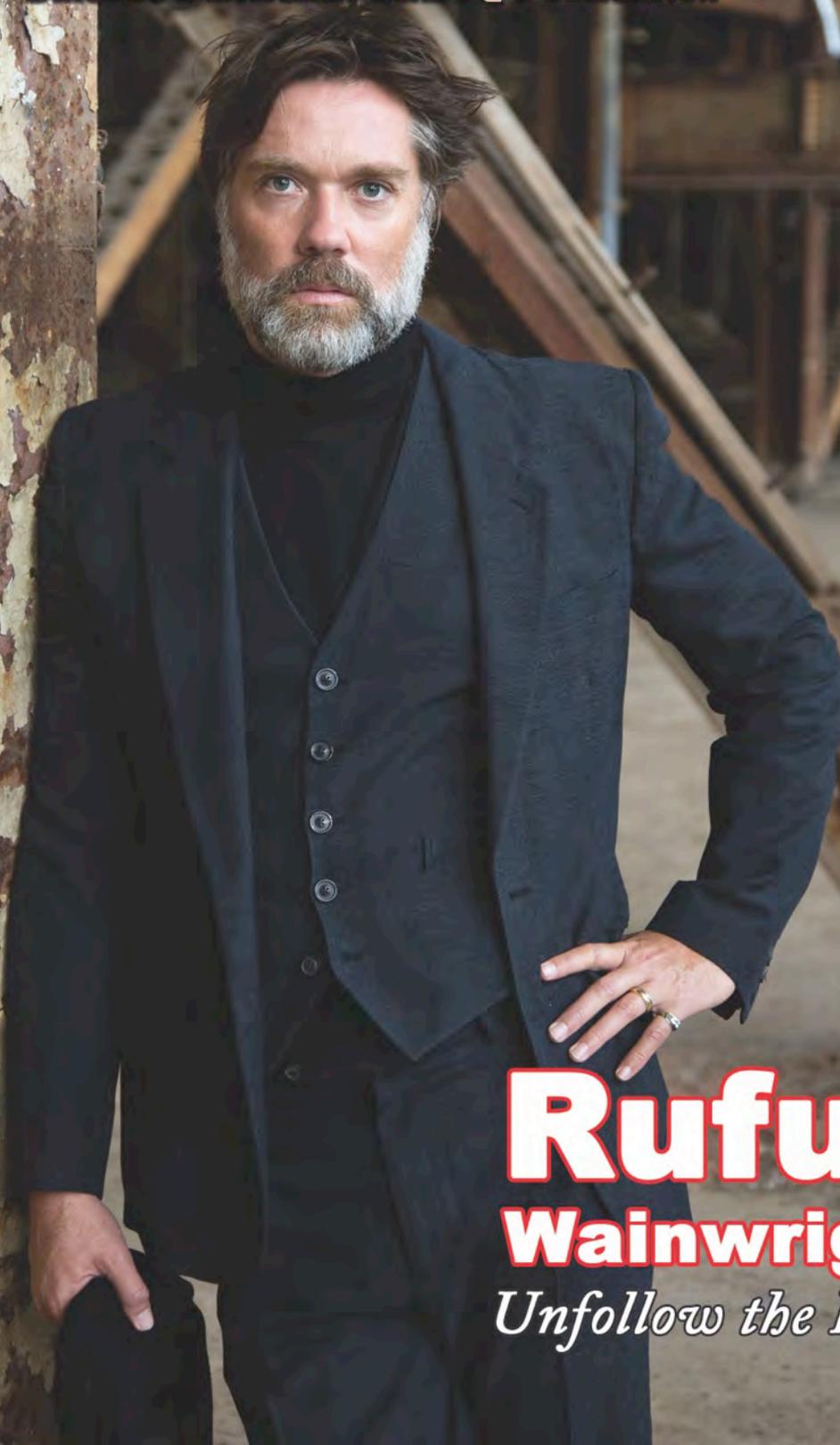


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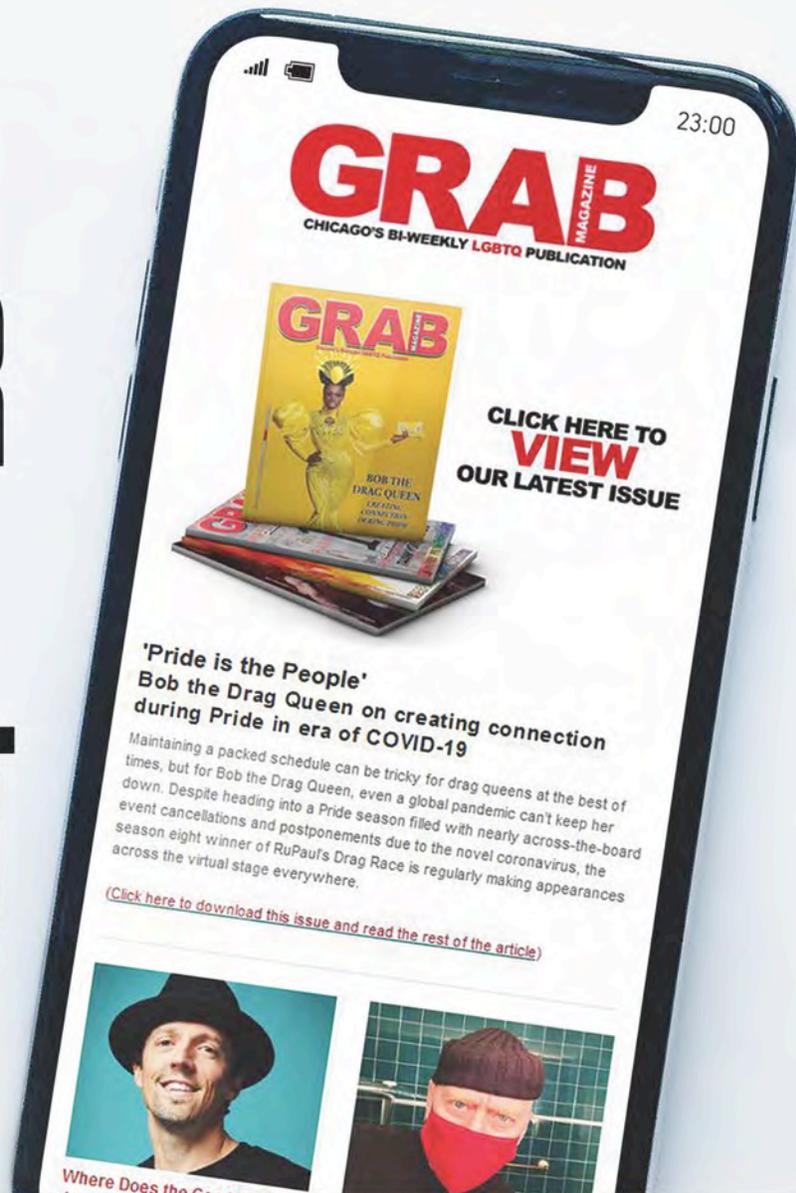
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GRAB DAN

NETFLIX

Crazy Sexy Time with Dan Stevens

The *Eurovision* actor talks campy gay role, an early-career gay role, and being a Dan Savage stan

By Chris Azzopardi

As closeted Russian pop prince Alexander Lemtov, actor Dan Stevens shows up in the Netflix comedy *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga* bejeweled in rhinestones, with a mopy head of Wham!-era George Michael hair. He gives double-cheek kisses. He gives invites to his “very crazy sexy” parties. Alexander’s extraneous, and that he doesn’t see what other far-less-opulent people do, is the joke. He’s beyond out of touch with the ordinary person, like Lars (Will Ferrell) and Sigrit (Rachel McAdams), small-town Icelandic best friends who become accidental *Eurovision* contestants and enter into a sing-off against Lemtov.

Co-written by Ferrell, the campy musical is an outrageous love letter to the *Eurovision Song Contest*, an inescapable UK phenom. Alexander is certainly worlds apart from Stevens’s star-making turn in *Downton Abbey* and his breadth of chameleonic work, which includes the live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast*, as the beast; the thriller *The Guest*; as a mutant with mind powers in the trippy FX series *Legion*, and, recently, in the Dave Franco-directed horror film *The Rental*.

As for Lemtov, this isn’t Stevens’s first time taking on a queer role. One of Stevens’s earliest roles, as Nick Guest in the *The Line of Beauty*, featured the actor as a gay man living in 1980s Britain during the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 2006 BBC miniseries adaptation of the Alan Hollinghurst novel of the same name.

For our recent interview, Stevens lost the Lemtov wig to reflect on portraying Nick Guest, and also talked about the safe place *Eurovision* provides contestants from anti-LGBTQ countries and, just for good measure, his favorite Cher songs.

Chris Azaopardi: During what might be the gayest scene in *Eurovision*,

you, along with the cast and former *Eurovision* contestant and drag queen Conchita Wurst, sing an epic medley of Madonna, Cher and ABBA. Can you name anything gayer that you’ve done in your life?

Dan Stevens: (Laughs.) It’s certainly up there! I don’t know if we can start ranking those, but most of those people coming out of the crowd were previous *Eurovision* contestants – and not all of them drag queens, it should be said. But yeah, amazing to have Conchita Wurst, Bilal (Hassani) and Jamala. It was an amazing list of former contestants, all of them incredible singers.

And yeah, to duke it out with those guys, and also with Will Ferrell and Rachel McAdams, was pretty surreal. I think for pretty much everyone involved in that sequence it was – I don’t know about the *gayest* moment of their life, but it was certainly one of the most surreal. And I’ve shown that sequence to a couple of, shall we say, *Eurovision* superfans who absolutely lost their minds at that sequence.

CA: Is “Believe” your go-to Cher song?

DS: I suppose it would be. I’m trying to think what else I would go for now. “Strong Enough.” “Fernando.”



Photo Courtesy of Netflix

“Chiquitita.” “If I Could Turn Back Time.” I probably would do a medley! (Laughs.)

CA: How did you navigate Alexander Lemtov’s campy-gay sexuality?

DS: First and foremost, I went at it from that Euro-millionaire thing, which I’ve always found very, very funny. There’s a certain kind of campiness to those sort of mysteriously wealthy Europeans, particularly the Russians with the philosophy that if something is gold it must be best. Lemtov definitely has that kind of attitude.

It was very much inspired by a bizarre meeting I had once at a thing with Irina Shayk, the model. I met her in Manhattan and she asked me where I live, and at the time I was living in Brooklyn. She went (in a Russian accent), “Brooklyn. Too far.” And I said, “Well, OK, so where do you live?” And she just said, in one phrase, “West Village best place.” And I was like, “All

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right. OK.” (Laughs.) That sort of told me everything I needed to know about her outlook and just that sense of, when you just have that much money it shapes how you see the world, and also how that kind of warps your taste as well. And Lemtov has some pretty warped taste – both in the wardrobe and the home-decoration department.

CA: George Michael’s name comes up at one point during the film. Did you tap into LGBTQ pop artists to get Alexander’s queer sensibility down?

DS: I mean, the wig was very much inspired by George Michael. And there was a lot of trolling of hundreds of hours of *Eurovision* acts on YouTube. Just sort of the way that they work the camera is very interesting. There’s always the flying camera, and they kind of embrace it flying around them. If you know *Eurovision*, there’s always at least one country that submits an oversexualized, erotically choreographed number with fire and leather, so Lemtov is definitely from that school. There’s also a Russian crossover singer, a sort of opera-pop act called Philipp Kirkorov, who if you’re not aware of him a quick Google search

will tell you all you need to know about him. He’s a really, really sweet man who’s a real sort of feature of *Eurovision*. He’s written a number of songs for *Eurovision*. I think he’s performed there at least once and he is a Russian superstar. Very, very friendly with Putin and apparently married with kids. But his wardrobe choice and his style might surprise you.

CA: The film points out the dangerous living conditions that LGBTQ people face in Russia, and you recently talked about this with *Attitude* magazine. Did the country’s conservative views on queerness surprise you?

DS: I think the way it was phrased in *Attitude* was like I had never even heard of these issues before and suddenly I was like, “Oh, wow, guess it’s really dangerous for them.” I was very aware of that. And I guess what I meant to say is, I wanted to be sensitive to that. You couldn’t really do a movie about *Eurovision* without touching on that subject; it’s famously a safe haven and a great champion of the LGBTQ+ community, and it has a huge fan base around the world for that very reason.

One of the first trans performers in Israel winning a few years back. Conchita winning. Netta has a huge LGBTQ following. It really embraces that, and it’s a delight for that reason. And yet some of these performers come from countries where it’s dangerous to openly acknowledge their sexuality, and however silly our film is and however ridiculous *Eurovision* is, I think it’s really important to remember that.

CA: When it came to the campiness of the character, was avoiding queer caricature a concern?

DS: I guess. I think historically there have been issues with that and with caricaturing, but you know, as we all know, there are as many different shapes and sizes of a queer person as there are of a straight person, so I think in the context of *Eurovision*, obviously Lemtov is a particular kind of performer. Whether he’s straight or gay, it’s sort of immaterial; he’s just that kind of guy, who’s just sitting on that much money with that kind of taste and is maybe not able to acknowledge fully who he is back home.

I think his need for Sigrít is a little different than we might expect. He’s not

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just the sleazy Lothario coming in to just kind of save Sigrít and break up (their band) Fire Saga. He's got slightly more nuanced and complicated reasons for wanting her by his side.

CA: How does he compare to other gay or queer characters that you have played in your career?

DS: I mean, he certainly has a more interesting wardrobe than say Nick Guest in *Line of Beauty*. I don't think Nick ever graduated to old-glamour camp. But to be honest, it never really occurred to me. I never sort of think, "I have had a quota of gay roles so I can't take on another one."

Same with *Line of Beauty*. It was just an absolutely beautiful book and a beautiful adaptation, so it never really was an issue for me.

CA: I believe I read that your first sex scene was in *The Line of Beauty*.

DS: It was one of the first things I ever did, to be honest. But quite possibly. I haven't been keeping count.

CA: That's what I'm here for.

DS: (Laughs.) Yeah, right. You've got the league table there. You know, to be honest, when it comes to onscreen love scenes, they're all fantasy scenes.

They're all made up. Me and whoever the other person is are not really together in real life, so you're always entering into a fantasy scenario. The very nature of what I do is just sort of jumping into someone else's life and exploring the world through their eyes, so it feels very much the same for me. I think obviously gay actors have been playing straight roles for a very, very long time, and maybe not able to openly acknowledge their sexuality in the countries that they come from. I hope I'm not taking away roles from gay actors by playing gay roles. I think it's just the nature of acting, really, that I don't think we should necessarily have looked for a gay Russian actor to play Alexander Lemtov. You could still sort of leap into a role as an actor, within the realms of possibility.

CA: Would you say that with *The Line of Beauty* you first became aware that you had LGBTQ fans?

DS: I suppose that's where it must've started. I mean, it is a really beautiful book and I think a very, very beautiful and sensitive adaptation as well.

CA: What was your introduction to the LGBTQ community?

DS: I think it would've been in the National Youth Theatre in London. Growing up, I didn't have many friends who were openly gay, and so I would've been about 15 when I first went to study – study is a strong word – but I got to go play with the National Youth Theatre and that's the first time that, for many people involved, you're meeting people from different backgrounds from all over the country, and all of them have this one thing in common: they love performing. And people from different ethnic backgrounds and different sexualities as well. It was a really, really eye-opening experience, and really fascinating. Some of those people are still my friends today. But yeah, it was a really valuable experience.

CA: Which moment in your career helped court a bigger gay audience: you as a hairy beast or the scene



Photo Courtesy of Netflix

when you come out of the shower in *The Guest*?

DS: (Laughs.) I mean, you'd have to look at your league table for that one. I don't have the stats on that.

CA: A film you starred in, *Permission*, took a hard look at monogamy and prominently featured a gay couple. Is LGBTQ representation important to you when you're considering a project?

DS: Yeah. I mean, that one was particularly interesting because an old friend of mine, Brian Crano, who is himself a married gay writer and director, and David Craig, who is in the film, is his husband and that film very much came out of conversations that – not just between myself and Brian but Brian and his circle of friends – have had in the years running up to that

movie. Just about relationships in general, not just LGBTQ, but about life partners and sexuality.

I thought it was a really interesting film in terms of how nuanced the discussion was and the questions raised in it. It wasn't clear cut. And it's not clear cut. I think that's the thing. I think everyone wants sexuality to be black and white and it's just not. And everyone wants marriage to be that as well and it's just not. And I think Brian is particularly sensitive to that. He introduced me to Dan Savage and the *Savage Love* podcast many, many years ago and I've been a very, very long-time listener. I've never called in, not yet.

CA: What would you ask Dan Savage?

DS: Oh god, the list is so long. But I'm a huge, huge fan of Dan Savage and what

he has done, not just for the LGBTQ community but actually just for people in general in their relationships. And particularly in the early days. It's gotten a little less out there, I would say, the call-ins. Or maybe it's that I've gotten less sensitive to some of these things!

CA: And about those dance-offs on your show *Legion*: What problems would you solve right now if problems could be solved by psychic dance-offs?

DS: (Laughs.) I mean, that is a great question. Psychic dance-offs could solve all sorts of things right now. And actually I've seen in the streets, during some of the protests that have been going on all over the place, that some people have taken to sort of collective dancing and I think that that might actually be a way forward.

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Photo By Tony Hauser

Rufus Rules: An interview with Rufus Wainwright

By Gregg Shapiro

For those who have been counting (and patiently waiting), it's been 12 (!) years since Rufus Wainwright has released an album of original pop music. Rest assured that with *Unfollow the Rules* (BMG), Wainwright doesn't disappoint. Album opener "Trouble In Paradise," which shares a kinship with "Going To A Town" (from 2007's *Release The Stars*), sets the tone with its political voice, something which echoes in "Only the People That Love." Wainwright also doesn't skimp on the operatic excesses on the dramatic "Early Morning Madness" and "My Little You." But there is also a hopefulness (and even humor) interwoven throughout on songs such as "You Ain't Big," "Peaceful Afternoon," "Damsel in Distress" and "Alone Time." Rufus was gracious enough to answer a few questions in advance of the release of *Unfollow the Rules*.

Rules, which is being released in July 2020, began in 2018. Is that about the average length of time for you when it comes to making a record or if this one took longer, why is that the case?

Rufus Wainwright: This one took longer. I had worked for this period of time years ago on my early albums. With this one I returned to that concept. I will say that we weren't working the whole time. We did it in spurts. I think if you actually put all the time that was spent consecutively, it didn't take anywhere near as long as that. That being said, I'm a strong believer in walking away from a project for a little bit to get a fresh sense of what it needs and coming back to it. This album had a lot of that; going away for a few months and then coming back. I think that really helped a lot.

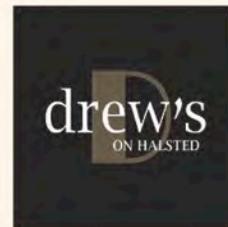
GS: What was it like working with producer and musician Mitchell From

on *Unfollow the Rules*?

RW: That is one of the great tales of my life. On an artistic level he was perfect. On the one hand, he respected my work and is a fan and wanted to fight for the songs and so forth. But on the other hand, he wasn't afraid to really question me and give me his honest opinion about what was going on musically. It was this nice combination of caring and also curt [laughs]. But then on top of all of that, he's a lovely guy. A true mensch. And we're very good friends now, which is the best thing that can happen.

GS: You said in a YouTube video that your daughter Viva came up with the album's title, *Unfollow the Rules*. Was the titular song inspired by the title or vice versa?

RW: Many years ago, she expressed that concept one afternoon and I jotted it down. "Daddy, I want to unfollow the rules." Then it became a lyric in a song



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Photo By Tony Hauser

and then it became a song itself. Now, it's the name of the record. That happened in a very organic way and I'm not quite sure which came first, the chicken or the egg at this point in terms of how this has all come about. But I will say that, like the album taking so long, having these big breaks in between, that song is similar. I kind of finished a couple little sections here and there, then I would go away and come back and hammer away at lyrics.

GS: In the eight years between *Unfollow the Rules* and *Out of the Game*, albums of original pop songs, the world has changed considerably, especially in light of the 2016 US election. Am I on the right track when I say that the songs "Hatred" and "Only the People That Love" sound like musical responses to the current state of things in Trump world?

RW: Yeah! You picked the right songs. Arguably, one could even say "Trouble In Paradise," the opening track is indicative of the era we live in. "Hatred" I wrote in a period of my life where I was just up against the wall somewhat concerning an adult issue. Things that we all go through as human beings, whether it's illness or going to court or losing a loved one. It was one of those

big moments in life and I was filled with wrath. I needed to do something with that wrath in order to win the battle and not destroy myself in the process. I do feel like we're at a similar juncture right now with the election. People are going to be angry no matter what. There's no getting rid of that, so we have to then channel that energy into the appropriate weapons [laughs] and come out better by the end. I don't think it's going to be easy, and it's quite frightening, actually. But human history is laced with troubled times, we've been here before in the world. You have to go through this to get to a better place. "Only the People That Love" is eventually the answer to the question. Love will conquer all and that is your best bet in surviving this tricky period.

GS: I have a feeling that there are probably going to be gay men of a certain age who will hear Sarah Siddons get name checked in "Romantical Man" and know who she was.

RW: [Big laugh]

GS: How did an 18th century actress find her way into this song?

RW: I've been a fan of All About Eve for many years. She briefly appears in that movie. Let's just say I wasn't deeply

knowledgeable of that whole concept until I ran into her grave. That's where I got the idea. I was walking through London and I saw this amazing statue of her in Paddington Green. Then I went and read up on her and fell into this rabbit hole [laughs] of the 18th century and Bette Davis movies [laughs]. I'm happy to bring people along on this journey.

GS: Does Stephen Sondheim know about the song "This One's For The Ladies (That Lunge)", and if so, what does he think of the semi-tribute?

RW: You know what? I don't know! That's a good idea. I'll send it to him. I met him a couple of times and we've hung out a bit. I should send him a link.

GS: In "Peaceful Afternoon", an anniversary song for your husband Jorn (Weisbrodt), you sing the line "between sex and death and trying to keep the kitchen clean" which may be the most romantic summation of marriage I've ever heard, and I've been with my husband for almost 28 years. What does Jorn think of the song?

RW: He loves it. It is now kind of part of our marriage that I write a song about him for every album of original songs I release. It's been that way for the last

three or four records, so it's not a new thing. Thankfully, they're all love songs [laughs] and they seem to grow in power and strength and beauty, so it's worth pontificating on.

GS: In the midst of all the seriousness, there is also humor, as in the song "You Ain't Big." What was the inspiration for that song and are you prepared to hear from the people of Lawrence, Kansas, as well as Southern Pennsylvania, Eastern California and Western New York state?

RW: [Laughs] Lawrence, I think, is a veiled compliment. The whole premise of the song is that you're not really a huge celebrity until you've been amongst the plebeians of America, which is an interesting place, to say the least. Lawrence has always been a bit of an oasis in the Midwest whenever I've gone there. I can kind of breathe, finally. I don't feel as tense as I do in the rest of the country. As far as Southern Pennsylvania, Eastern California and Western New York (are concerned), those are particular jungles, shall we say [laughs].

GS: Having seen you perform in concert many times over the years, I was wondering how you are

adjusting to the new normal of canceled and rescheduled concert tours during the pandemic?

RW: I have to say I am one of the luckiest artists around because I, thankfully over the last 10 years, really made great overtures to the opera world. I went out there and hammered away at this crazy idea of being accepted into the classical pantheon. I will never know if that's happened until I am dead for about 100 years. That being said, what's great about it now is that I must've had some effect because I do have a lot of commissions. They take



two or three years to compose. The calendar is much wider in the classical world than in the pop world. So, there's a ton of work that I could sit down and work on because of that little exit strategy that I had at one point.



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Love Knows No Status

Beloved serodiscordant couple, recently wed in Venice, share their love story

By David Artavia

In March 2013, David Lester-Massey (then Massey) gave an interview that would change his life forever. At the time, Atlanta-based marketing professional and producer Johnny Lester-Massey (then Lester) was casting a reality show and searching for potential talent. Following a brief phone call, Johnny informed David that he'd call him back. And he did.

That call lasted for hours – as did the next one, and the next one, and the next one. Eventually, David raked up the courage to ask Johnny if they could meet in person. Admittedly, Johnny says now, he thought it was going to be a business dinner. David, however, knew it was something more.

At this point, the two had hours of conversation under their belt and understood a genuine connection was forming. After having a “really good

time” at dinner, David, knowing his feelings for Johnny were building, decided to make an even more courageous move. Only this time, it was something deeply personal.

“I need to let you know that I am HIV-positive,” he told Johnny, expecting what many people living with HIV dread after disclosing their status: fear, rejection, and isolation. But what happened next took David by surprise.

Johnny, who is HIV-negative and was not fully educated about the virus at the time, responded with compassionate and concerning questions: “Are you OK? How are you? What does that mean? Are you healthy?”

David began to educate Johnny on his health, his numbers, and his statistics. What really moved him, he says, was that Johnny never lost

romantic interest after telling him he was living with HIV.

“[Johnny] took the time to get educated,” explains David. “When he left my house, he called his doctor and he had conversations about what it means to date or be in a relationship with somebody who is living with HIV. [The doctor] was like, ‘OK, so I want you to know something... First of all, if they disclosed that information to you this early on, please consider yourself special, because it's not easy to do, it's not easy to hear, and he chose to disclose to you.’”

The wise words from Johnny's doctor, who is also his uncle, brought the issue into a broader perspective for the young producer. It certainly wasn't the first time someone disclosed their status to Johnny before, but this time was different.

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“Atlanta’s very fast-paced, there’s a lot of hits and misses here,” Johnny explains about life in the Southern city, which according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is fourth in the nation for new HIV diagnoses. “I was at a point of time in my life where I was open and ready for a relationship. I wanted something different. Being from a small town... coming out as gay, being in front of a Baptist minister in the Bible Belt, you have all of these layers of stigmas and hang-ups that you have to walk through and deal with. I gave myself two years to really work on myself, to be my openly Black gay self, because I had never had the opportunity to do that. I was always terrified to do that. I said, ‘A relationship that’s meant to be will come.’ And it did.”

Six years later, David and Johnny have become leading content creators and relationship influencers specializing in building content for people living with HIV. As contributors for POZ magazine and Real Health Magazine, and hosts of Poz.com’s web series Table Talk and RealHealthMag.com’s Perspectives, the duo (branded as “David and Johnny”) give incredible advice and insight to couples who, like them, are in serodiscordant relationships whereby one person is living with HIV and the other is not.

Together, David and Johnny own HiClass Management, a boutique branding and imaging firm providing services for high profile clientele and awareness marketing around HIV. Recently, they launched into new ventures: Hiclass Blends, a luxury loose-leaf tea company, and SirHiclass Footwear, a luxury footwear line with products made in Italy.

By far, the most extravagant project they’ve curated to date was their 2019 wedding in Venice, Italy, a country that holds a special place in their hearts.

A few years ago, David had started touring in Italy, singing and directing a gospel choir, spending two to three weeks at a time traveling across the country. In 2017, he received a call from singer and Insta-celebrity Cheryl Porter, who’d been invited to perform at “Christmas at The Vatican” for Pope Francis.

“She said, ‘I can’t imagine doing this without you. Would you be able to come over?’” remembers David, who jumped at the chance. Johnny joined him for the tour, and the duo fell in love with all things Italy. So much so that when the time came for choosing wedding destinations, it seemed like a no brainer.

“And so, we said, Italy is a big country, where will we do it?” David

explains. “I’d been to Venice, but he hadn’t. And so, I was like, ‘I would really enjoy being in Venice with you, and if we could make our wedding happen, I think you would be blown away.’”

The couple started the planning immediately. Porter also sang at the intimate ceremony, which was performed in the music hall of the Ca’ Sagredo Hotel Campo Santa Sofia. And the private setting was intentional on their part.

Lester-Massey

“When we talked about the kind of money we were investing,” Johnny explains, “we said we don’t want to invest all of this money for people to come and just spectate. We want people [there] who are going to be rooting and cheering for us. [In Italy], they already invested to get themselves there, so I know they weren’t there to spectate.”

If there’s one attribute defining David and Johnny’s relationship, it’s authenticity. Checking in to make sure they’re both good and being honest about their feelings will always be top priority.

“We have this thing called maintenance time,” David explains. “Maintenance time itself is to take an hour of uninterrupted time. There’s no television, no radio, no cell phones, no computer, no devices. Just you and your partner, and you actually talk. You actually talk about the things that are going well. You talk about the things that you want to improve. You talk about things that you couldn’t talk about because you were too heated to talk about them. You save it for that one hour you’ve dedicated, every week.”

Admittedly, David says they got to that point through therapy, which is another thing they encourage couples to partake in.

“Get someone with an unbiased voice that can hear both of you at the same time, because what we find is that if I’m saying something in a language my partner can’t understand, it’s just like me not talking at all,” David adds. “Learn how to listen in the language that your partner can understand.”

“When David and I first started using [maintenance time], it’s because we couldn’t communicate effectively,” Johnny says. “I had a whole iPad note of stuff I was ready to talk about during maintenance time, so I was ready. I came to maintenance time ready to read and ready to just tell him everything I wanted to. [But] it became, ‘No, we need to go over this because of that’ and ‘This is going to be because of that.’ Eventually, we didn’t need maintenance time anymore because we

just started to deal with stuff as it came.”

“That’s what you would hope for,” Johnny adds. “You really hope that you won’t need [maintenance time] as a long-term situation. I think that’s one of the beautiful things I learned out of it. And when David talks about therapy, I laugh because I always say we were in therapy within the first six months. But then, we did therapy again a few years into the relationship, and we just kind of used therapy as a maintenance tool. I think it’s something that’s really contributed to the success and communication of our relationship.”

Without a doubt, David and Johnny’s love has grown stronger over the years as they continue breaking down their inner walls. For countless fans, many of whom are living with HIV, their story is one of triumph and trust. The fact that their experience as a serodiscordant couple is highly needed in this age of misinformation has not passed them by. But also, they’re fully aware that in order for anyone to fight stigma within a relationship, they must equip themselves with knowledge.

“I can understand that there are a lot of people who don’t have the education [about HIV] because I didn’t either,” Johnny says. “David didn’t know that he was the main reason I was comfortable being in that moment with him the first night he told me [his status], because he was calm. If he would’ve come to me freaking out and all over the place, I probably would’ve naturally reacted and been as freaked out as he was. But he was very calm. He had a conversation with me... People are not dumb. They know what’s going on. And you can tell if somebody’s kind of rushing things along... that doesn’t make somebody who’s unsure be okay.”

He advises to anyone choosing to disclose their status to their lover, “The person that’s sharing the information, they really are the gauge on that thermometer, because how they deliver it is probably how they’re going to get a response.”

David adds, “I was educated about my own status enough to share it with somebody else, when they felt comfortable hearing the information. So, just imagine what it would have been like if I was not educated and Johnny had questions, and then I either gave him misinformation or just said ‘I don’t know.’ That would make me seem less credible.”

“The onus of your status still belongs to you,” David explains. “You can choose to share it. You can choose not to share it. But you do have a responsibility to ensure that you protect

yourself and you protect the other person that you're with. Whether you plan to be with them for a week, a night, or a lifetime, you still have to protect yourself. The way to do that is to make sure that you have as much education in your tool belt that you can be able to share with somebody else. So, when they leave you, for whatever reason, they're more educated just by meeting you—not hooking up with you, not being in a relationship. Whenever they come into somebody else's presence, they can give that education to somebody else.

That education certainly helped when David disclosed his status publicly for the first time at a conference—after he already told Johnny.

"I didn't know at that time, but somebody was recording it and they had hit share," David remembers. "There were people in my hometown that got the information through social media, not me. There were people that were in Johnny's [circle] that got the information over social media and not through him"

"And so, now all of these questions are forming," he adds. "They're like, 'Wait a minute, did you know that David is living with this? Did Johnny know? Did you see him?' All of these things. I really wanted to control our message, and once we couldn't, it was like, OK, now that it's out there, we still have a

responsibility to let people know that, yes, this is a part of our story, but it's not the entire story. It's just the backdrop. This was more than HIV."

That was the moment they both realized their stories could actually help others, and they certainly answered the call.

"I told him this from the beginning," explains Johnny. "I was like, 'I want people not only to see you living with HIV, but they need to see you live well.' They don't need to just see you and say, 'Oh, he looks healthy, he's eating.' No. They need to see you be a rockstar, because they need to see something that they've never seen before."

Alternatively, they also understand that Johnny's voice is equally as important as an HIV-negative person who is in a healthy long-term relationship with someone who is poz—a narrative we often don't see in mainstream TV and film.

"I'm negative, he's positive, we know what our regimen is, we know what the doctors have told us, and we know how we operate," Johnny says. "It was like a revelation or an a-ha moment for me in that instance. I also told David, since we've never seen this before, since there is no template, my thing is, if we're going to do anything, we're going to do it fabulous."

Currently, they're in the process of piecing together a mini e-book, which will be a collection of quotations and small insights (or "David and Johnny-isms") their fans will be able to download and use if ever they need a jumpstart of inspiration.

However, their ultimate goal is to be the first gay Black male couple to host a talk show. And given their shared drive and passion for change, they might achieve that goal sooner than later.

"I do believe there is a space for thought leaders and people that want to take themselves, their relationships to the next level," Johnny says. "Us being men of color, by being open and vocal about who we are and what we do, I think it resonates with a lot of people."

David Artavia is managing editor of Plus magazine, the HIV Plus Treatment Guide mobile app, and HIVPlusMag.com. This column is a project of Plus, Positively Aware, POZ, The Body, and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ wire service. Visit their websites — HIVPlusMag.com, PositivelyAware.com, Poz.com and TheBody.com—for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS. (This article was previously published in Plus magazine and reprinted with permission.)

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	Artist	Title
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3	Riggi & Piros x VENIICE with RANI	My Feelings
4	Sia	Together (Andrew Marks Remix)
5	Robin Schulz	In Your Eyes ft. Alida (Charlie Lane Radio Mix)
6	Becky Hill	Better Off Without You ft. Shift K3Y
7	Alesso	Midnight ft. Liam Payne (Jack Wins Remix)
8	Voost & Robin Tayger & Santeli	Blame
9	Jonas Blue x Paloma Faith	Mistakes
10	Lost Frequencies & Zonderling	Love To Go ft. Kelvin Jones (MOTi Remix)
11	Marshmello & Halsey	Be Kind (Surf Mesa Remix)
12	Ultra Nate	Free (Live Your Life)
13	Alanis Morissette	Smiling (F9 Radio Mix)
14	Lastlings	No Time (Original Mix)
15	Julian Jordan	Nobody Knows ft. Feldz



Sukie de la Croix and Owen Keehnen need your assistance once again!

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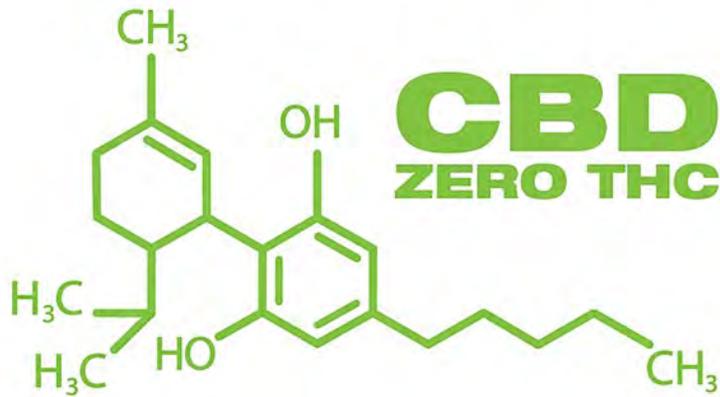


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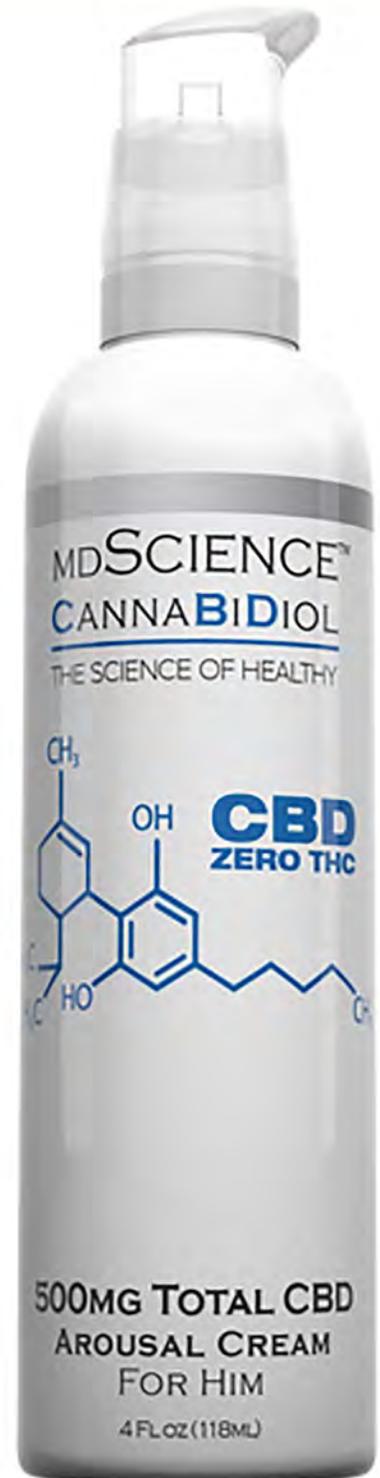
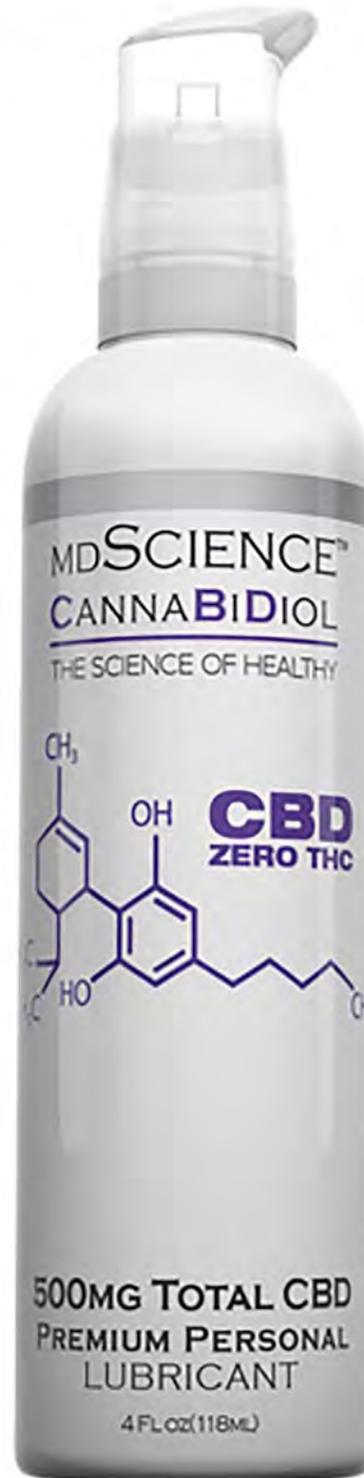
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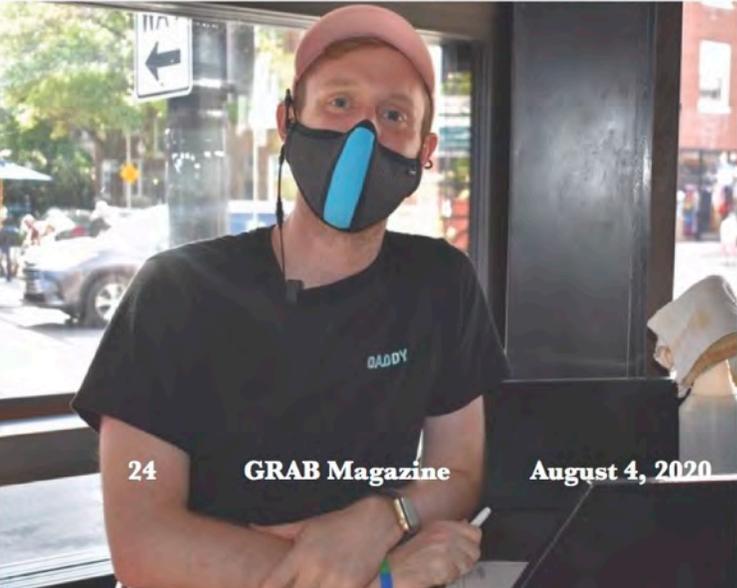
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GRAB HOLLY

That Fateful Tell

By Holly Maholm

I am not a poker player, but I do understand a bit of poker terminology that is unique to the game. When a player looks at his cards, and thinks and ponders, and finally bets or passes, it often happens that he will give away his strategy – and the strength of his hand – through subtle gestures, nods or facial expressions indicative of his secret estimation of success. Poker players call such subtle disclosures a “tell,” and they will try to read those signs among the other players, to gain an advantage.

And similarly, I, a transgender woman, am painfully aware that all you see of me – my frame and form, the features of my face, my mannerisms, voice and laugh – are but one enormous “tell.” Anyone watching me from across the room will soon observe my tells and read me as the tranny that I am. For me, this is not an easy thing to wake up to every morning; to know that I am doomed to fail at those “womanly arts” by which that gentler gender expresses those... alluring qualities we see adorn

and ornament our world.

For a long time I have envied my fellow LGBT-mates – the L and G and B – who, whatever other burdens they may bear (of which I have observed many), at least do not suffer from that same incapacitating “tell” as I do. A gay man seen from a distance is indistinguishable from any of his hetro-brothers (except, of course, as to his more dramatic sense of style, his more attentive grooming, and his horror of wearing anything which is either “not my look” or “so last year.”)

Thus, I was once of the opinion that gay men do not “tell.” Or so I thought.

I was standing in the door to the stable, waiting for Dave and one of his LGBT students to arrive. I wanted Dave’s class to agree to serve as interns in Donut Time’s new home-delivery business, but before they would make that commitment, there was one condition they wanted me to agree. Dave and his student were on their way to the stable to tell me what that was.

They arrived, and we retired to one of the stalls. I suggested we meet either at Donut Time or at Dave’s classroom, but the student (Chris) wanted to meet where we could be near the horses. When Chris began to speak, he opened a door for me upon an unreveal’d truth.

Chris turned his head and – noticing which horse was with us in the stall – exclaimed, “Oh! It’s Pickles!” (In fact, it was Scallywag, disguised as Pickles.) “She’s one of the gentle ones. I like her a lot.” He turned back to us and spoke from the heart.

“So, Holly, you can hear my voice, and you know what it means. I’ve got that ‘gay voice’ we gay men often have, and mine is pretty strong. I’ve got a lisp that nothing can change, and all my sentences have that melodious lilt, that upward inflection at the end. I’ve had it all my life, and it’s not going away.

“What my voice does to me is this: If I am



sitting quietly in class, I blend in as part of the group. But as soon as I speak up to express my opinion, everybody looks at me and thinks ‘So gay! So fruity! Just listen to him!’ I could be proposing a clever solution to a problem we have, or making some perceptive point that should earn me the admiration of my classmates... but, no, you can forget that. No one hears the content of what I say. They only hear ‘so gay, so gay!’

“I can’t tell you how much it has helped me to be part of Dave’s LGBT class. They accept me as I am, which has taken a weight off my shoulders. But it’s not just the other LGBT students who treat me like one of their own. Maybe it’s silly to make this observation, but the horses hear what I say... uncritically. When I’m driving one of the chariots and give a command, the horses never hesitate. They don’t stop to judge me; they hear my meaning and leap to obey. When I’m with them, there are no barriers between us.

“So, if you want us to serve as ‘Interns of Ancient Rome,’ then what we want is this: To be allowed to build a technologically-advanced Roman war chariot; to use modern tools and materials to construct the most deadly horse-drawn chariot imaginable. One which – if we still had an Emperor – he would build dozens like it and use them to drive away Invading Barbarians. We know such a chariot will be expensive to build, but that’s what we’re asking.”

“I hear you, Chris.” I replied. “You don’t have to tell me twice.”
(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.

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TRAVEL



Summer Fun in Madison, WI

By Bill Malcolm

Situated on an isthmus between two large lakes, Madison is perfect for a weekend getaway. Just a two-plus hour drive from Chicago, getting there is a breeze. Madison is perfect for bikers and walkers, so bring your bike or rent a B Cycle electric bike. The progressive city wins award after award. The 40,000 student University of Wisconsin brings folks from around the world. The city is also home of the beautiful State Capitol, which is visible from around town. The growing influence of the medical software giant EPIC Corporation also makes Madison a millennial boomtown. Look out Denver.

WHAT TO DO

Make your first stop a ride around the Capitol, State Street, and the UW

Lakeshore Path along Lake Mendota. Park your bike at Picnic Point for the one-mile walk out to the point for stunning views of the State Capitol, UW Campus, and city.

Rent a kayak at Brittingham Bay (<http://MadisonBoats.com>) and enjoy the bay and nearby Lake Monona. Paddleboats and canoes also available (in addition to a beach).

Ride east on the Lake View Loop to Olbrich Botanical Gardens (free and located at 3300 Atwood Avenue) and enjoy the array of plants and flowers.

Pick up some Wisconsin cheese at Fromagination on the Square.

Enjoy the prairie wildflowers at the UW Arboretum and at Owen Park on the west side.

Take a swim at BB Clarke Beach near downtown on Lake Monona or at James Madison Park on Lake Mendota.

Enjoy the views from the roof of Monona Terrace, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It serves as the city's convention center. You will find his Prairie style architecture all around town including at the airport.

NIGHTLIFE

The Shamrock at 117 W. Main right off the Capitol Square is a Madison tradition. Enjoy the new outdoor street dining and drinking tables. Grab a brat and tater tots for dinner. Happy hour every day runs 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Nearby also on the Square is WOOFs, the hangout of the bear and leather crowd. The outside chairs are



Photos By
Anthony Meade





perfect for enjoying a summer evening. Do not miss the Sunday beer busts.

Out on the Beltline, just 12 minutes from downtown is Club V Nightclub and Showbar. Enjoy a drag show on the outdoor patio Thursday-Sunday. You can even reserve a table.

WHERE TO EAT

State Street and Capitol Square restaurants feature StreetEatery on the weekends where you can enjoy outdoor dining.

The Statehouse at the Edgewater features terrace seating is very good as is the most casual Boathouse. Try the salads.

WHERE TO STAY

The Edgewater (1001 Wisconsin Place, <http://www.theedgewater.com>) is right on the shore of Lake Mendota near the campus and downtown and features stunning views of the Lake, a pier side restaurant (The Boat House), a great restaurant (The State House), and more. Ceiling-to-wall windows make the views even better from the Wisconsin Building. Work out at their gym. Watch the sunsets. Enjoy the boats parked at their pier. Being right on Lake Mendota, it really does not get any better on a hot summer day.

GETTING THERE

Madison is just over a two-plus hour drive from Chicago. The city is also served by Dane County Regional Airport. You will not need a car if you stay on the (Capitol) Square in the downtown area.

COVID

Masks are required indoors in

Madison and surrounding Dane County. Restaurants are open with capacity restrictions in effect so most dining is now outside. Hotels are open. However, many special events are cancelled which means hotel rates are unusually low with bargains to be had.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

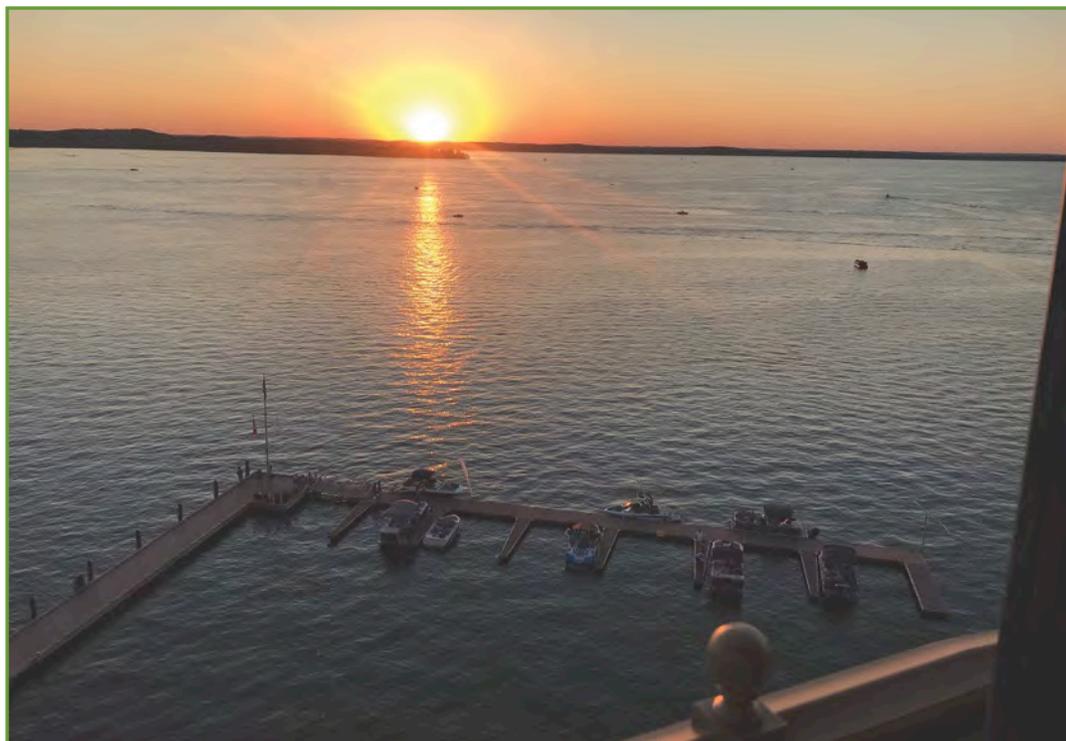
For more information, read Our Lives (<http://www.ourlivesmadison.com>), the city's LGBTQ publication. The OutReach LGBTQ Community Center also puts

out a calendar and guide.

Visit Madison is also full of trip planning ideas (<http://www.visitMadison.com>).

You will not run out of things to do in this lake-oriented, bike-friendly city. It is the only city on an isthmus.

Bill Malcolm is a native of Madison but now resides in Indianapolis. This syndicated column has or does appear in select LGBTQ publications around the country.



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OUTspoken—Chicago's Monthly LGBTQ Storytelling Night Celebrates 6 Years! August 4, 2020



In order to promote social distancing, the 7th year of OUTspoken will start with a very special Zoom Outspoken for viewers to tune in from around the city and

around the world: Tuesday August 4 at 7PM on Zoom. Four storytellers will take the virtual stage and share their stories on August 4: **Channyn Lynn Parker, Janet Anne, Shane Hendrix, and Mae Flores.**

This Zoom OUTspoken will be hosted by Kim L. Hunt and David Fink. This show is curated by current OUTspoken curator and Moth Grand Slam Winner **Archy Jamjun.**

OUTspoken stories from the past six years are now featured in the hit new podcast: *On the Mic: OUTspoken LGBTQ+ Storytelling at Sidetrack.* The podcast can be found wherever you find your podcasts and is produced by Devlyn Camp.

OUTspoken is a monthly LGBTQ+ storytelling event usually presented at Sidetrack, 3349 North Halsted in Chicago. And while all stories do not have sexuality or gender identity as their focus, all stories are told from the perspective of LGBTQ+ persons or their close allies. Storytellers vary month to month. It is the mission of OUTspoken to whenever possible present the most diverse cast possible.

Audience members are encouraged to RSVP "going" on the event page <https://www.facebook.com/events/1331510856952670> The Zoom event password will be shared on the event page 24 hours prior to the event.

Federal Judge Hears Second Round of Oral Arguments in Case of Two-Year-Old Daughter of Married Same-Sex Couple Treated as "Born Out of Wedlock"



A federal judge in Atlanta heard oral arguments in a case brought by Immigration Equality, Lambda Legal, and pro bono counsel Morgan Lewis against the U.S. State Department for refusing to recognize the citizenship from birth of **Simone Mize-Gregg**, the two-year-old daughter of U.S. citizens, **Derek Mize** and **Jonathan Gregg**. The State Department's policy treats the children of same-sex married couples as "born out of wedlock," and then denies that they are citizens.

"It's difficult to hear the government arguments about our daughter as though the concrete injuries we have endured as a family and continue to endure do not matter," said Derek Mize and Jonathan Gregg. "The government wants to dismiss our case and set up our daughter for a lifetime of unfair treatment. Of course, we will do everything we can to prevent that, and keep fighting on our daughter's behalf. We pray every day the court will do the right thing for Simone."

The oral arguments focused on a motion to dismiss by the federal government given the grant of legal permanent residency to Simone Mize-Gregg. The Court previously heard oral arguments in this case in May 2020, focusing on plaintiffs' motion for partial summary judgment in the case arguing that the Department of State's actions violated the text and structure of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

"As the court recognized in today's arguments, the Department of State's treatment of married same-sex couples, more generally, and of Derek, Jonny, and their daughter Simone, more specifically, is vexing," said **Omar Gonzalez-Pagan**, Senior Attorney at Lambda Legal. "No family should have to face the fear and uncertainty of having their child's citizenship status be in limbo. Supreme Court case law has made clear that the State Department cannot treat married same-sex couples and their children as second-class citizens. The Department of State's actions in this case are unmoored from the law and the constitution."

The oral arguments also come after a federal judge in Maryland ruled on June 17th that **Kessem Kiviti**, daughter of same-sex married couple **Roe** and **Adiel Kiviti**, has been a U.S. citizen from birth. Kessem's fathers are also both U.S. citizens, who were told by the State Department that their daughter was not a citizen because she was not biologically related to both of her parents. Immigration Equality, Lambda Legal, and pro bono counsel also represented the Kiviti family in their case against the U.S. State Department, which was filed in September 2019.

"The State Department's position that children born during the course of a marriage are actually born 'out of wedlock' is absurd, in stark contrast to statutory law, and unconstitutional," said **Aaron C. Morris**, Executive Director of Immigration Equality. "The State Department should change its discriminatory policy immediately. And, until it does, we will continue to fight for the dignity and protection of children like Simone."

Derek Mize and Jonathan Gregg are a same-sex couple who married in New York in 2015. They had their daughter Simone via surrogacy in England in 2018, and both fathers are listed on her birth certificate. When they applied for recognition of

her U.S. citizenship, the U.S. consulate in London rejected their application. Because only one of Simone's fathers has a biological connection to her, the State Department is disregarding Jonathan and Derek's marriage and is treating Simone as though she was born out of wedlock, a classification which requires more stringent requirements for recognition of her citizenship. The Immigration and Nationality Act states that children of married U.S. citizens born abroad are U.S. citizens from birth so long as one of their parents has lived in the U.S. at some point, but the State Department routinely denies that right to same-sex couples and their marital children. While different-sex couples are automatically presumed to both be parents of their children, same-sex couples are subjected to invasive questioning about how they brought their child into their family, and because one parent is not a biological parent, they are treated as if they are not married, and their children are not recognized as citizens unless the biological parent can meet additional criteria.

The lawsuit *Mize-Gregg v. Pompeo* was filed July 29, 2019 in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.

Handling the case are Omar Gonzalez-Pagan, Karen Loewy, and Tara Borelli for Lambda Legal; Aaron C. Morris for Immigration Equality, and lawyers from the law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP.

Learn more about Lambda Legal's *Mize v. Pompeo*: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/in-court/cases/mize-v-pompeo>

Next Issue of
GRAB
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Canadian pop singer/songwriter **Ryan Maynard** is soaking up that "Summer Sun (Nothin' on You)" with the release of his new single — available now!

A timely preview to his forthcoming sophomore album, *Matter of Time* — an upbeat pop explosion with contemporary

electronic sounds set for release this August — the video for "Summer Sun (Nothin' on You)" was shot entirely on an iPhone 11 Pro at L'Aboiteau Beach across two picture-perfect days.

"This song was inspired by our east coast's beauty during such a beautiful season," he shares of the origins behind the track. "And now, it's even better as restrictions are being lifted and people are starting to emerge from quarantine to be with their loved ones.

The album follows suit, Maynard shares. "Matter of Time speaks to the 2020 timeline of our world. I hope to bring an optimistic outlook to people through music, and give everyone something to smile about.

"With so much going on, I wanted to give people something they can dance to," he adds. "Something that will help them forget about their problems."

"Something to dance to" is a theme the Montreal-born, Moncton-based

multi-faceted artist repeatedly does more than just deliver on; through his work as a DJ, karaoke host, Pride event performer, singing competition creator and host, and more, he's become ubiquitously known for his unique brand of high-energy, all-encompassing performances.

Having technically fashioned his start as a kid with the help of toy recorders, Maynard quickly honed his personal and impassioned pop vision through songwriting and collaborating with producers from around the world. The results include his 2018 breakthrough debut, *Welcome to Utopia*, which stacked three New Brunswick Music Award nominations — including Solo Recording of the Year, Visual Identity of the Year, and Fan Favourite — and 2020's followup LP *Matter of Time*.

"Summer Sun (Nothin' on You)" is available now.

Matter of Time is available August 2020.

**DANNY GOO EXCLUSIVELY
PREMIERES NEW SINGLE
"BETTER OFF"**



There's something both otherworldly and immediately relatable about the atmosphere the Dallas native, Danny Goo conjures. Goo has announced that he is signing to Atoned Music, and is exclusively premiering his first release under his new home "Better Off" via The Noise! Spin the track, produced by longtime collaborator, Jojo Centineo, here.

"Sometimes in life we want things that aren't always what's best for us and sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where we are faced with letting go of something, or even someone that we love because deep down we know it's what's best for you as an individual. This inner battle between holding onto someone you love versus realizing that you would be better off without them is a tough reality to accept littered with uncertainty and a fear of being alone. 'Better Off' depicts what I went through when I realized deep down my partner wasn't right for me but was still filled with so many feelings for them. It's hard to love someone so much, but know deep down they don't have what it takes to be what you need. 'Better Off' is my way of coping with this sad truth," shares Danny.

Danny Goo is a rising star amidst a new generation of indie artists who transcend genre. His charming vocals blend plainspoken emotional vulnerability with intimate

minimalist pop and soothing postmodern R&B. Central Track wrote that Danny's music possesses the earmarks of alternative R&B while embodying a nexus of emo, cloud rap, and dream pop.

Listeners who discovered Danny via SoundCloud, Emo Nite, and on bills with Emotional Xan, Boyfriendz, and Sleye are the same dedicated listeners drawn to artists such as Lil Lotus. The energy of Warped Tour, the passion of pop-punk, and the confessional balladry of R&B are all here. Seamlessly blending seemingly disparate genres into a smooth and broad reaching sound that's as vibrant and dynamic as it is unique, Danny Goo is on a simple mission to spread peace, love and positivity. Take a seat, take a sip, and take it in.

To keep up with Danny Goo, visit:

<https://www.instagram.com/itsdannyygoo/>
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**BOY BECOMES HERO
SHARES NEW SINGLE
"FLEXIBILITY"**



Boy Becomes Hero new single "Flexibility" premiering last week exclusively with The Noise. The single is taken from the band's upcoming sophomore record *Escape Artist*, due for a September 25th release.

Explaining the upcoming concept

album, a prelude to 2019's *Reverie*, Boy Becomes Hero shares with The Noise, "Escape Artist" is a story that follows Amatera (the antagonist from *Reverie*), a man who is lost in an ever changing mental state. His story begins at a breaking point for change, misled by a corrupt leader, resulting in a devastating loss. Cast out to sea, Amatera finds himself captive by a Siren's song. With the help of Ninjen (Garret Rapp) and Ajna (Jonny Craig), our hero is able to heal and plan an overtaking of the Siren's ship in order to find restitution. The end of this album ties right into "Abstraction" from *Reverie*. A Deluxe Edition will be available next year with a few songs re-imagined from *Reverie*, where our characters from both albums' stories collide. *Escape Artist* is kind of a horror album; you'll really be able to

hear that. It makes its way musically with our characters moving from dark to light. Jonathan Gearing jumping on board this time really steps things up a notch with the programming and Andreas Magnusson really killed it with the mix. There's a whole lot of Garret on here too. I can't wait for everyone to really dig into this."

Boy Becomes Hero is a post-hardcore outfit from Michigan created by Andrew Brittingham (multi-instrumentalist, vocalist) that delivers thrashing anthems and melodic breakdowns. Boy Becomes Hero, with a partnership with To Write Love On Her Arms, is dedicated to creating a musical experience across the post-hardcore scene while raising awareness for depression, self-harm, addiction and suicide.

Fans can pre-save "Flexibility" now at <http://show.co/1jD8kk>



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*Photos By
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