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Publisher

Stacy Bridges

Creative Director (Web)

Miguel Ortuno

Contributors

Chris Azzopardi
Roger V. McCaffrey-Boss
Erik Sosa-Kibby
Holly Maholm
Gregg Shapiro
Terri Schlichenmeyer

Production

Stacy Bridges
James Gumb

Photography

Bear Lens Photography
KenBrown
CHRIS K.

Sales

Judy Kyle

Public Relations

Nick Wille

**NATIONAL SALES
REPRESENTATIVE**

RIVENDELL MEDIA
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In Memorium

Mark Nagel (Co-Founder)
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Bob The Drag Queen,
Shangela and Eureka O'Hara
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GRAB MAGAZINE
3712 N. BROADWAY #315
CHICAGO, IL 60613
TEL: 773-707-2660
WWW.GRABCHICAGO.COM
WWW.GRABBYAWARDS.COM
EMAIL: GRABSTACY@GMAIL.COM



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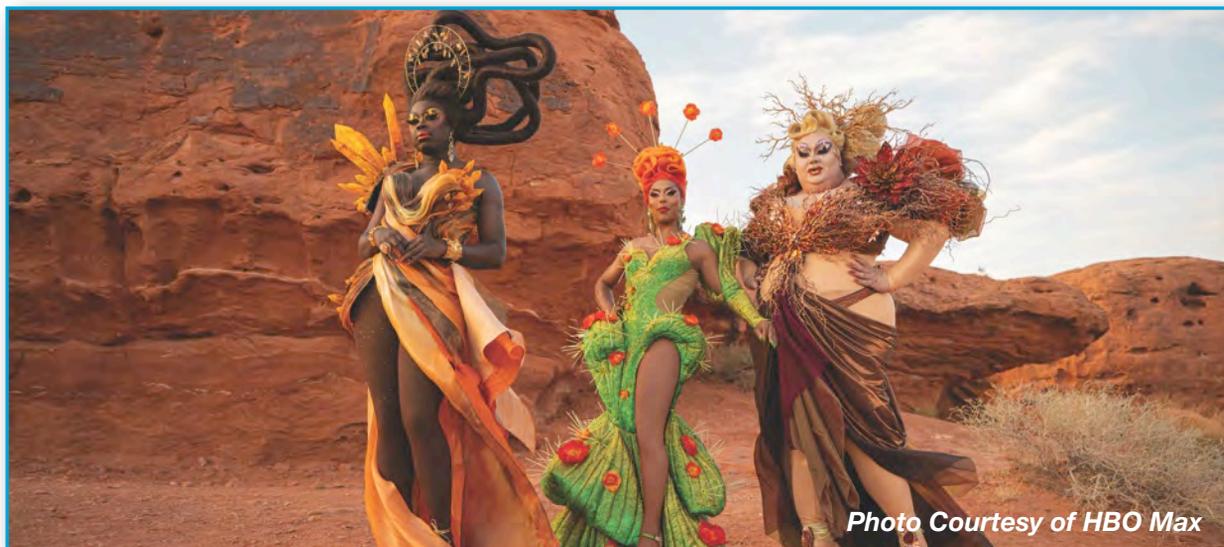


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GRAB THE REMOTE



There Might Be a Better Way, But This Is the Queerest Way

Bob the Drag Queen and Eureka, stars of HBO's 'We're Here,' on promoting equality through drag

By Eve Kucharski

Glitz, glam and, oh, just the small matter of changing hearts and minds. That's a tall order for anyone, and the basic setup of every episode of the HBO show "We're Here." But of course, once again in Season 3, drag queens Shangela, Eureka O'Hara and Bob the Drag Queen use their skills to deliver on that recipe and then some.

On the surface, "We're Here" is a show about drag queens teaching their craft to queer and allied people in small, conservative towns across middle America. However, look past all of the costumes, makeup and dance numbers, and it becomes clear there's a deeper message of acceptance running through each episode.

Drag becomes the conduit for the queens' drag kids to not only build up, and sometimes actualize, their confidence in deeply anti-LGBTQ+ environments, but it calls attention to the intricate and nuanced realities of small-town life for queer people — all while putting on a once-in-a-lifetime show in the unlikelyst of places.

Bob the Drag Queen and Eureka O'Hara, two-thirds of the iconic drag trio, joined me for an interview about the show's latest season. They discussed the importance of giving patience to those who want to listen, how spirituality and queerness can intersect, the political environment during each season, and much more.

Eve Kucharski: Every time you head into a new town there is a bit of resistance, but I felt like this season it was especially bad. There were hostile threats on social media, and then there was the Utah council that was working to cancel your filming permit. Did you feel that way?

Bob the Drag Queen: We've had resistance before. I mean, we even had the cops called on us in Season 1. Several times, actually [laughs]. And having a whole town try to shut us down, I don't know if that's a reflection of where we are now or if it's a reflection of where we were at the time, physically. But the political climate has changed. Each season has been a different world. Season 1 was pre-pandemic; Trump was still

president. Season Two was a very tumultuous election year, and we were in the middle of an election year. And now, [with] Season Three, we were ramping up to midterms, we had a new president and we are getting back out into the world in terms of coming out of lockdown.

Eureka O'Hara: Yeah, I agree. Bob hit it on the nose.

EK: Maybe some of the resistance you faced this time around was partly because more people are aware of the show than before.

Bob: Well, I still wonder if they watch our show. What the hell do they think we're doing? What are you protesting? What do you think is going on at these shows? Do you think that it's some kind of orgy? What do you think is happening on stage? Who could protest this?

Eureka: That's true. It's wild. It's just people being misinformed and not understanding. Misunderstanding is one of the biggest causes of discrimination. Honestly? I find most of the time that the people that fight against our show the most have not seen an episode of our show. They've just heard rumors or they

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see drag and they automatically make assumptions. There's no facts behind their fear tactics; it's all assumptions. I would love to test these people and say, "Why don't you watch an episode and see what we're showcasing before you combat us?"

EK: Eureka, at the Fourth of July parade in Granbury, Texas, there was a man holding up a sign with anti-LGBTQ+ scripture and he said, "I just want to show that there's two sides of the story here," and you were clear that queer people see his message every day.

Eureka: Yeah, I'm like, in your home, you say these things every day. The people that you live with already know you feel this way. People in your world know this is how you're feeling. It just frustrates me because I'm like, "No, you want to create this circle of innocence around what you're doing." And you want to be like, "Oh, I'm just doing this because of the grace of God." Well, I also do everything in my life, as a Christian person, as a spiritual person, by the grace of God as well — she's a Goddess. She's the God that I believe in, and I was raised Southern Baptist Christian, and I still believe very heavily in that faith. And how dare you tear me down for how I decide to live and for how I decide to praise? It

just goes against everything you say you believe in.

Bob: And as someone who is absolutely not religious in any regard, I want you to know that if you're reading this, you do not have to justify your life based on anyone's religion.

Eureka: Work! And the reason that me, as a spiritual person, is on Bob's side when he says something like that is because that's the truest and most honest way of thinking: allowing people to have their own free will. I'm not God. I don't get to play that part. I don't get to judge and pick and choose.

That's an interesting point, and at least those people actually stopped to try and listen to you, Eureka. Bob, you were just trying to cross the street in one of the episodes, I think you were looking for ice cream —

Bob: [Laughs.]

EK: And this guy just started shouting at you.

Bob: Yeah, and that's when I realized that guy didn't actually want to talk. It wasn't about God. It was about him. It was about his ego. And even if it was about God, I don't believe in that, so why do I care? [Laughs.]

You can't come at me with your religion, telling me that I need to live my life by some rules that you don't even know what they are. You and

your own parishioners can't agree, and now you want me, someone who doesn't even believe in it, to go by a set of rules that y'all motherfuckers can't come up with? [Laughs.] I don't have as much grace for religious bigots as Shangela and Eureka do. I have actually no grace for religious bigots. None whatsoever. I want to say, "Fuck you, don't tell me who to believe in. Mind your fucking business," but I didn't say that on television [Laughs.]

EK: This show got me thinking about the social pressures that exist in small-town communities and the niceness to your face but the lack of overall kindness to those who are outside the status quo. Do you think that's why even large and vibrant queer communities are forced to be silent even within their own spaces?

Bob: I always ask myself, "Do you want to be a nice person, or do you want to be a good person?" And every good person isn't nice, and every nice person isn't good. You know what I mean?

Eureka: True.

Bob: I think that a lot of times, people do feel completely silenced in these communities, especially because it's even harder to combat hate when it's thinly veiled as love. Because people

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say, "Well, we just want to protest because we love you and we don't want your soul to go to hell." And then you think to yourself, "Wait. Is it really because they love me? Are they really here just to save my soul?" And then you have to take a step back and you go, "No, no, no. That's none of their business."

EK: : Was there something positive about meeting these lovely queer and allied people that you were surprised by this season?

Bob: There's always something surprising to me. I'm always shocked and gagged when I see the amazing things that our drag kids can do. You know, everyone is remarkable at something. Isn't it wild? Not just kinda good, but remarkable at something. And sometimes we get to see that not just on stage but in their communities, and in how their fellow townspeople see and revere them. I got to see it with my drag kid, Micah, in St. George, Utah, where the community was just like in awe of how remarkable of a person they were.

Eureka: Same, honestly. We got a chance to work with some really interesting youths, the people that are the new generation. Especially this season, I had an experience with several young people who are a part of the generation that's coming behind us that wants to create change and they want to promote progression and equity. It just gives me so much hope in the world.

EK: It's really hard to go into communities that don't accept you even when you're trying to spread love. Bob, you said that it's not really about the drag, but it's about giving voice to these queer people. Is that what motivates you both to come back to "We're Here" season after season?

Bob: Let me be very clear — I sound like Obama, "Let me be clear." There has got to be an easier, softer way than rolling into a town with a bunch of drag queens [laughs], putting on a show, making costumes, blood, sweat and tears. This is not the easiest way to be doing what we're doing. I don't even believe that it's necessary that it has to be this. It doesn't have to be this, it could be something else. But this is what we do. This is what me, Eureka, and Shangela do and happen to be very, very good at. I don't want to be egotistical and say, "It has to be this, and it has to be us," because there's a lot of people doing a lot of stuff. But I know that what we're doing is effective. People tell me all the time, "I watched the show with my mom, and my mom used to be extremely homophobic, extremely transphobic, extremely racist, and now we're actually having conversations about it." And goddamn it, I like doing it this way. [Laughs.] It's fun and it's glitzy and it feels fantastic, quite frankly.

Eureka: And Bob just loves saying goddamn it..

Bob: Goddamn it.

EK: Bob, lastly, I loved the dichotomy of you being out and proud in "BLACK" and the very demure and controlled version of your responses to hate in "We're Here."

Bob: Well, thank you, and I would love for you all to go and check out my music video for "BLACK." I'm really, really proud of it. It's me, Basit, Ocean Kelly, and

it's directed by Marvin Brown, one of the creative directors of "We're Here," and I love it. Check it out.

Eureka: Sponsored by Eureka, too, with two big thumbs up, honey. It is big, old, fat, white, pussy-approved, honey. [Laughs.]

REK: Eureka, anything that you'd like to leave our readers with?

Eureka: Send love to everybody, let them know that [my new song] "Big Mawma" is coming out, and it's about caretaking for others and lifting each other up in need and it's about celebrating each other, and it's about body positivity. And, more than that, it's celebrating the big, fat, juicy heart of big Mawma and also celebrating me and my voice and the gender expression in my voice. I used to be really afraid to sing with my male vocals because I always wanted to be feminine and I really celebrate my natural male talents as far as stereotypically male vocal talents. And it opened my eyes to loving another little piece of myself, so, hopefully, the [audience] can, too. Everything's always so much deeper with me. I'm like a poet and didn't know it, you know?

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GRAB BEN



A Familiar Place to Be

‘Spoiler Alert’ star Ben Aldridge came out in 2020. Now he’s the leading gay man in two big studio films.

By Chris Azzopardi

This is Ben Aldridge’s moment, and that’s no spoiler alert. The Los Angeles Times already made that call in a recent profile of the 37-year-old English actor, writing that Aldridge is “on the cusp of stardom.”

And so it seems, as Aldridge, an established London theater actor who came out publicly as gay in 2020, thrusts himself into leading-man roles in two major studio films after a recurring role in “Fleabag” and a more substantial part, as Thomas Wayne, in HBO’s “Pennyworth.”

On the big screen, the actor can currently be seen in the new romantic tragicomedy from Focus Features, director Michael Showalter’s “Spoiler Alert.” In the film, Aldridge portrays Kit Cowan, a photographer whose romantic relationship with real-life pop culture journalist Michael Ausiello, played by Jim Parsons, is suddenly challenged when he’s diagnosed with cancer (the film is based on Ausiello’s 2017 memoir of the same name).

In early 2023, Aldridge will try his damndest to survive M. Night Shyamalan’s apocalyptic horror film “Knock at the Cabin,” portraying another gay character, this time alongside “Looking” actor Jonathan Groff. Aldridge and Groff lead the Universal Pictures project, out Feb. 3, as gay dads vacationing at a remote cabin, which ends up not being much of a vacation at all when they’re taken hostage.

From the Park Lane Hotel in New York City, Aldridge spoke about how it feels “invigorating” being a gay actor playing gay characters, his reaction to Sally Field portraying his onscreen mother and the “wave of progress” in LGBTQ-led content.

Chris Azzopardi: What was it like to tell such an emotional story that really happened in “Spoiler Alert”?

Ben Aldridge: I think exactly that. I think it was emotional. It was intense, but kind of intensely wonderful. I feel like this is the kind of acting role and piece that you

dream of doing. From falling in love, to the diagnosis, to the tragedy of Kit’s passing, it’s really a full life lived over 14 years in the film. And that’s kind of a dream come true, to be able to play someone that experiences all of that. I felt really honored, and sometimes daunted and overwhelmed, that I had been given the responsibility of telling the portion of Kit’s story in the film. It was a privilege from start to now. Still talking about it feels like a privilege.

CA: I imagine that you and Jim had a lot of work to do between the two of you to really make this feel authentic to Michael and Kit’s story.

BA: I really felt like my performance wouldn’t have existed without Jim’s. I felt so informed by him at all times and so much empathy for them as real people. But then that kind of just concentrated itself into me feeling specific empathy for Michael and Jim playing Michael that it just



Photo Courtesy Focus Features



Photo Courtesy Focus Features

really felt like everything I did was influenced by everything he did the whole time.

In terms of chemistry, we just started emailing. So as soon as the film came together and I was signed on to do it, Jim emailed me and the subject header said, "Let's start." We just started this pen pal-ship of these long letters. Sometimes about the project, but not very often; mostly just about ourselves to get to know each other. And we'd ask each other questions about acting, maybe, but more about our lives and our partners and all sorts, really. And there was still a leap of faith in that. We were very lucky that we've formed a real friendship, which I think definitely helped us just to know each other and trust each other in the scenes. And I think it helped with that chemistry.

Our guide really was the material in the book and it is so detailed, and it's so rich, and so full. It was always tethering it back to that. And Michael Ausiello was there on set as an exec and had really lived this. So I think we were just really lucky.

CA: I read that you used Kit's

actual camera in the film, and then I wondered what kind of role Michael had in helping you portray Kit. Had he shared with you some details about Kit that brought you closer to who he was to play him?

BA: Yeah, he did. As soon as I finished reading the book, I emailed Michael and he then emailed me back and just made himself a very open resource for anything Kit-related, him-related, relationship-related, including artifacts and specific things. It felt very powerful to hold that camera on set and to think that I was doing the thing that Kit did with it. There was something just very sacred in the object itself. Other things I asked him questions about, and that really helped me.

He has an active Kit Cowan Archives on Instagram and also his Flickr account. I'm surprised at how much that gave me an insight into the way he viewed the world. And he was a documentarian, so just very quirky observations. There's a lot of humor in his work. The things that he captured were very specific to the way he saw the world. And Michael told me that, really, Kit's camera was Kit making sense of the world and of himself. He also took a lot of selfies,

probably in a time where not many people did, but lots of famous photographers have done that as well. I just really enjoyed poring over the photographs. They helped me in a way that I didn't think they would.

CA: There's the moment where there's this de-gaying of Kit's place right before his parents come over. It's funny because I feel like that's relatable to every gay person. Did you relate to that particular experience?

BA: Yeah, definitely. I think something the film does very subtly is show us the journey of... as gay people, until the moment our parents find out about our true selves, we are very used to managing their handle on the truth and what they know about us. And I think it can keep a distance between you and your parents, and certainly I could relate to that.

What happens in the film, once [Kit's parents] Marilyn and Bob know and are accepting, there's just such an honest exchange. I think it just deepens the parental relationship for them to really know who you are. I did really relate to that. And I think the de-gaying of the apartment, I

can relate to almost de-gaying myself a little bit when going home when I was younger, and maybe potentially dressing differently or just being more conscious of that. I'm glad that element of the book is represented in the film.

CA: I love that Kit had "Beaches." And not just "Beaches" on DVD, but the special edition.

BA: Those DVDs are very specific. Sara K. White, the [production] designer, [made] everything in the apartment so specific to the book. But then things outside of the book, we shared several emails back and forth about what I wanted there. Certain books and art books. If you look at all those films, they all make a lot of sense. And again, there were things of Kit's in there. So yeah, it was very cool.

CA: What was your initial reaction when you found out that Sally Field would be playing your mother?

BA: So she was attached before I became part of the conversation, before I met Michael [Showalter] and Jim. So I knew that was always the deal. But of course, I was so excited. But also definitely a healthy amount of intimidation, just to think that I would be looking into her eyes and saying lines and hoping that she believed me. And yeah, that was a good nervous energy. But it was wonderful, and I could just marvel at her. All of us were really free to improvise and she did a lot of improvisation. And sometimes I'd be just in a scene, of course acting with her, but being a bit like, "Wow, she's so amazing." And Bill [Irwin, who plays Kit's father] too. Such wonderful actors. And they both have gay children themselves. So I think there was a real understanding and a real care. They had so much care over us and over playing parents to gay children. I just really felt that from them. They're both wonderful in the film as well.

CA: Was "RuPaul's Drag Race" actually on in that scene with Sally? Did you really watch "Drag Race" with Sally Field?

BA: Definitely knew we were watching "Drag Race." I can't remember if it was actually on the screen. Because there's a funny thing about actually playing stuff [on

TVs] and filming, so I don't know. But we definitely knew we were watching it. But also, Kit at that moment is so almost in and out of

consciousness. It was a really special moment because, I mean, I never watched "Drag Race" with my parents, and I wonder if they would understand it or not. But I just love that in our story that they sat down with their parents. It was just a really nice moment, cuddled up next to Sally Field. There was something really tender and gentle about [that].

CA: Is this your first gay character?

DB: No. I played a gay character on stage in a play called "The Lyons" in my 20s. And then I had done a UK detective series ["The Long Call"] just before filming this where it was apparently the first ever gay detective on UK screens. But yeah, that was very, very personal. I'm not a detective, but it really reflected my own life. And it's been really nice over the last three years, and something I've craved and wanted to do is to play people that I really identify with.

My 20s [as an actor] was about escaping. I was playing lots of straight romantic parts, which I love doing. But it was about escaping something. I think more recently I've wanted to do a deeper dive on myself and meet myself in the projects that I'm doing and really emotionally understand. We're in a wave of progress where there's more quick content, and I feel really excited and privileged to be getting to play these characters.

CA: To see your identity reflected in these characters on screen in kind of a big way, what does that mean to you?

BA: Yeah, it's a very personal experience. It's strangely relieving to



Photo Courtesy Focus Features

be on a set and being witnessed by a crew. It kind of feels like taking your skin off a little bit and being the most unguarded you've ever been. Even though you are still playing something, it feels invigorating, it feels life-affirming, it feels emboldening. And as someone who really struggled with their identity and a lot of shame in my teenage years and throughout my 20s, there is something... I feel very privileged to be doing it. And I feel like I'm part of riding a wave of progress. And I'm very pleased to be there and really glad that we're getting more stories about ourselves that are not just connected to tragedy in the way that we've been represented before.

Love is at the center of [this] film. And yes, tragedy strikes, but it's a real story that really happened. We're not immune to the reality of life. What we should be calling for is real reality and real stories about us. And that also should contain the spectrum and the breadth and diversity of our community as well.

This interview has been condensed and edited 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 @chrissazzopardi.

GRAB DUSTIN

Let Him Say This: An interview with Let Me Say This co-editor Dustin Brookshire

By Gregg Shapiro

If you ever doubted that Dolly Parton is truly worshipped and adored, you need look no further than “Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology” (Madville Publishing, 2023). What I mean is that if 54 emerging and established poets found it fit to write about Saint Dolly, the unofficial Patron Saint of Tennessee, there may be no greater seal of approval (other than, say, being a 2022 inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame). Among the poets praising Parton in poetic form are Pulitzer Prize finalist Dorianne Laux and National Book Critics Circle Award finalist Denise Duhamel, as well as the current Poet Laureate of Ohio, multiple National Endowment of the Arts Fellowship recipients, and two Lambda Literary Award recipients, among others. In fact, there are nearly 30 LGBTQ+ poets (this poet included) in the anthology. Co-editor Dustin Brookshire was generous enough to make time to answer a few questions about “Let Me Say This” shortly before the book was published.

Gregg Shapiro: What was the first Dolly Parton song you recall hearing and when was that?

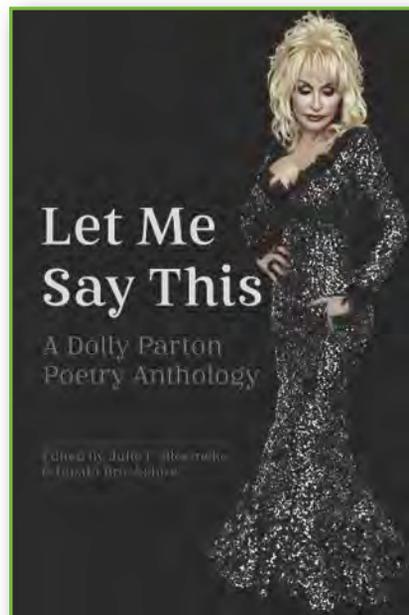
Dustin Brookshire: “Love Is Like a Butterfly,” when I was five. It’s a memory that is a bit fuzzy, but I recall sitting on the couch beside my mother watching Dolly on TV – she was sitting in a swing singing the song. This had to be a rerun of Dolly’s ‘70s show, “Dolly,” because she opened each episode singing the song. Later “9 to 5” enthralled me after I discovered my parents’ 45 of the song.

GS: Did you realize, at the time, that Dolly would become a lifelong fascination?

DB: High school is when I became a devout Dolly devotee. It makes sense when I think of how I struggled with my sexuality as a Southern Baptist in a conservative small north Georgia town. Dolly’s music spoke to me, but her attitude and philosophy on life really hit deep. Here is this famous person who is deeply religious, never shies away from her love of God and Jesus, and never judges others. In fact, she always speaks out about loving others and reiterating it isn’t her place to judge anyone on this planet. Dolly was my first experience of a Christian that wasn’t hypocritical and spouting hate.

GS: Have you ever met or spoken with Dolly?

DB: Thanks to Sibling Rivalry Press, when Dolly was on her “Pure & Simple” tour, I participated in an LGBTQ press interview by phone. Dolly wanted to do a press tour that was specific to the LGBTQ community. Each person got to ask one question. We were told not to be political and to stick to the album. I told Dolly that one of my favorite songs on the album was “I’m Sixteen” and asked about the inspiration for the song. Dolly did her Dolly squeal-laugh, and I almost died. Dolly shared that she thought no one would love that song and that her sister being in love later in life inspired the song. She said they’re old, all in love, and acting like they’re 16. She even went on to say she thought it’d make a cute music video of a couple in a nursing home



with flashbacks and asked what I thought of that idea.

GS: How did you know that poet Julie E. Bloemeke was the right choice to be your co-editor for “Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology”?

DB: Julie and I’ve been friends for roughly 15 years. We attended Dolly’s “Better Day” tour stop in Georgia in 2011. The second issue of “Limp Wrist,” an online poetry journal that I founded and edit, was a special issue in honor of Dolly’s 75th birthday, so I asked Julie to co-edit the special issue for a few reasons. We admire, respect, and love Dolly. Julie’s a lovely human being and an awesome poet and curating the Dolly issue of “Limp Wrist” together was a load of fun. We realized we needed to produce an anthology before we even finished the issue.

GS: You and Julie have committed to donating all annual royalties from “Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology” to Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in honor of the Book Lady.

DB: Dolly has shared on multiple occasions that she is most proud that children call her the Book Lady. Committing our annual editor royalties to an organization that Dolly loves, one that does so much good in this world, feels right. It is also our way to continue to pay tribute to Dolly.

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GS: The anthology is separated into four sections. Did the concept of the sections come first, or did they develop organically as the anthology began to take shape?

DB: We wanted sections in the anthology when we launched the submission call; however, we didn't know if sections would be possible. We knew that the poems would give us the answer, and they did. Each section of the anthology takes its title from a song written by Dolly. The introduction even has a section title that is from a song Dolly didn't write, but her recording of it went to the number one spot on the charts.

GS: If I asked you to prepare a spreadsheet of the songs, would "Jolene" be the most mentioned song in the anthology? If not, what would it be?

DB: "Jolene" is popular! It even gets a mention in my poem in "Let Me Say This." "Jolene," "9 to 5," "Here You Come Again," and "I Will Always Love You" are definitely popular references in the anthology. There are a few references to other songs that aren't known as Dolly staples but would be recognizable to diehard Dolly fans. We were particularly stoked by the uses of those lesser-known songs.

GS: One of the things that struck me about the poems in "Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology," is that readers learn as much about Dolly Parton as they do about the poets themselves. Is that something you were aware of while assembling the anthology?

DB: Julie and I made a conscious decision not to read a poet's bio or any comments submitted with poems until after we'd read and categorized the poem. As we read the submissions, we were very much aware that we were learning a lot about the poets. Benjamin Anthony Rhodes, a queer and trans writer, has a poem that borrows its title from a Dolly song: "It's All Wrong, But It's Alright." It was one of the poems that after I read it, I called Julie and said, "Girl, let me read you this damn poem." Rhodes's poem gives us insight into his identity. I'll leave it at that because if I say too much more it'll ruin the surprise of the turn in his

poem.

GS: As a gay poet yourself, can you please say something about Dolly's relationship with the queer community?

DB: Dolly is an ally and advocate. Many of us in the queer community admire Dolly for how she is unapologetically herself, always controlling her narrative, isn't

afraid to say exactly what she's thinking and is still pretty much universally loved these days. Dolly was the first person I encountered who identified as a Christian sharing a message that God loves all people as they are. It isn't her place to judge anyone, and people need to leave the judgment to God. I have a very complicated relationship with religion, thanks to growing up Southern Baptist, but I love the Christianity that Dolly embraces, practices, and exudes. Sometimes, I wonder how different my life would have been if I had been raised and interacted with Dolly's brand of Christianity. Can you imagine how different the US would be if most of the people claiming to be Christians, especially the right-wingers, practiced Christianity Dolly style?

GS: How many Dolly Parton poems have you written over the years?

DB: I've tried to write Dolly poems over the years, but I've trashed every one. I do have a poem where Dolly has a cameo – it's called "Signs," and is about a time when Julie and I were in a gay bar in Knoxville. We sat at a table, and Julie noticed that we were sitting under a portrait of Dolly. I don't know how many times I said to Julie, "Oh my God, I may not have a poem in my own anthology." One evening, after being inspired by hearing poets read in the Wild &



Precious Life Series, I was determined to write a Dolly poem. I sat on my couch with a heavy pour of Costco Pinot Grigio, Dolly serenading from my playlist, and started writing "Dolly At The Fox Theater (2008)."

GS: What types of events do you have planned for the anthology?
DB: We have our official launch in Wilton Manors on Dolly's birthday (1/19/23) and an Atlanta launch at Georgia Center for the Book on 2/2/23. A few "Let Me Say This" contributors will be submitting video recordings to be featured in Kai Coggin's virtual Wednesday Night Poetry on 1/11/23. We also have live virtual readings planned through Hudson Valley Writers Center (2/5/23), A Hundred Pitchers of Honey (3/16/23), the Wild & Precious Life Series (4/12/23), and Spoken & Heard through Stuart's Opera House (9/15/23). We're also looking forward to an in-person Books & Books (in Coral Gables, Florida) event on 6/25/23. If anyone reading this wants to host a reading, don't be shy, we're only an email away.

GS: Do you think that you and Julie might collaborate on another anthology in the future, or have you already started that process?

DB: Dolly turns 80 in 2026. In my humble opinion, that milestone deserves to be commemorated with a book. Stay tuned for details!



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GRAB JESSE

What Jesse Blake Rundle wants you to know

By Gregg Shapiro

Sometimes the most interesting queer music comes from the least expected places. Boise, Idaho, for example. That's where out singer/songwriter Jesse Blake Rundle is based. A Kansas native who spent a number of years living in Washington DC, Rundle has said that he crafted the songs on his new eight-song LP "Next Town's Trees" (jesseblakerundle.com) during a period of "immense change," when he left the church, uncovered his sexuality, began his first same-sex relationship, and became sober. The results are breathtaking, and blaze with beauty, emotion, and raw honesty. Jesse was kind enough to make time for an interview in early 2023.

Gregg Shapiro: I don't get to do this very often when interviewing a musician, but I'd like to begin by talking about poetry and your 2019 chapbook "Form Burn Step." First, what poets do you read/consider influences?

Jesse Blake Rundle: I love talking poetry! Over the holidays I went to Powell's in Portland and picked up some new books I'm excited to get started on. I really love Wallace Stevens, of course, since I wrote a whole song cycle from his poems. I love his approach to rhythm and also the mix of absurdity and seriousness. Then there's e.e. cummings, T.S. Eliot, Yeats, etc. as some classic influences. More recently, I've been reading Solmaz Sharif, James Tate, Mathias Svalina, and Terrance Hayes. That Solmaz Sharif book really blew me away.

GS: Were any of the poems in the chapbook previously published in

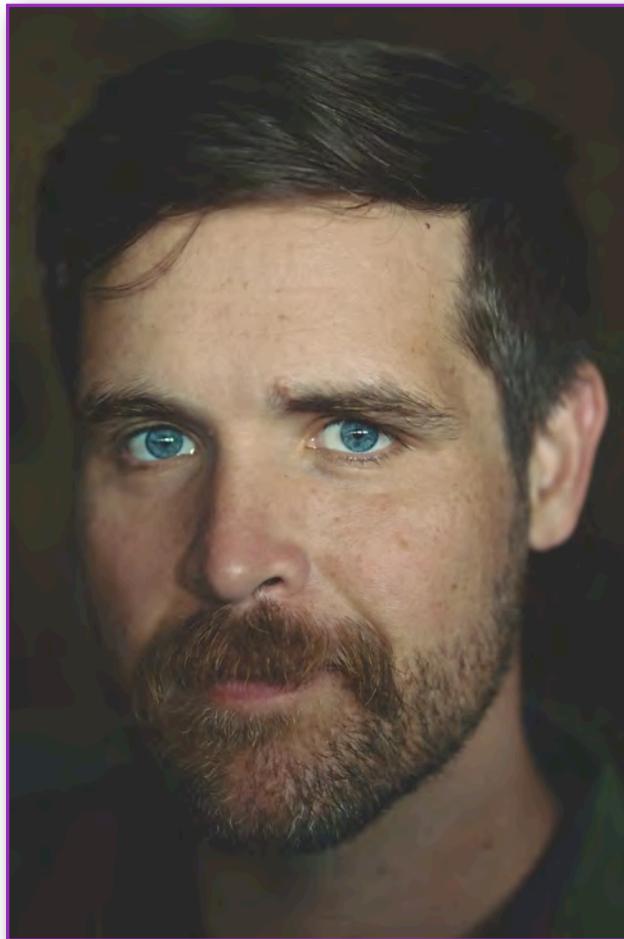
literary journals or anthologies

JBR: Not yet.

I never pursued journal publication for those poems, but I'd like to in the next couple of years. I started looking at journals in 2019 and then realized how involved it is – so I decided to spend my efforts on making music.

GS: What was involved in the process of selecting the poems for the chapbook?

JBR: In 2019, I took a poetry class from Kerri Webster, a professor here in Boise. I was so intimidated when I walked into the first day of class. There were about a dozen participants and most had MFAs and had published poetry. I honestly didn't know what a chapbook was, and I was just looking for some inspiration and structure to help me revise some poems. I soon realized I was going to be assembling a chapbook during the class. I gathered up a couple years' worth of poems, printed them all out, and started narrowing them down until I had a chapbook. Some themes started to emerge on faith, the longing for a romantic relationship,



and drunkenness. It was pretty intimidating to share those poems in class because I hadn't shared most of those thoughts with anyone. Every time I read in class I was shaking with nerves. It was overall an incredible experience and I'm so grateful for all the poets in that class.

GS: Have any of the poems turned up as songs on your albums?

JBR: Bits and pieces of poems definitely end up in songs, but rarely a full poem. When I'm songwriting, I usually start with an instrumental part and then search for a melody by mumbling over the guitar. Then I grab my stack of papers with old poems and start looking for words that fit the energy of the instrumental. I will often grab lines and stanzas from several different poems and from there figure out the themes and the arc of the story. I got a lot of practice at this process when I was working



on my “Radishes and Flowers” album. I used poems from Wallace Stevens’ “Harmonium” for lyrics and used a similar process for turning those into songs.

GS: In terms of music, what artists do you consider to be your strongest influences?

JBR: Radiohead really changed the way I understand music – particularly Jonny Greenwood, the guitarist. I love the way he thinks. I love the song structures and harmonies and their ability to sing about unusual topics in a compelling way. They cover a lot of emotional territory I rarely hear in music. Jeff Tweedy from Wilco and Isaac Brock of Modest Mouse are also big influences on my lyrics. They’re playful and complicated and meaningful all at the same time. I also spent several years studying classical piano and composition, and I can’t escape the influence of composers like Prokofiev, Messiaen, and Reich. They are all deeply embedded in how I think about harmony, texture, and rhythm.

GS: Fire is a recurring theme, as can be heard in the songs “I Want You To Know,” “White Hot,”

“Stones,” and “Fire.”

JBR: The fire theme wasn’t intentional and I’m not sure I’ve interrogated myself enough to even know where it came from. When I was working on the album art with my friend Tyson Gough, it became clear that fire was the key image recurring in the songs and needed to be represented in the art. Tyson and I grew up together in the flint hills of Kansas where the prairies get burned every year. So those prairie fire images are really part of our childhood experience of the world.

I think the theme of fire is about rebuilding from the scraps of what’s been burned down. It’s destructive and creative at the same time. And then there’s the idea that love – particularly the kind of gay love that was always off-limits before – is dangerous and sparked by the fires of hell.

GS: I really love the brass on “I Want You to Know” and “Stones.” How did you know that Jonny Enright’s trombone playing would be a good fit for those songs?

JBR: God, those horns from Jonny are so beautiful! When I was finishing up production, those songs felt like they needed some grand emotions

that I couldn’t capture with the guitar or piano. Horns just seemed right. I mapped out some really rough parts in midi first, but those midi sounds can’t carry the weight of a real player. So, I sent them to Jonny. He really captured the energy and emotions of the songs in those horn performances.

GS: The gorgeous strings played by Yoed Nir on “Yes, I’m Angry” create an interesting juxtaposition to what you are singing about in the lyrics. Please say something about that.

JBR: This was one of those a-ha moments during production. I almost cut “Angry” from the album so many times! I kept trying to make it a driving song – trying to carry the anger and frustration present in the lyrics – but it never worked. It felt empty and cheap. Then I realized the song’s not really about being angry. It’s about being angry internally, while on the surface looking serene. So, I tried out a heavenly type waltz vibe with strings and piano to juxtapose against the lyrics. And then it all made sense.

I didn’t have a huge budget for session players, but this song just wouldn’t work without real strings. So, I reached out to Yoed and loved

what he came up with. It made me cry when I heard it with those strings. It just felt right.

GS: “Hand In Hand” might be the loveliest queer love song I’ve heard in a long time.

Please tell the readers something about the inspiration for the song.

JBR: I don’t usually write songs that are this literal and personal, but it’s really just a recounting of my first date with a man. The streets were empty that night with a light rain, and it felt so quiet and private.

I was in a sort of trance the day after, and this song just came out of me. I was overwhelmed with the sense of freedom I never knew was possible. It was like all this weight of shame and anticipation for 30+ years was lifted. I didn’t even know that weight was really there because I was so used to it. So, the song is about that feeling of safety, freedom, and intimacy. The ability to just be myself fully and not worry about the world outside at all. And the last line – “no one can hear me crying, because I’m not anymore” – that was just real. I didn’t know how much my repressed sexuality was making me sad and lonely.

GS: You are currently based in Boise, Idaho. How does a gay man end up in Boise?

JBR: Well, I didn’t plan it out this way [laughs]! When I moved to Boise, I didn’t really understand my own sexuality. Once I decided (or maybe realized) I was going to come out, I was thinking about moving to a city that would feel safer than Boise, and also have more distance from the family and relationships I have here. It seemed easier to do if I was more anonymous. Then the pandemic hit, and I was stuck. I just couldn’t handle it anymore, so I decided to come out. It’s all gone so much better than I had imagined.

GS: What’s the queer community like in Boise?

JBR: Everyone has been welcoming and friendly. There are some nice community events that are outside of the regular bar scene hookup



culture and I really appreciate that group of people. It’s small for sure, but I’ve been able to connect to lots of people and feel like part of the community.

GS: What about your experiences as a musician in Boise? Is there a music scene on the verge of becoming the next big thing?

JBR: Boise is in a really good place with the scene right now. Treefort is an awesome music festival that happens every spring and brings the city to life. And there are a bunch of great bands with new acts popping up every month. I’ve been running a songwriting group for the last year and there have been so many great songs shared out in that group, in all sorts of genres. I think the pandemic gave us all a chance to really up our

game, focus on our craft, and write some great songs. I’ve been so impressed by the releases and live shows of a bunch of local acts. I can’t wait for us to have our breakout artists in the next couple of years. I know they’re here, making something beautiful.

GS: Do you have live dates or a tour in the works?

JBR: We’re playing Treefort Music Fest here in Boise in March. And the band is gonna play some shows in the Pacific Northwest this summer. I’m working on a few dates as a solo act, hoping to go back to my roots in the Midwest and also in the DC area, where I lived for several years.

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POSITIVE THOUGHTS

Positive Thoughts: PrEP Advocate Damon L. Jacobs Gets Real (and Naked) in Splashy Web Series

Neal Broverman

“What do you like about your body?”

That’s typically one of the first questions that therapist, life coach, author, PrEP promoter, and longtime HIV activist Damon L. Jacobs asks his guests on his YouTube show, “Tub Talks With Damon L. Jacobs.” This query is posed while Jacobs and his guests (mostly men, but sometimes women, too) are naked and sitting inches from each other in a sudsy bathtub.

The series allows people like a U=U proponent (Randy Davis), a sex writer (Alexander Cheves), a “thickfluencer” (Alex Borsa), a journalist and ACT UP legend (Liz Highleyman), and even one of President Obama’s HIV experts (Greg Millett) to talk about everything from self-esteem to self-care to substance abuse to sex positivity. “Tub Talks,” now with dozens of episodes available, is the latest feather in Jacobs’ cap, a New York-based marriage and family therapist who first became known in HIV circles for his early support of PrEP and U=U knowledge. Jacobs spoke to us recently about the origin of “Tub Talks” and why so many people let loose when their clothes come off.

Neal Broverman: Tell us about your work as a therapist and the kind of folks you specialize in helping.

Damon Jacobs: I have been proudly serving the LGBT community as a psychotherapist since 1996, in private practice in New York City in 2010. My work utilizes facets of cognitive behavioral therapy, Buddhism and a little bit of Cher, to help people experience peace, power and pleasure in their daily lives.

NB: How did you get connected with the HIV-positive community?

DJ: I came out as a teenager in the

1980s, at a time when AIDS was devastating our community. I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1990 where I loved and lost several friends, coworkers, lovers, clients, roommates, to AIDS. It seemed incumbent on me to challenge my training as a traditional “therapist” i.e., the kind that sits on their ass in an office all day. If I was going to take my role seriously as a healer, it means standing up, getting out, acting up, fighting back, doing something, anything, to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. I started volunteering facilitating “Rubberward Parties” on college campuses in 1991, and have just continued to work/volunteer in HIV prevention in some capacity ever since.

NB: Your “Tub Talks” series is incredible. Where did the idea spring from?

DJ: Thank you! I originally got the idea from a friend of mine in San Francisco, Mike Enders, who did his own bathtub series in the early 2010s. I got to be a guest on one of his last shows and it was the most fun interview I ever had. I thought — what a wonderful way to talk about ideas, hopes, dreams, struggles, by sitting naked in a bathtub with another person! Around that same time, I was talking with my friend Matt about his work as an escort, how often most of his sessions centered around a naked man telling him his inner thoughts and fears. I realized that as a sex worker Matt’s clients were often more open and trusting with him than many of my clients were being with me — that people in general are so much more honest and vulnerable when they are naked than when they have their clothed defenses on.

When I turned 50-years-old in 2021 I wrote an online series about the 50 Lessons that helped me to

get older with power, purpose and pleasure (<https://50lessonsof50.com/>). It was while writing this series that Covid vaccines became widely accessible, rates were coming down, and I was reminded that New York City is home to some of the most interesting individuals in the world. Actors, activists, healers, leaders, educators, entertainers, AIDS historians — wouldn’t it be interesting to capture their experiences and words of wisdom on video? Wouldn’t it be fun to listen to their experiences of aging, healing, grieving, celebrating sexual empowerment, creative expression, while taking a bath together? In the summer of 2021 I asked a few friends if they would be willing to come take a bath with me and almost all said yes. I started airing these interviews on September 13, 2021, and from there the momentum went forward.

Yet another source of inspiration was the fact that I continuously go to HIV conferences where people sit around and say, “Why can’t we get people to use PrEP? How do we get people to learn about U=U?” And I’m like — maybe it’s time to try to not do the same thing over and over again and expect different results! What if we communicated and taught about sexual health and pleasure in creative ways that aren’t being done by hundreds of other people? That was part of it as well — could I deliver education and information in a way that is innovative and entertaining? I’m trying!

DB: Have to ask: Have all your guests actually been naked?

DJ: Yes. Except for one.

DB: Do conversations flow easier while folks are squeezed together with little to no clothes on?

DJ: Conversations flow so much more naturally when we are naked! Whether it's in a bathtub, on a beach, by a pool, in a bed. People's minds and thoughts are so much freer when they are not being encumbered by clothes. I have done so many bullshit interviews in my time — I used to do some red carpet stuff at the Daytime Emmys and at the GLAAD awards. Those are absolute piffle — they rarely contain any meaning or depth. It's three minutes of me asking people how they're feeling and who they are wearing. So I reevaluated during Covid — if I ever was to do interviews again they have to be real, not fake. They have to contain sustenance, not verbal masturbation. When people are naked, they are real. When people are open they are able to share words of insight and wisdom that can help change people's lives. Those are the only kinds of interviews I want to do anymore.

NB: Talk a little about how different life is now than two years ago — you're hosting a bathtub series now and in 2020 we couldn't even be in the same room as strangers.

DJ: Right, so this is one of the reasons I waited until 2021 to start filming. I really wanted to start the series back in 2018 but at the time I was too busy with my private practice and traveling/teaching about PrEP to commit adequate time to the tub. Then Covid hit — and that clearly was not an ideal time either. But by the time I started shooting the first episodes in the summer of 2021, everyone had access to the vaccines. So shooting interviews in 2022 is delightfully different from anything we could have done safely in 2020, and I'm just so grateful that science and technology made it possible for us to connect and take baths together again. "No masks, no underwear."

NB: Do you think the worst of monkeypox is behind the LGBTQ+ and HIV+ community?

DJ: The data suggests that the worst of monkeypox is behind us. And to me that makes sense — it's not like we had to reinvent the wheel here. Effective vaccines were already developed, the science was



already available. It was just a matter of the government and health departments using them — and that has been the biggest disappointment for me. In NYC the MPX vaccine distribution is a complete embarrassment, especially because they just did the same thing with Covid vaccines. They created a system that perpetuates racial disparities in vaccine access. It's not like we didn't see this one year earlier with Covid. And I'm skeptical anyone learned their lesson from MPX either. But yes, I do think that thanks to the eventual vaccine distribution happening now we are on the other side of what could have been so much more painful and traumatic.

NB: How are you feeling about the state of HIV right now, especially with World AIDS Day this month?

Are you hopeful with some of the advances, like injectables and Covid research, or discouraged that we're not yet at a vaccine or cure stage? **DJ:** I don't get discouraged so much as I'm a realist. I've been working in this field for 31 years. It was dubious then that we would ever have a vaccine or a cure for HIV, and it's pretty dubious now. Are there strides forward? Yes. Are there incredible people working their asses off to make that happen, yes. Is there sufficient money and funding to make it happen — as far as I know, yes. But HIV is a very tricky virus to

cure and I'm not sure I'll see a cure or an effective vaccine in my lifetime. Meanwhile — injectable PrEP allows you to reduce your risk of acquiring HIV by nearly 100 percent and all you have to do is get a shot every eight weeks. What is the effective difference between that and a vaccine?

My hope rests more in people understanding and utilizing biomedical interventions to embrace sexual health and pleasure. We have three FDA-approved ways of using PrEP now, and more than 50 FDA-approved medications that help someone living with HIV become undetectable. Some of those drugs only have to be taken once a day. When someone is undetectable they are untransmittable, meaning they cannot give HIV to their sexual partners ("U=U"). When I see people organizing, celebrating, and connecting around their joy of sexual empowerment, that is where I feel hope, that is where I've witnessed substantial change.

Neal Broverman is the editorial director of Plus magazine. 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://hivplusmag.com>, <http://positivelyaware.com> and <http://poz.com> — for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.



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MONDAY	<p>2 Bears Tavern Uptown: . \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's), \$4StoliCocktails (Any Flavor). @mosphere: \$5 Well Cocktails & Draft Beer 6-8pm. Cell Block: Open 4pm-2am. Charlies: Bingo 7 – 11 pm Dancing until close. D.S.Tequila Co: \$5 10oz Margaritas. Hydrate: Lips and Mascara Doors at 8pm Show at 10pm. Lark: Happy Hour 5-7pm, Bottles of Wine 50% off with dinner entree purchase. Lucky Horseshoe: Open at 4pm, Dancers 8pm. North End: Open at 11am, \$5 Well Drinks. Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview: Open 2pm-2am, \$5 Drafts & Cans, \$6 Stoli Vodka Cocktails, \$7 Glasses of Wine, \$8 Larceny Old Fashioneds, \$5 Bud Lights 4-6pm.Shakers on Clark: Comedy Night \$1 off Well Drinks and Well Shots. Sidetrack: Open at 3pm, Musical Monday Show Tunes 8pm-2am. Steamworks: Every 3rd Monday TM4M (Trans Men For Men) 8pm-2am. The Sofo Tap: \$4 Whiskey, Rye& Bourbon \$3 Miller Lite Drafts \$5Big Ass Long Islands, \$4 Tallboys,\$5Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR,Hamm's)Free Darts. Touche: Euchre Night, Come out and Play 7-10pm Sports on our screens Club room Open!.</p>
TUESDAY	<p>2 Bears Tavern Uptown: . \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's), \$6 Big Miller Lite Drafts \$3 House Shots. @mosphere: \$5 Well Cocktails & Draft Beer 6-8pm, Game Night with Tony. Cell Block: Open 4pm-2am. Charlie's: TuneUp Tuesday Karaoke 7 – 11PM, Tag Team Tuesdays 11p – 2am, Dancing until close. D.S.Tequila Co: .50cent Wing Night 5pm-10pm, Must Purchase a drink for special. Dine in Only. Hydrate: TatTuesday XXL Doors open at 8pm. Kit Kat Lounge: Happy Hour 5-7pm \$8.95 Martinis Lark: 50% Off Bottles of Wine with any Entree Purchase, Bud Light \$5, Select Wine \$5, Well Cocktails \$6 5-7pm 50%off Bottles of Wine with purchase of an Entree. Lucky Horseshoe: Open at 6pm. Dancers at 8pm. Open auditions for male dancers 7pm. \$5 drink specials. Meeting House Tavern: \$6 Big Miller Lite Drafts, \$3 House Shots, \$5 Jäger, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tallboy Beers. North End: Open at 11am, \$5 Canned Beers, Seltzers & Ciders. Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview: Open 2pm-2am, \$5 Drafts & Cans, \$6 Stoli Vodka Cocktails, \$7 Glasses of Wine, \$8 Larceny Old Fashioneds, \$5 Bud Lights 4-6pm.Shakers on Clark: Game Night, Free Pool, \$3 Domestic Bud, Bud Light, Michelob Ultra, Miller Lite, Miller High Life and PBR. Sidetrack: Open at 3pm, Trivia Tuesday 8-10pm, TRL Tuesday: Totally Rad Line-up of 90's-to-Now Music Videos 10pm-2am, OUTspoken LGBTQ+ Storytelling 1st Tuesday of the month from 7-9pm. Steamworks: Every Tuesday 4 pm – 4 am Guys Under 25 Get In Free* (*Free 30 day membership and free locker). The Sofo Tap: \$4 Premium Well Cocktails, \$4 Tallboys, \$5Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR,Hamm's)FreeDarts.Touche:Hardcore Cruisin' No Cell Phones/Wifi.</p>
WEDNESDAY	<p>2 Bears Tavern Uptown: \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's),. \$4 Premium Well Cocktails. @mosphere: \$5 Well Cocktails & Draft Beer 6-8pm. Cell Block: Open 4pm-2am. Charlie's: Country Line Dancing 7 – 10pm, Sapphire's Secret Shadows 10pm – 1 am, Dancing until close.Kit Kat Lounge: Happy Hour 5-7pm \$8.95 Martinis Lark: Free Bingo, 50% Off Nachos & Totchos, \$8 Villa One Margaritas Frozen or on the Rocks, Traditional Flavor only. Bud Light \$5, Select Wine \$5, Well Cocktails \$6 5-7pm.Lark: Happy Hour 5-7pm \$4 Dud Light Drafts \$6 Well Cocktails. Buy One Pizza Get one half off Dine In OnlyLucky Horseshoe: Open at 6pm Dancers at 8pm. \$5 drink specials. Meeting House Tavern: \$3 Miller Lite Drafts, \$4 Stolis (All Flavors), \$5 Jäger, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tallboy Beers. North End: Open at 11am \$5 Lagunitas Draft & Cans. Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview: Open 2pm-2am, \$5 Drafts & Cans, \$6 Stoli Vodka Cocktails, \$7 Glasses of Wine, \$8 Larceny Old Fashioneds, \$5 Bud Lights 4-6pm Shakers on Clark: Karaoke Night \$1 Off Long Islands. Sidetrack: Open at 3pm, All Things Taylor & Ariana 1st Wed of month, All Things Beyoncé 2nd Wed of month, All Things Gaga 3rd Wed of month, All Things Britney & Rihanna last Wed of month: all 9pm-2am. Steamworks: Bear Hump Every second Wednesday 6-9pm A monthly mid-week gathering of Furry Men. The Sofo Tap: \$3 House Shots, \$4 Titos Coctails,\$6Big Miller Lite Drafts. \$5Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR,Hamm's)Free Darts. Touche:Jockstrap Night. Free Clothing Check.</p>
THURSDAY	<p>2 Bears Tavern Uptown: \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's), \$5 Whiskey, Rye & Bourbon.@mosphere: \$5 Well Cocktails & Draft Beer 6-8pm, RuPaul Drag Race All Stars 6 Viewing Party - 7pm. Charlie's: Survivor 10 pm – 1 am, Dancing Until Close. D.S.Tequila Co: Bottomless Tacos! \$23.95 5pm-10pm , Must purchase a beverage for special. Dine in Only. Kit Kat Lounge: Happy Hour 5-7pm \$8.95 Martinis. Lark: Happy Hour 5-7pm \$4 Dud Light Drafts \$6 Well Cocktails . 7pm Extreme Bing with Vian Dejour. 50%off Nachos or Tatchos \$8 Villa One Margaritas Frozen or on the Rocks Tradional Flavor Only.Lucky Horseshoe: Open at 6pm. Dancers at 8pm. \$5 drink specials. Meeting House Tavern: \$5 You Call It's, \$5 Jäger, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tallboy Beers. North End: Open at 11am, \$5 Deep Eddy Cocktails Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview: Open 2pm-2am, \$5 Drafts & Cans, \$6 Stoli Vodka Cocktails, \$7 Glasses of Wine, \$8 Larceny Old Fashioneds, \$5 Bud Lights 4-6pm. Shakers on Clark: Darts Night \$1 off Fireball, Jager, Malort and Well Shots, \$2.50 PBR Cans. Sidetrack: Open at 3pm, Let's Go Thursdays with Alex Kay & Friends 9pm-2am. Steamworks: Lights Out Thursdays, The Club goes Dark Every Thursday 4pm-4am. The Sofo Tap: \$4 Premium Well Cocktails \$4 TallBoys, \$5Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR,Hamm's)Free Darts. Touche: Throwback Thursdays70's& 80's Music & Porn by BijouVideo.</p>

GRAB YOUR FRIENDS

FRIDAY

2 Bears Tavern Uptown: . \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's), \$7 Big Miller Lite Drafts \$3 House Shots. **@mosphere:** \$5 Well Cocktails & Draft Beer 6-8pm, Dancers 10pm-1am. **Baton Show Lounge:** Doors open at 6pm, Shows at 7:30pm, 9:30pm & 11:30pm. **Cell Block:** Open 4pm-2am. **Charlie's:** 1st and 3rd Fierce Fridays 10p – 1am, 2nd Fierce Fridays - Traffic Light Party 10p – 1am, 4th Fierce Fridays - Glow Up Party 10p – 1am, 5th Fierce Fridays – Strut 10p – 1am, Dancing until close. **D.S. Tequila Co:** TGIF Special \$5 Effen Cocktails and \$4 Hornitos Shots. **Hydrate:** Fresh Faces A New Drag Competition Second and Forth Friday of the Month. **Kit Kat Lounge:** Happy Hour 5-7pm \$8.95 Martinis. **Lark:** Happy Hour 5-7pm \$4 Dud Light Drafts \$6 Well Cocktails .Every Friday from **Meeting House Tavern:** \$5 Tito's, \$7 Big Miller Lite Drafts, \$5 Jäger, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tallboy Beers. **North End:** Open at 11am, \$3 Miller Lite Drafts 4-7pm. **Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview:** Weekend Buckets \$25 All Day, Miller Lite, Corona Extra, Truly Punch Variety, Truly Wild Berry Seltzer, Freshie Tequila Seltzer (5 Cans per Bucket - Cannot mix and match.) **Shakers:** \$4 Domestic Bottles \$5 Well Mixed Drinks, \$10 Giant 23oz Long Islands in 22 flavors. **Sidetrack:** Open at 3pm, TGIF Show Tunes 4-9pm, Friday Night Dance Party 9pm-2am. **The Sofo Tap:** \$7 Big Miller Lite Drafts \$3 House Shots. \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR, Hamm's) Free Darts. **Touche:** 1/20 Cowboy Round Up 1/27 Porn Poker Party.

SATURDAY

2 Bears Tavern Uptown: . \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's), \$5 Lagunitas IPADrafts \$5 Premium Well Cocktails \$12 mimosa Carafes. **@mosphere:** \$5 Well Cocktails & Draft Beer 3pm-5pm, Dancers 10pm -1am. **Baton Show Lounge:** Doors open at 6pm, Shows at 7:30pm, 9:30pm & 11:30pm. **Cell Block:** Open 2pm-3am. **Charlie's:** Country Line Dancing 7 – 10pm, The Main Event 10pm – 1am Dancing until Close. **Lark:** Lakeviews #1 Free flowing Brunch 11am-3pm **Lucky Horseshoe:** Open with dancers at 3pm. \$5 drink specials. **Meeting House Tavern:** \$5 Signature Margaritas, \$5 Premium Well Cocktails, \$12 Mimosa Carafes, \$5 Jäger, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tallboy Beers. **North End:** Open at 11am, \$3 Miller Lite Drafts 11am-2pm. **Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview:** \$10 Champagne Bottles, \$5 Juice Kits, \$3 Bud Lights 12-2pm, Weekend Buckets \$25 All Day, Miller Lite, Corona Extra, Truly Punch Variety, Truly Wild Berry Seltzer, Freshie Tequila Seltzer (5 Cans per Bucket - Cannot mix and match.). **Sidetrack:** Open at 1pm, SaturGay Drag & Games with Sasha & Zamora Love 3-6pm, Saturday Night Dance Party 9pm-3am, Dog Day 1st Saturday of the month 1-5pm. **The Sofo Tap:** \$4 Lost Coast Tangerine Wheat \$5 Signature Margaritas, \$4 Tallboys, \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR, Hamm's) Free Darts. **Touche:** 1/21 Gear Night Dress Code in Clubroom BNC 6pm. 1/28 RIPE Party Dim Lights, Deep Beats, Go-go Dudes DJ Harry T.

SUNDAY

2 Bears Tavern Uptown: . \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort \$4 Tallboy Beers (BuschLight, PBR, Hamm's), \$5 Signature Margaritas \$12 Mimosa Carafes. **@mosphere:** \$6 Jack Products \$4 Domestic Draft, House Shots \$2. **Baton Show Lounge:** Doors Open at 11am, Shows at 7:30pm, 9:30pm & 11:30pm. **Cell Block:** Open 2pm-2am **Charlie's:** Queeriod! Every other Sunday 5pm – 7pm, Singasational Sunday Karaoke 7pm – 11pm Mas Leche 11pm – 1am, Dancing until close. **D.S. Tequila Co:** Coyote Ugly Drag Brunch \$50 all inclusive food and beverage package plus Drag Show. **Hydrate:** Doors open at 2pm Northalsted's Official after Brunch party. **Kit Kat Lounge:** Divalicious brunch with Madam X 11am-3pm, Happy Hour 4-7pm \$8.95 Martinis . **Lark:** Lakeviews #1 Free flowing Brunch 11am-3pm **Lucky Horseshoe:** Open with dancers at 3pm. \$5 drink specials. **Meeting House Tavern:** \$3 House Shots, \$5 Premium Well Cocktails, \$12 Mimosa Carafes, \$5 Frozen's, \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort, \$4 Tallboy Beers. **North End:** Open at 11am, \$3 Miller Lite Drafts 7-10pm **Replay Beer & Bourbon Lakeview:** \$10 Champagne Bottles, \$5 Juice Kits, \$3 Bud Lights 12-2pm, Weekend Buckets \$25 All Day, Miller Lite, Corona Extra, Truly Punch Variety, Truly Wild Berry Seltzer, Freshie Tequila Seltzer (5 Cans per Bucket - Cannot mix and match.). **Sidetrack:** Open at 1pm, Sunday Funday Show Tunes 4-9pm, Sunday Funday After Dark Dance Party 9pm-2am **The Sofo Tap:** \$7 Big Miller Lite Drafts, \$6 Chicago Handshake, \$5 Prairie Vodka Cocktails, \$5 Jager, Fireball & Malort. \$4 Tall Boy Beers (Busch Light, PBR, Hamm's) Free Darts. **Touche:** Beer Bust \$2 Bud Light Drafts, Clubroom Opens 6pm, Movie Night 7pm.



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	Artist	Title
1	Manuel Riva & Alexandra Stan	Heal Your Soul
2	AVIRA & The Golden Boy	Reach Out For Your Love
3	D.O.D & Raphaella	Like You Do
4	DES3ETT	Seventeen
5	Leftwing Kody & Goodboys	Only You
6	Andrew Rayel x Sam Gray	Wild Feelings
7	HEATT	Wild (Radio Edit)
8	Ownboss x Sevek	Move Your Body (Amitre Instrumental Remix)
9	David Guetta & MORTEN	You Can't Change Me ft. RAYE (Radio)
10	Paige x Nihil Young x Lauren L'aimant	River (Radio Edit)
11	Young Bombs	Kinda Funny ft. Audrey Mika
12	Dillon Francis x ILLENIUM & EVAN GIJA	Don't Let Me Let Go
13	Tungevaag x Lovespeake	I Knew It Was You
14	A Trak & Lee Foss ft. Uncle Chucc	Free (Radio Edit)
15	ARTY ft. Annie Schindel	Where Have You Been
16	Syence	Forever For Now ft. Riley Biederer
17	Swedish House Mafia	Heaven Takes You Home
18	RUDY	No Touchin
19	Alina Eremia	Party Song (MST)
20	Win and Woo	All This Motion ft. Louis The Child
21	OneRepublic	I Ain't Worried (Liam Keegan Radio Edit)
22	GTOface	Never Together
23	Shane Codd & Bryn Christopher	Feels So Good (Radio Edit)
24	Fred again	Clara (The Night Is Dark)
25	Drake	Massive
26	Hayden James	Good Life ft. Emie (Radio Edit)
27	Tiesto & Solardo	I Can't Wait ft. Poppy Baskcomb
28	Ryan Ennis & Sadie Rose Van	Take My Love
29	NIIKO X SWAE ft. Allie Crystal	Nothing On Earth
30	Robbie Mendez	Run



PhotosBy Anthony Meade



GRAB HOLLY

The Crash of the Crypto-Donut Economy

By Holly Maholm

Christmas Morning came and went, and soon all of us – humans and unicorns alike – became aware that a new day had dawned: The Age of Crypto-Donuts. We had unknowingly transitioned into a new dimension wherein the previous “laws of nature” governing the behavior of “unicorns” (vis-à-vis “donuts”) had been overturned in favor of entirely new and heretofore unimaginable habits.

To wit and for example: Previously, it was understood-by-all that if you were to place one unicorn and one dozen donuts together in a confined space (a stall in the stable, for example) then in the shortest possible period of time (“one shake of a lamb’s tail”) the donuts would be gone. This principle was as invariable and immutable as gravity.

Now, however, something fundamental had changed: Conduct the same experiment placing one unicorn in that same stall with one crypto-donut (representing, let us say, Blueberry Cake), and no matter how energetically that lamb might shake his tail, the unicorn will not eat that crypto-token. This had never happened before – not in the world of unicorns, and not in any School of Monetary Theory devised by humans.

As you might expect, there have always been unicorns who can be

depended upon to favor “Pink Icing” or “Chocolate-Covered” as their preferred variety; and so, I had baked several dozen crypto-donuts representing just those flavors. But now... a “market” in crypto-tokens had begun to develop and mature; a market wherein “Glazed” was considered... what we might call the “lowest common denomination” of tokens.

Thus, for example, if one of the unicorns wanted to trade for a “Chocolate-Icing with Candy Sprinkles” (a popular variety), he might have to offer five Glazed in return. Yes, in just days a sophisticated market in crypto-donuts was fully in operation. Every popular variety of donut (represented by its corresponding crypto-donut token) received a sort of “exchange rate” (similar to a Foreign Currency Exchange Rate) according to which every unicorn could know how many of the basic Glazed tokens had to be offered in trade for that desirable token.

Much like the original gathering of stock-traders that later developed into the Wall Street Stock Exchange, the unicorns took to gathering in the pole barn in the afternoon to “trade donuts,” as they liked to joke. The joke being that in the old days, they did no more than eat their donuts, whereas now they “made a market” in donut options, donut puts and donut calls. As for me, I attended their trading sessions just once, after which I refused to attend any more – for two reasons.

First, it appeared to me that this “market in crypto-donuts” was having a most deleterious effect upon the unicorns. Where before the only ill-effect I ever saw from their “donut mania” (their compulsion to eat as many donuts as were available) was weight gain. Now, however, they had developed a “mania” to collect, trade and hoard crypto-donut tokens; a mania so all-consuming that they were reluctant to cash-in their crypto-tokens for the sugary treats themselves!

The unicorns exhibited the same obsession we often see in humans who collect, for example, baseball cards: They come to see their collection as a valuable asset to be “improved” by clever and judicious trades with other collectors, rather than a means to enable them to connect with the famous athletes depicted. Often, they know the value of an Ernie Banks rookie card, without knowing what team he played on.

The second problem I faced was



this: Me being the source of all crypto-tokens, I soon came under intense pressure to pursue an “expansionary” policy as to the baking of tokens. But I held out strong. I refused to “feed inflation” (or the ravenous unicorns) by agreeing to bake quantities of tokens in excess of the quantity I knew I could produce in the ovens at Donut Time.

It was not long, I am grateful to say, before our Queen Penelope visited me in the stable. She spoke, “Holly, let me first say that I appreciate your effort to make Christmas Morning gift-giving a more... ‘structured and organized’ experience. But as I believe you will agree, there have transpired certain unforeseen developments which now suggest that your little project should be discontinued.” I replied, “As you wish, your majesty.”

But as it happened, the “crypto-donut economy” found its own, unforeseen terminus. Two days later I walked into the tack room at the stable (where the big pegboard – and hundreds of crypto-tokens hanging on it – was stored). I heard crunching under my shoes, and looking down, I saw the floor was covered with a multi-colored carpet of hardtack crumbs.

Instantly, I realized my mistake. I had left the door to the tack room open, and both Blossom and Biscuit – horses, after all – had found (and consumed) that rainbow of delicious crypto-treats.
(To be continued)

Holly Maholm is a transgender woman living in Cleveland, Ohio. Look for Holly’s book *Offered Magic: My Life Among the Unicorns* (now available on Amazon) which collects the first 126 episodes of Holly’s adventures involving both magical unicorns and her LGBTQ friends. Send a message to Holly at www.hollymaholm.com.

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Photos By Anthony Meade

GRAB A PLANE

FUN IN THE SUN — YOUR SOUTH FLORIDA GET AWAY

By Bill Malcolm

You cannot beat a winter vacation in South Florida including Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Wilton Manors. I recently spent time in all three. Yes, the beaches are great but there is also a lot to do besides that. Wilton Manors is a LGBTQ+ friendly city surrounded by Fort Lauderdale. It replaced Miami Beach as the gay mecca 20 years ago and is still going strong.

WHAT TO DO

Enjoy the Botanical Gardens, The Holocaust Museum, and the many Art Deco buildings in Miami Beach. The 12th Street Beach is fun. In Fort Lauderdale, it's the Sebastian Beach near the Ritz Carlton.

Explore Holiday Park and meet up with the Fort Lauderdale Frontrunners Wednesday at 7 p.m. for a run or walk.

Work out at BRXV Fitness in Wilton Manors. A 24-hour pass is \$15 which allows for workouts for two days. Then go shopping for new clothes next door at the Pride Factory. Lunch at Rosie's is also in order.

Enjoy the Sunny Side Up (Farmers) Market in Flagler Village at 820 NE 4 Ave in Fort Lauderdale. For other farmer's markets, see <https://www.visitlauderdale.com/articles/post/top-farmers-markets-in-greater-fort-lauderdale/>

Walk along the Riverwalk and have lunch on Las Olas Avenue in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

NIGHTLIFE

All the bars are close together in Wilton Manors. I like Hunters Night Club for happy hour. Georgie's Alibi is a lot of fun and has events. You will find dancers nearby at Johnsons which has a great happy hour as well. The Eagle and the Village Pub are popular bars. The Gym is

actually a sports bar and is also worth a visit. All are steps from each other.

In Miami Beach, the Palace is your go to drag show bar and restaurant. The Gaythering has a nice bar and Twist is the main stay.

WHERE TO EAT

In Wilton Manors, Rosie's is the local's favorite to see and be seen and has good food.

Sistrunk Marketplace is the first food hall in Fort Lauderdale and now has 13 vendors.

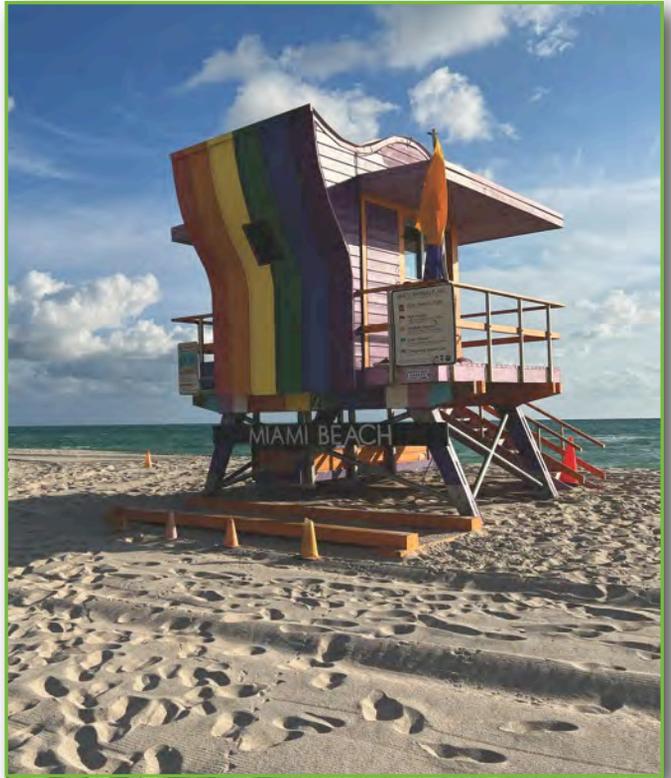
For the latest roundup of what's new in Fort Lauderdale: <https://www.visitlauderdale.com/articles/post/whats-new-noteworthy-in-fort-lauderdale/>.

AIDA just opened two weeks ago. It is upscale Mexican food.

Grab some take out and Florida strawberries (the sweetest I have ever tasted) at Publix Market (Florida's grocery store chain) including the Wilton Manors store at 2633 N. Dixie Highway.

GETTING THERE/GETTING AROUND

The Brightline train takes you from Miami to Fort Lauderdale in just 30 minutes. Take the #50 bus to Wilton Manors from the nearby Transit Center. The new Circuit



shared taxi takes you everywhere in Wilton Manors for just \$2. It is free in Fort Lauderdale. Download their app. You don't need a car in either Wilton Manors or Miami Beach. Both are very walk able and have excellent public transportation.

WHERE TO STAY (OR NOT)

The Axel Beach Miami in South Beach is the only North American outlet of this popular European "hetero friendly" hotel chain. The pool scene is fun as is the bar (they had trivia night when we went). Their rooftop bar is a must on the weekends. Book your stay at axelhotels.com.

The Gaythering Hotel is another option in Miami Beach complete with sauna locals can use.

Bargain hunters might like The James which is handy and does not charge a resort fee. However, the clerk could not find my Hotels.com reservation which was annoying to say the least.

In Fort Lauderdale/Wilton try theManors, try the Home2Suites byHilton in Flagler Village. You get a complete apartment.

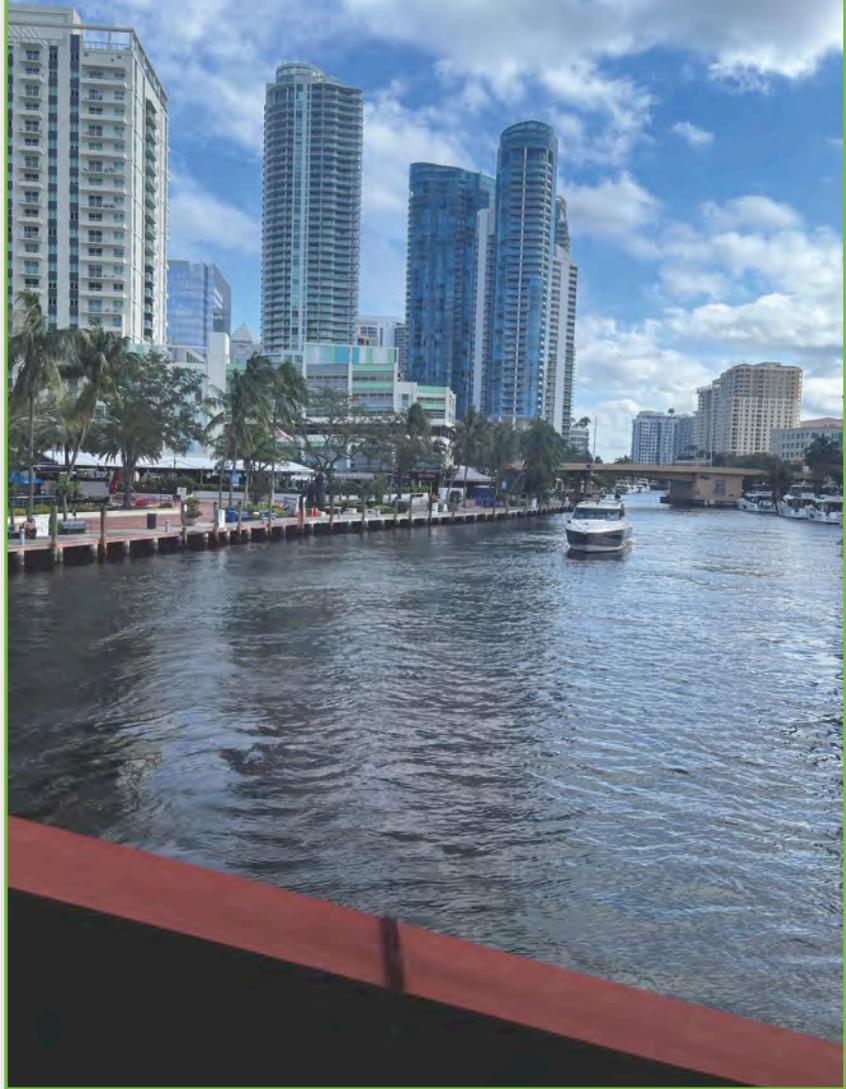
Men will like the Calypso Inn in Wilton Manors which is handy to the bars, shops, and restaurants. You can stumble home from the bars. The Key West suite features its own private patio and garden.

Wilton River Suites rents you a full apartment. The new option is at 611 NW 29th Street (wiltonSuites.com).

GETTING THERE WAS NOT HALF THE FUN

My flight on American Airlines from DFW to MIA was delayed due to having to move fuel from one tank to another even though the plane came from the hangar. Then after announcing the gates for the very tight connections when we landed one hour and 40 minutes late at around 7 p.m. Those not connecting were asked to remain seated so connecting passengers had a chance to make their connections. Then the pilot announced our gate was occupied, so we sat on the tarmac for 30 minutes, causing many to miss their connecting flights. However, being on a spacious 767 (with business class lie down seats) was a treat.

I ran afoul of the Southwest Airlines meltdown on the way back from Fort Lauderdale. Long story short, we were missing a flight attendant. We finally snagged one off one of the many cancelled flights. The gate agent suggested before



that to seek a refund and book on another carrier as there would be no flights for the next six days! After much drama and miscommunication, we took off just two hours or so late.

Note both airports have excellent public transit to and from the airport: Take the #150 Bus from MIA to Miami Beach. It runs every 20 minutes. From MIA to FLL or downtown Fort Lauderdale, take TriRail. The #1 Broward County Bus serves FLL to downtown Fort Lauderdale where you can hop on the #50 to go to Wilton Manors. Rental car not needed.

TRAVEL TIPS

HOTSpots! Florida is your go to magazine of what to do and where to go in Wilton Manors/ Fort Lauderdale as well as

Miami Beach and Key West. They have even carried my column. Check them out at hotspotsmagazine.com.

OUTClique Magazine is the monthly magazine in print and on line at outclique.com.

And congratulations to Jason Parsley, the new editor of *South Florida Gay News*. They are in print and on line at southfloridagaynews.com.

The new quarterly in Florida, *Embrace Magazine* also carries my column. You will find them in print and on line at embracemedia.us.

It's great to be in an area with four-plus thriving publications.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Plan your trip at visitlauderdale.com. Special thanks to Ivonne MacMillan and Richard Gray of Visit Lauderdale for their helpful tips.

Bill Malcolm is North America's only LGBTQ+ syndicated travel columnist.

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PROGRESSBAR



GRAB A FILM

By Delven Shaw

The Fabelmans is a portrait of the artist as a young filmmaker.



The Fabelmans is the last of Steven Spielberg's award-winning films, but this time he is the film's subject. He tells the origin story of his childhood interest in filmmaking with humor, clarity, and joy. Most startling may be the exploration of his mother's relationships with the two men in her life. The film's final segment is the most potent, exploring the antisemitism Spielberg suffered in his high school, making it a very timely film.

All Spielberg films are known for perfect casting, excelling performances, terrific production values, overlaid with a moving score. And this time delivers in spades.

Michelle Williams is radiant as **Mitzi Fabelman**, a woman surrounded and strangled by men who love her. Paul Dano is terrific as her steady husband, with **Seth Rogen** as their magnetic best friend. **Gabriel LaBelle** carries the weight of the story as the filmmaker ages, and his performance is excellent.

Spielberg's excellent craftsmanship is on full display. The often hilarious recreations of the films he made as a kid, using all his friends as actors, are fantastic. And the time exploring his movies of a family camping trip and senior ditch day are lovely. His screenplay crafted with Tony Kushner is fine.

The Fabelmans may seem old-fashioned and traditional to some audiences. But if you are looking for more adventurous and diverse choices, plenty of new filmmakers are making an impact. It won Golden Globes as Best Movie Drama, and Spielberg was named best director.

Everything Everywhere All at Once, is a worthwhile trip through the universes.



I was disappointed that *The Banshees of Inisherin* was awarded the Golden Globe Award for Best Comedy. *Banshees* is a terrific art film and deserves great acclaim for the work outfits four principal actors. But *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is challenging, hilarious, and ultimately very powerful work about mothers and daughters.

The first impression of *EEOA* is that it will explore the life of Evelyn (Golden Globe Winner **Michelle Yeoh**), a Chinese immigrant approaching middle age and dreading an IRS audit. But while in the agent's office, brilliantly played by an unrecognizable **Jamie Lee Curtis**. Evelyn's husband, Waymond (Golden Globe winner, **Ke Huy Quan**), reveals that multiple universes exist and that she must follow him to save the world. Initially, Evelyn and Waymond's daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu) is a minor character. But as we zip in and out of various universes, the loving and angry bond between mother and daughter becomes our primary theme.

The film's humor is both brilliant and juvenile at times. The world in which characters have flexible hot dog fingers may be best remembered for the lovely piano version of **Clair De Lune**, played with Curtis' toes. A great bit. Have you ever seen so many butt plugs?

The film's technical elements, including editing (**Paul Rogers**) and production design (**Jason Kisvarday**), are exceptional. The cast appears in a vast array of ages and styles as we explore their lives in the various universes and the costuming and makeup particular acclaim.

The brilliance begins with **Dan Kwan** and **Daniel Scheinert**, who directed their screenplay. It is bold, brassy, and profoundly moving.

Like *The Matrix* or *Being John Malkovich*, both made in 1999, the

fantastical world conjured up by 'The Dans' will have a long-lasting impact on audiences and filmmakers for decades.

Award season shines a light on LGBT film and talent.

The Golden Globes ceremony was some proudly gay moments, the most notable being the excellent introduction **Billy Porter** gave introducing **Ryan Murphy** as the *Mary Tyler Moore Award* winner. Murphys's body of work has placed LGBT characters front and center in TV and film projects, including *GLEE*, *Pose*, *American Horror Story*, *The Normal Heart*, *Boys in the Band*, and many others. The fact that these characters range from heroes to serial killers makes his body of work a powerful force in a country still challenged by gender identity.

Several queer international films are on the Oscar shortlist for Best International Film. *The Blue Caftan* (Morocco), directed by **Maryam Touzani**, *Close* (Belgium) directed by **Lukas Dhont**, and *Joyland* (Pakistan), directed by **Saim Sadiq**. None have captured the joy of streaming films like *Smiley Heartbreaker*, but representation at major awards is crucial.

Other films with LGBT themes include *The Whale*, *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*, and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Openly gay performers are also in the spotlight, especially **Jeremy Pope** in *The Inspection* and Ben Whishaw in *Women Talking*.

As documentaries continue to gain favor, watch out for the film about **David Bowie Moonage Daydream**, directed by **Brett Morgen**, and the excellent film about Chicago's abortion activists, *The Janes*, directed by **Tia Lessin** and **Emma Pildes**.

Some might say the films receiving acclaim are negative stories about LGBTQ experiences and don't capture the joy of streaming movies like *Smiley*, *Fire Island*, and *Heartbreaker*, but representation at major awards is crucial.



PhotosBy Anthony Meade



FRUIT WINE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS THE GOLDEN GALS LIVE!

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"A small idea that started four years ago has taken on a life of its own and become a runaway hit in Central Florida," shares Ginger Minj. "In the midst of selling out every performance and winning multiple awards, we have been asked to bring the show to Chicago, so we're packing up our cheesecake and taking the show on the road! Everyone's favorite sassy seniors are back and as hilariously heart-warming as ever in this all new, all live tribute to the beloved original

Tickets are on sale now at the box office, 3745 N. Southport Avenue in Chicago, or online at <http://www.mercurytheaterchicago.com>

LEAGUE OF CHICAGO THEATRES, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CHOOSE CHICAGO ANNOUNCES DATES AND SNEAK PEEK OF PARTICIPATING SHOWS FOR CHICAGO THEATRE WEEK 2023 FEBRUARY 16-26



More than 100 productions are expected to participate, offering value-priced tickets to productions throughout the city and suburbs. The

program continues to bring in new audiences to area theatres with an average of 2/3 of attendees visiting their chosen theatre for the first time. Despite the pandemic, in February 2022 over 10,500 value-priced tickets were sold to over 60 participating shows and almost 400 individual performances.

A LIST of the many productions expected to participate is online at www.ChicagoTheatreWeek.com.

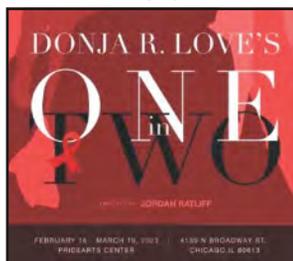
"Theatre at its root is about sharing stories. Every experience whether you are seeing a show for the first time or the 100th is completely unique in the way it's told, the reaction from the audience, the actors onstage, the interpretation of the director, and the person you choose to share that moment with," said League of Chicago

Theatres Executive Director **Marissa Lynn Ford**. "Chicago Theatre Week gives you the opportunity to experience multiple stories and participate in this unique experience across the city. There is a story for everybody on our stages."

"Nothing can replace the experience of a live show, and Chicago Theatre Week is the perfect time to explore some of Chicago's incredible productions," said **Lynn Osmond**, President and CEO of ChooseChicago. "We are proud to partner with the League of Chicago Theatres to present this exciting celebration of Chicago's unique and vibrant theatre scene."

For Tickets and more information visit <http://www.ChicagoTheatreWeek.com>.

CAST AND DIRECTOR ANNOUNCED FOR CHICAGO PREMIERE OF DONJA R. LOVE'S ONE IN TWO, OPENING FEBRUARY 20 THROUGH MARCH 19TH AT PRIDE ARTS CENTER



Casting has been announced for PrideArts' first production of 2023 – the Chicago premiere of *one in two* by **Donja R. Love**. *one in two* (lower case is intentional) is an autobiographical play named for the shocking statistic that one in two Black men in America who have sex with other men will be

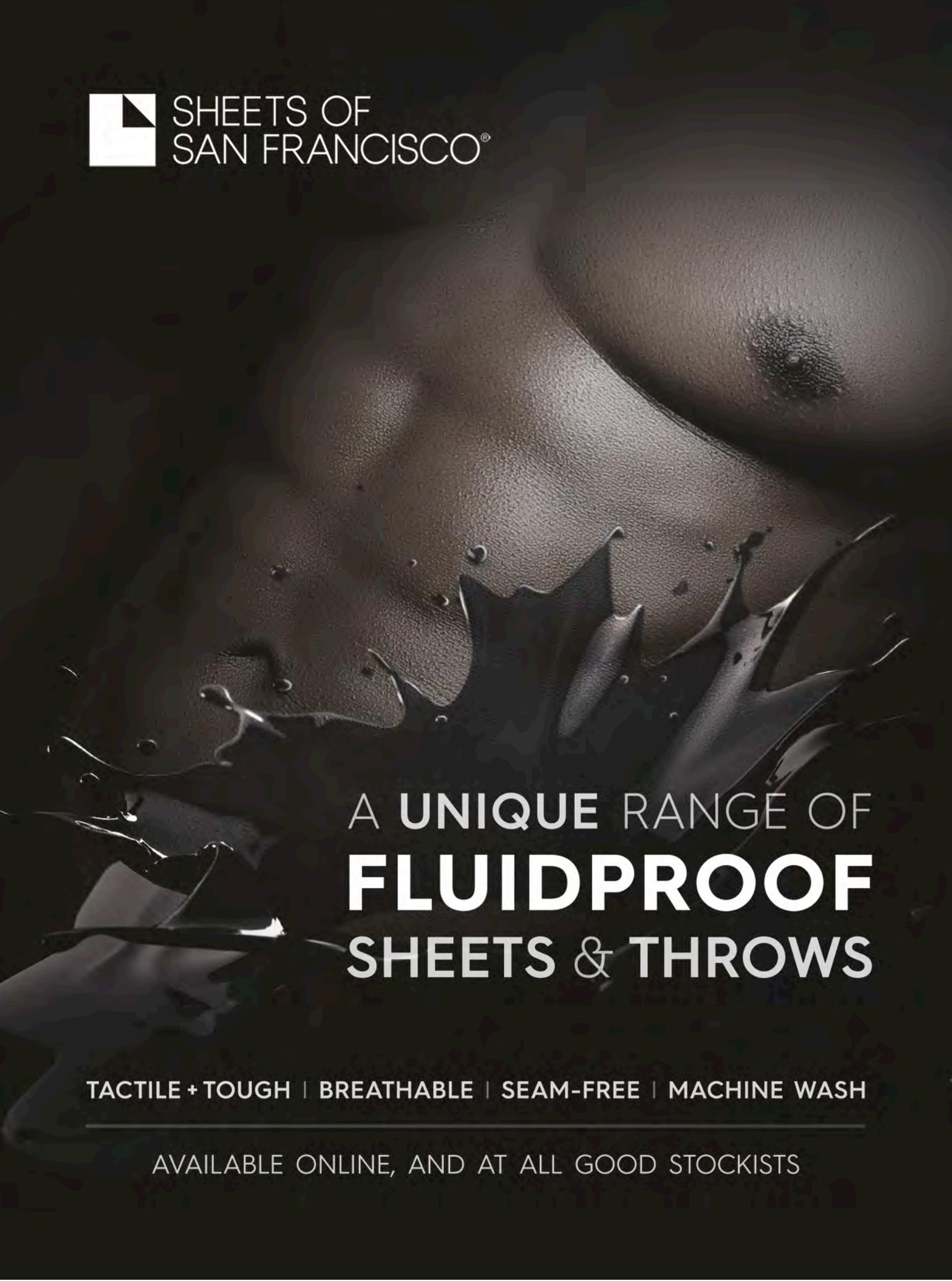
diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime.

Love brings this statistic to life through the story of one character – a young man named Donté who is diagnosed with HIV. The play follows Donté through his experiences in a bar, the bedroom, a waiting room, a medical office, and in his childhood. *one in two* was originally produced by New York City's The New Group in December 2019 and was a *New York Times* "Critics Pick." The *Times* said of it, "Defiantly life-embracing, it's a call to action over what Love describes as "a hidden state of emergency" in his own community." Love has become recognized as one of America's leading young African American playwrights and has in the past four years had four plays produced off-Broadway – by the prestigious non-profit companies Manhattan Theatre Club, Atlantic Theatre Company, The New Group, and MCC Theatre.

One in two will be directed by **Jordan Ratliff**, a 2021 graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champaign who has already been highly active in the Chicago theater community. Ratliff has directed plays in the Chicago Dramatists Network 10 Minute Play Festival, in the 2022 Lime Arts Fringe Festival and a virtual reading of his own play *Fugitives in America* for PrideArts. He has also served as Assistant Director for PrideArts' *The Things I Never Could Tell* Steven. Ratliff's cast will include **Jonathan Samuel Allsop** as "Person in the Middle," **Anania Williams** (they/them) as "Person on the Left," and **J. Xavier** as "Person on the Right." **Richard Allen** will understudy all roles. To underscore the randomness of the fact that "one in two" Black men who have sex with other men will eventually be diagnosed with HIV, the audience will choose at each performance which of the three cast members will play Donté, the young man who is diagnosed with HIV. The remaining two actors will play all other parts.

Tickets for *one in two* are now on sale at www.pridearts.org



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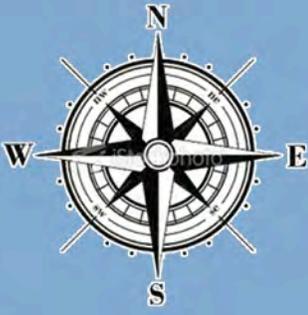
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