

JUNE 8, 2021 • VOL XII • ISSUE #12

# GRAB MAGAZINE

CHICAGO'S BIWEEKLY LGBTQ PUBLICATION

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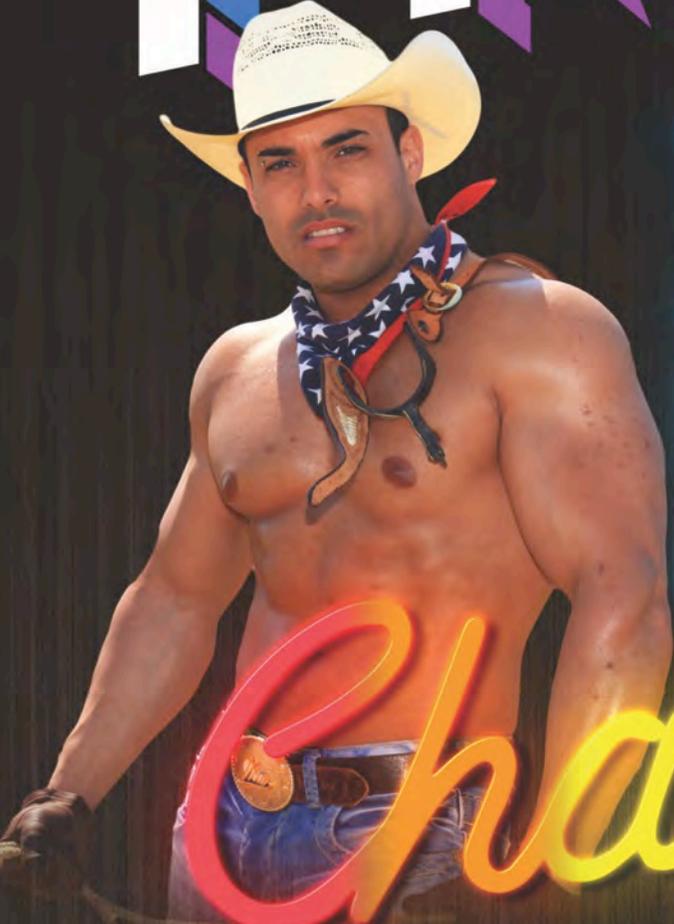
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***PRIDEChicago is announcing a new date for the 2021 Chicago Pride Parade:***

*Sunday, October 3, 2021*

*The Parade will begin at 12 Noon.*

*The Parade route will remain the same as past years:*

*Beginning at Montrose and Broadway and then moving south on Broadway to Halsted and continuing south on Halsted to Belmont where it turns east to Broadway and then south on Broadway to Diversey where it again turns east on Diversey to the end point at Cannon Drive.*

*We anticipate that everything else will remain the same as in past years.*

*Please understand that this is a ONE TIME change in the date for the Pride Parade. This was made necessary by COVID-19 and concerns for the safety of participants and onlookers were a parade to take place in June of this year.*

*Next year the Pride Parade will take place on Sunday, June 26, 2022.*

*This year's parade takes place at the beginning of LGBTQ History Month. We will be celebrating our part in that history and encourage everyone to explore our LGBTQ history and see how we reached where we are today and the LGBTQ people from the past who helped to make it happen.*

*We also encourage everyone to celebrate June Pride Month. Take part in Pride Month events whether in person or virtual.*

*We will be sending out Pride Parade applications mid to late June.*

*We look forward to a Happy Pride Month and, for this year, a Happy Pride Parade at the start of LGBTQ History Month.*

*Times are better, but still be safe.*

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*Sincerely,  
Tim Frye  
2021 Pride Parade Coordinator*



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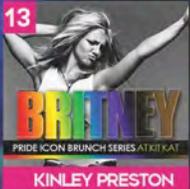
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# GRAB TOM & DANIEL

MUSIC



## Bear Trax

By William Cooke

Everyone knows Tom Goss crushes on plus-sized gay men, especially the nerdy ones that dig superheroes and video games. He sang about his too legit to quit love last summer

in the smash anthem, “Nerdy Bear.” Now he returns with a reinterpretation of the song, but from the bear’s perspective! Nerdy Bear: the Markaholic Remix raises the BPMs and features hot-new rhymes by the gay community’s ultimate nerdy bear, Mean Girl and Looking actor Daniel Franzese.

Franzese wittily weaves his own raps in the song. Many turn up the naughtiness on popular arcade games from the 80s. He gets playful with the shapes from Tetris, the cherries in Pac-Man and the mushrooms in Mario Brothers. The idea is not just about getting laughs, though. It is meant to convey the confidence Franzese and others in the gay bear community have built by not only accepting their girth, but embracing it.

We spoke with the fab duo from their homes in LA.

**William Cooke: Whose idea was it to come together on the Nerdy Bear remix?**

**Daniel Franzese:** Tom played the original for me last summer and I loved it right away and immediately suggested we should make a remix.

**Tom Goss:** When Danny said he had an idea for a rapping remix, I was all ears. I love working with him and I’ve always wanted to work with Markaholic, as well. It seemed like a perfect opportunity to get all of us together make something campy and dance-y.

**WC: We don’t often hear of gay, nerdy and hairy plus sized men as sex objects.**

**Tom:** That’s the point! But the song’s not really about sexualizing plus sized men as much as it is plus sized men being seen and represented. I don’t want anyone to feel alone, unseen, unloved or undesired.

**Daniel:** Yes, representing everyone in the queer community is important.





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**WC: Did you ever feel shame associated with your body?**

**Daniel:** I can never claim to understand what it's like to be a trans person but I can certainly empathize with feeling like I was born in the wrong body. Society and the media are constantly telling plus sized people that we are wrong for being the shapes that we are.

**WC: Were you a large kid?**

**Daniel:** I was chubby but nowhere near as big as I felt myself being. Body dysmorphia is real.

**WC: Tom, is there anything about your body that you felt shame over at one point in your life?**

**Tom:** Absolutely. I was the chubby kid in my family before becoming a gymnast and then wrestler. Both sports emphasized being as small as possible which led to a non-stop quest for body perfection and eventually, body dysmorphia, too.

**WC: Have you overcome the shame?**

**Tom:** I wouldn't say that I've "overcome" anything. It's all a process. Some days I am better at self-love than others. I do my best to cut myself slack and see the things that I love about my body, but it's not always easy.

**WC: How did your shape impact your coming out experience?**

**Daniel:** Growing up, I never felt like I belonged anywhere because I was gay. Then I came out and the gay community wasn't so welcoming either. The community isn't always kind to large people. I remember thinking, If I don't belong with the LGBTQ community either, then where do I belong?



Photo By Dusti Cunningham

**WC: Tom, when did you discover your affinity for large, hairy men?**

**Tom:** All my friends in high school and college were my teammates; all were hyper fit. I was showering with them every day and I didn't find myself

attracted to them. It wasn't until I finished college and got out into the world that I became close to, and realized I was attracted to, men of size. I fell in love with a friend of mine. He was a chubby, nerdy, shy and sensitive man. I found that combination

irresistible from the start.

**WC: Daniel, is Tom a rarity?**

**Daniel:** Tom is one and a million!

**WC: Do you get hit on by skinny dudes?**

**Daniel:** These days I do. I think all kinds of guys are attracted to my size because of the confidence I carry with it.

**WC: What role does your celebrity play in that confidence?**

**Daniel:** None. I'm not one to pop bottles at the club! Maybe it's an ice breaker at time, but I tend to go for guys who are less familiar with my work.

**WC: Do you like being seen as a sex object?**

**Daniel:** Sure! Being desired makes you feel good. Who doesn't want that? One thing I really love is when hot guys comment sexy things on my Instagram. I think it shows other big dudes there are guys out there that find them hot.

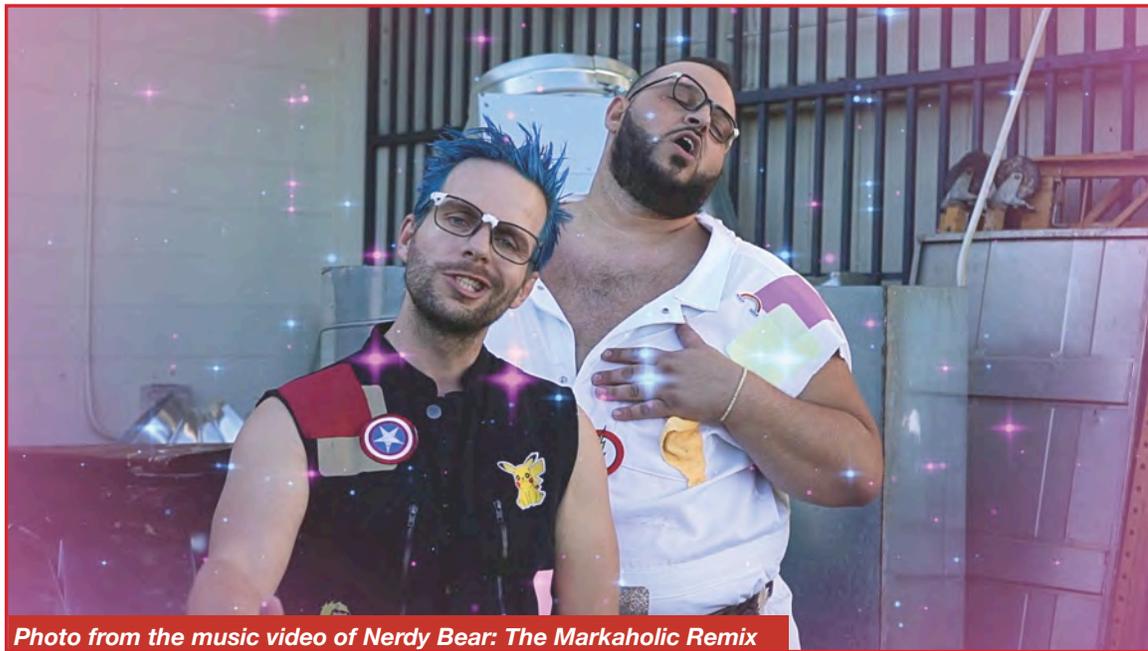


Photo from the music video of Nerdy Bear: The Markaholic Remix

**WC: Are you guys planning to tour the song this summer?**

**Tom:** What a great idea!

**Daniel:** I would be so down if the world is ready!

In fact, I am releasing a new single and video called "Pride" that celebrates all those who came before us and made our pride possible.

**WC: How will you each celebrate Pride this year?**

**Daniel:** With gratitude for awesome people in my chosen family, like Tom.

**Tom:** I will celebrate, in gratitude of the good people who made pride possible.

*Tom Goss's "Nerdy Bear: The Markaholic Remix (featuring Daniel Franzese)" is available on iTunes, Spotify and all major digital platforms. Its music video is on Youtube.*



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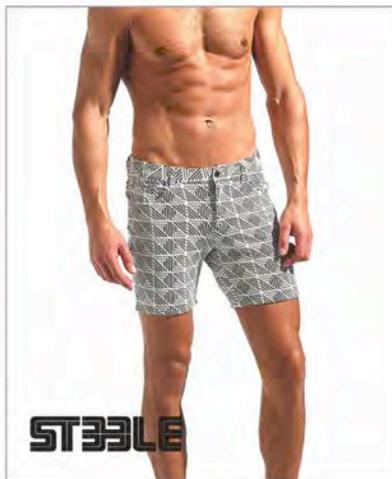
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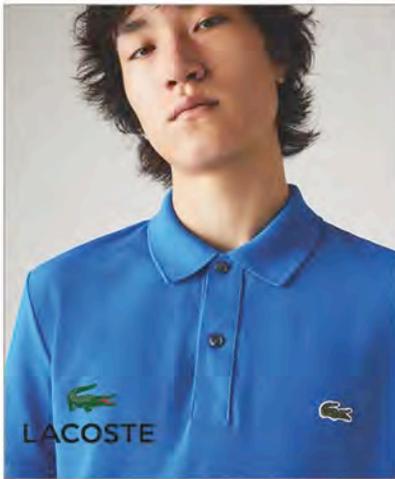
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# GRAB RITA

FILM



Photo Courtesy-of-Roadside-Attractions

## Best side story: An interview with Rita Moreno

By Gregg Shapiro

How fortunate are we to be alive at the same time as Rita Moreno? Groundbreaking actress, writer, activist, dancer, mother, singer, feminist, Latina and EGOT. The recipient of two Emmy Awards (for *The Rockford Files* and *The Muppet Show*), a Grammy Award (for *The Electric Company* cast album), an Oscar (*West Side Story*) and a Tony (*The Ritz*), Rita Moreno shows no signs of slowing down at 89. In December 2021, Moreno will be playing Valentina, a role written especially for her, in Steven Spielberg's big-screen remake of *West Side Story*. If you can't wait to see her until then, you are in luck. The documentary *Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It* (Roadside Attractions), is being released in June 2021. Revelatory and celebratory, *Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It* features Rita Moreno front and center, telling her story as only she can. Rita was gracious enough to answer a few questions in advance of the release of the documentary.

**Gregg Shapiro:** Rita, in 2011, your book *Rita Moreno: A Memoir* was published and now, in 2021, the documentary *Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It* is being released. During the 10 years in between, you have continued to be a hard-working actor – appearing in movies as well as sitcoms such as *Jane The Virgin*, *Happily Divorced* and, of course, Norman Lear's *One Day At A Time*. Would it be fair to say that the documentary is a kind of visual extension and update of the book?

**Rita Moreno:** Actually, it is a kind of visual extension, and definitely (an) update of the book. Except to say that there's a lot more detail in this. It's important to know, for the viewers, that I made a promise to myself, once I decided I was going to take part in the documentary, that I would be as truthful as I could possibly be. I did not want to pull any punches whatsoever and I paid the price because [laughs] I was asked

very serious and difficult questions. But you can be sure that everything I said in this wonderful documentary – by the way, I think it's marvelous – is absolutely the truth.

**GS:** In addition to being the director of the documentary, Mariem Riera is also the mother of Marcel Ruiz, one of your *One Day At A Time* co-stars. How did everyone involved know that she was the right person to helm the documentary project?

**RM:** The reason Mariem was chosen as the director is really very simple. For one thing, on her behalf I'll say this, she had been studying me for months doing the series *One Day at a Time*, so she got to know me very well, simply from observation. Of course, being the mother of the young man who plays my grandson helped a great deal because I had a great relationship with him. She decided one day when she heard that a documentary was going to be done about my life, she went to Brent Miller,

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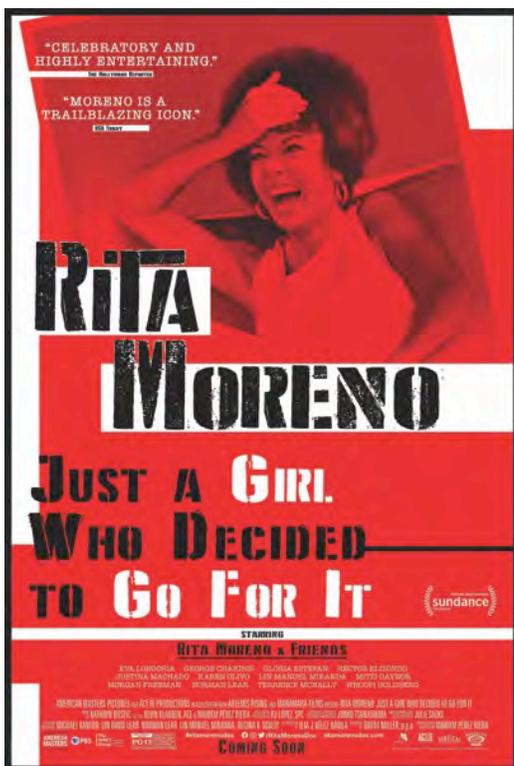
one of our producers, and Norman Lear's (producing) partner and said, "I would like to be considered." They said, "Great. You know what to do." So she made a whole, I don't know what they

call this in that business, but she made a whole kind of storyline of what she wanted to do. I think one of the things that really charmed them, as it did me, was the little paper doll Rosita -- me as a young girl. I just love that. I love that little Rosita and I love the conceit. I think they did, too. She also had some super ideas of how to make this very personal. That's where, in a way, it differs from the book because it becomes a living thing, a document. I think she did a marvelous job! I really do. It's gotten huge reviews and even Rotten Tomatoes gave it 100, and we know what that means to most people.

Spanish, that she somehow navigated that journey and helped me through that journey, is simply amazing. My mom was a very brave woman. My mom was the kind of person who had several jobs at one time because she had left Puerto Rico, having divorced her husband, my father, and it was just her and me. She had a very strong constitution. I think I initially got that from her. I don't know that it was something she so much taught me as something that I intuited, and I saw examples of. I've always been kind of strong in that sense. Very sensitive kid. Cried easily. I still get very hurt. I still cry. But I'm able to somehow make my way around that and understand that, more often than not, good will come from bad. It's something I know I got from my mom whether it's genes or observation almost doesn't matter.

**GS: Your identity as an activist is also featured prominently in the documentary. Do you have words of advice or wisdom for future generations of activists?**

**RM:** I think that the most important advice I can give to people who are activists, but activists seem to know this without being told, is to never ever give up. If they believe in something, they will hang on to those beliefs forever, because they're made of that



**GS: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It is the very definition of a journey; from Puerto Rico to New York to Hollywood. From actress to activist, from lover to wife and mother. What do you think it was in your constitution that helped you navigate the journey, through both good and bad times?**

**RM:** I had a remarkable mother. I'm sure everyone says that and, you know what, they're probably right. What was special about my mother is that despite the difficulties of being in a brand-new country where nobody seems to speak



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kind of stuff. So, I would simply say, just hang on to that, because it's wise and it's necessary for you to teach future generations. That wasn't thrilling, but that's all I can think of [laughs].

**GS: The documentary features an extraordinary cross-section of people singing your praises – from politician Jackie Speier to scholars and historians such as Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Julia Foulkes and Annette Insdorf, fellow performers Mitzi Gaynor, Justina Machado, Eva Longoria, Gloria Estefan, Morgan Freeman, George Chakiris, Whoopi Goldberg and Lin-Manuel Miranda, as well as your daughter Fernanda (Gordon Fisher). What was the experience of hearing these people singing your praises like for you?**

**RM:** I think the person that impressed me the most, with respect to saying complimentary things about me, was my daughter. It's not something you do with a mother, rarely. I mean you rarely go around saying, "Oh mom, I love you and I admire you and aren't you the strong one" [laughs]. That doesn't happen. So that when I hear my daughter say those things, I am touched to the very quick. The other people are very important to me because some of these people are people who deal with society, such as the professors. I think that the choice of using these two women to explain what was happening at the time, in social terms, was so important to understanding what this documentary was about.

Because it's really not just about a woman who somehow made her way into movies and sang and danced and was strong and suffered terribly. It's very important for the viewer to understand that these were really hard times. It's a question of setting an example when I never expected to be doing such a thing. That makes me very proud. Proud for the documentary and proud for myself. I also want to say how much I appreciate the people who spoke about me. Mitzi Gaynor, Justina Machado, Eva Longoria, Gloria Estefan. [Laughs] I never knew I would even know such people in my life! It never occurred to me that Gloria Estefan would consider me a friend and a talented actress. Morgan Freeman, George Chakiris, Whoopi Goldberg, for Pete's sake! I didn't know there was such a person as Lin-Manuel Miranda!



Photo Courtesy-of-Photofest

So, I simply want to say how much I appreciated what they said about me, particularly knowing that they went through very similar difficulties. And color sometimes had nothing to do with it. Sometimes it was just a very tough business to be in.

**GS: In *Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It*, you talk about how the late gay playwright Terrence McNally (who is interviewed in the doc), incorporated the Googie Gomez character you created into his play *The Ritz*, for which you won the Tony Award, a role you reprised in the movie version. It made me think about how, in the late 1970s, you were in two gay-themed movies *The Ritz* and *Happy Birthday, Gemini*, something you did before a lot of other actresses did. Can you**

**please say something about your decision to be in those films, as well as your LGBTQ+ fanbase?**

**RM:** Being in two films that had gay themes was really not a difficult decision [laughs]. They were wonderful. They were delicious. They were funny. Being a part of that was just not a big deal. I've had gay friends forever. In fact, let me tell you something. I had the most wonderful little girlfriend as a seven-year-old child. This girlfriend was around for at least seven years of my life and her name was Eddie Lopez. Because I just knew there was something different about him at the time. We had the best time. So I always thought of him as my little girlfriend. I've had an LGBTQ fan base for a long time and it started way before *The Ritz* and the movies. It's just something that is so



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much a part of me. I love the humor. I think gay people are just hilarious and I think they're heartbreaking. I think they're brave and I think they are here forever. Anybody who's unhappy about that, tough titty [laughs]!

**GS: With your show-stopping Best Picture Oscar presentation in April, Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It being released in June, and the forthcoming Steven Spielberg-directed West Side Story remake arriving in December, 2021 is turning out to be an especially big year for you professionally. In Tony Kushner's revised script, you play shop owner Valentina, a gender-swap with the original Doc character. How does it feel to be able to be involved in this project?**

**RM:** I just don't think there are enough words to express my happiness at being in the new West Side Story. Being with Steven Spielberg is a dream come true. I've always loved his work. It has such breadth. He can do almost anything! He can do E.T., he can do Lincoln, and now he's doing something that, by the way, he's wanted to do from the day he saw our original movie. Let me just say that he is brilliant. Oh my God, he's so cinematic!

Some of the shots in this movie are not to be believed. I literally followed him around like a child. He, in turn,

behaved like a child so much, because he loved doing it. He'd say, "Rita, what do you think of this shot?" It was one of the greatest experiences of my life! The set design is incredible. That has everything to do with Steven. He chooses his people. The cinematography is unreal. The young actors are spectacular and here's what really means the most to me. That he and Tony Kushner had a great deal to do with the fact that the Sharks are Hispanic for real. They're not all Puerto Rican; that's not necessary. What's necessary is that they had to be Latinx and they are. That makes me so proud.

Steven and Tony went to the University of Puerto Rico and had a panel. They invited anyone who wanted to come and tell them how they feel about West Side Story. Some people didn't love it. Some people, like the mayor of San Juan at that time, said she was not crazy about it because she felt that the Hispanic kids were depicted in a negative way, being in gangs and all that. I don't think she quite understood, or maybe she did, that it was really Romeo and Juliet. That's what made it so different and so original and so brilliant. But they went there, to the University of Puerto Rico, had a big panel meeting with people who literally just walked in to make demands. "So how are you going to do it?" It mattered so much to them that it be authentic

and if you were going to play a Puerto Rican kid you had to at least be Hispanic. There's a lot that I admire about both of those fellas. I'll never forget being invited. When I spoke to Steven on the phone and he said, "Would you be interested in doing this movie?" I practically dropped the phone. Certainly, my jaw dropped. I said, "Well, yeah. I think so yes." [Laughs] I was peeing my pants, really. Then I said, and good for me for remembering, "I wouldn't want do a cameo. Number one, I think it would be a terrible distraction just to sort of pop in and pop out." He said, "No, it's a real part. You will play Doc's widow. You have a real part in this. It's not a cameo." It was a great day in my life.

**GS: Finally, do you have something special planned for your 90th birthday in December?**

**RM:** It seems that, perhaps, I can actually have a birthday party again. I always had one and I don't think I'll have as many people as I used to have, but I think I'm definitely going to create something very special. It has to be with costumes of some kind. I don't know what that will be yet. I realized that people love to wear costumes, they just love it. So I don't want to disappoint them. But more likely than not, I will be having a 90th birthday party. Ninety, I can't believe it!

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## GRAB RYAN



## Ryan O'Connell Wants You — Yes, You! — to Talk More About Queer People with Disabilities

The 'Special' actor on why his groundbreaking show has felt like a 'bad boyfriend' and gay sex on TV

By Chris Azzopardi

A gay man with cerebral palsy. You won't find that kind of important representation just any time you flick on the TV, which is why Ryan O'Connell's Netflix show "Special" has been uniquely refreshing and profoundly revolutionary.

It began as a memoir — his memoir, entitled "I'm Special: And Other Lies We Tell Ourselves" — and then evolved into a full-fledged, semi-autobiographical dramedy in 2019 on Netflix. He created it, he stars in it, he writes it. And he does so once again with the second and final season, which expands episodes from short bits to sitcom-length servings, with openly gay actor Jim Parsons still producing. During this season, which premieres May 20, lead character Ryan (the actor, who is gay and living with

cerebral palsy himself, shares his name with the title character) continues his journey to self-fulfillment. That path is lined with hiccups involving an open relationship, topping and his relationship with his mother.

Here, O'Connell talks about his honest approach to gay sex (and why he thinks most gay sex on TV is "dire"), deciding to incorporate a storyline on the, uh, shitty part of butt play and how it's important for him to still, after "Special," create stories about people living with disabilities.

**Chris Azzopardi: I'm gonna miss TV Ryan.**

**Ryan O'Connell:** Oh, I know, I know. It's a bummer. But, uh, at least you get more time with him for Season 2, right?

**CA: How're you feeling now that the show has come to an end?**

**RO:** Honestly, it sounds weird to say, but I feel pretty good about it. I mean, obviously, the decision to end the show was not mine, but here's the deal: I'm gonna give you a little blurry timeline of the show. We pitched it in 2015; it took four years to get made. Then it came out April 2019 and took us five months to get renewed and then COVID shut us down. (It took) us two years for Season 2.

So, as amazing as the show has been, and incredible, it's also kinda been like a bad boyfriend. This has been a part of my life for six years, so because we knew from the jump that this was going to be the last season, we were able to really craft, I think, a really



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complete and final season. So from the storyline perspective, it feels totally right. "Special" has been really incredible, but it's been a really, really difficult show to make and it feels like it's always hanging on by a thread and, yeah, I think I'm ready (laughs) for a new anxiety moment.

**CA: Difficult in the sense of you being so involved in every aspect of the show or...?**

**RO:** Well, no. That I love 'cause I'm a Type A Virgo from hell, so that's where I thrive. I refused to do 15 minutes again, so we had to do a whole new deal, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Everything was really protracted and it's been a journey with the show, man. She has not been easy!

**CA: Listen, boyfriends are work too.**

**RO:** They (are), and they give you amazing orgasms sometimes.

**CA: So what you're saying is the payoff was worth it in the end?**

**RO:** The payoff was totally worth it.

**CA: With this season, where do you end and where does the other Ryan begin?**

**RO:** As the show's gone on, the character of Ryan has become less and less like me, especially in Season 2. Season 1, honestly, wasn't really like me either (laughs). I mean, I was never like this character; I was never this arrested development. I moved out of my parents' house at 18 — right on schedule! Lost my virginity at 17 — right on schedule! What I do relate to with this character of Ryan in Seasons 1 and 2 are the emotional themes, like what he's struggling with, this feeling of, "Is he enough?" This struggle with self-worth and independence. That really resonates with me deeply. But in terms of the situations this little goof troop finds

himself in, I don't relate to that.

Like, I would never date someone in an open relash who has all these convoluted rules and be like, "Sure, I can see you Tuesday evening and I'm totally OK with that." I mean, maybe I would've, honestly. I would have done that in my early 20s. But the situation never presented itself to me. But emotionally I get it. I've been through what he's been through.



**CA: I'm calling this season "Ryan's journey to being a dom top."**

**RO:** Oh my. Well, at least emotionally, yeah. And actually, you're right, he does top! Oh my god, you're right! (Laughs.)

**CA: How could you have forgotten?**

**RO:** The metaphor is very thinly veiled, I would say. *Very* thinly veiled.

**CA: And I'm just obviously being as literal as possible.**

**RO:** Well, I think it works both ways, baby. I think Ryan has been emotionally and physically bottoming for a lot of people and this season is all about him coming into his own and asserting what he wants and not apologizing for it. He's not apologizing for taking up space; that's something I really, really relate to.

A couple years ago, I really experienced a shift in terms of realizing how much I was contorting myself to make everyone else around me comfortable while never asking, "Am I comfortable? Do I want to do this?" And then I would see straight, white males waltz around the world with such confidence, engaging their female baristas in non-consensual conversations about their band and my blood would boil because I'd just be like, I can't imagine going into an interaction not fully wondering what the other person is feeling and taking their feelings into account. I feel like I'm so hyperaware of how I'm being perceived and making sure that everyone else around me is OK with who I am. But I really have learned to let go of that completely and I just try to walk around with the confidence of a New York straight, white male. I cosplay as one every day. Not at the coffee shop, though. I leave those baristas alone. They don't need any of this, they don't.

**CA: They're getting enough on their own.**

**RO:** Exactly, exactly. They don't need to hear about my day, I can tell you that right now.

**CA: It sounds like you had a past as a barista...**

**RO:** No! As if I could carry anything, are you kidding me? A barista is a guy with cerebral palsy's worst nightmare. It's like all the things he can't do: hand-eye coordination, like balancing. Oh my god, I would be fired immediately. It would be a lawsuit waiting to happen.

**CA: As for the gay sex on "Special":**



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**It's not the kind of gay sex that's watered the fuck down to make straight people more comfortable, which is why I love it so much.**

**RO:** Yes, it's definitely ... you can tell it's written and performed by a gay person. And also, I've been very vocal about how I only hire gay actors to play gay roles and people are like, "Um, it's called acting, ever heard of it? That's their literal job." And I'm like, "Honey, sweetie, darling, baby, that's not what this is about. I understand, I'm very aware of what acting means, but we don't live in a world where there's an equal playing field and that's why I wanna give people opportunities to get parts, because not a lot of people are giving them those opportunities." And also, from a selfish point of view, it's much easier to shoot a gay sex scene with a gay actor than it is a straight actor. I don't wanna fucking explain the mechanics of gay sex to a straight actor. Life is too short, honey.

**CA: Somebody had to say it.**

**RO:** Yeah. But we definitely pushed the envelope. And then we cum all over it for Season 2 in terms of sex. Sex is my muse, for better or for worse. I just don't understand why the representation of gay sex has been so dire. It's either

hypersexualized and very porny and erotic, or it's done in a tent, off-camera, and you just hear lots of grunting and moaning.

So it was really nice to *not* do any of that and also not have sex that's cloaked in shame or secrecy. I'm not saying that there's not value to those stories 'cause it is a part of our existence, but I think we've reached a point where I'm like, "OK, I'm ready for us to level up for gay storytelling." I'm interested now in stories that don't revolve around our trauma and our pain, or that include our trauma and pain but also include like, you know, anal sex jokes. We contain multitudes.

**CA: Season 2 also explores the pleasures of being gay.**

**RO:** Which there are so many. You couldn't pay me to be straight, it's horrifying. So I just think it's really, really important that we tell a different kind of story, 'cause I think we've earned it and I think we're ready.

**CA: From what I know, this season was shot entirely during the pandemic, which means the sex scenes were also shot during the pandemic. Is that right?**

**RO:** The first four episodes were shot

pre-COVID. So what I'm saying is they were real (laughs). And then COVID came along and we're like, "Oh no, I guess we have to fake it." Just kidding! The first four episodes were done pre-COVID. It's so funny watching the first four episodes 'cause I feel like I have a literal record of the last month of the world before it changed aerobically forever. It's so eerie. But again, with me and Max Jenkins, Max is a friend of mine and I've known him for a long time and there's just a level of comfort between the two of us that, again, is another benefit of just shooting with gay friends. There's this ease that I feel I wouldn't have with some rando straight stranger. So I don't feel like the pandemic actually made the sex scenes suffer. And I know that some people were cutting sex scenes throughout the pandemic, and I was like, "This is the DNA of the show." Like, I can't. I was like, "I will die on this literal sex hill." Truly. Like, literally die. When we talk about dying for your art, I didn't realize I was going to be really metabolizing that in a literal sense for block two of shooting, but here we were, baby, here we were.

**CA: And those sex scenes, even for gay actors, are still pretty**



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**choreographed, right?**

**RO:** Yeah, it is. Again, when you're doing it with another gay guy, it's pretty intuitive and very easy to construct because we've all done it and we've all been there. It's not like "Building a Mystery" by Sarah McLachlan.

**CA: On the topic of sex, I want to say that I really appreciate the storyline involving anal sex and poop.**

**RO:** Oh my god, I know. Why has no one talked about that? That's crazy.

**CA: Well, this is why we're gonna talk about it. I want to know everything about that bit in the show, and mostly why you decided to write a storyline involving the part of butt sex so few gay men talk about.**

**RO:** Well, because it happened to me when I was 17, losing my virginity: I shit on my boyfriend-at-the-time's dick and, again, there was no reference point for anal sex in 2004. There just wasn't anything; there was no Netflix series tackling it (laughs) with care. So you kind of had to wing it. And, uh, anal sex was really intense!

I remember the first few times we tried fucking, it hurt too bad 'cause I don't think we even realized lube was a thing. I mean, it was all very weird, it

was a DIY affair. Then, finally, when I did my emotional exercises and was ready to do it, then that's when I had the accident and I remember thinking, "Oh my god, is my asshole broken? Is this like a cerebral palsy thing? Like, what the fuck is going on?"

I remember Googling — or I don't even know if there was Google, but whatever it was in 2004 — "Anal. Shit. Sex." Nothing really came up. So I remember feeling a lot of shame about that, and I didn't know about douching or anything like that so whenever I have to go through something and suffer, I'm always like, "Wow, this is a nice opportunity for someone who is a teenager who may be thinking about having anal sex for the first time to know that this does happen." Shit happens, literally. And you're not freakish, your asshole is not broken. Honey, it's a part of the fabric of our gay ass lives.

**CA: And in the show, you take the shame out of it, which is great.**

**RO:** Yeah, I actually just thought it was an interesting kind of turn for Tanner (Jenkins) to have the sexual misstep, as it were, and have Ryan not respond in a kind of chic, compassionate way, because Tanner's been kind of compassionate with him and anytime

that Ryan kind of acts in an uninvolved way is very interesting to me. I'm a big advocate that marginalized people exist, but they can also exist as very flawed and not always doing the right thing, 'cause I think, again, we're given this tiny space to exist but we better be virtuous and be magical and wonderful. And so I thought it was an interesting way to make Ryan sort of the asshole, as it were, in the sexual experience with Tanner. I thought it was just an interesting little wrinkle for their doomed relationship.

**CA: Something that I have also never seen on TV: the guy who you meet who fetishizes disability. Were you faced with a situation like that in your own life?**

**RO:** I've never been fetishized, but I've heard about it and I know that it's a thing. I think they're called "devotees," and I thought it was an interesting way to explore Ryan grappling with his self-worth. So it was really important to me that it was very clear that this is a consensual experience. Ryan's not being sexually assaulted. The guy says, "Is this OK?" and Ryan says yes because that's a very real thing that we don't talk about, which is basically sex that you're not comfortable having but

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you don't necessarily have the self-esteem to MacGyver yourself out of it.

**CA: How do you hope "Special" has enlightened people within the LGBTQ+ community, and beyond, who haven't really considered the experiences of someone who is a queer person with a disability?**

**RO:** I hate the word "normal," 'cause what is normal? But so little is discussed in terms of disability. I feel like disabled people often exist on the fringes of our society because they are quite literally shut out, based on this world not being accessible on a very basic level. So I think that the dialogue around disability is happening, but I still think it's not happening to the level that it should and I think people feel uncomfortable when talking about disability. I feel like they're worried about saying the wrong thing. I think with "Special," you know, comedy is the best superpower that I have, that I've used throughout my life to get through it. And I think that when you give people permission to laugh, it creates this general ease and comfort.

Ryan is disabled, but you don't have to be disabled to be feeling the things that he's feeling. So I think it's really just important to show a gay character who doesn't fit the physical ideals. I hope that it normalizes disability and I hope that it adds more texture to the queer experience, because in a lot of ways TV is gayer than ever. I feel like you can't sell a pilot without including a gay guy in there. But I still think that gay men are rarely allowed to be the complicated main course of the show. I think they're often relegated to being the appetizer. So I think it's really important that we show gay men and (their) rich interior life, not just in the context of them, like, shopping or being comedic relief.

**CA: Totally, which is what you do. You accomplish that in Season 2 with Ryan. There's moments when he's not particularly likable.**

**RO:** We're not all likable. I just feel like TV exists in this really binary way where it's either someone is really virtuous or amazing, or they're a fucking asshole. People aren't total assholes, and they're not totally amazing. They exist in between, and I think that's always what I try to show with Ryan and other characters: that, yes, they can act deeply flawed, but they can also be incredible.

**CA: Looking ahead, what kind of**

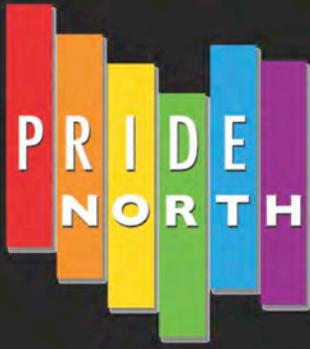


**stories do you want to tell next or be a part of? And in what form: film or television?**

**RO:** Picasso had his Blue Period, and I'm still in my Gay Disabled Period. So, I wrote a novel called "Just By Looking At Him" that is about a gay guy with cerebral palsy who writes for TV. What?! She didn't stray too far for this one! That's being adapted into a movie with Greg Berlanti producing, so I'm gonna be writing that and starring in it, which will be really great. Then I sold a show to HBO Max called "Accessible," which is a teen disabled comedy, which I hope gets picked up to series.

Sometimes I feel like, "Should I really kind of dive into disability again?" or "I've already done that," but the fact is that there's so much that has not been explored and that's what really gets me excited as a storyteller: when you can say things like, "Wow, I've never seen that on TV before."

It's crazy that we're still saying that in 2021. Even though there are approximately 40 million shows on the air, there are things that still have stigma and still have taboo. So I'm only going to be playing in the world of disability for a little bit longer! And we'll see what happens.



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## GRAB LEYNA

## In Full Bloom

### This Trans Actress and Sports Illustrated Model Is Changing the Game for Trans Women of Color

By Chris Azzopardi

Leyna Bloom made a splash this year for being the first Black and Asian openly trans woman to be featured in the annual Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition, out in July. But even before reaching that historical milestone, the 27-year-old Chicago native was changing the game both on the runway and on the screen.

In 2019, Bloom was the only transgender woman of color to walk Paris Fashion Week in 2019 at the Tommy Hilfiger x Zendaya fashion show as part of an all-Black female runway. Then there's her drama "Port Authority," which features Bloom making her major movie debut in a prominent role, positioning the model, actress and activist as the first trans woman of color to lead a feature film at the Cannes Film Festival in the festival's 72-year history. After first premiering at Cannes in 2019, "Port Authority" will expand to VOD on June 1.

In writer-director Danielle Lessovitz's romantic drama, which was executive produced by Martin Scorsese, Bloom plays Wye, a trans woman of color and "femme queen" who encounters Paul (Fionn Whitehead) after he's kicked out of his home in central Pennsylvania. Set against the backdrop of New York's vogue houses and kiki ballrooms is their blossoming love. Bloom's next film, "Asking For It," a film focused on sexism that stars Kiersey Clemons, Ezra Miller, Vanessa Hudgens and Gabourey Sidibe, will premiere this summer at the Tribeca Film Festival. The actress can also be seen as ballroom figure Pretentia Khan in the third and (allegedly) final season of Ryan Murphy's "Pose."

During our recent conversation, the rising trans vanguard got emotional reflecting on making Cannes Film Festival history with "Port Authority." Bloom also talked about drawing on legendary house mother Carmen Xtravaganza for her role on "Pose," her dashed dreams of being in the Navy like

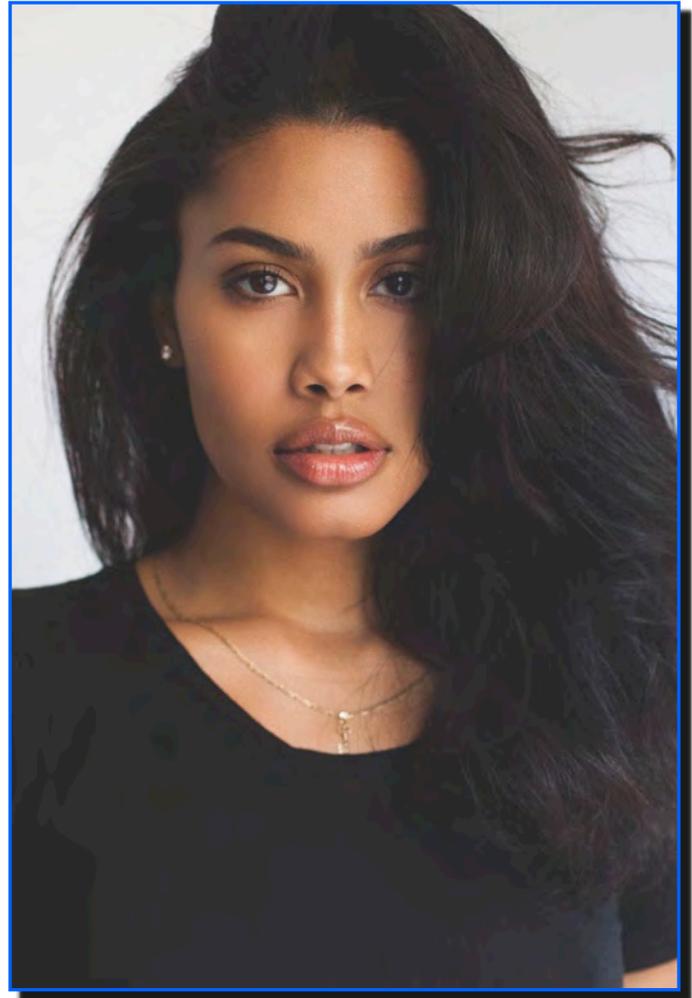
her father, and being celebrated for her groundbreaking Sports Illustrated shoot.

**Chris Azzopardi:** When were you first interested in acting and modeling?  
**Leyna Bloom:**

My great-grandmother was a model. My grandmother and my auntie, her daughters were both models. And my auntie was a dancer; she danced for Sammy Davis Jr. So dance and performing have always been in my blood. I come from two backgrounds, Nigerian and Filipino, which has a very rich background full of dance. So my ancestry and my creativity is all inside my body asking to be released constantly.

Acting has kind of always been kind of part of the plan, just like, "When am I gonna get there, and what script and what project will be the best project for that opportunity?" When "Port Authority" arrived, it was right on time because it was just a dream opportunity to play that character because it is literally the voice and the story of so many trans bodies. So, I'm glad that that was the first opportunity given to me to show the world the future.

**CA: "Port Authority" is the first film in Cannes Film Festival's 72-year history to feature a trans woman of color in a lead role. How do you feel knowing**



**that?**

**LB:** To be able to do something like this, which is my ancestors' wildest dreams, is truly monumental. Why has it taken so long? And what can we do with this moment to make sure that it doesn't take that long for the next person? That's where my mind is always going to be wrapped up in. Because I may be the first, but I will not be the last. I think it's just powerful because just 72 years ago, Black and brown bodies and queer bodies were nonexistent in this space. I think it's just... I don't know. I'm getting so emotional thinking about this.

**CA: Who are some of the people who paved the way for you to feel comfortable to be who you are?**

**LB:** A lot of beautiful women. Carmen Xtravaganza. Halle Berry. Tyra Banks. Tracey "Africa" (Norman). You know, Tyra Banks was the first woman of color to be on the cover of Sports Illustrated, so I'm standing on her shoulders. It's very powerful and I'm so happy that



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("Port Authority," a story about) love was the first reason why we made history. It wasn't about war, it wasn't about pain. It was about love. It was a love story that made history about two people, (featuring a) trans woman, that has been missing in society. That is why it is so important, and that is why we need to continue having more moments like this.

**CA: How much of your own ballroom experience is the experience of your character, Wye, in "Port Authority"?**

**LB:** My experience is very similar. Wye's character comes from a ballroom family where she is getting ready for balls and she is helping her family get ready for balls. Paul's character is actually helping her get ready for balls, so that is very familiar to my lifestyle over the years. I've been (doing) ballroom since I was 15 years old, so I've gotten ready for many balls and prepared myself for many different competitions through the circuit. It's very real, it's very raw, and I love that Danielle wanted to just bring that authenticity to the film.

**CA: I chuckled at the line, "I mean, you could be a model or something,"**

**which Paul says to Wye after she tells him that she was in the Navy. Was that based on your own real-life experience?**

**LB:** My dad was actually in the military. He was a Marine. I was raised in that environment, I was raised around my dad and us living on base, and us traveling to many different bases around the world, and officially being a Marine brat. That was something that we wanted to add to the character. I also wanted to be in the Navy at one point in my life, but because I am trans and because the system is not set up for me to serve my country, I could not do that. So I thought that was a beautiful little piece of nuance.

**CA: How did ballroom culture shape who you are today?**

**LB:** Ballroom just allowed me to see myself in my rawest state and understand that if I wanted to change, it's up to me; it's not up to anyone else. Ballroom is a place where you can find harmony in yourself, in your community. Where you can feel the vibrations of the people that are feeling the pain that you're feeling and can heal together

because of that. So ballroom holds lots of raw energy and power that the world has been exploring at a very small rate. But now ballroom is going to homes around the world, and people are redefining the ideas about themselves and what's around them.

**CA: As for "Pose," were you a fan of the series before you starred in it?**

**LB:** I actually auditioned for "Pose," and a lot of my friends on the show auditioned and got the part. I was a huge fan of any project that was about Black and brown trans women being the centerpiece of the glory of television. So, I'm a huge fan of that show, and I'm so happy I got a chance to be a part of (this) last season.

**CA: How would you describe your character, Pretentia, and what was it like embodying her?**

**LB:** I have so many ideas about her character. Pretentia is kind of like Carmen Xtravaganza, this amazing ballroom icon woman that is Spanish and Black African, and she just inspired me growing up. I wanted to just really bring Carmen back to life through

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Pretentia. She's just a combination of a lot of different strong women that I just grew up loving. She reminds me a lot of Sharon Stone. She had a lot of really strong alpha characters, and I wanted to bring that to Pretentia.

**CA: Tyra Banks has been such a huge supporter of yours. How important is it to have prominent cis people, like Tyra Banks, lift up the trans community? And what does it mean for you to have people like Tyra in your corner?**

**LB:** Honestly, it's full circle for me. I was that kid that was watching "America's Next Top Model" first season, jotting notes to use in my everyday life. Tyra was this woman that was giving us access to free information about her lived experience. And, to one day be aligned in some way, shape or form — aligned to what she has created — is truly powerful. And for her to acknowledge that is even more powerful.

I grew up reading Sports Illustrated, and knowing that Tyra was on the cover many times was truly powerful for me as a young trans woman. Seeing a beautiful Black woman that was full bust — big smile, beautiful personality, in tune with her femininity — was really powerful for me to see. When I did Sports Illustrated and it was announced, I immediately hit her up to acknowledge her as like, "I would not be here if it wasn't for you," like I did when I did "Pose." I hit up those women that I told you (about): Carmen, Tracey "Africa." I hit up these women to acknowledge that, "I'm doing this because you allowed me to see something that changed my life, that now I can be a part of, and I would not be able to do it if it wasn't for you." And (Tyra) acknowledged me. We're texting here and there, and she's sending me words of affirmation, and I'm moving to Paris soon. She's like, "Oh, that's where I was at; my career started in Paris." So she's a huge inspiration of mine, but she's also a mentor, and you know, like a mommy also. I'm one of her babies. (Laughs.)

**CA: Who else reached out to you acknowledging how big of a deal your Sports Illustrated shoot was?**

**LB:** So many people hit me up. People from all different walks of life. A lot of white men reached out to me, and not fetishizing or sexualizing me but acknowledging the fact that the world is changing and the decisions that Sports Illustrated is making allow me to not only



just be a part of Sports Illustrated but to tell my story through them. (It) was truly monumental for them. They acknowledge that the world needs to change, and why has it taken so long? A huge, prominent person in sports, (NBA star Dwyane) Wade, who is also from Chicago, reached out to me and congratulated me, sent me some bottles of wine — shout out to D-Wade! He's raising a young trans daughter, and it was just truly powerful to know that the world is really changing in this moment.

**CA: What do you think it will feel like when you get your hands on a physical copy of the magazine?**

**LB:** I just... I honestly, oh my... even seeing a billboard of me anywhere just

gives me chills. Because that was part of my vision board, you know? I would go to these places and see these billboards and just dream that one day that could be me. So the idea that there's a magazine that's on the level of Sports Illustrated that is acknowledging my life and what I do in this world with my life, wants me to be something, or sees something inside of me, that's just truly powerful to me. This new generation of people, you ask them the names, you tell them the stories, and it doesn't really click with them. But for me, who comes from that era of understanding before social media how powerful these spaces are, it's just out of this world. I just pinch myself every time.

**CA:** When it comes to trans women of color leveling the playing field both in and out of Hollywood, what's next? What do you want to see leveled up next for trans women of color?

**LB:** I want to see education level up. I think it's important for me to pass on information just like information was passed onto me. Since we are in a time when education is always going to be a powerful tool, I definitely want to see how I can work in that environment, whether it's me opening my own school or building a curriculum in a school to develop some type of information and data so people like me can have resources that I didn't have when I was growing up.

**CA: What's next for you?**

**LB:** One of my mentors, Carmen Xtravaganza, I'm writing her story. That



was one thing she wants to leave on this Earth: just information and ideas and wisdom, and I want to put it in a book. After I write her book, I'm going to be writing my own book.

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

*Chris Azzopardi is the Editorial Director of Pride Source Media Group and Q Syndicate, the national LGBTQ wire service. He has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.*



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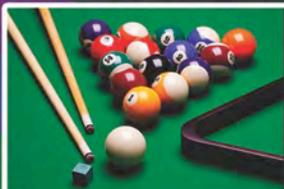
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5	Audien	Learn To Love Again
6	Tommy Capretto	Situationship
7	TELYKast with Loren Gray	Nobody To Love (LM Mix)
8	Ritt Momney	Put Your Records On (DJ Scooter House Bootleg)
9	Bebe Rexha	Sacrifice (Niiko X Swea Remix)
10	Toby Romeo x Felix Jaehn x Faulhaber	Where The Lights Are Low (Radio Edit)
11	Don Diablo & JLV	Problems ft. John K
12	Niiko x SWAE	I Ain't Going Home
13	Moodshift	Heartless
14	Lost Frequencies	Rise
15	RAYE ft. Rudimental	Regardless
16	Mako	Ocelot (Rat City Radio Remix)
17	Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike x DVBBS x Roy Woods	Too Much
18	Shift K3Y & Tinashe	Love Line
19	Melsen	You
20	Louis The Child	So What ft. A R I Z O N A
21	Shane Codd	Get Out My Head (Radio Mix)
22	DJ Snake & Selena Gomez	Selfish Love
23	Silk City x Ellie Goudling	New Love ft. Diplo & Mark Ronson
24	Bombs Away	Love Magic
25	SAY SAY x ASDIS	Stories
26	Sleepwalkrs	More Than Words ft. MNEK (Clean)
27	Lucas & Steve	I Want It All
28	Paige & Nihil Young	Mercy ft. Sarah De Warren (Radio Edit)
29	Love Harder x HUGEL x Tobtok	My Bed ft. RBVLN
30	Rompasso & Leony	Love Me
31	Zookeeper	Think Of You ft. Marlhy (Morgan Page Remix)
32	CamelPhat	Easier ft. LOWES (Radio Edit)
33	Hook N Sling & Galantis ft. Karen Harding	The Best
34	Lucas & Steve x Blackstreet	No Diggity
35	London Grammar	Lose Your Head (Dave Glass Animals Remix)
36	Elderbrook	Body
37	Glass Animals	Heat Waves (Oliver Heldens Remix Edit)
38	Robin Schulz	All We Got ft. KIDDO (Lodato Remix)
39	Afrojack & David Guetta	Hero
40	Alesso x CORSAK	Going Dumb



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# GRAB HOLLY

## Stirring Up Trouble

By Holly Maholm

We have all heard the phrase “stirring up a hornet’s nest,” referring, as it does, to a person who unwittingly activates a dangerous enemy against which there is no adequate or available defense, and multiple painful stings are to be expected. But how, today, are we to interpret this old chestnut now that our continent has become infested with what we call “Murder Hornets?” Perhaps, hereafter, we must recognize that “stirring up a hornet’s nest” has been promoted to a fatal misfortune.

Cindy and I were in the midst of a confrontation with Barb Potter, wife of Pastor Potter from the local True Holiness Baptist Church. Barbara had taken up a position on the Green opposite Donut Time, where she conspicuously and theatrically scowled and postured in an effort to conjure up some sort of Biblical judgment upon all the trannies then infesting Donut Time. But, shockingly, she had just realized that those whom she considered to be no better than pestilent insects (one of the plagues visited by Jehovah upon Pharaoh, in an effort to free the Hebrews) were not mere “locusts” (as the Bible instructs) but “murder hornets.”

Cindy had just informed Barb that – if further provoked – Cindy, Xandra and Aly were prepared to defend themselves by “outing” the many men in our town – several of whom belonged to Barb’s church – who had sought them out in the days when they supported themselves by hooking. This threat was instantly understood by Barb as one that would be painful (perhaps even “murderous”) to her church.

The expression on Barb’s face said, “Oh, no, you couldn’t do that...you wouldn’t... would you?” But Barb was saved by a most unexpected intervention. No one had noticed, but during the confrontation, Grandma Lily walked up near to us and heard everything. She turned to Barb and spoke.

“I know you. You’re that real estate lady, the wife of the pastor over at that church on Pine. All this time Donut Time has been in business, you’ve never once come in for coffee. And you’ve never chatted with the retirees who get their breakfast there, or who gather out here on the Green to currycomb the horses. It’s nice to see you finally found us.”

She went on. “You’re still somewhat of a young woman, but I’ve been attending church for several more decades than you’ve been alive, so I know a few things about churches you don’t.

“Fact is, if Cindy, Xandra or Aly were to start ‘naming names’ of men at your church who have patronized a tranny hooker, those men would suffer for a while, but the main result would be this: The congregation would blame your husband for his lack of leadership. All those men acting sinful would be a stain on his reputation, and likely the church would start looking for a new pastor.

“But there’s an easy way to avoid that result, if you’re willing. All you have to do is agree that every Sunday morning, after the service, when your members gather in the church basement for coffee and pastries, you will serve donuts purchased from Donut Time. Just agree to buy all your donuts and pastries from the trannies, and your problem is solved.”

She paused, and in that interval Cindy, Barb and I silently



rehearsed the word “extortion.”

“Now, honestly,” she resumed, “this is not a bribe to keep quiet. No. Truthfully, the girls at Donut Time are sympathetic to their former customers, and they would never do anything to hurt them, even if you and your church keep up your hostility. So this is not a bribe.

“No, this is something your church needs to do to ‘fight sin’ in our town. You see, as long as Donut Time is profitable, Cindy and Xandra and Aly will be kept busy in the kitchen baking donuts, fritters and eclairs. And as long as they do that, they won’t be forced back out onto the street corner, where they used to pick up men for sex. So what could be more ‘Christian,’ even ‘Biblical,’ than to ‘love the sinner but fight the sin?’

“And one more thing I’m gonna say – as a long-time church-goer – is this: You and your husband never visiting Donut Time has not gone unnoticed by the customers of Donut Time, especially the retirees. They can’t figure out why you’ve got a stick up your butt about enjoying the best coffee and donuts in town. And what’s worse, you miss the opportunity of reaching out to the retirees – in a loving, supportive way – to show them how your church would be a friendly and hospitable place for them to visit on a Sunday morning.

“So think about it. But my advice is, ordering your donuts from trannies is better than your husband looking for a new job.”

*(To be continued)*

*Holly Maholm is a transgender woman living in Cleveland, Ohio. Look for Volume 2 of What Would a Unicorn Do? (now available on Amazon) which contains additional episodes of Holly’s on-going story of her life among the unicorns, plus additional articles and a short story of a transgender woman confronted by Satan! Send a message to Holly [www.hollymaholm.com](http://www.hollymaholm.com).*

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# POSITIVE THOUGHTS

HIV

## I Had to Get Past the Stigma of Having HIV. Then I Had to Do the Same for Mental Illness.

By Mariah Wilberg

I was 19 years old and pregnant when I received my HIV diagnosis in 2006.

“This is punishment,” I thought, just rewards for the survival sex I turned to on the streets of Minneapolis as a homeless, runaway teen. I already felt unlovable because of my history of sex work. Now it felt like the love I had to give would be literal poison.

My abusive partner, who tested HIV negative, reinforced these fears. He said I was lucky to have him. Without him, I’d still be on the streets selling my body, he said. And nobody else wanted a dirty, diseased bitch.

When he went to prison, I fell apart. I had no support system. I relapsed almost immediately, and I wasn’t being the mother I wanted to be for my newborn daughter.

I stopped taking my HIV meds. It was so easy to take them when pregnant to keep her from being born with HIV, but then so hard to take them just for myself. Besides, the other drugs I was taking — cocaine and ecstasy — made me feel good. Unlike the HIV medications, which were a constant reminder of my unworthiness.

When my daughter was 8 months old, I was arrested for selling drugs. Out on bond, I impulsively fled from Minnesota to Texas. My daughter was safe at my parents’ house, and I figured, “I already have a death sentence, so I’ll be damned if I spend my last years, the rest of my life, in prison.”

After I missed court, my parental rights were terminated and a felony warrant was issued for my arrest.

I buried my HIV deep and locked it away, telling no one. The one time I re-engaged with HIV care while on the run, a roommate discovered my pills and told our mutual friends and my then partner. I convinced them she was

lying to hurt me — and in the garbage went the HIV meds.

After four years as a fugitive, I was on my way home to visit my family for the holidays. I had just told my daughter I would see her in the morning over the phone; I was never to see her again, as of yet.

We were pulled over after that phone call, and I spent the holidays in jail, instead of with family. I was sent to prison shortly after.

There, I received an AIDS diagnosis. I was 25 years old. I could no longer afford the luxury of denial; it was killing me. In group therapy, I told my secret to a group of women I had come to know and love.

I saw no fear, no disgust. “It could have been me,” they said. “Thank you for sharing, I now think differently about HIV because of you.”

My life suddenly made sense. I had the power to transform my pain into purpose. “I’ve made it this far so that I can help others,” I thought. In prison, I began to learn how to love myself. All of me.

When I left prison in 2013, I knew I was done with closets. I settled down



in St. Paul and was quickly embraced by Minnesota’s HIV community — my community. I became a volunteer HIV educator, which quickly turned into a paid position. Learning that my undetectable viral load meant I was unable to transmit HIV through sex was the final blow to my internalized stigma. I could love without fear! I started dating, this time, sharing my status.

I was relieved to find that most people were receptive after learning more about HIV. However, it didn’t all go smoothly. After disclosing my status to a potential partner, I noticed some red flags and stopped talking to him. In retaliation, he put my picture, name, and HIV status on social media. It was my community that kept me safe, holding me tight as I received death threats from strangers online.

That was the worst-case scenario I always feared, but I was strangely relieved. Because I realized then that



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the fears were far worse than the reality.

Months later, I met my husband. He chose science over stigma, and we recently celebrated our sixth anniversary. I wanted to make sure all people living with HIV knew the truth about their bodies. So I incorporated the most recent science about treatment as prevention into the presentations I did as an educator and prevention worker.

Later, as a communications specialist for the state of Minnesota, I led us to be the third state to sign on to the undetectable equals untransmittable (U=U) campaign. I also coordinated a U=U transit campaign with millions of views. Since 2019, I've been leading the implementation of END HIV MN for the state. Not only am I done with HIV stigma in my own life, but I am also privileged to work alongside my community on statewide efforts to reduce stigma for everyone.

This is my dream job! It's the reason I sacrificed, spending seven years of full-time school on top of full-time work to earn a bachelor's and master's degree.

Yet as work-from-home dragged into the fall of 2020 because of the COVID pandemic, my dream job started to feel more like a nightmare.

I was wracked by guilt as the pandemic upended much of my work. Projects were moving slowly or put on hold as staff reassignments and a hiring freeze turned my coordinator position — designed to lead project teams across departments — into a one-person show.

I felt like a constant failure, like I was letting my community down. I was isolating myself, scared to leave the house, uninterested in video calls with family or friends. I didn't think I was depressed. I told myself, "I can still get out of bed. I'm still going to work. I'm not sad, I'm just overwhelmed. Everything is just so hard." I was drinking more and more, mostly to escape the feelings of failure and get some sleep.

Then I suddenly developed an aversion to alcohol and quit drinking around the new year. I've done that before in the past, cycled through times of heavy drinking and total abstinence. I was overdoing it anyways, so I didn't give it much thought. Besides, my husband and I are saving up for in vitro fertilization, so stopping was a good thing.

Sleep was elusive without the alcohol. My thoughts would race, magnifying my every fear. It might start with, "Should I have worded that email

a little differently?" It always ended with, "You are failing, everyone secretly hates you, and you're terrible at your job."

Objectively, I knew that wasn't true. I was even participating in the Emerging Leaders Institute for the State of Minnesota. But logic was no match for these feelings.

Then came the panic attacks. I usually have maybe one a year — now I was having one every few days. My heart was racing, sometimes resting at over 120 beats a minute. I couldn't understand why my anxiety, usually limited to overthinking, was now showing up in my body.

I was worried about money. My husband lost his day job during the pandemic. Ever since, he's working around the clock to grow his own automotive detailing business from part time to full time.

Even though I knew winter is a slow season for detailing, I became suspicious of the fact that he wasn't pitching in as much financially.

And then, Aha! Suddenly, it all made sense. The panic attacks, the insomnia, the racing heart — "It's my body telling me something," I decided. "I know what it is now. My husband is hiding something."

I became fixated. I was investigating him, looking for evidence to back up my fears. I found none, but that didn't dissuade me. My brain wove snippets of phone calls and meaningless events into an intricate story of a double life. I thought he was using our home security cameras to listen in and spy on me, to monitor whether I had learned his secrets.

I finally confronted him. He was adamant and believable in his denials. And a month prior, we were excitedly discussing the types of parents we'd be together. But I still had a gut feeling that something was wrong. Very wrong. I was so confused.

It felt like he was speaking to me in subliminal messages, trying to hurt me. I spent hours researching gaslighting, trying to understand why I was doubting my own perceptions. When he spoke to me, I sensed an underlying malice, hidden meanings. I finally told him that I wanted a divorce.

He stayed on the couch, where he had already been sleeping for days. I went upstairs to our bedroom and saw the smoke detector on the dresser, from months before when I watched him take it off the wall because it was chirping.

Only this time, I wondered if he was planning to set the house on fire and kill me for insurance money.

That's when I knew something was very wrong — with me. My husband wasn't gaslighting me; my own brain was. I realized I hadn't eaten in days and had barely been sleeping. But I was neither tired nor hungry.

I asked my husband to take me to the ER. When I got there, my heart rate was over 180 beats a minute, and I had an immediate EKG test. Even as he held my hand tightly, I was flipping back and forth between understanding I was having a medical issue and fearing that he was orchestrating this, to get me admitted and out of the way.

Those thoughts only stopped after a medication to rebalance my neurotransmitters dissolved under my tongue.

As I calmed down, they told me I was experiencing mania. The fear and confusion, paranoia, altered perceptions and false beliefs were symptoms of psychosis. The doctors said that had I wandered in alone in the state I was in, I would have surely been admitted. But since I had a support person with me, I should continue taking the medication they had just given me and follow up next week.

As we finally got home after a very long night, I Googled my new meds. Zyprexa (olanzapine), an antipsychotic. I noticed a visceral reaction in my gut. I've been here before, confronting stigma in a pill bottle.

A little over a month later, I am still confirming the suspected diagnosis of bipolar disorder, with a full neuro-psychiatric test scheduled later this spring. My new provider strongly suspects that I am living with attention deficit disorder as well.

I am not afraid of these new labels; rather, I am empowered with this new lens. It puts so much of my life in perspective: running away from home, the homelessness, the sex work, my HIV diagnosis, my incarceration, my relationship with drugs and alcohol, my yo-yoing body weight.

Did I only gain 15 pounds during pregnancy from the HIV meds alone, or was I manic also? After my baby was born, was I really just a bad mom, or was it more likely that I had experienced postpartum depression?

Looking back, I have more empathy for my younger self. I don't believe in regrets — I am exactly where I'm supposed to be in life. But I do wonder if my child would be with me now, as I so desperately want, had I been diagnosed at a younger age.

I now see how my internalized stigma of mental illness prevented that earlier diagnosis. I channeled all my symptoms into two socially acceptable

categories: I am anxious, or I am overwhelmed.

Once I recognized the stigma, I was set free. I have no desire to climb into a closet. Instead, I immediately knew that I would — I must — be open and transparent about this part of my journey. I know that our stories triumph over stigma. HIV taught me that.

I hear the stigma informing my friend's gentle questions. "Are you sure you want to be open about this?" "Don't you want to take some time and think about it?" and "As long as being open doesn't hurt other areas of wellness — like employment."

They are not trying to silence me — they are my friends. But they worry about what I'm up against.

Unstable. Dangerous. Crazy. These are some of the many labels that society assigns to people living with mental illnesses or differences, people who aren't neurotypical.

But these do not describe me, not at all. I will not participate in stigmatizing myself. Just as I learned to reject labels like "dirty" or "diseased," I reject these labels, and the idea that I should keep this a secret.

I love myself, and my brain. The same gifts that have allowed me to

build a life and career I am proud of are the same things that got dialed up too high during my episode. I wouldn't trade my brain for anything. I believe it is different, but not ill.

Others in my life reacted warily to my suspected diagnosis and new mental health meds. "You probably don't need to take them forever," they said. "Aren't you worried your personality will change?" "You're probably not actually bipolar."

But so far, my new medication, the antipsychotic, makes me feel great. It hasn't changed my personality or dampened my gifts. Rather, I feel like the best version of myself.

Gone are the racing thoughts, torturing me into the night. I am sleeping well, and I have no panic, no racing heart. I trust my husband again, even when he's working late. Since starting them, I feel even-keeled, more optimistic, more motivated, and I am happier than I have been in a long time.

For now, I'm sticking to prescribed medications and nonalcoholic beverages. I'm getting out of my own way and giving the doctors a chance to diagnose and treat the conditions that I've obviously been self-medicating my whole life.

I see how my trauma history is negatively impacting my relationship with my loving and incredibly patient husband. So I've also started EMDR therapy, which helps reduce the impact of trauma on your life.

I will accept whatever diagnosis aligns most closely with my symptoms, while also understanding that human diversity is rich, the line between "normal" and "ill" is subjective, and we don't fit neatly into checkboxes or categories.

This pandemic and isolation are hard for us all. Please, seek help if you need it. Don't let stigma stand in your way.

*Mariah Wilberg utilizes her lived experience with HIV, trauma, homelessness, survival sex, substance use, mental illness and incarceration to inform an award-winning career in public service that spans from public health to justice reform. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service. Visit their websites — <http://thebody.com>, <http://hivplumag.com>, <http://positivelyaware.com> and <http://poz.com> — for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.*

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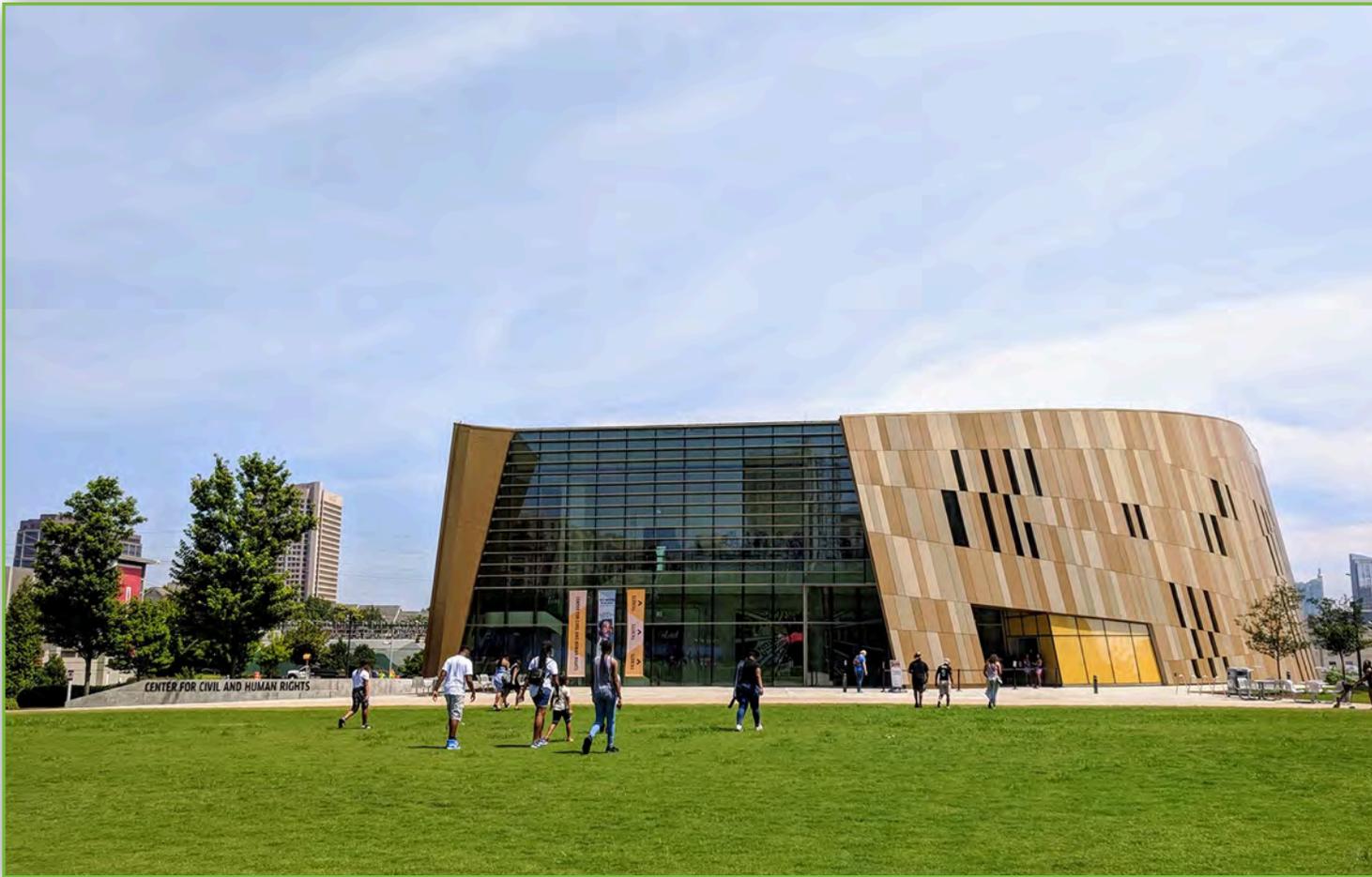
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# GRAB A PLANE

TRAVEL



## Pride Journey: Atlanta, Georgia

By Joey Amato

Almost everyone has been to Atlanta at some point or another. Whether for a conference or just passing through the Hartsfield-Jackson airport, the busiest airport in the world, Atlanta sees more than 100 million visitors per year. As the largest city in Georgia and one of the largest in the country by population, Atlanta has exploded to become an economic powerhouse. Skyscrapers are popping up throughout the city and many Fortune 500 companies have a presence in the region. Of course, the city is known for their hometown favorites: Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines and Turner Broadcasting System, which was founded by none other than Ted Turner, who's name is everywhere in Atlanta. Turner has a downtown street named after him as well as 3 namesake restaurants – **Ted's Montana Grill** – just in the Atlanta city limits.

Not too far from the downtown restaurant is Centennial Olympic Park,

home of the 1996 summer Olympics. The park is adjacent to three other incredible attractions: the **Georgia Aquarium**, **World of Coca-Cola** and **National Center for Civil & Human Rights**.

On this visit, I decided to first swing by World of Coca-Cola, which gives visitors a wonderful overview of the history of the brand, talks about the secret formula and of course offers the opportunity to sample Coca-Cola products from around the world. If you time your visit right, you may even get a chance to take a picture with their mascot, the Polar Bear.

Next, I stopped by the National Center for Civil & Human Rights, a museum I had visited in the past. This time I was given a tour by the Executive Director for the LGBTQ Institute at the museum. Although the Center doesn't have a specific LGBTQ exhibition, it does talk about the fight for LGBTQ

rights throughout the years. The Center also houses the largest collection of papers and artifacts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and has recently expanded their offerings to include a human rights training program for law enforcement officials as well as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) experiences for workplaces.

One of my favorite things about Atlanta is MARTA, their public transportation system. It is one of the most efficient and inexpensive in the country, easily connecting travelers from the airport to all parts of the city including Buckhead, where I was staying for this visit.

While the Buckhead neighborhood isn't known for its LGBTQ nightlife, it is however known for its abundance of luxury shopping. Lenox Square is one of the most upscale malls in the country and boasts retail boutiques including Fendi, Louis Vuitton, and Prada. Don't

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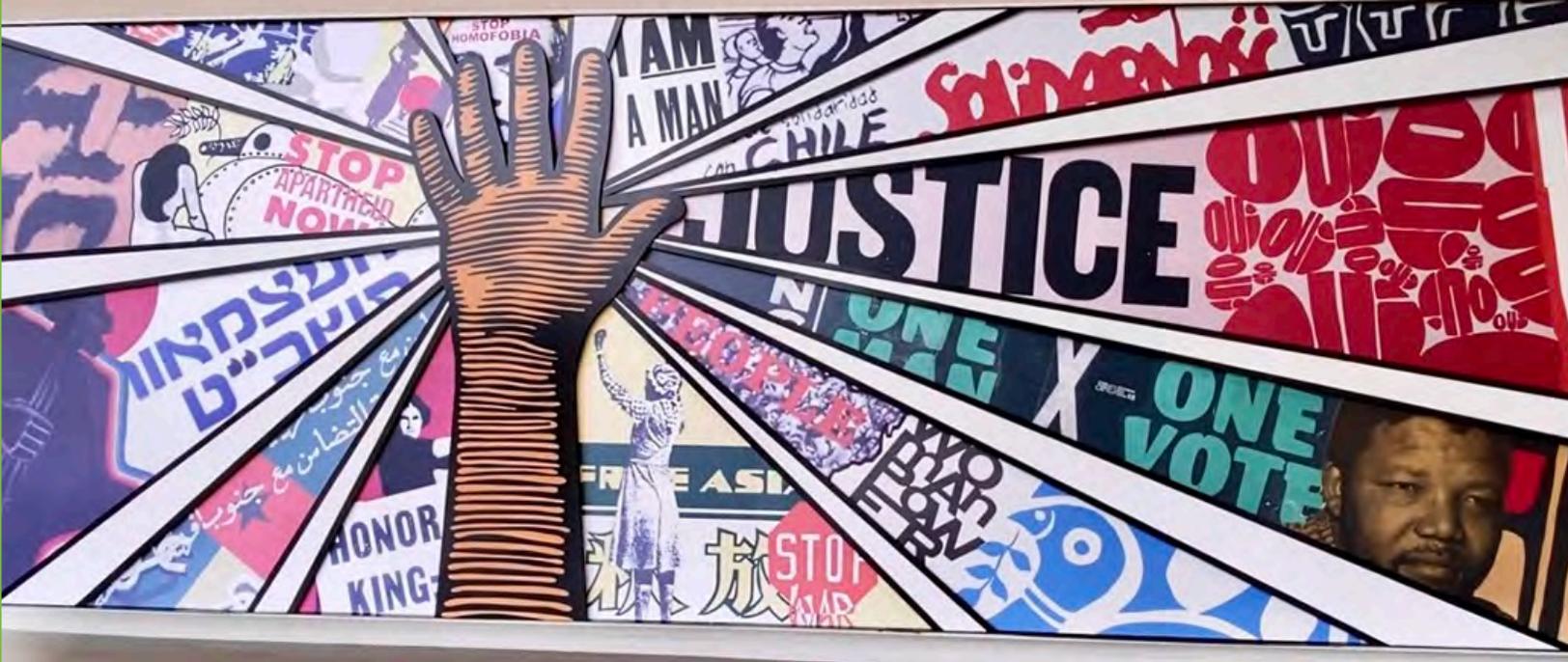


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The reason I chose to stay in Buckhead is because I wanted to check out the brand new **Kimpton Sylvan Hotel**. The mid-century modern property is a short ride, or 20-minute walk to the MARTA station and features a rooftop bar, daily social hour with complimentary wine as well as a 24-hour fitness center with Peloton bikes for those looking to work off some calories. Speaking of food, I would highly recommend the Charred Cauliflower + Cucumber from Willow Bar located just outside the hotel lobby.

The Kimpton brand is known for being one of the most LGBTQ-inclusive hotel brands in the country so whenever I have the chance to stay at one of their

properties, I usually do. They are also a global partner of IGLTA.

This September, Atlanta will host the **IGLTA Global Convention**. The International LGBTQ+ Travel Association will welcome guests from around the globe to midtown Atlanta for possibly the first in-person LGBTQ convention since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Registration is now open through the IGLTA website. I've been to this convention numerous times and can't wait to see all my friends and colleagues in the same room once again.

Midtown Atlanta is the epicenter of LGBTQ culture and nightlife in Atlanta. There is no lack of bars and restaurants here. Some standouts include **Joe's on Juniper**, **Blake's on the Park**, and **My**

**Sister's Room**, a two-story lesbian-owned dance bar which has become a favorite among Atlanta's LGBTQ community.

The Midtown neighborhood is also known as the cultural hub of the city with over 25 different arts and cultural venues and more than 30 permanent performing arts groups residing in the area including the Grammy-winning Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and the world-renowned **High Museum of Art**.

Not too far away is **Zoo Atlanta**, an AZA accredited facility home to over 1,000 animals. Having a deep love for animals, I decided to take the elephant encounter, a one-hour experience that gives visitors a behind-the-scenes look at how zoo staff care for these majestic animals. During the program, we learned about the elephant's behaviors and even had the opportunity to feed them. In this case, Tara was especially fond of the lettuce that I was giving her.

After touring the zoo, head over to **Guac y Margys**, an LGBTQ-owned restaurant located along the Atlanta BeltLine's Eastside Trail. Everything I tried here was on point, from the house made guacamole to the slow roasted pork tacos. If you are in the mood to sample a variety of different cuisine, check out **Ponce City Market**, located in the historic Sears, Roebuck & Co. building. The indoor/outdoor market offers dozens of dining and retail options including my favorite, Botiwalla Indian Street Food.

Atlanta is truly a multi-cultural destination that needs to be explored in its entirety. Venture away from the tourist-focused neighborhoods and meet the locals. You are sure to find surprises around every corner.

To learn more, visit <https://discoveratlanta.com/>





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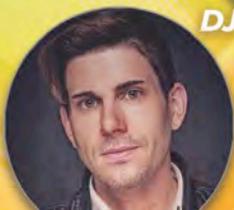
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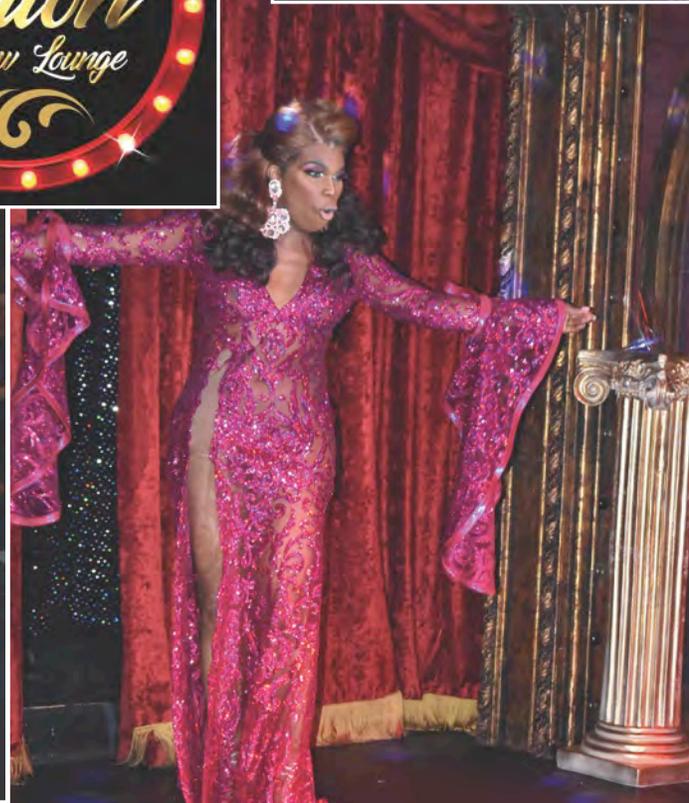
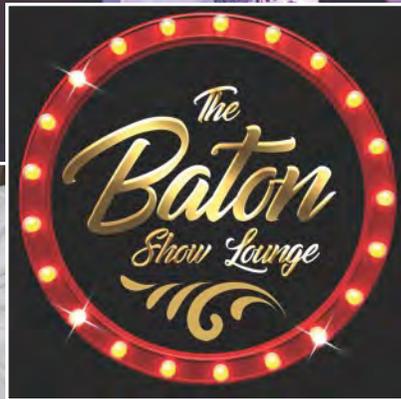
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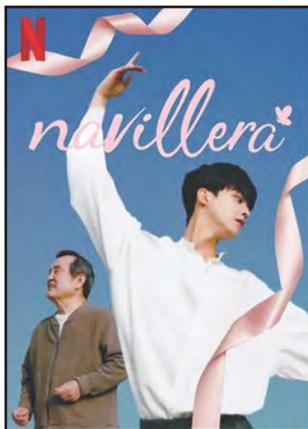
# GRAB A FILM

By Delven Shaw

FILM



**NAVILLERA** wows and surprises.



Are you a fan of dance, or more specifically ballet? Do you have a dream for your life that remains unfulfilled? Do you enjoy works with older characters? If so, the Korean dance drama *Navillera* will delight.

Based on a graphic novel, *Navillera* centers on Mr. Shim (*In-Hwan Park*), a retired postman whose father forbid him to dance. As the Netflix series begins, he is turning 70 and is a bit lost as his friends and family encourage him to age gracefully. When he spots the beautiful Chae-Rok (*Song Kang*) practicing alone in a gorgeously lit dance studio, his dream is reignited.

Chae-Rok is having trouble achieving his own dreams, as his mother has died, and his father has been imprisoned for an attack on one of the young man's teammates. The cast of characters – including Mr. Sims wife and children – are terrific, including the over-achieving son who does not understand the other siblings who cannot live up to his standards. They do not support their father's dream.

The characters of the studio are just as interesting, with his divorced teachers strategizing on if – and how – they should encourage Chae-Rock to reach his full potential.

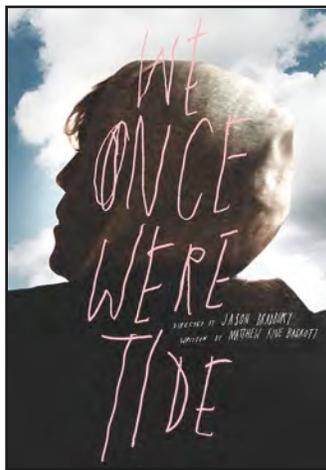
The series is beautifully filmed, and

the acting is top notch. It is a great look into the drama within two vastly different families – with Chae-Rok on his own, and Mr. Sim overwhelmed with relatives. You only see short snippets of dance, but they are well done. This is also an insightful beautiful glimpse into the soul of this very driven country.

And it is a great reminder that indeed we only live once.

Check out <https://youtu.be/YtK3Vtw4rno>

**WE ONCE WERE TIDE** is lovely look at longing.



**WE ONCE WERE TIDE**, a short from 2011 now featured on Here TV and Dekko, is a lovely exploration of themes covered in great depth in the excellent *God's Own Country*, the new classic gay feature from 2017.

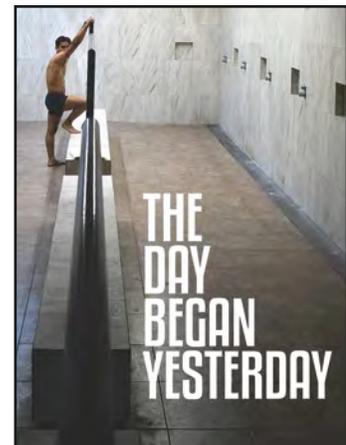
In *We Were Once Tied*, Anthony (the brooding *Alexander Scott*) is trapped with his ailing mother on a failing farm on the Isle of Wight. A visit from Kyle (*Tristan Bernays*) brings solace on a windswept day.

The relationship is captured in a few polaroid photos – of joy, connection, and eternal connection.

The film is quiet and lyrical, and at 18 minutes. Packs a lovely punch.

**Jason Bradbury** directs a beautifully craft screenplay by **Matthew Kyne Baskott**.

**THE DAY BEGAN YESTERDAY** is sexy and serious.



A hot gymnast who is HIV positive meets a studious young man who is unsure of so many things. This accidental be meeting results in *The Day Began Yesterday*, a Dekkoo short directed by **Julián Hernández**, from a script he co-wrote with **Ulises Pérez Mancilla** and **Saúl Sánchez**.

**Cristhian Díaz Cruz** is that very uninhibited gymnast. He looks great in the gym and in his crop top. He is well matched with **Esteban Caicedo** whose raw honesty is a great match for Cruz's confidence.

The show is sexy and smart, and you will enjoy it while appreciating the serious themes.

Check it out <https://youtu.be/MsNJ9fkridY>

There are a lot of queer culture available screening right now. Check out the two-minute reviews at [DelvenShaw.com](http://DelvenShaw.com) for more!



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## k.d. lang Releases "If I Were You (Main Mix)" from 'makeover'



**k.d. lang** releases "If I Were You (Main Mix)"—a track off her forthcoming album, *makeover*—along with an accompanying video.

The 1995 remix was produced by **Junior Vasquez**, and the remix video was edited by **Dean Kensler** from **Kevin Kerslake's** original "If I Were You" music video. As journalist **Larry Flick** says in his essay about *makeover*: "With 'If I Were You,' lang did more than enhance the promotability of her work to the dance market. She made good on the promise of her previous club-focused remixes ... Her collaboration with Junior Vasquez laid her emotional cards on the table. No more mystery. No more hiding in shadows of innuendo. lang had evolved from delightfully confounding country music star to proudly queer pop icon."

*makeover*, in celebration of Pride Month, is due out May 28 on Nonesuch Records and comprises classic dance remixes of some of lang's best-loved songs. The album brings these remixes, made between 1992 and 2000, together for the first time, and includes "Sexuality," "Miss Chatelaine," "Theme from the Valley of the Dolls," "Summerfling," and the #1 dance chart hits "Lifted By Love" and "If I Were You." *makeover's* cover art features a previously unseen 1995 portrait of lang by **David LaChapelle**. The album is available to pre-order on all formats, including transparent turquoise vinyl, here. Nonesuch Store pre-orders include instant downloads of "If I Were You (Main Mix)" and the previously released "Miss Chatelaine (St. Tropez Mix)"; an exclusive, limited-edition print of the album cover signed by lang; and a paper doll PDF set, designed by a fan—**Katja Virtanen** of Finland—to print out at home, featuring iconic looks from throughout her career.

"I had the idea of putting together a dance remix compilation, as I mused about how we built community in those days before the internet, mobile devices, and dating apps. Those dance clubs were a key

to a world, which was still called 'underground' in the '90s. I also surprised myself by finding that there was a cryptic, sort of secret zone in my career, that hadn't been explored, overlooked even by me. Two of these tracks had even hit #1 on the dance charts!" says lang.

Called "one of the greatest singers of all time," by Elton John and "the greatest female singer in the whole world" by fellow Canadian Michael Bublé, k.d. lang's distinguished career includes four Grammy and eight Juno Awards. In addition to a fruitful collaboration with Tony Bennett (who calls her "the best singer of her generation"), lang has performed alongside luminaries including Roy Orbison, Bonnie Raitt, Elton John, and Loretta Lynn. She sang at the closing ceremonies of the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary and the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. lang has contributed music to the soundtracks of several films, including *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, and *Happy Feet*. She has also appeared in a number of films, including *Salmonberries*, *The Black Dahlia*, and *Eye of the Beholder*. In 1996, lang received Canada's highest civilian honor, the Order of Canada.

lang released her first album with Nonesuch Records in 2004, the acclaimed and highly personal "Canadian songbook," *Hymns of the 49th Parallel*, featuring work by Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, Jane Siberry, and others. Her subsequent releases on the label include *Watershed* (2008), her first career retrospective *Recollection* (2010), and *Sing It Loud* (2011). Most recently, Nonesuch released *Ingénue: 25th Anniversary Edition* in 2017, comprising lang's multi-platinum, Grammy Award-winning original album, as well as the previously unreleased 1993 MTV Unplugged performances. In the words of *Uncut* magazine, "Ingénue still dazzles, 25 years on. Luminous, languid and seductive to the point of intoxication. This reissue proves its status as a modern classic." To coincide with the anniversary, lang performed sold-out concerts in Canada, the US, Australia, UK, and Ireland; a DVD of the show, *Ingénue Redux: Live from The Majestic Theatre*, was released in 2018. "A canny and sumptuous blend of roots music and pre-rock pop, *Ingénue* sounds as great today as it did upon its release. The songs shimmered with dreamy textures," wrote the *Los Angeles Times*. "lang is so good that she is in a class of her own. Wow. Just wow. Most other singers should just give up now," proclaimed the *Daily Telegraph*.

For more information visit <http://www.kdlang.com>

## Jennifer Nettles releases RELEASES "WAIT FOR IT" FROM HAMILTON



Multi-GRAMMY® Award winner **Jennifer Nettles** has released the next track from her anticipated album of American Songbook classics *Always Like New*.

*Always Like New* will be released on CD, Vinyl and Digital on June 25th. For this project, Nettles teamed up with GRAMMY® and Tony® Award-winning orchestrator **Alex Lacamoire**, best known for his work on Broadway's critically acclaimed shows *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, and *In the Heights*, to reimagine, arrange and produce some of the most beloved songs from the stage, infusing each with her signature sound and giving these timeless works of art a new context and meaning in our current landscape.

Nettles shared, "As a child who grew up in musical theatre, this album feels like a homecoming to me. I savored every note of singing and arranging these songs with Alex Lacamoire. It is thrilling to be able to celebrate this amazing songwriting with arrangements and vocals that allow them to be rediscovered anew."

The album, executive produced by **Adam Zlotovich** (*Dear Evan Hansen*, *The Color Purple*, *An American in Paris*), spans classics from "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" (Oklahoma) and "Wouldn't It Be Lovely" (My Fair Lady) to contemporary favorites including "You Will Be Found" (Dear Evan Hansen), "Wait for It" (Hamilton) and "It All Fades Away" featuring **Brandi Carlile** (The Bridges of Madison County).

*Always Like New's* first single "Sit Down, You're Rockin' The Boat" features Nettles' soaring vocals in a jazzy up-tempo version of the Guys and Dolls classic.

*Always Like New* is available for pre-order and digital pre-save here: [https://found.ee/jennifernetles\\_alwayslikenew](https://found.ee/jennifernetles_alwayslikenew)

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## Pride in the Park Announces Legendary Lineup in Grant Park June 26 and 27



Pride in the Park Chicago, presented by Truly Hard Seltzer, announces the legendary lineup for this year's Main event in Grant Park (downtown Chicago) on June 26 and 27, along with being one of the city's first in-person festivals.

Heading this year are

- **Chaka Khan**, the legendary Queen of Funk, Queer Icon, and ten-time Grammy-winning artist.
- **GRYFFIN**, the self-taught prodigal producer, with a #1 on Spotify's US and Global Viral charts and #2 on Spotify's New Music Friday playlist.
- **Tiësto**, a Grammy award-winning artist, dubbed "the world's greatest DJ," the Godfather of EDM, and

commanding the title of "best DJ of the last 20 years.

**Dusty Carpenter**, Pride in the Park Chicago President and Lead Organizer, said, "To say we are excited is an understatement. We have legendary artists – with 12 Grammys combined – diverse Allies and Queer icons that are going to simply bring the house down. What better way to celebrate our Pride than with amazing music in a diverse and inclusive atmosphere? We continue to celebrate Pride to remind us of our achievements and to also remind us of our history, struggles, and work that is yet to be done."

*The Full Lineup includes;*

- **Betty Who**, the Australian-American singer and songwriter of "I Love You Always Forever," peaked inside the top ten in Australia and reached the top of the Billboard Dance Club Songs chart in the United States.
- **Tracy Young**, a Grammy award-winning producer, history-maker, and proud member of the LGBTQ community, she is the first woman ever to win a Grammy in the category of best-remixed recording.
- **Alyssa Edwards**, the iconic star from Emmy-winning television series "RuPaul's Drag Race," American

entertainer, choreographer, and television personality.

- **Derrick Charter**, a Queer, Black Chicago-native, was named No. 53 in the 100 Most Famous.

Among these show-stoppers, there will be other renowned and diverse artists such as CircuitMOM, Hector Fonseca, Tony Moran, Lady D, The Vixen Denali Foxx, Karsten Sollors, Tenderoni, Miss Toto, Mila Jam, Kinley Preston, Traci Ross, Naysha Lopez, It Jomama, Hinkypunk, Kara Mel D'Ville, Sheeza Woman, Avi Sic, Matt Suave, O'Laysia, Chamilla Foxx, Zoliy Miyake Mugler for Ballroom Pride & Guest Speakers.

Ticket pricing information - Limited Capacity:

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Teen/Adults (15 years old+) \$80.00 and up – Individual, Weekend Pass  
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\$210.00 and up – Individual, Weekend Pass

Children 11-14 years old must have a ticket and be accompanied by a ticket-holding adult.

Children 10 & years old and under admitted free of charge with a ticket-holding adult.

- Limit 2 children per adult.

Tickets sales now at <http://www.PrideParkChi.com>

## Northalsted Plans to Hold Market Days in August 2021 Festival Organizers Seek to Expand event to Three-Days August 6, 7 - 8

The Northalsted Business Alliance plans to host Market Days August 6-8, adding a Friday night edition, the first in its 38-year history. As vaccinations increase and Illinois begins planning for stage 5 reopening, organizers of the iconic event are in full preparation mode. Chairperson **Mark Liberson** commented, "The committee is hard at work selecting performers, signing contracts, and making plans for an exciting weekend in Chicago this summer."

Since the first Market Day in August 1982, the LGBTQ+ positive event has grown from a handful of folding tables and chairs on the sidewalk, to a half-mile long, annual summer ritual on Chicago's North Halsted Street from Belmont to Addison, featuring all-day lineups of live music and international DJs on 5 stages, 300 vendors, arts, crafts, wares, summer food & drinks, dancing in the street, and more. A \$15 recommended donation for entry supports the festival entertainment cost, local charities, neighborhood programming, and maintenance in the community.



Northalsted Business Alliance President **Ramesh Ariyanayakam** shares his optimism for hosting this year's event. "We look forward to the possibility of welcoming neighbors and visitors alike to this iconic event. While planning is underway, we will remain in continual contact with the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois and monitor the CDC guidelines to be flexible in our approach to meet all necessary requirements to produce a safe event."

**Where:** Halsted St. from Belmont to Addison

**When:** (anticipated) August 6, 7, and 8, 2021

**Why:** Celebration of community and culture in Chicago's Proudest Neighborhood

**Who:** Northalsted Business Alliance & Chicago SSA#18

**Admission:** suggested \$15 donation, all ages

**Website:** [marketdayschicago.com](http://marketdayschicago.com)

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- GRAB a Bite
- GRAB a Drink
- GRAB Some Sleep
- GRAB Some Culture
- GRAB a Towel

# GRAB CLASSIFIEDS

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