In wide release in theaters

RR *Two Gods*

Comparable to Gordon Parks’s revelatory photography, Zeshawn Ali’s feature debut is a stunning evocation of its irrepressible subjects. Hanif, one of the documentary’s main figures, is a middle-aged Black Muslim in East Orange, New Jersey, who works at a funeral home, building caskets and assisting in the washing of dead bodies per Islamic tradition; he also serves as a mentor to two boys, preteen Furquan and teenage Naz. All three face their own struggles: Hanif previously sold drugs and spent time in prison, while Furquan is subject to abuse at home and Naz deals with ongoing legal troubles. Intermittently Ali returns to sequences depicting the Muslim burial practices, wherein the cleansing property of water is emphasized; death is ever present throughout, both literally via such scenes and less so as the film incorporates references to violence in the subjects’ community. Like Hanif, Naz is Muslim, while Furquan is Christian, hence the two gods of the film’s title. Ali (who’s Muslim himself) handles the disparate theologies belletristically; the film is less about religion than how religion manifests itself in peoples’ lives. The unalloyed black-and-white cinematography recalls the photographs of artists like Parks who went into underrepresented communities and revealed the beauty within, when much other media focuses on the less savory aspects of life in those neighborhoods. Through a coalescence of off-the-cuff scenes and stylized, rhapsodic passages (the latter heightened by Michael Beharie’s airy score), Ali creates a singular document of three ordinary—in the process rendering them extraordinary—lives. —KATHLEEN SACHS 86 min. Music Box Direct

Two Lottery Tickets

The scenario is ripe for laughs: A person wins the lottery, only to have lost the ticket. In this 2016 Romanian buddy comedy-cum-caper, not just one, but three men do exactly that. Against all hope, the reserved Dinel (Dorian Boguță)—the de facto main character, who’s hoping to pay for his wife’s return from her job in Italy—hedonistic Sile (Dragoș Bucur, star of *Police, Adjective*), and buttoned-down, conspiracy theorist Pompiliu (Alexandru Papadopol) win the six-million-euro jackpot, only for Dinel to lose the ticket after being shaken down in his

apartment building by some thick-necked ruffians. Perennially down on their luck, the friends attempt to find the thieves, first by going door-to-door in Dinel’s apartment building (encountering an assembly of stoners, fortune tellers, and sex workers along the way), then to Bucharest, where further hijinks ensue. Making his feature debut, writer-director Paul Negoescu (who adapted the story from a 1901 novel by Ion Luca Caragiale) trades in the droll, often dark humor that typifies the Romanian New Wave, though he also mocks the dourness that discerns the national cinema. His effort is amiable enough, but there are several off-color jokes, specifically of the anti-Semitic and woman-hating variety, with no recourse against those saying such things, that put a damper on the fun. In Romanian with subtitles. —KATHLEEN SACHS 86 min. Music Box Direct

RR *Undine*

The perils of dating abound if you are a mermaid. Be careful with the diver figurine you found inside a fish tank, for example. If its leg snaps off by accident, you had better glue the leg back on, otherwise something could happen to the human leg of your human industrial diver boyfriend Christoph, a man in such rough shape under your aquatic spell that he sprints after your trains when they are leaving. Concerns of a barely human kind keep swimming up from the water’s edge in director Christian Petzold’s latest film, where they are met in due course with all the ordinary contingencies: unanswered calls, seeing exes in public, a gargantuan catfish named Big Gunther, and so on. Played by Paula Beer, the title character Undine’s hybrid being complements the hybrid structure of this fantasy-tinged urban romance, shot partially on land in Berlin and underwater, leading to a work that culls its arresting phantoms along margin lines of both genre and landscape.

Even in quasi-documentary scenes from *Undine*’s job as a freelance docent at the Berlin City Museum, which layer her voice onto shots of an exact scale replica of the capital in miniature, the hybrid format intrudes, as we are told that Berlin’s Humboldt Forum is a metamorphosed Hohenzollern palace, its entire urban grid a once-upon-a-time loose network of swamps. Mending dam supports in a tributary of the Rhine using an underwater soldering gun, Christoph (Franz Rogowski) comes face to face with the aforementioned Big Gunther, catching the monster on tape with the camera mounted to his wetsuit. The wetsuit camera is not so adept, though, at nabbing Christoph’s encounters with other varieties of submarine life such as ghosts, water nymphs, and ghost water nymphs. As ambiguities swirl, the viewer winds up poised at the outer margin of fantasy and reality—the zone of the myth, the place where guys up to their knees in water go to yell into the fog at mermaids and are never prepared for when one appears. —MAX MALLER 91 min. Landmark’s Century Centre Cinema, in wide release on VOD

PRIDE



Terry Martin and Robert Ford in 1992 at *Thing* headquarters, housed in the apartment Ford shared with cofounder Trent Adkins. © COURTESY TERRY MARTIN



Terry Martin and Robert Ford on a flying expedition. © JUAN COLON



Thing published ten issues between November 1989 and summer 1993. © AMBER HUFF

THIRTY YEARS AGO, A BLACK QUEER ZINE CAPTURED THE SCENE THAT BIRTHED HOUSE

Robert Ford and Trent Adkins shaped the bold, subversive, gossipy, funny, deeply engaged voice of *Thing*, which was felled by the AIDS pandemic in 1993.

By LEOR GALIL

In February 2021, dance-music site Selector republished a list of 100 important house records taken from a 1992 issue of a short-lived Chicago zine called *Crossfade*. “Chicago’s House: A Checklist” originally ran in November of that year as part of a story package about house history, sandwiched between a brief but trenchant essay by co-publisher and editor Terry Martin on the birth and evolution of Chicago’s underground dance culture and a six-page interview Martin had conducted with the godfather of house, Frankie Knuckles. The cover of that issue—there were only three in total—featured a live shot of pioneering house DJ Ron Hardy, who’d died eight months before.

You can’t know that from the Selector story, though: it mentions only the list, and the crinkled *Crossfade* page pictured in the article doesn’t have anything else on it. The list itself explains that it includes the wide range of records that influenced the house music coming out of Chicago, and it doesn’t mention anything that contemporary listeners would consider “house.” There’s no sign of the scene-defining cuts that Chicago labels Trax and DJ International had been pumping out for nearly a decade by that point, and the 12-inch widely considered the first house release, Jesse Saunders’s 1984 classic “On and On,” is nowhere to be seen.

Instead the list focuses on the sounds that foundational house DJs drew upon back when “house” still described a scene more than a genre: MFSB’s lushly orchestral soul (“Love Is the Message,” number one on the list), Logg’s refined, funky disco (“You’ve Got That Something,” number 14), ESG’s out-of-this-world postpunk (“Moody,” number 64). These are the kind of songs that boomed out of the speakers at the Warehouse—the nightclub at 206 S. Jefferson that gave house music its name—when Frankie Knuckles ruled the

roost. They’re what the creators of the list, Robert Ford and Trent Adkins, danced to as they witnessed—and helped shape—the birth of house.

Ford and Adkins originally published “Chicago’s House: A Checklist” as the “House Top 100” two years previously in *Thing*, a zine they’d cofounded in 1989 with their friend Lawrence Warren. The best-remembered fanzines from that era document underground punk, so *Thing*’s emphasis on house tracks and artists would have set it apart all on its own. The zine’s entire editorial perspective was devoted to Black queer life and culture, though, which made it truly sui generis in Chicago. *Thing*’s vision was large enough to encompass club gossip, Black hair-care tips, erotica, poetry, film and literature reviews, and personal essays on homelessness, anti-gay violence, and AIDS.

Thing began as a photocopied and folded half-letter-size zine (8.5 by 5.5 inches) and in just two years grew into a staple-bound letter-size publication professionally printed on newsprint, in the process ballooning from 20 pages to 48. It published interviews with prominent Black queer figures such as future drag star RuPaul Charles, poet Essex Hemphill, and filmmaker Marlon Riggs; Hemphill and Riggs, both of whom died from complications of AIDS in the mid-90s, also contributed to *Thing* themselves. As publisher and coeditor, Ford ran *Thing* out of his apartment. The zine never did better than break even, despite a largely volunteer staff, but even on its shoestring budget it had grown popular enough by 1993 to sustain a run of 3,000 copies—and its readers were spread around the U.S. and across the Atlantic. *Thing* sold subscriptions as well as individual issues, and it appeared on shelves at bookstores in multiple major cities. Even before *Thing* reached peak circulation, it had become a lifeline for gay and trans people

from all walks of life, Black and otherwise—and sometimes that was because of its music coverage.

DJ and producer Daniel Wang, who founded Baliu Records in 1993, discovered *Thing* because of its “House Top 100” list. During a 2006 Red Bull Music Academy lecture in Melbourne, Wang held up a photocopy of the *Thing* list while explaining its significance: “I was living in San Francisco; it was about 1991. My friend said, ‘You’ve gotta see this magazine. There are these two gay Black guys from Chicago who put out a big list of all the records that were ‘house’ records for them, up until about 1987.’ Which was already amazing.”

Wang tracked down as many of the list’s records as he could find, though his roommate slowed him down by accidentally disposing of his back issues of *Thing*. Wang sent Ford and Adkins a \$17 check for replacements, along with a two-page handwritten note filled with glowing praise of their work. He also told them he’d be moving to Chicago six weeks later: “I am sure you can imagine my excitement,” he wrote. “Meanwhile, I need your list of house’s greatest 100 hits so that I can clear out SF’s used record shops before I leave.”

I found Wang’s letter in one of the 21 boxes in the Chicago History Museum’s *Thing* magazine archives. All the material in the collection—letters, postcards, subscription cards from readers, photo negatives, meeting notes, faxed drafts from contributors, unpublished essays, newspaper clippings, press releases, VHS tapes, cassette recordings—previously belonged to Ford. A few months after he died in October 1994, Adkins (and Ford’s partner, Michael Thompson) donated the collection to the museum. Adkins passed away from complications of AIDS in 2007, and the materials remained unprocessed until 2018, when project archivist Rebekah McFarland noticed a job listing.

“*Thing* was a thing that I dropped everything for,” McFarland says. “When I saw the proposal mentioning what this project was, I immediately dove down the rabbit hole of research to find out as much as I could before applying to it. As a Black queer person, I was like, ‘Oh, this is definitely the sort of thing that I want to uplift, help preserve, and make accessible to other people.’ Thanks to a grant from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation in New York, the Chicago History Museum could finally hire someone to do that work.

From fall 2018 till June 2019, McFarland studied *Thing* and its short-lived predecessor, a Black literary-arts publication called *Think Ink* that was also founded by Ford, Adkins, and Warren. Art historian and critic Solveig Nelson also answered McFarland’s questions and helped give her more context for the archive; in February 2018 Nelson had published an essay in *Artforum* on the legacy of *Thing*, which by then had been all but forgotten. (In December, *Thing* will be featured in the Art Institute exhibit “Subscribe: Artists and Alternative Magazines, 1970-1995,” which Nelson put together with AIC photography curator Michal Raz-Russo.)

McFarland encountered a welcome difficulty while attempting to categorize the *Thing* material by subject matter. “A problem—but in a good way, I thought—was just, like, how intersectional it is,” she says. “It’s like, here is this Black queer zine during the HIV/AIDS crisis that talks about fashion and house music. You can’t extract any of that—you can’t take the Blackness out of the queerness out of the house music out of the health crisis. It’s all in there.”

I wanted to explore the *Thing* archive in order to understand the zine’s relationship to music, especially house music, and McFarland’s catalog let me easily see much more. Learning about the people involved in *Thing*—Ford in particular—allowed me to understand the key role they played in the evolution of house. Like *Thing*, it emerged from a Black gay community, and Ford knew that as intimately as anyone could. In his introduction to an interview with Frankie Knuckles in *Think Ink*’s second and final issue in 1988, Ford wrote, “To talk with Frankie on the history of the sound was a welcome chance to record our own history.”

Born November 17, 1961, Ford displayed precocious artistic talent. As an adolescent, he put on puppet shows for CPS students, and he studied acting, dance,

PRIDE

continued from 29

and singing at Mayfair Academy of Fine Arts in Calumet Heights. He also joined the Jack and Jill Players, a children's theater troupe, which cast him in *A Raisin in the Sun* as Walter and Ruth Younger's son, Travis.

Music took hold of Ford's life after he graduated from Corliss High School in Pullman. He attended a few different colleges, and during his three semesters at Antioch in Ohio he met a friend named Charles. According to an unfinished essay Ford had intended for John Preston's 1992 anthology *A Member of the Family: Gay Men Write About Their Families*, it was Charles who told Ford about the Warehouse—he invited Ford while they were both back in Chicago on break, and Ford's parents dropped him off at the club.

As Ford later detailed in his *Think Ink* music column, Boplicity, he came out around the same time he discovered the Warehouse. "The Warehouse was a way to conquer repression and escape oppression," he wrote. "It was a haven, owned and operated by black, gay men for black, gay men. Though all were welcome, it was clear on whose turf you were."

The Warehouse had a similarly transformative effect on Thompson, Ford's future partner, a white man who'd moved to Chicago in the late 60s to follow the city's Black blues musicians. "It's hard to describe, but it was, for me, a completely exotic and incredibly beautiful experience, and at the same time, very foreign," he says. "I grew up in southern Kansas—one of the most racist places in the world, by the way. It was a whole new thing for me."

Thompson had learned of the Warehouse through Chicago's nascent punk scene, which had taken root in a few north-side gay bars, most notably Lincoln Park punk disco La Mere Vipere. "I was very connected to punk-rock music," he says. "That was what I called my third childhood. I knew all these DJs—in fact, I DJed a little bit myself during that period."

The city's small, loosely defined punk scene of the day also attracted Steve Lafreniere, a Denver native who'd helped Jim Nash and Dannie Flesher open the original Wax Trax! record store there. "I would come visit, and my friends would take me to La Mere," Lafreniere says. He moved to Chicago before Nash and Flesher relocated Wax Trax! from Denver to Lincoln Park in 1978, but Lafreniere and Thompson would later meet at the shop (and subsequently become roommates for a decade). The fact that they and people like them were interested in La Mere Vipere as well as

the Warehouse benefited Chicago's queer counterculture as a whole by creating an area of overlap between two distinctive subscenes.

"We would go to punk shows, and we'd immediately run over to the Warehouse and dance the night away after we'd been pogoing at whatever bar we'd been at before," Lafreniere says. "It was all kind of the same thing to all of us."

Ford's time at the Warehouse inspired him to buy a pair of turntables and a mixer and try his hand at DJing. He practiced mixing in his spare time and funded this new pursuit by working as a sales clerk at the Rose Records location on State Street in the Gold Coast. He started the job in 1982, and among the customers who came in was a gay white DJ named Terry Martin, who struck up a friendship with Ford. "Robert was like an encyclopedia," Martin says. "He had such wide-ranging tastes, so he was up on everything."

Ford's knowledge of dance music in particular proved invaluable. "I remember him recounting the story about Madonna's first 12-inch," Martin says. ("Everybody" came out in October 1982.) "The buyer in the store—I forget how many copies they initially bought, but it was a ridiculously low number of copies of that first record. Robert was like, 'I think you're gonna need to buy a few more.'"

Ford became Rose's dance-music buyer in 1983. On one of his CVs, he claims to have increased the store's sales of 12-inches from 3 percent of its total to 12 percent. He got promoted to assistant manager in 1984, at which point Andre Halmon, a gay West Englewood native and veteran of the Warehouse scene, took over dance.

"Robert came from the same cloth as me," Halmon says. "I remember working well with him at the record shop. And when he did *Think* magazine, I was really happy to contribute."

Rose Records shaped Ford's life beyond the job too—as Thompson remembers it, the person who introduced them was Ford's coworker and friend Wendy Quinn. But in the mid- to late 1980s, Ford mostly connected with people through the city's queer nightlife. During that period, underappreciated house trailblazer Michael Ezebukwu was spinning at Club LaRay, a gay nightclub at 3150 N. Halsted that also attracted straight dancers. Just northwest, at 3400 N. Clark, a gay Latinx bar called Club Normandy had become a hot spot. At those two clubs, says Lafreniere, "The DJs that we loved would play." That's also the

neighborhood where he recalls meeting *Think* cofounder Trent Adkins.

"Trent was such a social butterfly in so many scenes, and found so many things interesting," Lafreniere says. "He could go to the white-hot center of something and pluck out what it was that we should all be paying attention to. He was one of those kinds of guys—beloved, funny as hell, really cute. He was this amazing character in that whole scene." Lafreniere and Adkins eventually dated for about a year.

Adkins's outgoing nature brought him in contact with Simone Bouyer, a queer Black production artist who worked at ad agency Ogilvy & Mather and used her free time for her art. "I discovered that I had nowhere to show my work," she says. "I'd go to the arts district and all the top galleries, and they weren't interested. They were like, 'Well, who do you know? What have you done?' It's like, 'Well, I'm here. I have work. I have slides. Take a look.' They're like, 'No, come back when you've done something.' So I thought, 'Well, I'm not the only one facing this. Let's see if I can just start my own space.'"

In 1987, Bouyer opened Holsum Roc Gallery and Cafe at 2360 N. Clybourn with accountant and small business advisor Stephanie Coleman. "I can't say we made a lot of money," Bouyer says. "But we had a lot of fun. I met a lot of people and I even sold some artwork." She kept her day job while running the gallery, which was open from 7 PM till midnight during the week. "We'd rent the space out too, for people to host parties," Bouyer recalls. "That was mostly a dance-party, DJ kind of function. There was a lot of crossover there between Robert's crowd and our crowd."

On November 17, 1987, Holsum Roc hosted Ground Zero, a kickoff celebration for *Think Ink* that doubled as Ford's 26th birthday party. In spring 1988, Adkins published a recap in the second issue of *Think Ink*, as part of his Tee Parties column. Guests included house songwriter and producer Riley Evans, Ten City vocalist Byron Stingily, and Frankie Knuckles. "This was a cocktail party, mind you. No dancing," Adkins wrote. "There were thousands of *Think Inks* on hand."

Just days after Ford's death in 1994, queer Chicago nightlife and events weekly *Babble* ran a lengthy interview with Ford by Lafreniere. Ford hadn't looked at his work with rose-tinted glasses, and he saw *Think Ink* in particular as having made missteps. "It was a free black arts magazine, and I think one of its biggest problems was that it wasn't a gay

magazine," he said. "We were more a kind of mainstream black arts magazine. It was kind of unfocused."

Ford and Adkins had made a couple attempts to launch a publication before *Think Ink*. In a review of *Crossfade* (part of a zine roundup in the seventh issue of *Think*), Adkins referred to a failed plan to launch a dance magazine called *BPM*. Ford recalled in his unpublished *Member of the Family* essay that he and Adkins had wanted to publish a magazine called *Tee* in the early 80s, and got as far as throwing a fundraising party at Space Place, a punk venue at 955 W. Fulton. "Being all too green in the business of event promotion, we had only one paying door customer, and eventually scrapped the first issue," he wrote.

To help get *Think Ink* off the ground, Ford, Adkins, and Warren recruited Bouyer to help design it. "I had a lot of the technical skills and access to equipment, so I could help him create this professional-looking thing," Bouyer says. "It had to be really high quality for him to send it to the printer and have them reproduce it." Both issues of *Think Ink* are printed on broadsheet-size newsprint, which gives them plenty of room to emphasize images—the first, number zero, includes a two-page spread of an etching by Connecticut mixed-media artist Margaret Roleke.

Think Ink's debut issue, from November 1987, features a profile of the Kronos Quartet by contributing editor Gerry Fisher; a brief exploration of the emerging acid-house sound that Andre Halmon wrote for a house-music column called Real Estate; and an interview with artist, poet, and DuSable Museum cofounder Dr. Margaret Burroughs conducted by Ford, Adkins, and Warren.

If you miss Ford's brief reference to his sexuality in the half-page Boplicity column, though, it's hard to see *Think Ink's* queer roots. "At that time I had the idea that that was the more subversive way to do it," Ford told Lafreniere in the *Babble* interview. "Have them pick up *Think Ink* for a Margaret Burroughs interview and get this glossary of black gay slang in the back." ("The Tee glossary" appeared only in *Think Ink's* second issue.)

Think Ink had few advertisers, and many of those were from Ford's immediate network. Rose Records and Holsum Roc bought prominent ads in the second issue; Ford's father, Frank R. Ford Jr., placed a small notice for his accounting work in number zero. Ford covered much of the cost of *Think Ink* out of his own pocket and stored stacks of untouched copies in his apartment—its print run of 10,000 was,



A subscription card tucked into an issue of *Thing*; Terry Martin's handbill soliciting pitches for the first *Crossfade* in 1992. AMBER HUFF; COURTESY TERRY MARTIN

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to put it gently, hugely ambitious for a new free publication. After the second issue hit the streets in spring 1988, he decided to call it a day.

Shortly before the final *Think Ink*, Lafreniere took a trip west to help mount an installation and performance—he says it involved a couple dozen slide projectors—at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions. In the LACE bookstore he discovered *Fertile La Toyah Jackson*, a zine by Black “terrorist drag” artist Vaginal Davis. Lafreniere bought three issues and shared them with friends back in Chicago. “No one could believe how hilarious they were, how political they were, and how fucking brilliant they were,” he says. “More people started getting into the idea of doing queer zines.”

Ford was pretty burned out after his *Think Ink* experience, but he got the itch to dive back into publishing after reading a couple queer zines out of New York City: *My Comrade*, created by drag queen Linda Simpson, and *Pansy Beat*, an exploration of downtown gay nightlife by Michael Economy. “I liked both of them a lot, the kind of in-your-faceness and the real campy sense of humor,” Ford told Lafreniere in *Babble*. “I liked them, too, for just being

totally and completely and unapologetically what they were.”

Ford had a Macintosh computer, a copy of Adobe PageMaker, and an idea: He wanted to publish for an audience whose needs weren’t being met by white queer zines or by relatively straitlaced Black queer magazines such as *BLK*. He saw an underpopulated niche where an irreverent, underground zine aimed at Black queer people could thrive. Out of that came *Thing*, which debuted in November 1989.

Ford’s friends began getting into zine making around the same time. Bouyer launched *Planet Roc* to promote events at Holsum Roc, and it slowly grew from an events calendar into a hub for poetry and short fiction. Lafreniere published *The Gentlewomen of California* and became an active participant in a growing international network of queer zinesters who communicated largely by mail. He expanded his circle by finding unfamiliar publications in the ads of zines he already had, and he shared work by a wide range of queer artists and writers in a photocopied packet that he sent to a growing mailing list. One envelope at a time, he helped build a new queer community distinct from and opposed to mainstream gay culture.

“Mainstream gay culture was racist, sexist,

boring—and these zines were people expressing the same thing all over the world,” Lafreniere says. “That’s why we started calling ourselves ‘queer’—we wanted to set ourselves completely apart from mainstream gay culture. ‘Gay’ was kind of a negative word, as far as we were concerned, even though we were gay.”

The debut issue of *Thing* got right down to staking out its territory. Warren wrote a personal tribute to gay disco icon Sylvester, who’d died the previous year from complications of AIDS; Adkins provided Black hair-care tips next to a Ford essay about queer phone-sex lines; erotica and poetry shared a two-page spread; and the cheeky Bunny & Pussy gossip column appeared the page before the lists that would also become a regular feature of *Thing* (the categories constantly changed, but in that issue they included “most embarrassing comeback efforts” and “some girls that gay men are stereotyped to love and emulate”). It was brazen to a fault: it printed a David Sedaris essay that had been copied (possibly without Sedaris’s knowledge) from one of the packets Lafreniere had sent to his queer zinester mailing list. And it unabashedly spotlighted its creators’ inner circle, though without excluding everyone else: Adkins’s scene news

column, whose name he’d changed from Tee Parties to Tee: Word, opened with a story about Terry Martin partnering with Ford on a jazz-themed party at infamous Lakeview nightclub Medusa’s (for which Ford finagled a one-day beer-and-wine license for the ordinarily alcohol-free juice bar).

It didn’t take long for *Thing* to find readers—including a few who were inspired to do more. Malone Sizelove, an advertising art director who’d befriended Ford and Adkins on the nightlife scene, asked Ford if he could come work for *Thing*. Ford told Sizelove that he’d like to bring him aboard, but he’d feel bad about ditching his current art director. “I found out later he was the art director,” Sizelove says.

Sizelove asked Ford for his blessing to make a queer zine with a slightly different bent—it would be entirely about nightlife, built on photos and bar gossip. Ford was encouraging. “Robert was one of the most generous, kind people I’ve ever known in my entire life,” Sizelove says. In 1991, as Sizelove worked to launch his queer monthly, *Gag* (which would become the weekly *Babble* a year later), he reached out to Ford with questions about computer technology and printing.

Author and historian Owen Keehnen sees *Thing* as one of the publications that gave him space to establish himself as a writer—he was an occasional contributor, and the zine provided him with a place to express his queerness in his writing. “It was a zine that really was about claiming who you are and being your outrageous self, if that was what you were feeling,” he says. “It hit at the right time, where suddenly it didn’t seem as important to be like the gay mainstream.”

On May 25, 1991, Randolph Street Gallery (then at 756 N. Milwaukee) hosted SPEW: The Homographic Convergence, a queer zine convention organized by Lafreniere and Larry Steger. For about six months, Lafreniere had been sending letters and making phone calls to recruit zinesters and writers from around the U.S. and Canada with whom he’d been in touch. The convention’s 60 or so participants included G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce, the Toronto punks who’d sparked the queercore movement in the mid-80s with their zine *J.D.s*. LaBruce screened his first feature film, *No Skin Off My Ass*, and at the afterparty—which also featured Vaginal Davis and DJ sets by Ford and Adkins—Jones performed with her band Fifth Column.

Mark Freitas, a queer-zine advocate and

PRIDE

continued from 31

punk who'd traveled from Michigan for SPEW, met Ford for the first time that weekend. He already had a soft spot for *Thing*. "It covered something that nobody else was covering and a culture I really cared about," Freitas says. "It was covering the house scene, which was one of the main reasons why I moved to Chicago." He moved here in early 1992 and cofounded queer punk concert series Homocore later that year.

Freitas rented a Ukrainian Village apartment a stone's throw from Ford and Adkins. (Warren didn't live with the other two *Thing* cofounders, and seemed to contribute only if and when he wanted—nobody I talked to for this story knew how to reach him.) Their place at 2151 W. Division served as *Thing*'s headquarters and an after-hours hangout. "His place was like Warhol's factory," says Scott Free, an iconoclastic musician who contributed photos and occasional record reviews to *Thing*. "He had his magazine stuff spread all over, and then he would have the house music going, and people would just come in and hang out. I think I met Essex Hemphill there. . . . I think we kind of knew that there was this scene happening, this queer art thing."

Free had found his way into the scene through house producer and songwriter Riley Evans, whom he'd met via an ex. Evans brought Free to Seagrape Studios and introduced him to the folks at Gherkin Records, who'd put out several of Evans's tracks; Gherkin recorded its artists almost exclusively at Seagrape, and Seagrape advertised in *Thing*. In an interview in the zine's second issue, Evans credits Gherkin cofounder Brett Wilcots with giving him the chance to build a career. Evans isn't terribly well-documented today, despite having cowritten Lil Louis's single "Nyce & Slo" (released by Epic in 1990), but *Thing* gave him four pages for that interview.

House was all over that issue: Adkins profiled Paris Grey, the Glencoe vocalist whose voice elevates the 1988 Inner City smash "Big Fun," while Mark Farina, Derrick Carter, and Chris Nazuka appeared in a front-of-book piece about their acid-house trio, Symbols & Instruments. The center spread was a smart-assed mock board game called House Hayride that asks players to roll dice to move through a minefield of jokes ("Get your song on a beer commercial—Ahead 4"; "Go to Smart Bar, and have your worst fears realized listening to New Order and the Cure all night—Back 1"). And of course the "House Top 100" was in there too.

Music would maintain its prominence in the pages of *Thing* as it grew in size and stature. The zine ran big interviews with salacious Chicago vocalist Candy J, aka Sweet Pussy Pauline (issue nine), with music promoter and journalist Bill Coleman (issue five), and with RuPaul, who was pushing 1993's *Supermodel of the World* (issue six). Unlike *Think Ink*, *Thing* wasn't free—its cover price peaked at three dollars—but more than any other source of revenue, music advertising supported it. Tommy Boy Records (which released the RuPaul album) was especially important—it bought a back-page ad for half of the zine's run. (Label president Monica Lynch, a Chicago native, had befriended Lafreniere and Michael Thompson at La Mere Vipere in the late 1970s.) Tommy Boy also advertised in *Gag*. "That was real validation, when you're getting a major label in the club scenes that wants to advertise in your magazine," Sizelove says.

Terry Martin had written about music in almost every issue of *Thing*, but he wanted to cover much more than the zine could fit. The second wave of Chicago house was beginning its rise, propelled by the likes of Derrick Carter, Mark Farina, and DJ Sneak; in 1992, Cajmere released the immortal "Percolator" on his own Cajual Records. That summer, Martin created *Crossfade*, enlisting Ford as copublisher and sharing the *Thing* offices in Ford and Adkins's apartment. "*Crossfade* really was a canvas and a platform to spotlight music, artists, and record labels who weren't getting much of any exposure from mainstream media outlets," Martin says. "Oftentimes, artists that we covered were marginalized—Black or gay or otherwise marginalized."

Crossfade wasn't an exclusively queer music zine, but it did explore the overlap between music and gay culture. Its first issue, published in September 1992, includes a few pieces on Lifebeat, an AIDS-awareness organization founded by producer and artist manager Bob Caviano. *Crossfade* expanded quickly, and by its third issue in November (which had a full-color back-page ad for RuPaul) it had grown from 20 pages to 32. That jam-packed issue featured the aforementioned story package about house history, the second installment of Derrick Carter's up-to-the-minute column on new tracks (titled Subterranea), a hip-hop column by someone writing as "G-Most," album reviews, and record lists from DJs prominent in the scene.

It would also be the final issue of *Crossfade*. "We had planned on it being a monthly, and continue it in perpetuity," Martin says. "But



The only two issues of *Thing*'s short-lived predecessor, *Think Ink*, published in late 1987 and early 1988
AMBER HUFF

we stopped after the third issue because Robert became ill, and I didn't want to carry on with a different designer or copublisher—it was just too much at the time."

The crisis that put an end to *Crossfade* was, tragically, far from new. After the fourth issue of *Thing* came out in spring 1991, Adkins had sent a letter to the staff. Though he enumerated a few reservations about their recent work—the issue had some typos, and the copy was occasionally too dry—his main purpose was to express concern about how they were holding together in the face of grief, fear, and pain.

"Again it's recalled that nearly everyone directly involved with THING is suffering from some normal and/or abnormal load of stress," he wrote. "Many of us who aren't ourselves HIV+ or facing an ARC or full blown AIDS diagnosis are desperately searching for ways and means to give love and caring to family and friends who are infected or ill. Where, inside of the black gay AIDS era community, can we afford to not be kind and understanding towards each other?"

For more than two more years—and six more issues—*Thing* continued to publish fearless pieces that laid bare the joys and anxieties affecting the Black queer community. It ran scathing critiques of local clubs that lambast-

ed their lame posturing or racist policies. Ford wrote about the lingering trauma that dogged him after he was assaulted by passersby, and his story (in issue seven) included a scan of the worthless paperwork he'd filed with the police department. Filmmaker Marlon Riggs wrote the most moving piece in that issue, "Letter to the Dead," which was not only a probing dissection of his own fear and denial as the virus tore people from his life but also a detailed account of his own discovery that he was HIV-positive.

AIDS hung over everything *Thing* published, even when it wasn't the explicit focus of a story. In his interview for the second issue, Riley Evans talked about throwing an AIDS benefit show featuring Ten City, Candy J, and Gherkin group North/Clybourn. He also mentioned the effect AIDS had already had on the dance community. "In a negative way, it's taken away some of the better dance musicians," he said.

That issue came out in April 1990. In May 1991, Evans died of complications from AIDS at age 31. "It's a shame that he wasn't around long enough to do what he wanted to," Frankie Knuckles told *Tribune* writer Mark Caro at the time.

"I don't think we could deal with the illness stuff very well," Scott Free says. "I don't think we processed it or anything. I think especially

because we were so young—and that was the hard part, was to have people dying in their late 20s.”

In August 1993, shortly after publishing issue ten, Ford announced that he was ending *Thing*. As he wrote in a posthumously published private letter to a reader in January 1994, his declining health meant he could no longer shoulder the financial stress and labor of publishing a quarterly zine: “These days I’m living solely on Social Security Disability Insurance (unable to work because my AIDS-related medical regimen is so demanding); this sum barely covers rent, utilities, and out-of-pocket medical expenses.”

Ford continued to write for Bouyer’s *Planet Roc* and Sizelove’s *Babble*, the latter of which ran a half dozen installments of his trenchant column about living with AIDS called *Life During Wartime*. “*Life During Wartime*, you really got to hear Robert’s personal voice—the Robert that we all, who knew him personally, knew,” Freitas says. “I got to see parts of Robert I didn’t know about through those columns.”

In *Life During Wartime*, Ford recounted a trip he’d taken with Thompson to New York City—an upbeat story interrupted only once by a flare-up of symptoms. He eviscerated the media hype surrounding the 1993 film *Philadelphia*, complaining bitterly that Hollywood was selling a milquetoast AIDS story while the LGBTQ+ community was still struggling to get anyone to care about the pandemic—he especially hated a *Tribune* story that speculated about the harm Tom Hanks might do to his likability by playing a gay man. Even as his health declined, he often wrote about it with humor: “I feel like a human being most days, and have so few T-cells that I’m tempted to give them names.” After Riggs died in April 1993, Ford used the column to grieve: “With Marlon’s passing, I lost part of my voice, a part of my vision. And I was once again enraged at this disease, for taking my contemporaries, and circling around *my* door as well.”

Ford died in his home on October 2, 1994, a month and a half shy of his 33rd birthday. Among those at his side were his parents, his sister, Wendy Quinn, Terry Martin, Trent

Adkins, and Michael Thompson. “When people say, ‘I’m really sorry that your boyfriend died,’ it was Robert who had the tragedy—and he knew it deeply,” Thompson says. “That he would not be able to continue that work that he loved—that was the hardest part.”

In 1995, Daniel Wang released his second 12-inch, *Aphroasiatechnubian*. The yellow hub label on the B side is crammed with text. Just below the vinyl’s center hole, it says, “This record is dedicated to Robert Ford of Chicago, 1961-1994: dear friend, fierce disco diva, and editor of *THING* Magazine.”

Twenty-one boxes might not sound like a lot, but I would’ve needed several months to absorb every document, recording, and piece of ephemera in the Chicago History Museum’s *Thing* archive. I mostly studied the material I could handle on paper, including subscription cards from readers around the country, planning documents for *Thing* and *Think Ink*, and letters to and from the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame (which inducts Ford in 1993).

I did take a little time to listen to a CD copy of an interview that Ford, Adkins, and Warren had conducted with Frankie Knuckles for the second issue of *Think Ink*. I found it hard to follow the conversation—not because it was especially esoteric, but because their voices overlapped so often that I felt like I was eavesdropping on four tight friends during a late-night hang. But hearing them together underlined a point Knuckles made about the birth of house music: the dancers at the Warehouse, among them Ford, Adkins, and Warren, were as necessary to its genesis as the DJs spinning records.

“It once was a feeling and a spirit that not me alone invented or conjured up or whatever,” Knuckles told his friends. “It was something that people on the dance floor created themselves. People from that particular period and that particular era, in that particular club, on that particular dance floor, under that particular sound system. It’s something that they adapted and they made all their own.”

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ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
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PICK OF THE WEEK

Chicago's Thomas Comerford assembles a cast of local musicians on *Introverts*

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THOMAS COMERFORD, INTROVERTSSelf-released
thomascomerford.net**Thomas Comerford, Bethany Thomas** Sat 6/12, 8 PM, the Outta Space, 6840 32nd St., Berwyn, \$10 suggested donation, 21+**Thomas Comerford release party for *Introverts*** Fri 6/18, 9 PM, Montrose Saloon, 2933 W. Montrose, free, 21+

CHICAGO HAS ITS SHARE of bands playing country or alternative country, but Thomas Comerford's lonesome sound is in a category of its own. Comerford straddles the singer-songwriter era of the 1970s and the dusty, deadpan observations of psychedelic iconoclasts such as Bill Callahan. He's also an independent filmmaker—he teaches film and art history at the School of the Art Institute—and his lyrics accomplish dazzling feats by combining abstract and literal imagery. “The way the light plays on the glass block / A winking joint on a toilet seat” (from “Onion City”) is as good a portrait of despair as any still image. To make *Introverts*, his new fourth album, Comerford has cast a large ensemble of musicians and singers, including members of Smog, Glass Mountain, Urge Overkill, and Bright Eyes, which makes the big country-soul moments in “Cowboy Mouth” and “Three Sisters” major highlights. Another focal point is “Partners,” a duet with Azita Youssefi, which follows two misfits making plans that you get a sense may never come together. Yet amid all the album's expansive sounds, including the pretty lilt of Tom McGettrick's pedal steel guitar, the natural tremor in Comerford's voice makes him sound more apprehensive than confident. These beguiling country songs leave their doors open for you to poke around and find hidden interpretations that are inevitably right. Comerford has a gig booked at Berwyn venue the Outta Space on June 12 and a record-release show at the Montrose Saloon on June 18; at this point in the pandemic, fans don't have to wait till an undetermined future date to hear a new album performed live. —**MARK GUARINO**

CHORD, IMPERFECT AUTHENTIC CADENCEDebauche
chordgroup.bandcamp.com/album/imperfect-authentic-cadence

Chicago power-ambient unit Chord find their art in small details; for more than a decade they've been exploring a single chord in each of their compositions, wringing every bit of depth, power, and resonance out of it. Their new fourth LP, *Imperfect Authentic Cadence* (Debauche), concerns a common progression that's been baked into Western music since at least the 17th century: the V-I cadence. Also known as an authentic cadence, it moves from the dominant to the tonic and creates a strong sense of resolution. The new album enacts such a shift, albeit imperfectly (hence the title). In their press materials, the band explain that the harmonic structure of its three pieces demonstrates “the intrinsic directionality” of tonal music—that is, “the idea that certain notes in certain contexts have an innate sense of direction, a longing to move somewhere specific.” Thankfully, you don't need to understand the music theory driving *Imperfect Authentic Cadence* in order to get lost in Chord's rhapsodic, glacial sonic expeditions. “G9/11sus(b2)/F” is the band's first piece to include a chord change, and its molecular-level shifts happen gradually enough to make you feel like the proverbial frog in a pot of water set to boil. They land the transition precisely, and their heavy, atmospheric composition feels like it can literally change the weather. Chord's practice of unpacking every last shift and interval in a single cadence feels borderline spiritual—especially in the way it transforms time, so that its most drawn-out processes seem to fly past. —**LEOR GALIL**

COLLEEN, THE TUNNEL AND THE CLEARINGThrill Jockey
colleencolleen.bandcamp.com

Under the name Colleen, French composer and multi-instrumentalist Cécile Schott has spent the past two decades traversing musical styles: She explored hypnagogic looped samples on her 2003 debut, *Everyone Alive Wants Answers*, dulcet folktronica on 2005's *The Golden Morning Breaks*, and chamber-music ambience on 2007's *Les Ondes Silencieuses*. Schott's work is consistent in its arresting simplicity, but her pieces aren't so much minimal as they are featherlight. Schott's latest album, *The Tunnel and the Clearing* (Thrill Jockey), builds on the vocal pop of 2015's *Captain of None* and the sparse electronics of 2017's *A Flame My Love, a Frequency*. Though its songs glide along gently, it's the most brazenly straightforward of all her records. On “Revelation,” when she sings “Reveal yourself to me,” it feels like an invitation to open your ears to the soft textures of the song's diaphanous ambience and vocals. The album has its moody moments, most notably at the beginning of the title track, but Schott always brings it back to an amiable shuffling of layered synths that dissolve into celestial glistening. On “Hidden in the Current,” which embraces that astral atmosphere, her voice appears amid throbbing electronic pulses, as though she's been ejected into outer space and is singing among the stars. The instrumentation on *The Tunnel and the Clearing* exudes the same sort of beautiful naivete found in the work of German synth maestro



Michelle Zauner of Japanese Breakfast PETER ASH LEE



The Lincoln Trio: Marta Aznavoorian, David Cunliffe, and Desirée Ruhstrat CEDILLE RECORDS

Hans-Joachim Roedelius, and the album's pop tracks have a whimsy that recalls Stereolab's most delicate avant-garde tunes or the breezy lounge-pop of Antena's *Camino del Sol*—though Colleen's music is more wonderfully uncomplicated than either of theirs. *The Tunnel and the Clearing* feels like sitting on a porch on a hot summer day as a gentle wind cools your skin: it's easy, refreshing, and the perfect way to pass time. —JOSHUA MINSOO KIM

AUGUST FANON & DEFCEE, *WE DRESSED THE CITY WITH OUR NAMES*

Filthē Analects
defcee.bandcamp.com/album/we-dressed-the-city-with-our-names

The new EP by Defcee and producer August Fanon, *We Dressed the City With Our Names*, ties Defcee's history in Chicago's rap and poetry scenes to the primordial hip-hop culture of New York graffiti artists depicted in the 1983 documentary *Style Wars*. The first track opens with a sample of a young graffiti writer explaining that his work is for him and other writers to see—forget the outsiders—and then Defcee raps about being animated by that same desire to leave a mark on hip-hop subculture. In his verses, he reminisces about his youth in Chicago like a contemporary Nick Carraway to aspiring street Jay Gatsby—telling his own story while providing a porthole into others'. Set at a funeral, "Tragic/Magic" is about the way memories held among a group of friends can get sanitized as they're shared with the greater public (if they're not kept secret entirely). The song counterbalances its occasional melancholy with Fanon's excellent production and the audible joy in Defcee's raps. On "All You See Is," the quivering sampled flute and huge rhythms recall the Donny Hathaway sample on Dr. Dre's "Lil' Ghetto Boy," but the drums feel heavier and grimmer. On "Just Beautiful," Defcee recalls his youthful expectations of fame and acclaim over lovely space-age keyboard sweeps and yelping guitars. And on "Alive," he delivers what may be his thesis state-

ment: "It's nerdy and it's basic, but the closest thing to magic that we had was language." Defcee is also a high school teacher and Young Chicago Authors teaching artist, and he's dedicated to helping the next generation of writers learn how to cast their own spells. *We Dressed the City With Our Names* proves that his methods work; it's a testament to the power of creativity that pulses with youthful energy while dispensing the kind of wisdom that's only born through years of experience. —JACK RIEDY

GARBAGE, *NO GODS NO MASTERS*

Stunvolume / Infectious
garbage.tmstor.es/product/77850

When Garbage broke out with their self-titled debut album in 1995, their alluring but abrasive sound—dark power-pop melodies topped by Shirley Manson's alternately growled and whispered vocals—enticed listeners like sweet pink candy with a messy center. Their second album, 1998's *Version 2.0*, expands on this recipe of fuzzed-out guitar and distorted vocals with multilayered tracks and slick production, and it helped them attain even more commercial success—including a gig recording the theme song for the 1999 James Bond movie *The World Is Not Enough*. Though they've had their share of highs and lows since then, including a five-year hiatus in the mid-2000s, Garbage's original lineup remains together today: Manson, guitarist and bassist Duke Erikson, guitarist Steve Marker, and drummer Butch Vig (a producer who'd already done famous work for Nirvana and the Smashing Pumpkins by the time Garbage formed in 1994). On June 11 they're releasing their seventh studio album, *No Gods No Masters*.

If the early Garbage albums expressed playful exploration and experimentation, *No Gods No Masters*—a common anarchist and labor slogan—conveys disgust and disillusion. Though its sound largely continues down the path of the band's past records, its indictments of social injustice, misogyny, and corporate greed shift the focus away from

personal obsessions and dysfunctions and toward the brokenness of the outside world. Opener "The Men Who Rule the World" starts with the jingling of a slot machine, and then Manson fires the first shot in a blazing attack on power imbalances between classes and genders: "The men who rule the world / Have made a fuckin' mess / The history of power / The worship of success." The machinelike synth on the title track underscores lyrics that speak of a universe with no higher beings to blame or appeal to for salvation, while the industrial grind of "Godhead" contrasts with quiet vocals from Manson that deliver a forceful assault on the double standards that allow men to hold more power because of their gender. A deluxe edition of the album due June 12 has eight additional tracks, including covers of Bruce Springsteen and Patti Smith's "Because the Night" (with indie rockers Screaming Females) and David Bowie's "Starman." Whether they're confronting social inequity or a lover's betrayal, Garbage show that even *weltschmerz* goes down easy when it's wrapped in catchy melodies and kick-ass production. —KIRSTEN LAMBERT

JAPANESE BREAKFAST, *JUBILEE*

Dead Oceans
michellezauner.bandcamp.com/album/jubilee

If you've ever watched someone you love struggle through a cruel illness and eventually succumb, you know that some days it can be hard to find any lightness under the crushing weight of grief. So it's beyond inspiring that Michelle Zauner, the solo artist behind Japanese Breakfast, made not one but two dreamy indie-pop albums exploring the complex emotions she went through while caring for her mother as she underwent cancer treatment (2016's *Psychopomp*) and then healing after she passed away in 2014 (2017's *Soft Sounds From Another Planet*). On her third full-length, the new *Jubilee*, Zauner moves out of sadness into joy with a set of songs that radiate hard-won triumph. Opener "Paprika" sheds Zauner's early lo-fi sound to adorn

its buoyant pop melodies with cascading strings and horns. Some tracks, such as "Sit," stick with the dreamy feel of Zauner's earlier releases, but the album also makes plenty of twists and turns, and it's often direct and playful. "Savage Good Boy" is a charming anticapitalist pop song, while the yearning "Be Sweet" and chic "Posing in Bondage" would sound just as good on a dance floor as in a rock club—the latter even bears a slight resemblance to some of Martin Gore's slower synth ballads. But for all *Jubilee's* colorful flourishes and intricate arrangements, its most crucial moments come when Zauner pulls back the curtains widest: "Posing for Cars" opens with her soft vocals over bare-bones acoustic guitar, then builds into a wistful, summer-drenched instrumental-rock arrangement that seems to float off into the sky. —JAMIE LUDWIG

THE LINCOLN TRIO, *TRIOS FROM THE CITY OF BIG SHOULDERS*

Cedille
cedillerecords.org/albums/trios-from-the-city-of-big-shoulders

It's Leo Sowerby's summer. Had 2020 gone as planned, musicians across the city likely would have launched into 125th-anniversary celebrations for the late Chicago composer (1895-1968) and one-time St. James Cathedral organist. Any such plans were obviously tabled, but luckily for us, quasiquintennial recordings of Sowerby's chamber works are nonetheless bubbling to the top of Cedille Records' catalog, starting with this Lincoln Trio album (and continuing with his *Organ Symphony in G* on July 9 and his symphonic jazz forays on August 13). On *Trios From the City of Big Shoulders*, Sowerby shares top billing with one of his contemporaries, Chicago-born composer Ernst Bacon (1898-1990). Over the course of their decades-long careers, both men racked up classical music's earliest accolades: between them they share one Rome Prize, two Pulitzer nods, and three Guggenheims. Today, if either composer is known at all,



SqueakPivot and MFN Melo MICHAEL SALISBURY

continued from 35

it's for his vocal repertoire—Sowerby for his church music, Bacon for his 200-plus songs. Their instrumental works remain woefully under-recorded: Lincoln's recording of Bacon's Piano Trio No. 2 (1987) is an industry first, and their release of Sowerby's sole piano trio (1953) is only the second by a commercial label. Written three years before Bacon's death, Trio No. 2 treads churning harmonic waters before settling into something like a career retrospective. In the span of six movements, Bacon lifts melodies from two of his own songs and swerves between brusque marches, revue-style romps, and angular Romanticism. The collage never quite coheres, but that's no slight to the Lincoln Trio's spirited, scintillant interpretation. Nor, frankly, is it a slight to the piece, which like a roller-coaster ride renders pleasure and whiplash indistinguishable from each other. Old and new meld more organically in Sowerby's trio: while structurally traditional, the dark-hued, quietly radical work, with its harmonic brambles and idiosyncratic doublings in violin and cello, seems to have come from an entirely different pen than Sowerby's church music. But when the strings decouple in the second movement, the heavens beckon. In one breathtaking passage, cellist David Cunliffe arpeggiates under the soaring treble line of violinist Desirée Ruhstrat, while pianist Marta Aznavoorian plants pillar-like chords in the firmament. Surely there is a touch of the sacred here too. —HANNAH EDGAR

MFN MELO & SQUEAKPIVOT, #ENROUTE
Pivot Gang LLC / Lil Pack Productions
soundcloud.com/squeakpivot/sets/mfnmelo-x-squeakpivot-en-route

Producer SqueakPivot has long been a crucial member of the Chicago hip-hop collective he's incorporated into his stage name, applying his talents largely to mixes and DJ sets—I'm hard-pressed to think of Pivot Gang show I've seen where Squeak wasn't behind the turntables. He's infrequently released his own music, though that began to shift when Pivot dropped the playful 2019 group album *You Can't*

Sit With Us. Squeak brought an understated cool to the songs he coproduced, two of which ("Jason Statham, Pt. 2" and "Clark Kent") feature MFN Melo. As Squeak recently told *These Days* writer Pedro Gonzalez, he got close with Melo while Squeak's brother, Pivot rapper Frsh Waters, served time in the mid-2010s: "Melo was my big brother when my big brother left. I instantly looked at Melo for guidance as far as teaching me how to move or just learning from him."

Melo and Squeak's kinship invigorates their new collaborative EP, *#EnRoute* (Pivot Gang LLC / Lil Pack Productions). Squeak excels with subtle production touches; icy keys ripple behind brief, limber bass figures and a thin percussion loop on "One With Me," while murmuring bass intensifies a watery fingerpicked guitar sample on "Ball Is Life." Melo's easygoing verve, lighthearted lyricism, and rich, sumptuous voice make him a great foil for Squeak, and he knows how to adapt his flow to match Squeak's energy. On "Risk," Melo switches up the speed of his raps to mirror Squeak's multipronged percussion, then shifts gears again to deliver the song's smooth hook in a velvet coo. On the relaxed, joyous "Handheld," an EP highlight, the duo recruit Frsh Waters to lend his suave grit to Squeak's dreamy instrumental and Melo's laid-back, debonair performance. *#EnRoute* hits a lot of targets in its short run time, and I get the impression Squeak and Melo are only beginning to flex their muscles. —LEOR GALIL

GEORGIA ANNE MULDROW, VWETO III
Foreseen Entertainment
georgiaannemuldrow.bandcamp.com/album/vweto-iii

Stevie Wonder's personal archives are reputedly filled with decades of homemade demos and jam sessions that have never been released. If I had to guess what they sound like, I'd say some of them probably have a lot in common with the new album from Georgia Anne Muldrow. The Los Angeles singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist is



Adam Schubert of Ulna ALEXA VISCIOUS

a true original, operating across genre boundaries in soul, rap, jazz, R&B, and elsewhere, and *Vweto III* recalls Wonder's early-70s experiments with Moogs and other analog synths. Just like Stevie, she isn't just making noise, even though her music is so far-out that it feels like instrumental funk from the planet Pluto—and I mean that as a compliment. Its unorthodox sensibility owes a debt to Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention, which seems even more appropriate when you learn that one of Muldrow's early mentors was Mothers keyboardist Don Preston, who played with the band in the 60s and 70s. Aside from the occasional guest vocal, Muldrow performed, recorded, and produced everything on *Vweto III* herself. Some synth-heavy music immediately evokes the era in which it was created, but *Vweto III* has a heart that will still sound brand-new in 15 years. Funky rhythms coexist with sci-fi keyboards, and tracks such as "Boom Bap Is My Homegirl" provide a reminder that avant-garde music can have hooks. What sounds like a squealing psychedelic guitar makes its presence known on "Grungepiece," though it's hard to be sure—Muldrow's production style blurs the lines between instruments and their digital re-creations. An atonal keyboard riff builds the foundation of "Ghostride 21716," and a psychotic piano figure repeats itself in "Slow Drag." If you've ever wished your favorite risk-taking musical pioneers would've followed their most eccentric impulses and just let themselves go, *Vweto III* might be just what the doctor ordered. —JAMES PORTER

SPECTACULAR DIAGNOSTICS, NATURAL MECHANICS
Group Bracil
spectacular-diagnostics.bandcamp.com/album/natural-mechanics

As Spectacular Diagnostics, Chicago producer Robert Krums specializes in hip-hop tracks that seem to circle the planet in low orbit, collecting cosmic dust that mixes with flecks of grit from our world. On his new album, *Natural Mechanics* (Group Bracil), he blends samples like he's devising floral arrange-

ments for a royal wedding—the glassy keyboard melody that strolls through "Molasses" picks up new colors as he throws on sparse, dubby percussion and a brief clip of springy sitar. Krums can create refinement out of filth (and vice versa), and he knows how to make a mean beat for an underground MC to chew on. He recruited a few guests to drop verses on *Natural Mechanics*, including UK rapper Pertreli Purple and Chicago MC and producer Jeremiah Jae. But in productions unperturbed by anyone's voice—except maybe a wisp of a vocal sample—Krums can build a contemplative space defined by the mood of a groove. —LEOR GALIL

ULNA, OAE
Born Yesterday
ulnatheband.bandcamp.com/album/oea-2

Adam Schubert, who plays guitar and sings in Chicago psych-rock unit Cafe Racer, took up music more than a decade ago. At age 14, he shattered his ulna (one of the bones in his forearm) in a skateboarding accident; since he couldn't skate, he decided to pick up the guitar. By age 16, he'd gotten comfortable enough with the instrument to write and record his own material. He kept his solo work private up until a few years ago, when he started releasing lo-fi tracks as Ruins. Schubert has since changed that pseudonym to Ulna in tribute to the broken bone that pushed him to play music. Schubert wrote most of the stripped-down, reflective songs on the new *Oea* (Born Yesterday) while sobering up in a recovery program, and his journey colors every musical detail and lyrical nuance. His capacity to face his worst behaviors with self-possessed kindness (as he does on "I Was a Monster") enriches these serene songs, which he sustains with a hushed grace. On "Last Song" his lilting, half-whispered vocals float through a gently fingerpicked melody, languid drums, and a scrim of slide guitar, and his voice lends his darkest lyrics a yearning that feels almost like optimism. Schubert's perseverance allows *Oea* to deliver a gratifying catharsis. —LEOR GALIL



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

GOSSIP WOLF GOT acquainted with local queer crooner **Andrew Sa** via his show-stealing turns with the Hideout's hilarious and heartwarming campy **Cosmic Country Showcase**. At this recurring revue, aliens, monsters, and other oddballs display an uncanny talent for belting out country tunes—usually backed by a killer band with **Sima Cunningham** (Ohmme), **Sullivan Davis**, **Dorian Gehring**, **Liam Kazar** (Marrow), and **Spencer Tweedy**. On Sa's new covers EP, **Cosmic Country Stars: Andrew Sa**, his high, keening voice is very much of this Earth, adding pathos and lovely loneliness to a sparkling version of Chris Isaak's "Wicked Game" and a plaintive duet with Kelly Hogan on Neko Case's "I Wish I Was the Moon." This wolf can't wait to see Sa and his otherworldly cohorts onstage again!

Jazz saxophonist **Dave Rempis** has stayed busy—and maintained his commitment to community—throughout the pandemic. He released a steady stream of old recordings via his label, **Aerophonic**, and performed online or outside (weather permitting). He streamed solo from Unity Lutheran Church, booked a few outdoor gigs in Milwaukee with drummer **Tim Daisy**, and played a small-group series in **Margate Park**, usually with drummer **Tyler Damon** and sometimes with cellist **Tomeka Reid**, bassist **Joshua Abrams**, and other guests. On Saturday, May 8, Rempis resumed the Margate Park series, and on Tuesday, June 15, he drops **The COVID Tapes: Solos, Duos, & Trios**, which compiles several 2020 performances.

On Saturday, June 12 (the first of two summer 2021 **Record Store Day** holidays), pop-up record store **Miyagi** throws a crate-digging bonanza at the **Silver Room** in Hyde Park. **South Rhodes Records**, **Beverly Phono Mart**, and **Jaytoo** will also sell vinyl; the event runs from noon till 6 PM, with music from funk band **Mathien** and several DJs. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

ALL AGES FREE



Ashley McBryde DANIEL MEIGS

NEW

Dee Alexander 6/30, 6 PM, DuSable Museum of African American History **FREE**
American Aquarium 9/3, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Archers of Loaf 7/24, 10 PM, Subterranean
Architects 12/1, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Avatar, Magic Sword 9/15, 7:30 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Angel Bat Dawid 7/1-7/3, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Beach Bunny 12/18, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre **FREE**
Madison Beer 11/12, 7:30 PM, House of Blues **FREE**
Pete Benson Trio 6/18, 8 PM, Bananna's Comedy Shack at Reggies
Boundary Waters, Splits, Ok Cool 8/25, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen
Rachel Brooke, Rod Hamdallah 7/16, 7 PM, Bananna's Comedy Shack at Reggies
Cadence Weapon, Fat Tony 10/2, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Caribou, Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith 11/19, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Case Oats 7/6, 9 PM, Hideout
Chamberlain 10/22, 9 PM, Sleeping Village
Chicago Metal Fair 6/19, 7 PM, Bananna's Comedy Shack at Reggies **FREE**
Chvrches, Donna Missal 11/19, 7:30 PM, Aragon Ballroom **FREE**
Circuitmom presents Champions featuring DJ Isis Muretech 8/6, 9 PM, House of Blues
Cloud Nothings 8/19, 9:30 PM; 8/20, 10 PM, Empty Bottle
Joan Collaso 7/14, 6 PM, DuSable Museum of African American History **FREE**
Ishaiah Collier & the Chosen Few 6/23, 6 PM, DuSable Museum of African American

History **FREE**
Colony House, Fleurie 10/24, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall **FREE**
Thomas Comerford, Bethany Thomas 6/12, 8 PM, the Outta Space, Berwyn
Thomas Comerford release show for Introverts 6/18, 9 PM, Montrose Saloon **FREE**
Current Joys 2/12/2022, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Decoy Prayer Meeting 6/19, 6 PM, the Northman Beer & Cider Garden **FREE**
Deeper 10/9, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Delta Spirit, Deer Tick 11/13, 7:30 PM, the Vic, 18+
Devil in a Woodpile 7/8, 8:30 PM, Hideout
Elder Island, Clavvs 11/16, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Electric Feels DJs 8/20, 9:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater presents the Zafiro Flamenco Festival featuring Patricia Ortega, David Chiriboga, Paco Fonta, José Mareno 6/18-6/20, 7:30 PM, North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, Skokie **FREE**
Flat Five 7/9, 7 PM, Sketchbook Brewery and Taproom, Skokie
Foons 7/15, 8:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston **FREE**
Andy Frasco & the U.N. 11/6, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
French 79 9/10, 9:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Kevin Gates 10/6, 7:30 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Carol Genetti, Ute Wassermann 6/18, 2 and 8 PM, stream at twitch.tv/elasticartschicago **FREE**
Terisa Griffin 6/18-6/19, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery **FREE**
Half Gringa 9/25, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Hell Patrol 7/10, 9 PM, Reggies

Music Joint
Hellogoodbye 9/25, 8:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Hiss Golden Messenger 3/11/2022, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
iLE 10/8, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **FREE**
Keefe Jackson, Lia Kohl, and Macie Stewart 7/9, 7 PM, Hideout
Juneteenth celebration featuring Fareed Haque with Sparring Fared Haque & the Afro Soul Ensemble 6/19, 8 PM, livestream at oldtownschool.org **FREE**
Outronaut 8/13, 7 PM, GMan Tavern
Joanie Pallatto release party for My Original Plan featuring Fareed Haque with Sparring Fared Haque & the Afro Soul Ensemble 6/19, 5 PM, Palmhouse, Evanston **FREE**
Polo & Pan 12/9, 7:30 PM, Radius Chicago **FREE**
Psychedelic Furs 9/16, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+
Pvris 8/7, 8 PM, House of Blues **FREE**
Dave Rempis, Jim Baker, Joshua Abrams, and Avreeayl Ra 7/8, 8:30 PM, Elastic **FREE**
Rod Tuffcurls & the Bench Press 9/10, 9 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Satori 6/25, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Keith Scott and friends 6/25, 5 PM, Reggies Music Joint **FREE**
J.D. Simo, GA-20 10/16, 9 PM, Martyrs
David Singer & the Sweet Science release show for Vicious Kicks 7/10, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Smallpools, Morgxn 11/13, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge **FREE**
Split Single 7/10, 7 PM, Sketchbook Brewery and Taproom, Skokie
Squirrel Flower, Mia Joy 6/26, 4:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Squirrel Flower, Kara Jackson 6/26, 7:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Tim Stine Quartet 7/5, 8 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/

7:30 PM, Schubas, 18+
Mazie 12/7, 7:30 PM, Subterranean **FREE**
Nick Mazzarella's Meridian Trio +1 6/19, 8 PM, Constellation, 18+
Ashley McBryde, Priscilla Block 12/8, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Pat Metheny's Side-Eye 10/15, 7 and 9:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Miyagi Records Record Store Day event featuring Mathien, DJ Jaidot, DJ K.Max, DJ Noshua Luv, DJ Shazam Bangles, DJ Trew 6/12, noon, Silver Room Hyde Park **FREE**
Moontype release show for Bodies of Water 7/17, 9:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Mud Morganfield 7/2, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **FREE**
Nahko & Medicine for the People 9/10, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Nation of Language 10/3, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Kathleen Nisbet & Steve Charles 6/18, 9:30 PM, livestream at veeps.com **FREE**
Gary Numan 10/10, 8 PM, Park West, 18+
The Original Chicago Blues All Stars Revue, Ugochi & the Afro Soul Ensemble 6/19, 8 PM, livestream at oldtownschool.org **FREE**
Outronaut 8/13, 7 PM, GMan Tavern
Joanie Pallatto release party for My Original Plan featuring Fareed Haque with Sparring Fared Haque & the Afro Soul Ensemble 6/19, 5 PM, Palmhouse, Evanston **FREE**
Polo & Pan 12/9, 7:30 PM, Radius Chicago **FREE**
Psychedelic Furs 9/16, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+
Pvris 8/7, 8 PM, House of Blues **FREE**
Dave Rempis, Jim Baker, Joshua Abrams, and Avreeayl Ra 7/8, 8:30 PM, Elastic **FREE**
Rod Tuffcurls & the Bench Press 9/10, 9 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Satori 6/25, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Keith Scott and friends 6/25, 5 PM, Reggies Music Joint **FREE**
J.D. Simo, GA-20 10/16, 9 PM, Martyrs
David Singer & the Sweet Science release show for Vicious Kicks 7/10, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Smallpools, Morgxn 11/13, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge **FREE**
Split Single 7/10, 7 PM, Sketchbook Brewery and Taproom, Skokie
Squirrel Flower, Mia Joy 6/26, 4:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Squirrel Flower, Kara Jackson 6/26, 7:30 PM, Sleeping Village
Tim Stine Quartet 7/5, 8 PM, livestream at twitch.tv/

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elasticartschicago **FREE**
Struts 9/14, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre **FREE**
Sylmar 6/26, 9 PM, Schubas
Tiësto 6/26, 10 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Tiffany 6/20, 5 and 8 PM, City Winery **FREE**
Toadies, Reverend Horton Heat, Nashville Pussy 10/10, 7 PM, Metro, 18+
Tomblands, Late Nite Laundry 6/25, 9 PM, Schubas
Victor Torres Band 6/25, 8 PM, Bananna's Comedy Shack at Reggies
Uma Bloo 7/7, 6 PM, Tack Room **FREE**
U.S. Air Guitar Championships 6/26, 9 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Leah Wes with Rick LaCour 6/17, 5 PM, the Northman Beer & Cider Garden **FREE**
Eli Winter, Sam Wagster, and Tyler Damon 6/25, 8 PM, Constellation, 18+
Wolf Alice 11/8, 7:30 PM, the Vic **FREE**
Cory Wong featuring Antwaun Stanley and Sierra Hull 2/18/2022, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+

UPDATED

Black Crowes, Dirty Honey 8/7, 7:30 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, opener added and time changed **FREE**
Blackberry Smoke, Allman Betts Band 7/17, 6 PM, Aragon Ballroom, canceled
Chicano Batman, Los Retros 12/17, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, lineup changed, 18+
Goddamn Gallows, Decayed 7/14, 8 PM, Reggies Rock Club, opener added and time changed, 17+
Guns N' Roses, Mammoth WVH 9/16, 6 PM, Wrigley Field, rescheduled and opener added **FREE**
Lady Gaga 8/27, 7:30 PM, Wrigley Field, postponed **FREE**
Luttrell 12/18, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, rescheduled, 18+
New Order, Pet Shop Boys, Paul Oakenfold 9/30/2022, 6:45 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion, rescheduled and opener added **FREE**
Palaye Royale 7/9, 6:30 PM, House of Blues, postponed **FREE**
Pimpinela 10/17, 6:30 PM, Copernicus Center, rescheduled **FREE**
Yam Haus 10/22, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, rescheduled, 17+ **FREE**



NATALIE ESCOBEDO

CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

Alison Chesley, cellist and composer, aka Helen Money

"A year without music venues, without audiences, without seeing other people play has really made me realize how important that is for me."

As told to JAMIE LUDWIG

Alison Chesley, 61, is a cellist and composer who makes music under the name Helen Money. She released her latest album, *Atomic* (the follow-up to 2016's *Become Zero*), just as Chicago went into lockdown in March 2020. She plays a three-night residency at the Empty Bottle from June 17 through 19.

Become Zero dealt a lot with grief, but *Atomic* is more about moving forward. What do I do? What are my family's relationships with each other going forward? How are we connected to where we live?

[When the pandemic hit,] my label, Thrill Jockey, was very supportive. They figured out

a way that I could promote the record at home. That meant doing a couple of things here in my studio, streaming a performance, talking on panels with Will Thomas, who produced it with me, about the process. That was really helpful—and I felt, in a sense, it got out there. After that, I thought, "OK, now we're going to be here for a while. How do I navigate this?"

The first thing that I did was to connect with nature. I got into watching the birds in my backyard, putting up feeders and a fountain. There's a park near me where I'd go for walks. And I took this huge solace from connecting with nature in Chicago. I live just west of Lincoln Square, so I can walk along the river, and

it was very comforting to me.

Then my world just got smaller. At some point, I stopped reaching out to as many friends to try and connect, because it was too hard. And I kind of focused on family. Now it feels like we're all emerging, and it's so super interesting. I feel like we're all going through this together.

I did play a show at Constellation in August—Mike Reed did an amazing job of getting his place up to code. And that was right when things started opening up again. I even wrote on my set list, "First post-COVID show." It was the first time since March that I was able to play in front of people. And then we all went back into lockdown after that.

But a year without music venues, without audiences, without seeing other people play has really made me realize how important that is for me, living here in Chicago—how deep the scene is here, and how connected we are to each other and how we feed off each other. It was that way when I came here in '92, and it's still that way. I feel really grateful for the people who come to the shows, for the venues that are here, and for the other musicians I get to play with and see play.

I'm really excited for these shows at the Empty Bottle, because I get to play with three of my favorite musicians: Sam Wagster, who I've known a long time and is going to be playing pedal steel; Nora Barton, who is also a cellist; and Billie Howard, who's on piano and violin.

When we were locked down, I went on the roof of the Empty Bottle and played a show. So what a great thing, to celebrate being at this club that gave me a place to play when there really wasn't any place to play. When I was first coming up with Helen Money material, they always gave me a place to play then too. I almost feel like the past year I was in a coma, and I've woken up out of the coma. I have my life back, and I just appreciate it so much.

During lockdown, I started following people online more. I was able to actually collaborate online with a musician I have always admired, Thalia Zedek, who started the band Come and is also on Thrill Jockey. She reached out to ask if I could do a couple arrangements for her. If it wasn't lockdown, maybe she would've had

a local musician, but because everyone was doing this remotely, it became an opportunity.


And then Jason Narducy, the guy who was in my very first band in Chicago, Verbow, reached out to me and asked if I wanted to do arrangements on a couple of his songs for his new album with Split Single. That was really cool for me, because I haven't done anything with Jason since probably 2010. It was a really nice way to reconnect. And because I'd invested a little money in my setup here at my home, I was able to just record here and send the files.

It was interesting that people were buying music during the pandemic; they were seeking out stuff. Music brought people a lot of comfort and release, and so they were buying music and they were streaming.

I knew that people were buying my record, which is really awesome. And when I was streaming performances, people would be there watching. I'd be upstairs playing my set in my bedroom, and my husband would be downstairs, and he'd say, "God, I saw all these people, all these hearts and smiles and reactions." In that way, I still felt I was connecting with people, even though there weren't people in front of me. I'd get nervous—I think the way to really enjoy streaming concerts is to not feel like it's trying to take the place of a live show. It's just connecting in another way.

I'm actually going to be doing material from all five of my records during these shows. The *Atomic* material still feels current to me, and getting back into the other stuff has been really interesting. There's a song on *Become Zero* called "Blood and Bone," which I'm really excited to have Nora and Billie play with me on. I've always done it with my loopers, so it will be great to have them play—and it'll all be live. Sam's going to help me play some songs I haven't played before, "Something Holy" and "Radiate," which are really hard for me to perform by myself.

There'll be like a core from *Atomic*, and then I'll bring in other songs from the other albums, different ones each night. It's a lot to pull together, but I think it'll be really fun.

I'm still gathering all the material for the shows, so I'm just gonna make sure a lot of people know about them. For me, they're going to be super special. I remember when I did that show at Constellation in August, and I walked through the door—I love that club—and I got chills. "Oh my God, I'm in a club!" So I'm hoping everybody will be really happy to be together at these shows. 

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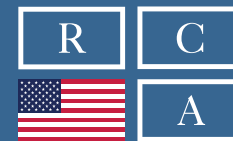
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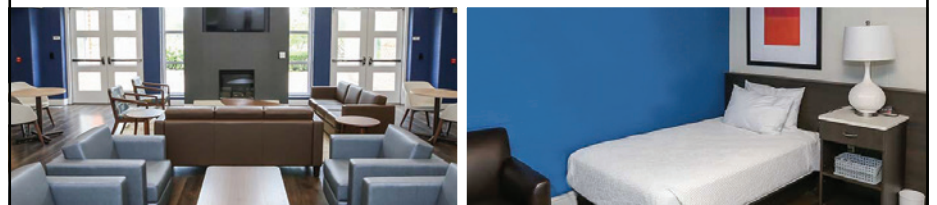


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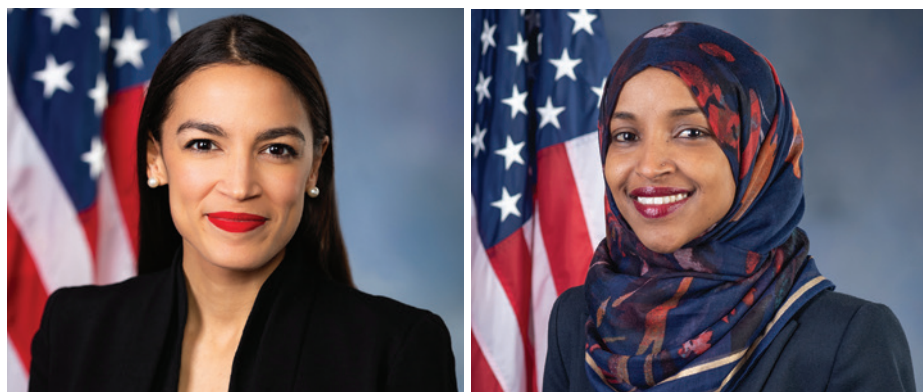
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Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar, two founding members of the Squad
FRANMARIE METZLER; KRISTIE BOYD

NATIONAL POLITICS

What happened to the Squad?

Their collapse shows change won't come from within the Democratic Party.

By **LEONARD C. GOODMAN**

Leonard C. Goodman is a Chicago criminal defense attorney and co-owner of the Reader.

I signed up for the COVID-19 vaccine on a public health website and got my two shots at a Salvation Army facility on the northwest side of Chicago. The site was efficiently and competently run. The experience provided a small glimpse into how a true national health-care system—like they have in other developed countries—might look and feel. No one demanded to see my insurance card or sent me a bill.

Of course, the reality of the U.S. health-care system bears no resemblance to the system that delivered vaccine shots. Millions of Americans can't afford to see a doctor when they get sick, either because they have no insurance, or because their insurance is substandard and they can't afford the thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket deductibles and copays. One in four Americans avoids necessary medical care due to cost, while two-thirds of U.S. bankruptcies are caused by medical bills.

Despite promises during the campaign to reform the system, the election of a Democrat to the White House in 2020 has not brought us closer to universal health care. The Democratic Party markets itself as a champion of the issue, but this is just propaganda. Behind the scenes, the party rakes in health-care industry cash and protects industry profits. For example, instead of just paying health-care bills directly, the government pays health

insurance companies to issue policies, with no guarantee that the recipients will receive actual care when they get sick.

In the last election cycle, Democrats outpaced Republicans in collecting donations from the health-care sector. Democrats hauled in \$286.5 million from health insurance companies, big pharma, and hospitals, compared to \$165 million for Republicans. President Biden led the pack in individual recipients from the industry, collecting \$60.8 million compared to \$30.4 million for Trump.

In the House, 125 Democrats have signed on as cosponsors of a single payer bill, also known as Medicare for All, or M4A. But this bill, originally introduced in 2017, has never cleared a single committee, much less made it to the House floor for public debate or a vote. As the Huffington Post explained in a revealing article, the act of cosponsoring a populist bill like M4A in today's Washington, D.C., doesn't necessarily mean the lawmaker supports the bill. Oftentimes their sponsorship is just *aspirational messaging*, meaning they support the idea of universal health care, so long as there is no chance of the bill becoming law. The likelier single payer is to become law, the more some Democrats—who once viewed supporting it as a cost-free gesture—will have second thoughts about putting their names behind a bill that is so strongly opposed by major donors to the party.

Our health-care system—designed to maximize profit—barely functions in the best of times. Now in the pandemic, the wheels have

come off. Millions of Americans have lost their employer-provided health insurance. Others, as the *New York Times* reported last month, have found their lives and finances upended by medical bills resulting from a bout with the virus. And even healthy Americans with good insurance are starting to see that a health-care system that discourages sick people from going to the doctor is highly problematic and puts us all in danger.

Consequently, M4A is more popular than ever, favored by 85 percent of Democratic voters, and about half of Republican voters. Yet Democratic party leadership still refuses to even hold hearings on the bill. Biden's plan to deal with the crisis is to give more taxpayer money to health insurance company giveaway programs like COBRA and the ACA.

Early in the pandemic, President Trump promised to have the government pay everybody's COVID bills. This promise quickly vanished after health insurance companies saw it as a major threat to their industry. If Americans saw our government paying COVID bills, they might demand the same for other illnesses. Then pretty soon we will have M4A and no one would need private insurance. To stave off the threat, insurance companies volunteered to cover COVID bills. But then, as the *New York Times* reported, the insurers gamed the system to protect their profits, first by manipulating billing codes to avoid coverage of COVID-related illnesses, and then by just declaring COVID over and ending the program. Meanwhile Congress has done nothing to protect working people buried in medical debt.

What happened to the Squad?

Just a few years ago, Democratic voters elected a group of progressives who promised to go to Washington, D.C., and start a political revolution. Led by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) of New York, the "Squad" promised to take on the corporate wing of the Democratic Party and fight for programs that benefit working people over the donor class. First on their list was M4A.

It is sad to report that in just a few short years, the Squad has collapsed into a puddle of excuses and Twitter spats. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has demanded all hands on deck to protect the party's donors in this unique time of crisis. And the Squad has fall-

en in line.

As I wrote in a previous column, because of the Democrats' slim majority in the House, just a handful of progressives had the power to demand a vote on M4A, if they chose to exercise that power on behalf of working people. AOC and her colleagues did not force a vote on M4A. Instead, they stood with Pelosi and the donors in keeping the bill off the floor of the House.

The Squad did finally coordinate their votes last month. But it was not to help working people. Rather, three out of six Squad members, including AOC, agreed to vote "present" to assure passage of a bill to increase funding for the Capitol police. All six members of the Squad told activist groups that they opposed the bill. AOC and the other abstainers spent a year chanting and tweeting that the police should be defunded. But then behind closed doors, they coordinated their votes so the bill could pass by a one-vote margin.

Even worse, the Squad have run interference for President Biden, discouraging their millions of followers on social media from demanding that he keep his campaign promises. Biden has already abandoned every promise he made to working people, including a \$15 minimum wage, a public option to compete with the for-profit insurance industry, forgiveness of student loan debt, lowering of the Medicare eligibility age, and a promise to negotiate drug prices. Yet AOC asserted that Biden has exceeded her expectations while Representative Pramila Jayapal gave Biden an "A" grade for his performance thus far.

What passes for the left in the Democratic Party has mastered the art of performative resistance. They tweet out antiestablishment rhetoric. But behind closed doors, they play for Team Blue, which means they play for Team UnitedHealthcare, Team Humana, and Team Raytheon.

The collapse of the Squad shows that change will not come from inside the Democratic Party. The two corporate parties that control Washington, D.C., are rotten to the core. It is a fool's errand to think that we can make the Democrats fight for working people while the party's major donors are telling them to keep the status quo. It's time for progressives to walk away from the Democratic Party and support a third party that is free of corporate influence. **✎**

[@GoodmanLen](https://twitter.com/GoodmanLen)

GROWING FOR GOOD with Green Thumb

Automatic expungement: Did the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act expunge my record?



Featuring Brandon Williams, Supervising Attorney at Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA).

Q: In our last interview, you mentioned that the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act “automatically” expunged a number of cannabis non-convictions and convictions. Can you explain further what this means?

Brandon Williams: The word “automatic” is kind of a misnomer because the process is not really automatic, especially compared to places like California where they’ve worked with groups like Code for America to automate the process.

A lot has to go into expunging a record in Illinois and, right now, the only process that’s automatic involves cannabis non-convictions—where someone was just arrested, released without charges, or the case was dismissed.

The Act automatically expunged law enforcement records, but not court records. Court records for cannabis non-convictions unfortunately were not included in the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act, so people still have to file a petition to expunge their court record. That’s a big distinction that most people may not know about.

Q: Could an amendment to the Act fix the law to include both law enforcement records and court records?

BW: Yes, it’s possible. Cabrini Green Legal Aid has already been working with legislators on how to close that loophole. And there are other loopholes in other parts of the expungement process in the Act that we’re trying to get covered as well.

Q: And can a person find out if their cannabis record was automatically expunged?

BW: That’s another good question. Right now, they really won’t know. Depending on what area you fall in regarding the expungement process for cannabis, the Illinois State Police are supposed to make available a court disposition record. But Illinois State Police don’t have those types of documents, so I’m not sure why that was written into the law.

There are two ways people can find out if their record was automatically expunged. They can contact their local County Clerk’s office at www.cookcountyclerk.org or contact-us to reach the Cook County Clerk’s office in English, Spanish, Mandarin, or Polish. Or, they can get a new copy of their criminal

history transcript or RAP sheet. In Chicago, they can get their RAP sheet from the Chicago Police Department for \$16. Information about CPD’s hours of operation can be found at www.home.chicagopolice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Informational-Guide.pdf. If the record has been expunged, it will not be reported on the RAP sheet.

Q: Does the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act automatically seal my record?

BW: Expungement is for non-convictions and sealing is for convictions. The automatic process the state police are supposed to take care of is for minor cannabis non-convictions.

For any minor cannabis convictions, on the other hand, the process is not automatic but the records can be expunged without the person having to take any action in one of two ways: One, the Illinois Prison Review Board will recommend a pardon for the cannabis conviction to Governor Pritzker. Once the Governor grants the pardon, the Attorney General will file a petition to expunge the conviction. Or, two, the local State’s Attorney’s office can file a Motion to Vacate and Expunge. Kim Foxx, Cook County’s State’s Attorney, has filed more than 1,000 Motions to Vacate and Expunge for some cannabis convictions and is scheduling scores more to be heard almost weekly. In addition, people with cannabis records can also file their own Motion to Vacate and Expunge.

If you want help figuring out which bucket you fall into, go to NewLeafIllinois.org to get connected with pro bono services that will help you move through the process.



This is a sponsored content series, paid for by Green Thumb Industries. Submit YOUR questions on expungement and record-sealing in Illinois to socialequity@gtigrows.com. Learn more about Cabrini Green Legal Aid at www.CGLA.net and Code for America at www.codeforamerica.org.

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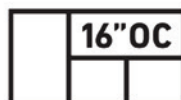
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Author Talk
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Fatimah Asghar

Author

Fatimah Asghar is a poet, filmmaker, educator, and performer. Her work has appeared in many journals, including *POETRY Magazine*, *Gulf Coast*, *BuzzFeed Reader*, *The Margins*, *The Offing*, *Academy of American Poets*, and many others. Her work has been featured in outlets like *Al Jazeera*, *Elle*, *W Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *PBS*, *NPR*, *Time*, *Teen Vogue*, *Huffington Post*, and others. She is the writer and co-creator of *Brown Girls*, an Emmy-nominated web series that highlights friendships between women of color. In 2017, she was awarded the Ruth Lily and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation and was featured on the 2018 *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list. Asghar's debut book of poems, *If They Come For Us*, was released by One World/Random House in August 2018 to much acclaim. Along with Safia Elhillo, she is the editor of *Halal If You Hear Me*, an anthology that celebrates Muslim writers who are also women, queer, gender nonconforming, and/or trans. She is a frequent collaborator with singer/songwriter Jamila Woods, directing music videos for "Eartha" and "SULA (Paperback)." Asghar directed Jidenna's "Sufi Woman" as well as wrote and directed her first narrative piece, a short film titled *Got Game?* that was released in May 2020.



Sujay Kumar

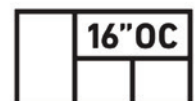
Moderator

Sujay Kumar is co-editor in chief of the *Chicago Reader*. He also fact checks for *Columbia Global Reports*. He previously edited at *The Daily Beast*, *Newsweek*, and *Fusion*.

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SAVAGE LOVE

If your man outsources stalking you, then dump him

Sometimes the solution is simple: run.

By DAN SAVAGE

Q: I've been living with my boyfriend for a year. We met on FetLife and I was honest about being in an open relationship (at the time) and seeking a sexual connection over a relationship. But one nut after another and pretty soon we were professing our love for each other and he shared that he wanted to be the father of my children. However, right before he moved in I found out he was still texting other women despite asking me not to text, sext, or have sex with any other men. He also regularly "yucks my yum" and makes fun of the types of porn I watch and calls it "gross" (my thing for cuckolding being his main target) and he also insists men can't be friends with women, yet he's still friends with women he's had sex with. He hides the fact he is masturbating from me but expects to participate



in all my masturbation sessions. He claims we have no sexual secrets but I snooped and learned he was looking at porn with titles like "TS," "sissy," "gay," and "BBW Black." It makes me feel small because of the nagging feeling I may not be his cup of tea since he hides these other interests from me while not allowing me to hide anything from him. I also worry that his "affection" for my black BBW ass may be no different than his objectification of trans women. He says he doesn't want to "burden" me with "rapey" sex play but I am open to all kinds of sex, not just the softcore-porn type—so long as he doesn't start by rubbing my boobs like they're doorknobs. I am at my wits' end. I already e-mailed an LGBTQIA+ friendly couples counselor because we are both scared the relationship will end. But

I can't keep turning a blind eye to his half-truths, double standards, and hypocrisy.
—FEELING EXTREMELY TENSE

A: BREAK UP.

This guy sounds like equal parts asshole and mess. And he needs to work on that—he needs to clean up his mess—on his own. You can't do the work for him, FET, and I would urge you to resist the urge to use the relationship as leverage. Because by staying in this relationship despite his half-truths, his double standards, and his hypocrisies—by sticking around to be shamed and manipulated—you're sending him a message that says, "It's fine, you're fine, we're fine." Perhaps I shouldn't say, "You're sending him a message," because this shit isn't your fault, FET. But he will self-servingly interpret your willingness to stay and work on the relationship—

JOE NEWTON

as if the relationship is the problem here—as proof that he doesn't need to do something about his own shit. He will assume he can continue to get away with being a controlling, manipulative, and sex-shaming asshole . . . because he's getting away with it.

When your current boyfriend "yucks your yum," when he says the porn you like is gross, he's projecting the shame he feels about all the non-normative (but perfectly wonderful) stuff that turns him on. When someone vomits their shame all over you, FET, getting yourself out of vomit range is your best option. And for the record: I don't think your boyfriend is a mess because he's interested in more kinds of sex than he admits or more types of women than just your type of woman or dudes or power games that touch on gender roles and/or taboos. And the fact that he's hiding his attraction to trans women from you isn't by itself proof that he objectifies trans women, FET, or that he's objectifying you. You don't know how he would interact (or how he has interacted) with a trans partner. What you do know is he treats you like shit and makes you feel bad about yourself and demands transparency from you without being transparent in return. DTMFA.

P.S. Please don't let his shitty comments about your turn-ons lead you to doubt your desirability—just the fact that you're into cuckolding makes you something of a prize, FET, as there are easily a hundred times as many men into cuckolding as there are women. It wouldn't take you long to replace a guy who shames you for being into cuckolding with a guy who absolutely worships you

for it.

P.P.S. I don't think you had grounds to snoop, FET, or a need to snoop. You knew everything you needed to know about this guy before you found his secret undeleted browser history. Insisting you cut your male friends and exes out of your life was reason enough to end this relationship.

Q: I'm an out 26-year-old gay man with a 30-year-old boyfriend who is not out. That's fine. Everyone gets to come out at their own pace. We have been together for three years and lived together for two. Which is also fine. I like living with him. But he "jokingly" calls me his "faggy roommate" and sometimes puts me down about being gay when we are around mutual friends so people won't think he's gay. —JUST OVER KEEPING EVERYTHING SECRET

A: NO.

Everyone gets to come out at their own pace—sure, OK, I guess, whatever. But closeted adult gay men don't get to heap insults on their out gay sex partners in order to throw mutuals off the scent. (The scent of cock on their breath.) Unless you get off on this treatment and wrote in to brag (not a single question mark detected in your e-mail), JOKES, you need to DTMFCCA. ("Dump the motherfucking closet case already.")

Q: I'm a fit and healthy 66-year-old woman. (Vegan 53 years and have never been sick a day in my life!) I've been told I look 40ish—so not too bad! I was married for 20 years and then sat on the bench without so much as one date for 18 years because I was a hardworking single mom of three kids. So I met a guy about six years ago. I was dating around a bit at the time and figured he was too. Well, I later found

out he had me "checked out and followed" and even hacked my computer, where he found a couple of sexy e-mails to another guy. We were not exclusive at the time and years later—six years later—he throws the details of one particular e-mail I sent to another in my face every chance he gets. He has actually told me he was dating other women when we first met. Of course he was! No big deal at all but it irks me that he hired someone to follow my every move! (He even accused me of getting paid for sex and said he had proof! Totally false!) We have been engaged and I am holding back from marrying him. Otherwise he is good to me. What's the deal here?
—ENGAGED DAME GROWS EDGY

A: RUN.

This is emotional abuse—hurling that none-of-his-business e-mail in your face every chance he gets—and it's gonna get worse if you marry him. This kind of shit always gets worse after the wedding, e.g. it gets worse once getting away from someone like this requires lawyers and court dates. DTMFA. There's a huge difference between the kind of lapse in judgment that might prompt someone to snoop and hiring a private investigator to track someone's movements. Someone who would do that—someone who would essentially outsource stalking you—isn't a person you're obligated to break up with face-to-face or sit down with to give them "closure." Prioritize your safety, EDGE. A text message and a block are all the closure he needs and far more consideration than he deserves. ☒

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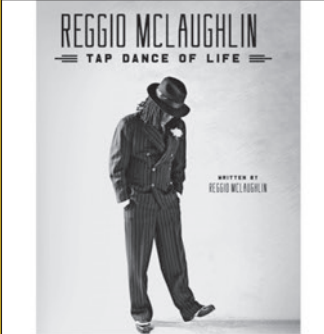
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