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CHICAGO'S BIWEEKLY LGBTQ PUBLICATION

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CONTENTS

THIS ISSUE

NEXUS DANCE CHART	26
GRAB ROGER	30
GRAB HOLLY	32
TOM GOSS	34
POSITIVE THOUGHTS	36
GRAB MUSIC	38
GRAB NEWS	40
Bar/Restaurant/ Directory/	42 & 44
MAP	45
CLASSIFIEDS	46

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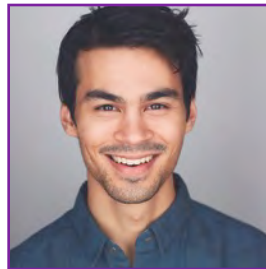
MAGAZINE

**SLICK
CHICKS**
6



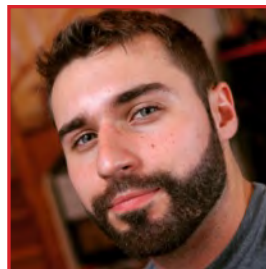
**LGBT
HALL
OF
FAME**
12

**JJ
BOZEMAN**
18



**KRIS
REY**
20

**GRAB
DYLAN**
28



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Slick Chicks
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GRAB NATALIE



Photo Courtesy of Sony Music

Slick Chicks

Chicks frontwoman Natalie Maines on the queer creators behind the trio's comeback album and their kinship with the LGBTQ community

By Chris Azzopardi

Sitting somewhere with an abstract-art background obscuring her precise location, (Dixie) Chicks frontwoman Natalie Maines erupts into an explosive maybe-I-shouldn't cackle during our Zoom call as she talks about how she's about to get in trouble for saying too much. This time, it's regarding a controversial decision made by country trio Lady A, formerly known as Lady Antebellum. After the band changed their name in solidarity with the current Black Lives Matter movement, they sued a Black blues singer named Lady A for the trademark to the title. And yes, Maines has something to say about that.

After all, this is Natalie Maines, who directed pointed criticism at then-President George W. Bush in 2003 at a London concert, when the Lubbock, Texas native said The Chicks were "ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas."

Country music blackballed them. Conservatives torched their CDs. The promo poster for the 2006 documentary about the fallout, *Shut Up and Sing*, depicted The Chicks sitting on top of the U.S. Capitol building, their half-naked bodies graffitied with words and phrases like "Dixie Bimbos," "Traitors" and "Big Mouth." In the 2020 doc *Miss Americana*, about Taylor Swift's

evolution into a vocal anti-Trump liberal and LGBTQ-rights advocate, Swift said she had been pressured to refrain from being politically and socially free-spoken to avoid a Chicks-like career implosion.

Returning after a 14-year recording hiatus, Maines, fortunately, still refuses to shut up on *Gaslighter*, the trio's most authentic and unflinchingly personal album yet. Joined by sisters Martie Maguire and Emily Robison, *Gaslighter* does exactly what Maines couldn't during our interview (a prenup preempts her from doing so): detail her divorce from her husband, actor Adrian Pasdar, of 17 years with scathing lyrical

The image shows two cups of shaved ice on a metal table. The cup on the left is filled with bright red shaved ice, and the cup on the right is filled with light pink shaved ice. Both cups are topped with a single red cherry and have a black straw inserted. In the background, there is a colorful fence made of vertical wooden slats in various colors like blue, yellow, red, and green. The 'SIDETRACK' logo is overlaid on the top center of the image.

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specificity, the kind of wig-snatching realness the queer community devours. An honest album about survival, it couldn't have come at a better time.

During our Zoom session, Maines discussed the post-controversy era of their career as the moment she noticed a major show of support from the LGBTQ community, the queer creators who nurtured the new album's vibe, and the gays she'd party with on her boat. Yes, *that* boat.

Chris Azzopardi: Let's start with a different personal journey you've taken. It involves you watching *Vanderpump Rules*. Tell me what led you down that road – a road so many gay men themselves have gone down.

Natalie Maines: Ha! Well, let me say, it's a part of my pandemic TV binging. In the past, when I was sick, I was in bed all day and, "Oh, hey, I've never watched *The Kardashians*. But there's a whole marathon. I'm gonna watch *The Kardashians*." So I think with COVID, I've binge-watched shows I never would've binge-watched before, and *Vanderpump Rules* is a really good one, actually. I will continue to be a fan even after this pandemic! Ha!

CA: You get to live vicariously through someone else's drama.

NM: I like drama at a distance! A *big* distance.

CA: For *Gaslighter*, you worked with queer pop songwriter Justin Tranter and trans-woman producer Teddy Geiger. How did working with LGBTQ collaborators help to shape the authenticity of the album's narrative?

NM: They kind of play different roles, but yeah, the first song that we wrote for the album was with Teddy and Justin, and it was "Sleep at Night." That (track) was a very different sound for us and that really excited me. That was all Teddy. She went to these electronic

drums and just started with that beat, and the way that Justin and Teddy can both phrase things very percussively and put them in the song was a real lesson for me that I try to do now and perfect and get better at. So, yes, as far as where we could go with the sound, they were very much there. And Justin is such a great lyricist. He was definitely there to help us say what we wanted to

lot of males just look at him as the female producer so they don't ask him. Ha!

CA: When we chatted in 2013 you told me Rachel Maddow would be your "lesbian girl crush." Maybe your lesbian chemicals and Jack's lesbian chemicals are what really made this collaboration work.

NM: Ha! I don't know.

Because we all *three* got along great with him! He just has a sensitivity. He just doesn't have that macho, masculine, jerk kind of thing. He's got a healthy ego. He doesn't need to build himself up by putting other people down or by holding them back. And he's a great communicator, which women love. A lot of straight men are not! Ha!

CA: You consulted different activist groups for the "March March" video, which features images from a Pride parade alongside footage from current Black Lives Matter protests. For the video, who did you consult from the LGBTQ community?

NM: My friend Michael Skolnik, an activist and an organizer and a liaison for a lot of people (and the founding partner of The Soze Agency, a creative agency focusing on authentic campaigns that uplift compassion and equity), we consulted him for the "March March" video. One of the things he said was, "Have more from gay Pride marches." He mentioned the (Black) trans march in Brooklyn (in June). He was like, "That was a huge march,

so you should put that one in." I've known Michael for a long time; he's a great guy; he organized March for Our Lives (in 2018 in D.C.) that we all went to as well.

Also, I'm on these calls as part of a group called Harness (founded by America Ferrera, Wilmer Valderrama and Ryan Piers Williams, the group connects communities through



Photo Courtesy of Sony Music

say and tell. Ha!

CA: Your producer, Jack Antonoff, once told me he was a straight guy with "lesbian chemicals."

NM: He's very in touch with his feminine side! I think that's why he works so well with females. I have never asked him this, and he works with males too, but I wonder if he does enjoy working with females better. Or a

conversation to inspire action and power change). They've been having a lot more Zoom calls, and I've been on a lot of those.

Harness brings all different walks of life together and supports diversity and Black Lives Matter, and White People 4 Black Lives and different trans and LGBTQ causes or groups. It's a great place as just somebody who wants to speak out and hear and know as much as I can, and those calls are a great way to listen and not talk, and learn. Learn directly from the source.

CA: Your relationship with the LGBTQ community goes way back, at least publicly. Have you always been a queer magnet?

NM: I mean, I was always open to it. But growing up in Lubbock, Texas, I can think of people that I knew who were *probably* gay, but they weren't out yet. I don't even know if they knew that about themselves yet, necessarily. Lubbock was a very suppressive place.

CA: But you would've guided them and held their hand through the coming out process.

NM: I would've always been their friend, for sure. In Lubbock – I'm sure it's different now, I'm an old lady, ha! – but back in the '90s in high school, I can't even think of somebody who was out-there gay. They might not have been trying to act straight but you just ... you didn't feel free like that. So I hope that's changed in Lubbock. I have to assume it has.

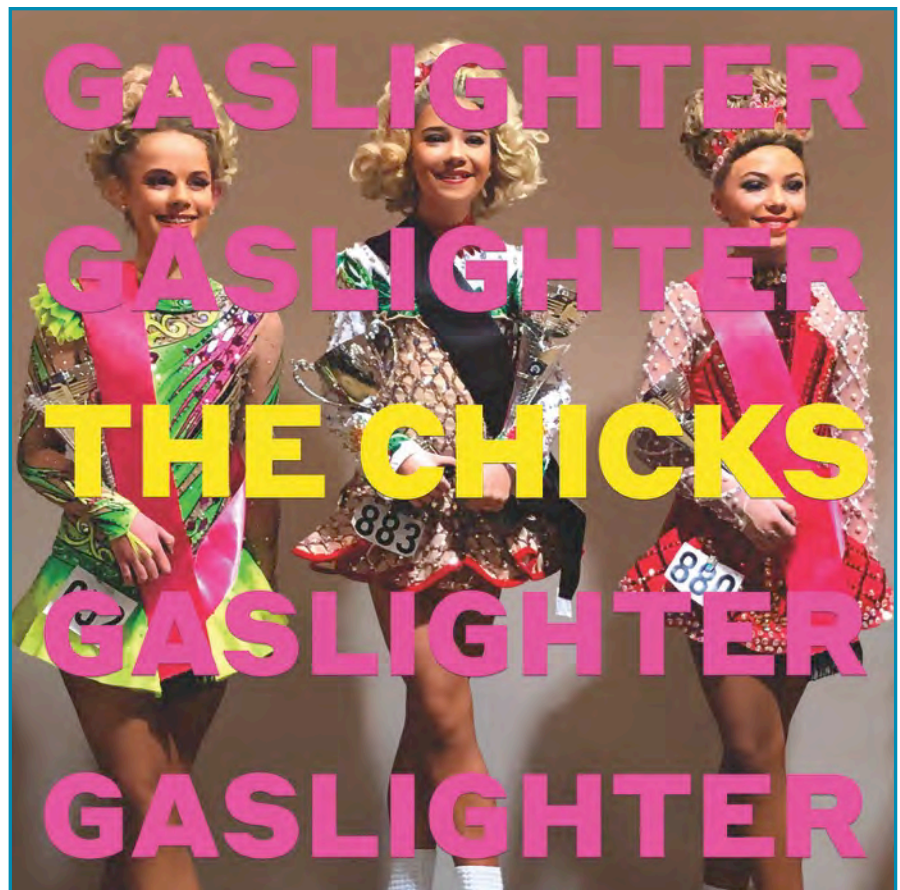
You know, I've asked some of our gay fans, "What is it that has drawn gay people to us?" Because I think after the controversy there was an extra kinship for just understanding what it feels like to be hated by a mass group of people. Ha! _Then_, them acting out on it. But then fighting for what you believe is right, and standing up for yourselves, and not letting them shush you. Before that, what my friends have told me was what gay fans liked was the over-the-top sort of Spice Girls fashion. Ha! We were the cliché for every fad! We wore every fad all at once!

CA: You must've seen a lot of Chicks drag queens then, right?

NM: Yes. "Chicks with Dicks" – there were a lot of those kinds of revues.

CA: I think your divorce has maybe given some false hope to lesbians. On Twitter, I'm seeing queer women express that even though they love Gaslighter, they'll always be sad that you're not queer.

NM: Ha! You know, sometimes I do



think, "Would that have been easier? Darn it!" But I think I'm more of a gay guy on the inside. Is there a title for that?

CA: For a straight woman who presents as a gay man?

NM: Or just *feels* it on the inside!

CA: Call Jack. I'm sure he has a good name for it.

NM: Yeah, we probably meet right in the middle. I forgot the question!

CA: It was about lesbians who are sad that you're not queer.

NM: Ha! I mean, we used to always joke that when I got the short hair, yeah, people liked to think that. But before that we always joked that lesbians seem to like Martie. Martie's always dressed a little more gender-neutral. She likes pants. And listen, she's got a great body, so (she attracts) *all* demographics. One time she flirted with Ellen on a red carpet.

CA: Gay Twitter is obsessed with your boat, referenced on "Gaslighter" and then, of course, "Tights on My Boat." And they want to party on that boat. If you could invite three famous LGBTQ folks to hang with you on your boat, who would they be?

NM: Ha! I'm thinking of several. I'm gonna go with Andy Cohen, Howard Stern's top gay. Goin' with him. I also have the stress of: I'll probably miss my favorite one because I'm just not thinking! I could go all news. I have to think in smaller categories.

CA: You're an Indigo Girls fan. How about Amy and Emily?

NM: Yeah, there'd be some good music there. I could go, like, Anderson Cooper, Rachel Maddow and Don Lemon. There's my three *news* people.

CA: Wait. What about Fortune Feimster? I mean, you *did* have a dance with her.

NM: Love, love, love Fortune. See, that's why I said you gotta go smaller categories! So if I had a *comedy* LGBTQ guest list it'd be: Fortune, Wanda Sykes ... who else? Maybe Rosie or Ellen. Yeah. I could have a good time with either one of them!

CA: Is Fortune a good dancer?

NM: Fortune's a good ice cream dancer. We did her first *duo* ice cream dance (in which they danced with ice cream in their hands). I had the honor of being the first person to do that. Ha!

CA: The Chicks changed their name



Photo Courtesy of Sony Music

to meet the moment. The name change was subtle; there was no flashy press release. And you didn't even have to sue a Black artist for the rights to the name. How do you think other bands have handled their approach to changing their name?

NM: Listen, I think it's unfortunate, yes. Bad move on the lawsuit. I think they should've rethought that. Just not a good look. And I say this with peace and love, but if they had called me for counsel – ha! – this is what I would've told them: I would've said, "Listen, by suing her, you're doing the opposite of what you're trying to do. And it's not going to go well. And it's just *not* the right thing to do. If you really want to meet this moment, if you're changing your name for the right reasons or to really have a certain impact or outcome, then you are doing the opposite of that."

And listen, we felt the pressure of, once you've had success, changing your name feels like a huge thing to overcome. We had had discussions

about changing our name since 2003. But it seemed, just for whatever reason, too big a thing to do, and nobody was calling on us to do it. We just felt icky having Dixie in our name. Then, for us, we had to think of other names. We didn't really want to have anything other than The Chicks, but we knew that that could legally be a really hard thing to get because it's such a common word.

So we had lawyers, and we took our time. But even Lady Antebellum, or Lady A, they had that trademark for, like, six years. But I don't know their situation. To me, if they were told nobody else had that name, they should fire that attorney. Ha! Because, basically, that was an easy thing to find. So I don't know if (the attorney) knew and just thought, You're bigger than them so you would win the trademark and you'll be fine going forward. But it's really not the right way to do it.

So, I think they should've just picked a brand new name. That's what I would've told them. Because they might've even had more fans, or made

people recognize their name even more. I think the worry is, "Nobody's gonna know who we are." Like, maybe they missed the news story where you changed your name. Ha!

But I think that's what they should've done. Brand new name. And they can still do it right now. That is my advice to them. And it feels amazing. I have to say, all of that discussion and overthinking and worry, like, "How do you change your name after so much success?" Oh my god, it was a gift. It was a weight that you didn't even realize you were carrying.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.



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SHANTELL D'MARCO



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TRACI ROSS



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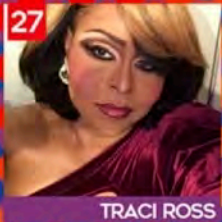
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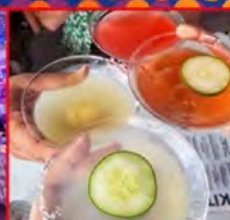
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GRAB AN INDUCTEE

Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame Announces 2020 Inductees, Virtual Ceremony



The Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame was founded in 1991 to honor people and entities, nominated by the community, who have made significant contributions to the quality of life or well-being of the LGBT community in Chicago. The Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame inductees for 2020 were selected from a slate of candidates submitted by Chicago's LGBT community. This year's individuals, organization, businesses and "Friends of the Community" (allies) inductees are as follows:

Individual Nominees:

· **John Ademola Adewoye:** in recognition of his work in helping offer asylum and counseling to LGBT people from less welcoming environments such as Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe and for providing housing, connections and services to help them navigate their new world.



· **Caprice Carthans:** in recognition for her work with many community agencies including AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Chicago House, and Heartland Alliance as a transgender advocate.

· **Dr. Raymond Crossman, PhD:** as the longest-serving LGBT university president in North America, Crossman helped pave the way for LGBT leaders in higher education. He co-founded LGBT Presidents in Higher Education and brought the first national conference for LGBT leaders in higher education to Chicago.



· **Jay Paul Deratany:** recognized for his work as both a human rights lawyer providing volunteer legal services during the AIDS crisis and working with homeless youth and as a board member of Human Rights Watch, which provides support for international LGBT individuals fighting for their lives in countries that have the death penalty for the LGBT individuals.

· **Ronald J. Ehemann:** for 40 years of activism in Chicago's LGBT community. In 1978 Ron Ehemann became one of Chicago's first openly gay attorneys, representing many of the city's bars and organizations. He co-founded Organization to Promote Equality Now (OPEN), Illinois' first gay/lesbian political action party as well as the Greater Chicago Gay & Lesbian Democrats. While doing all of this he helped raise money for community organizations and charities too numerous to mention.



· **Denise Foy:** for her long history of service to Chicago's LGBT community. Beginning in 1993 when she served on the board of Horizons Community Services, fundraising to help establish The Center on Halsted. She was a founding member of the LGBT Community Fund at the Chicago Community Trust. She now serves on the national board of SAGE providing advocacy and services for LGBT elders.

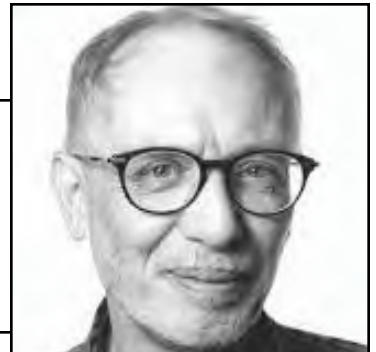
The Chicago LGBT HALL OF FAME

· **Dalila Fridi:** for 30 years of tireless work to advance the rights of LGBT people in Chicago. She has served as a grassroots organizer supporting marriage equality and political candidates who fight for equal rights for the LGBT community. Dalila has also been an advocate for LGBT rights among Chicago's Muslim community advocating for the understanding of intersectionality between Islam and LGBT rights.



· **Terry Gaskins:** for documenting life and activism in Chicago's LGBT community through her services as a photographer and a humanitarian for more than 20 years. She is probably best known as the staff photographer for Gay Chicago Magazine, but she has also donated her time and talents to benefit numerous organizations within and beyond the LGBT community, including animal rights organizations.

· **Joel Drake Johnson (posthumous):** was an award-winning, internationally produced Chicago playwright and teacher. He was nominated for a Joseph Jefferson award five times, Emmy nominated and was a member of the Pen America Center. His most commercial successful work, "Rasheeda Speaking", opened off-Broadway and was nominated for an Outer Critics Circle Award for best new work.



· **Steve Kulieke:** honored for breaking barriers while covering and advancing the struggle for civil rights equal justice for Chicago's LGBT community. Kulieke did groundbreaking work as a reporter and editor at Chicago's GayLife weekly newspaper from 1977 through 1982. Kulieke was not only at the center of action he was integral to the community's emergence as a social and political force. In the 1980s Kulieke gained recognition throughout the journalism world as the nation's first ever municipal press corps reporter representing an LGBT paper.

· **Matt Stuczynski:** for his work in founding the Chicago chapter of GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network). He has been instrumental in LGBT visibility in schools throughout the Chicago area. Under his guidance, Chicago's GLSEN chapter became one of the most successful in the nation. The chapter donated innumerable amounts of LGBT friendly educational materials to the Chicago Public Schools as well as spearheaded protections and inclusive language in the Chicago Teachers Union and Chicago Public School governance.



· **Michelle Zacarias:** for more than a decade of work as a queer, disabled, Latina organizer, she has facilitated social justice, anti-oppression, and LGBT movement work as one of four founding members of the Trans Liberation Collective (TLC) a coalition that formed after the anti-transgender bathroom bills swept the nation in 2017. Michelle continues to positively impact queer communities in her role as a board member of The Brave Space Alliance, a black and brown trans-run non-profit on Chicago's south side, and through her disability-centered community care workshops.

The Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame

In addition to recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals, the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame also honored one LGBT organizations and two businesses as well as three allies, dubbed "Friends of the Community"

The organization and businesses inducted are:

· **The Legacy Project:** an award-winning cultural and educational non-profit dedicated to researching and promoting the contributions LGBT people have made to world history and culture. The Legacy Walk is the only outdoor LGBT museum walk in the world. It spans one-half mile of North Halsted Street. It is anchored by twenty (20) two-story tall steel architectural pylons which feature forty 18" x 24" bronze memorials highlighting the contributions of LGBT people. The Legacy Walk was declared an historic landmark in 2019. In addition, the Legacy Project has developed an LGBT inclusive curriculum and offers a traveling exhibit of LGBT history.



· **Windy City Times:** since its inception in 1985, under then publisher Jeff McCourt, through the current incarnation with publishers Tracy Baim and Terri Klinsky, Windy City Times has functioned as Chicago's premiere news source for the LGBTQ community. The award-winning publication is the only remaining newspaper serving the LGBTQ community in Chicago.

· **Women & Children First Bookstore:** since it opened in 1979, Women & Children First has been Chicago's premiere feminist independent bookstore. As dozens of other bookstores closed during the 90s and 2000s Women & Children First has grown to be one of the largest feminist bookstores in the country stocking more than 30,000 books by and about women, children's books, and the best LGBT literature.



"Friend of the Community", ally inductees include:



· **Judy Baar Topinka** (posthumous): for her support of LGBT causes when it was politically risky for anyone, Democrat or Republican, to be associated with the movement. The fact that she did so as a Republican showed an incredible amount of political courage. She supported the Illinois' Marriage Equality Bill and during the November 20, 2013 ceremony at the University of Illinois at Chicago, when the state's marriage equality bill was signed into law, Judy Baar Topinka was the only Republican speaker at the event. Judy Baar Topinka was "a consistent and firm supporter of gay rights. Even when attacked by members of her own party for her gay rights support, she never wavered." She was truly a friend of the LGBTQ community.

· **Brenetta Howell Barrett:** honored for her work in the fight for civic and economic rights on Chicago's west side, since the 1960s and for her commitment to addressing homophobia and lack of access to resources in the community. She is notable for her inclusion of the LGBT community, standing up to homophobia in the black church. She has worked with public officials and faith-based community groups to bring greater awareness and resources in the fight against HIV/AIDS, helping reduce the stigma, and fostered greater acceptance. Barrett's commitment to fighting homophobia continues as she enters her 87th year.



· **The National Museum of Mexican Art:** for the inclusivity of its mission since it opened its doors in 1987. The NMMA has made it possible for Latinx within a cultural context to celebrate their full identity. The programming at NMMA has always intentionally included LGBT artists and performers, programming and displays.

Due to restrictions caused by the Covid-19 crisis, this year's induction ceremony will be a virtual one, and will be webcast October 13, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. in recognition of National LGBT History Month. Plans for the virtual induction ceremony are in progress now, more information on the induction ceremony will be released at a later date.

Founded in 1991 as the Chicago Gay & Lesbian Hall of Fame, the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame's purpose then, as now, is to honor people and entities, nominated by the community, who have made significant contributions to the quality of life or well-being of the LGBT community in Chicago. It is the first city-sponsored hall of fame dedicated to LGBT people, organizations and community in the United States

The new inductees to the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame were selected from a slate of candidates submitted by Chicago's LGBT community. That slate of candidates was then reviewed by a selection committee comprised of individual inductees to the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame. For more information on nominating a candidate for 2021 go to <http://www.chicagolgbthalloffame.org/nominate>.

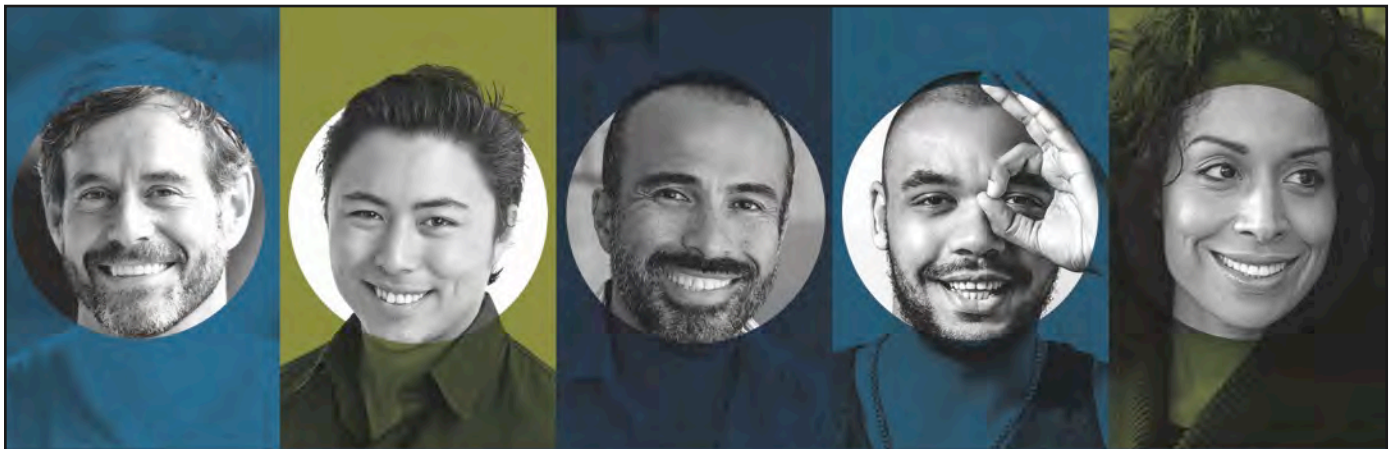
The first Chicago Gay & Lesbian Hall of Fame ceremony took place during Pride Week and was held at Chicago City Hall. Mayor Richard M. Daley hosted the ceremony and afterwards, photos of the inductees were displayed in City Hall. The Hall of Fame has no physical facility but maintains a website, which allows anyone to visit the Hall of Fame at any time. Traditionally, the City of Chicago has displayed the Hall of Fame materials during induction periods, Pride and in October, Gay & Lesbian History Month.

From its founding in 1991 until 2016 the Gay & Lesbian Hall of Fame relied on support from the City of Chicago. The city ceased funding the Gay & Lesbian Hall of Fame in



2016, at that time, it was rechristened the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame and has since been supported and maintained by the Friends of the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame, a 501c3 not-for-profit organization, with approval from the City of Chicago.

For more information, visit the organization's web site <http://www.chicagolgbthalloffame.org/> or its Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/56108152083/>.



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GRAB JJ

One to Look Out For

JJ Bozeman Stars in LGBTQ political thriller, *Snowflake*

By Phil Bessimer

JJ Bozeman grew up in Augusta, GA, the son of a U.S. Navy Dad and an immigrant mother.

He first moved to NYC in his junior year in high school but left a year after graduation to pursue a relationship in Wilmington, North Carolina. When it ended, he returned north to pursue an acting career, moving into a Bronx apartment with a female model he had never met. It was a total leap of faith and desperation, but it worked out, and he still lives with her, except now they call Brooklyn home.

Life as a young, gay, Filipino actor in New York has been challenging, but Bozeman has found success on stage, starring in Haleh Roshan's *FREE FREE FREE* and in readings of plays by Filipinx playwrights Megan Tabaque and Alton Alburo. This month, he makes the jump to movies, starring in Jack Tracy's acclaimed LGBTQ political thriller, *Snowflake*, a fictional story that depicts the fear of a nation when a Trump-like politician is suddenly thrust into the White House.

At the center is Bozeman's character Ethan, whose increasing panic of the new administration drives the film. When happenstance puts Ethan in the same room as the Vice President, he is forced to choose the best way to protect his friends and the LGBTQ community.

Snowflake began streaming on Vimeo on August 4. We spoke with JJ Bozeman from his Brooklyn home.

Phil Bessimer: Hi JJ, pleasure to speak with you! How are you coping

through the pandemic?

JJ Bozeman: I'm taking it day-by-day in this bizarre time we live in. A lot of my focus has been on supporting Black Lives Matter and staying healthy.

PB: With theatres closed, are you keeping yourself busy?

JJ Bozeman: I've been teaching myself editing, lighting, and sound, working on a project I shot with friends right before the quarantine.

PB: Is *Snowflake* your first lead role in a film?

JJ Bozeman: Yes, it is!

PB: How did you land the role of Ethan?

JJ Bozeman: I auditioned to be in Jack Tracy's web series, *History*, back in 2017. I didn't get the part, but he kept me in mind for other roles. He also offered me the opportunity to work behind the scenes, and I jumped at it to learn about being on that side of the camera. It gave us time to get to know each other and he says he wrote the part of Ethan with me in mind.

PB: Could you relate with Ethan and



Photo By Kryz Fox

Photo by Lauren Toub Griffiths



the paranoia he feels after his worst nightmare is elected President?

JJ Bozeman: Absolutely. The election in 2016 really horrified me and so working on a project that directly confronts those fears was both cathartic and taxing, because it felt close to home. There was safety in making a movie because it is pretend, but the story comes from current events, and that's not pretend.

PB: Of everyone in Ethan's circle (Ryan, Paul, Owen...), who do you identify with most?

JJ Bozeman: I'm becoming Paul, the older character, who was an ACT UP activist. The current political climate and battle against racism is shaping me as a person.

PB: Without giving anything away, what are your thoughts on Ethan and how he handles his panic?

JJ Bozeman: Ethan is emotional and intellectual. In moments that feel so uncertain, you don't know if your fear or your rational mind are going to drive the ship. I think Ethan is deeply human in his struggle. I have sympathy for how he handles things, because he's in such an intense position.

PB: Why should everyone see

Snowflake before November?

JJ Bozeman: Because we have a demagogue as president. He discredits any journalist that isn't applauding him. He doesn't believe in science. He doesn't care about the working class. There are still children in cages. Millions of people have lost healthcare in the middle of a pandemic. I don't think I've even covered the tip of the iceberg. Every week we have something new to worry about. Not all of these issues are explored in "Snowflake", but the film is a reminder of how important elections are for everyone in our country. Get ready to vote, people!

Snowflake is available now at <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/snowflakefilm>.



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Rey of light: An interview with filmmaker Kris Rey

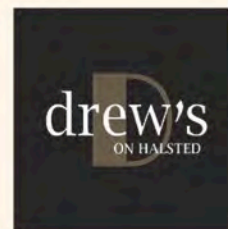
By Gregg Shapiro

Now, more than ever, when there's so much uncertainty and fear in the world, we need a reason to laugh, to escape from our troubles. Luckily, we have Kris Rey's new movie *I Used to Go Here* (Gravitas Ventures). An official SXSW selection, *I Used to Go Here* is a hip comedy about a first-time novelist who is invited back to her alma mater to give a reading from her book. Unfortunately, her life is crumbling around her, including her canceled wedding, the cancelation of her book tour, problematic book reviews, and that's just the beginning. Rey's hilarious screenplay spins these traumas into comedy gold. I had the pleasure of speaking with Kris, who also teaches film production at Northwestern University, before the movie's August 2020 release.

Gregg Shapiro: *I Used to Go Here* joins a growing family of movies, including *Wonder Boys* and *Storytelling*, and television shows, such as season four of *Girls*, that are set in Creative Writing MFA programs. What makes that setting appealing to you as a writer and director?

Kris Ray: It's personally inspired. I didn't go for creative writing; I went to school for film. I didn't get my Masters; I got my bachelor's. I'm a little hesitant to say this out loud in an interview, but the movie was inspired because of a trip I made back to not only my university, but to a bunch of different universities. When my last feature played Sundance 2015, I got invited to all these universities afterwards. Before the movie came out, and after it had premiered, I got invited to like five

different universities for some reason [laughs] to screen the movie for students and to do talks. I guess I was 35, and I felt like, "Wow, isn't this strange? I relate so much more to the students than I do to the professors, except I'm old. But all the students think I'm cool because I made a movie" [laughs]. Nothing weird, like in the film, happened to me where I stayed there for a long time and hung out with everybody. I went to my alma mater – they brought me back to Southern Illinois University, which is where the movie takes place – and I took the train down from Chicago to Carbondale. I started writing the outline for this movie on the way there, before I even arrived and experienced it, I started writing the outline. The thing that I was afraid sounded stupid was that I didn't want it to be a movie about



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a filmmaker. So, I was like, I don't know, she's a writer [laughs].

GS: Gillian Jacobs, who people will recognize from the TV show *Community*, plays the main character Kate in *I Used to Go Here*. What was it about Gillian that made her right for the part?

KR: I just vibed with her so much when we met. I sent her the script. It's so funny, because now with coronavirus you're talking to everybody virtually. I had met a lot of potential actors I had met in person. I had flown out to L.A. and had a lot of meetings with people sort of to consider them for the part. Gillian was doing a play in New York, so we weren't able to meet a person. She read the script and we met over Skype. I just loved her! She also has a reputation of being great, really nice and cool to work with. The rumors are true [laughs].

GS: From its Carbondale setting to the mention of the Crab Orchard Review, IU in *I Used to Go Here* is apparently SIU. But you call it IU.

KR: [Laughs] we weren't legally allowed to use Southern Illinois University. We

sent them the script. I knew that this was going to be a problem because I had made my last feature, *Unexpected*, also features an Illinois university. At the time, we were trying to use U of I, but they wouldn't let us. We had to make up a fake university and we're using the same fake university here, which is Illinois University, which is not real. But we shot our exteriors at Carbondale. Honestly, everyone I talked to at the University was awesome. They're still in communication with me. They're so excited! The (movie) trailer was released yesterday. They want to arrange some kind of screening there. I really loved going to school there. I try to support them and the film school as much as I can.

GS: The movie features poetry and novel excerpts by characters within the script. Did you find it rewarding or challenging to create the writing by Kate and April?

KR: Challenging. I would say both rewarding and challenging. It was fun and easy for me to come up with what she reads from her book because it's kind of supposed to be bad. That, I think, was fun for me. It was much

harder to come up with the poem that April reads, because it's supposed to be good [big laugh]. I'm not a writer in that way.

GS: *I Used to Go Here* also has some other wonderful details. For instance, Kate runs into an old classmate named Bradley Cooper (played by Jorma Taccone). Does actor Bradley Cooper know he gets name-checked?

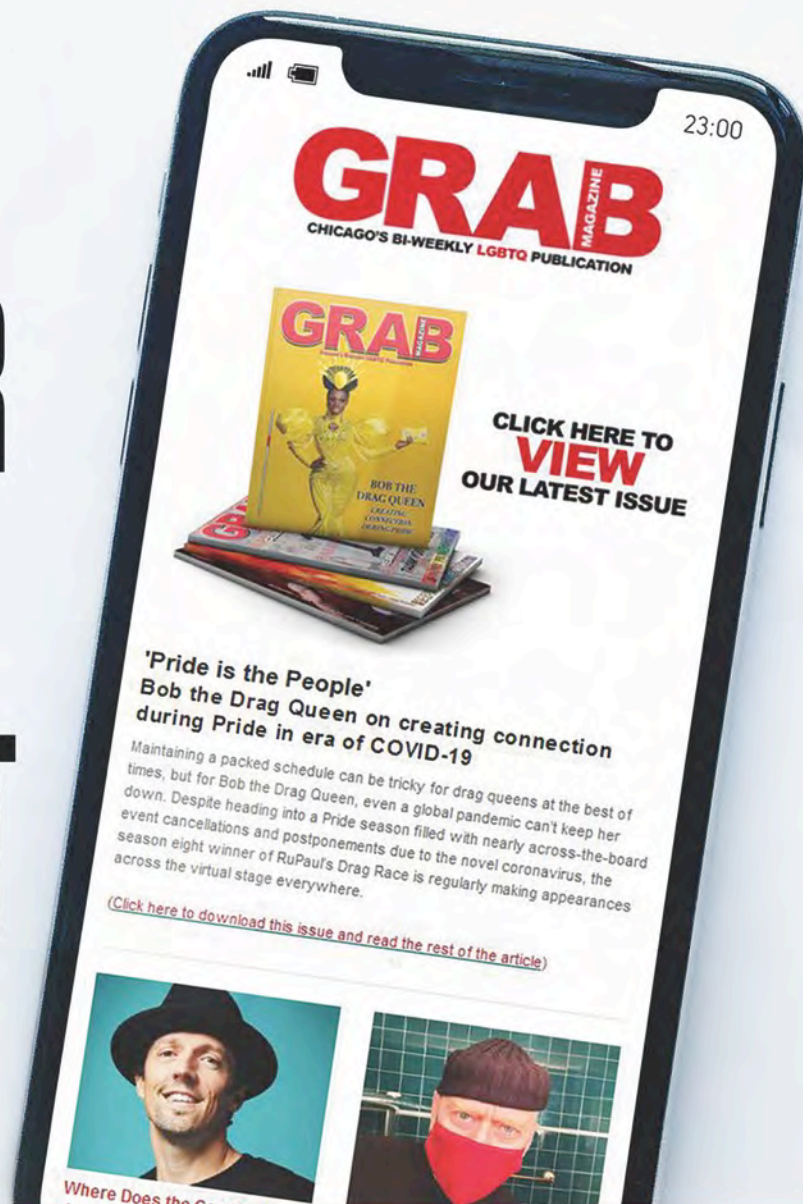
KR: There's no way he knows that [big laugh]. I have no connections to Bradley Cooper personally. I don't know anyone that worked on the movie that does. Maybe he's crossed paths with The Lonely Island guys (Taccone, Andy Samberg and Akiva Schaffer, who produced the movie), but they didn't mention it to me. So, who knows if he'll ever find out [laughs]?

GS: There's also a scene where Kate goes through her ex- fiancée Michael's Instagram posts and sees him with a woman named Rae who happens to be you.

KR: That truly is a hallmark of an independent film. There's so much to figure out when you are making a movie

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and one of those things we left until the end. We didn't have the budget to hire an actress to just be in a photo. Totally for ease, I play the woman. The guy who plays Michael was my First Assistant Director Morgan's husband. Declan Deely, he's just a friend of mine and my First A.D.'s husband. There are some photos where we're in swimsuits at the beach, and that's just because Morgan and I were location scouting the lake location, and Declan came along for the ride. I said, "This will be great. We'll have a variety of shots, let's do a photo shoot here."

GS: Without giving away too much, something wonderful happens to Tall Brandon (Brandon Daley), one of the IU students who lives in the house where Kate used to live. How did you come up with that idea?

KR: [Laughs] I don't know how to not give it away. Are you talking specifically about the kiss?

GS: Yes.

KR: In the script, they don't kiss. In the script, they sort of shake hands and

you can just tell they're into each other, that he's coming back to hang out with her. Then on set, these two actors just had so much chemistry [laughs]. Brandon kept joking and saying, "I feel like I'm going to kiss her. I feel like I'm going to kiss you." She was so smitten with Brandon. She was like, "Oh my God, he's so funny." I said, "Do you guys want a dry run where you kiss?" They were like, "Sure." We just did one take of it and that's what's in the movie.

GS: Morgan Jon Fox, your First Assistant Director whom you mentioned earlier, is an award-winning queer filmmaker. How did you come to work with Morgan?

KR: I have known Morgan for years. I don't even know when (we met); maybe the 2006 or 7 film festival circuit. I know we spent time together at the Sidewalk Film Festival (in Birmingham, Alabama) and maybe Memphis because Morgan is from Memphis and lived there up until two years ago. Strangely, my parents live in Memphis. I moved to Memphis when I was in high school and spent two years there before going off to

college. When I'd go back to Memphis for Christmas and Thanksgiving, Morgan and Declan and I try to hang out while I'm there. Declan got a job in Chicago. He works in mental health with veterans. He's not in filmmaking. He moved here for a graduate program and got a job working at Rush University Hospital and Morgan moved with him. They live here in Chicago now. Totally unrelated, I went out to get drinks with them and just meet up because we're friends. They asked how the movie was going and I was complaining about not being able to find a First A.D. that I liked. Morgan said, "I'm a First A.D." I said, "You are?" I had no idea. I knew him as a writer/director in his own right and didn't know that he worked as a First A.D. I was like, "Oh my God, can I hire you?" He said yes! I never want to make another move without Morgan. He's a great First A.D. He's everything you want, which is that he's a natural leader. He's very dynamic. He knows how to run a set. But, also, he's so lovely that everybody likes him. He's not yelling at anyone. He's really wonderful.

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9	Alex Newell	Mama Told Me
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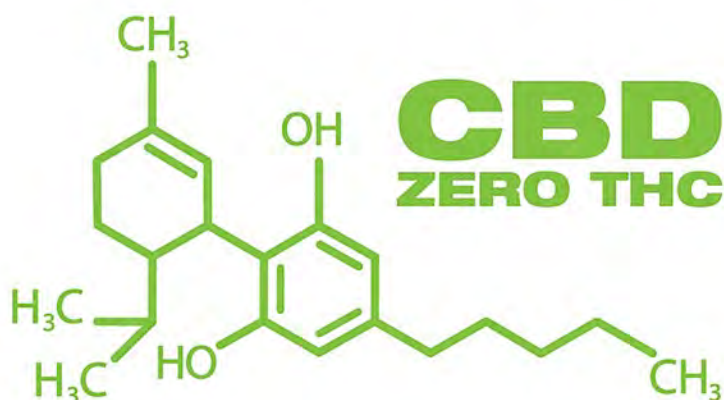


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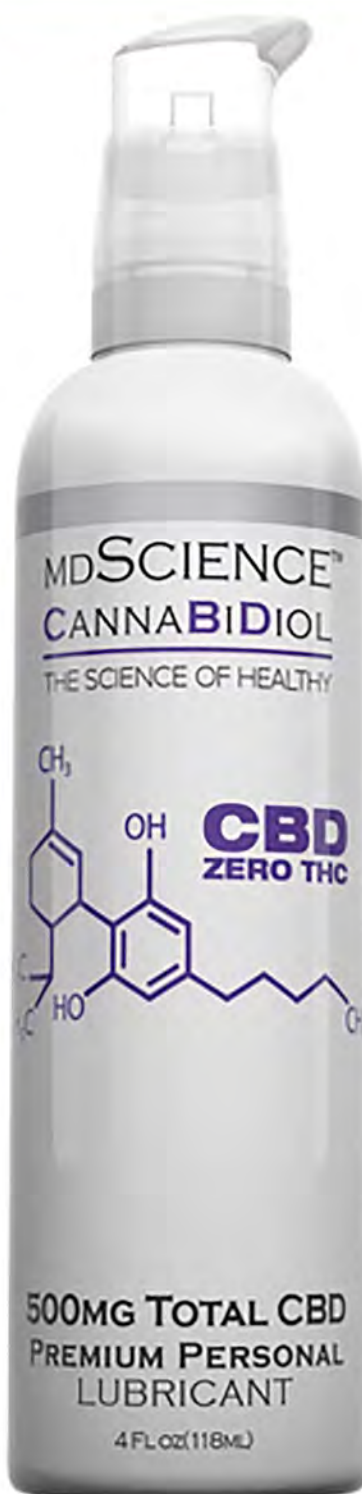
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GRAB DYLAN

The Evolution of Karen

By Dylan Seitz

It's a bird... it's a plane... it's that bitch at the grocery store demanding to talk to the manager over her six-month-old expired coupons. Her name? Karen. We all have met her, but where did she come from? In today's article, we will deep dive into the subject and find out!

First, let us first discuss who and what is a "Karen." The moniker typically describes a person of privilege, typically white, and that is middle-aged. She comes in many shapes and sizes. Karen tends to have short and choppy hair which is her iconic look if you wish to spot one out in the wild, but not exclusively so. A notable example for reference is Kate Gosselin in the late 2000s, a reality TV show star featured on the show *Jon & Kate Plus 8*. Karen plays the victim card to get her way when making unreasonable demands. When she doesn't get her way, she then demands to speak to someone in charge while inconveniencing everyone else nearby in the process. However, this is but one scenario of the forms that Karen

takes.

You may be telling yourself, "Wow. This person sucks!", but there are many ways that they do and it is a large spectrum. Karens can be categorized as anti-vaxxers, racists, or more relevantly, during these times as anti-maskers (dubbed as "Coronavirus-Karens") among other types. Emotions run the show here and their arguments defy all science and logic. So long as acting this way benefits them, in some way, that is the only thing that matters.

With that in mind, you now know who and what is a Karen, but let's take a look at some specific examples. These days, it's not too difficult to locate a viral video of one of these entitled creatures. A notable example is "BBQ Becky" who contacted the authorities on a black family over using charcoal grill in the park claiming it to be illegal. Then we have "Cornerstore Caroline" who decided it was appropriate to call 911 for accusing a child of sexual assault simply because the child bumped into her. These issues escalate from extremely minor

circumstances, but are unfortunately not uncommon. Some of the aforementioned examples are considered racially charged, but not all cases are so. At some point, you may have experienced this phenomenon whether it had been a stranger or a family member. I know I have over the years working from job to job.

However, we need to go back and see how it evolved to what the term "Karen" actually came from and what it is today. The term didn't spark popularity until about 2018, but our story goes back to 2005. Its origins have



been theorized to be linked to a Dane Cook skit, a skit known as "The Friend That Nobody Likes" which can be located on Youtube. The skit discusses having "friends" whose sole goal is to tear someone down. I think we all have people like that in our lives, people that do these things to make themselves feel better. Fast forward about 10 years to 2015 and you come to find that Karen was once known as something else. Originally the meme "speak to the manager haircut" was what Karen's were called based on research of Reddit to a subreddit called "/r/FuckYouKaren". After that, the rest is history. The meme slowly flourished to the point that it is at today being carried in reference through other memes and the name Karen stuck with the hair style.

Chances are that you may not encounter a Karen right now on account of the pandemic but fret not. There are other ways to identify a Karen on social media. Karens typically follow essential oils Facebook pages, have a "Live, Laugh, Love" cover photo, has a profile picture of her and her kids, and have antivax rants on their Facebook pages. These are known as "Keyboard Karens." They will also tell their friends that they refuse to wear a mask citing that being forced to wear one go against their rights and may pull out fake exemption cards to get around having to wear a mask. Karens are selfish people that only care about themselves and don't care about putting people in harm's way. The only way to defeat one is to become one. So if you ever encounter a Keyboard Karen, make sure to get your "let me speak to your manager" wig out and get ready for a battle of Karen proportions.

Overall, the term Karen has gone through a metamorphosis of evolution over the years. Originally it started as a joke (as most memes do) and grew to something more. With the help of social media has grown into the meme we all love to hate. Of course make sure to take the generalizations with a grain of salt. At the end of the day all we can do is try to be kind and to not to be a Karen ourselves.

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GRAB ROGER

Co-Signers on Debts – The Risks Involved

By Roger V. McCaffrey-Boss, Esq.

Q: I allowed my former lover to use several of my credit cards by making him an authorized signatory on my Visa and Mastercard accounts. I also agreed to co-sign a bank loan so he could buy a new car. After we broke up last year, he promised not to use the credit cards and said he would make all the monthly payments on the car loan. I learned from the bank that he is behind on the car loan and the bank wants me to make the loan current even though I don't have the car. What are my legal rights and obligations?

A: If your former lover hasn't made the payments on the car loan, there is also a good chance that he could use your credit accounts and run up new charges, leaving you legally responsible for payment of all those debts.

While you are going through the process of a separation from your lover, one of the first things you should do is

write to all your creditors, where he is authorized to sign, close those accounts and ask for a new account in your name alone. Tell your lover you're doing it so he can write for his own personal account at the same time. It's rotten to leave a lover with an invalid credit card.

You will need to make sure that the cancellation takes effect. Even though you wrote to the creditor, canceled the account, sent back the cut-up card and got an acknowledgment, the account may still appear open on your report. Even though the account may be closed with the creditor if it appears open on your credit report it may cause you to be turned down for credit elsewhere if your credit report shows too many open accounts even though they are actually canceled.

To make sure that your canceled accounts have, in fact, been closed, get a copy of your credit report. It's free if

you were turned down for credit based on information it contained. If your credit report shows a closed account as open follow the bureau's procedures for reporting an error. They will then have to verify your claim with the creditor within a reasonable time, usually 30 days, and advise you of the results. If the creditor agrees that you did close the account, it will be so listed. If the creditor is still showing, the account as open you will have to go through the whole cancellation process again. Regarding



the debts that you co-signed for your former lover, it is a common practice for family members or friends to co-sign on large debts for family members and lovers without being aware of the legal problems they can face.

The drawback to guaranteeing a loan is that the guarantor can be fully obligated for the entire loan amount, not just the portion due, if there is a default in payment of the loan. Because you co-signed on the car loan, you are legally responsible to pay the loan if your former lover fails to make the payments even though you don't have use of the car.

There could also be a problem if the bank repossess the car. Usually when a bank repossess a car for non-payment, they will sell the car trying to get the highest price possible. If the sales price is less than the amount due on the loan there is a deficiency. You, as guarantor of the loan, will be liable to pay that deficiency.

Another drawback to co-signing on a loan is the effect it has on the guarantor's own credit access. If the person in the question wanted to buy his own new car, he might be turned down because the full amount of the payments on the first car when factored into his income debt ratio could disqualify him. This means that the bank would add up all his existing debt, add in the new car loan with the loan he guaranteed and if it were greater than their guidelines they could turn down the loan for the new car.

Roger McCaffrey-Boss is a graduate of Hamline University School of Law, St. Paul, Minnesota, and is a member of the Chicago Bar Association. You can email him at RVMLawyer@aol.com. He suggests that you consult your own lawyer for any specific questions regarding the issues raised in this column.

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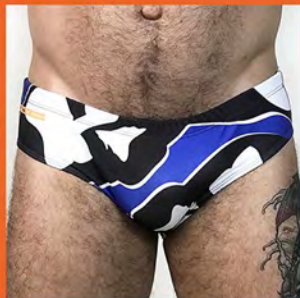
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GRAB HOLLY

The Secret Gay Agenda

By Holly Maholm

After our meeting, Dave and I remained in the stable, while Chris returned home. "You know, Dave," I began, "I'm so impressed with your LGBT students. You've got as confident and level-headed a group of teenagers as I've ever seen." Dave turned to me with a quizzical scowl on his face. "Holly, if you only knew the truth. Let me tell you how things really are.

"Looked at from the outside, you might think you're seeing a group of teenagers who work hard in class, support each other, and (usually) stay out of trouble. But that's like looking at a similar group clinging for dear life to a leaky rubber life-raft on a storm-tossed sea. The good study habits and solidarity you see is mostly a matter of them having to 'hang together, or all hang separately' – as Benjamin Franklin once said.

"And that's not all. My position as the high school's most infamous 'gay faculty member' is equally precarious. For my students who are already 'out' to their

parents, friends and classmates, nothing prevents me from lending a sympathetic ear to their fears and heartaches. But if any other student comes to me to open up his heart, I'm in mortal danger!

"You see, if I let... 'Billy' tell me his troubles, and then six months later Billy announces to his parents he's gay, word will inevitably get back to Billy's parents that he came to me for advice. And you know what they'll say. That I took advantage of his youth and vulnerability to 'recruit him' for the 'gay lifestyle.' That I acted according to some Secret Gay Agenda to 'turn' that confused young man in the direction of sin, Satan and perversion.

"No, I'm in danger every day of being betrayed by my sympathetic heart. Why, even if Billy later decides he's straight after all, if he tells his parents he confided in me, they'll still conclude I must've tried to win him over to the Gay Agenda, but their son was too strong to buy what I was selling. So you see... it only takes one Billy and one pair of angry parents to get a teacher like me fired.

"But that's not the only risk I'm running. You and I know Josh's secret: Our handsome, All-State quarterback is secretly gay, and he won't – really, can't – come out until he gets to college. So

what do you think happens when he does finally come out?

"When his parents ask, 'How long have you known you're gay? Did you ever tell anyone?' and he tells them, 'I've known since ninth grade, and my teacher, Dave, has known all along,' what do you think will happen next? If I'm lucky, Josh's parents will accept him, but if not – and maybe, even if they do – they'll blame me for lying to them and keeping his secret from the only parents he's ever had, who love him very much.

"That's why I can't rest easy at night, knowing what I know. But let me tell you the greatest tragedy I see. Often, there'll be some young Billy who is



suffering confusion, depression and anxiety. So I let him open up his heart to me, and all the while I'm wondering 'Is he afraid he might be gay? Is that the problem?' But then it turns out that's not it. Sure, he's confused about his sexuality – how he doesn't care about sports or the other stuff his Dad and brothers like – and he wonders 'Does that make me gay?'

"I wish all those parents could remember what they were like when they were teenagers; all the confusion and shame and 'identity crisis' we all lived through during those years. But it's not just my LGBT students – even the ones living in stealth – it's all my students. The agony they go through trying to find their identity; to accommodate themselves to being overweight or awkward or unattractive or unpopular. It hurts my heart to hold back – as I often have to do – from hearing their shame and confusion, and all because I don't want to be accused of 'pushing' that Secret Gay Agenda.

"Nevertheless, I teach my LGBT students what they need to know to survive in a world where being gay is grounds for poverty, violence and bigotry. And what I teach them is a deep, dark secret that Mike and I and other gay men have learned to keep to ourselves.

"But, I trust you, Holly, so I'm going to share with you the True and Authentic Secret Gay Agenda... what I try to 'push' on all those impressionable young minds their unsuspecting parents have placed in my care.

"So – just between us – the Secret Gay Agenda is this: Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Statistics, Electrical & Mechanical Engineering, History, Economics, Data Analytics...."

(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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GRAB TOM



Tom's Got Game

The Sexy Crooner Makes Moves on the Furred Nerd in New Summer Jam

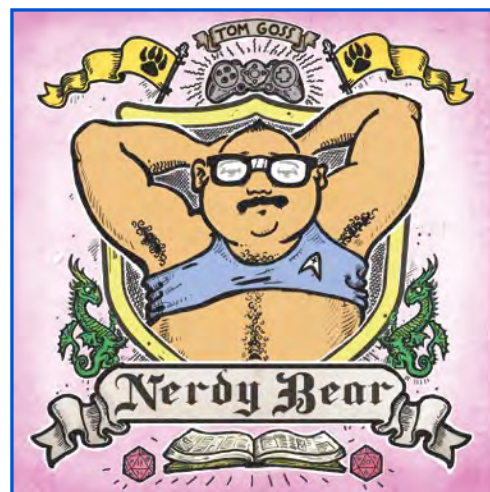
By Jacob Gomez



Tom Goss's sultry new R&B track, "Nerdy Bear," is an ode to plus-sized gay men who enjoy super heroes and playing video games. "It would be hard to pinpoint what I love most about nerdy bears," Tom says from his LA home. "From my experience, they tend to be gentle and warm. They want to have a good time, they're easy to get to know and of course, they're cuddly. To me, that's a winning combination." The song is a lighthearted jam with a serious message that is authentic to Tom's dating experience and relays his unique perspective that beauty doesn't fit a standard mold. "We've all seen the movies where the nerdy girl is hot, but she doesn't know it," Tom continues. "She has to take off her glasses and let down her hair for the world to recognize her beauty. I say hell no to all that. The

nerdy bear is already as cute as can be!"

Tom Goss was raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a small city on Lake Michigan, between Chicago and Milwaukee. Much of his youth was spent focused on his studies and on wrestling. He didn't feel much in the way of sexual and emotional desires



growing up. In fact, he didn't go on his first date until he was 22, while in seminary, training to be a Catholic priest.

That was when Tom realized he did have an appetite for sex, only it wasn't towards women or even the men that society deemed as handsome. His attraction was toward large, furry men and nerdy ones to boot.

Tom interviewed a bunch of candidates for the right man to play Nerdy Bear in the music video. He eventually chose Jason Villegas. "When I saw Jason's pictures, I knew he was the one. His smile is perfection!"

Tom manages to show off his basketball dribbling skills in the music video and he even pulls off a bit of drag, appearing in several scenes as Princess Peach from the Mario Brothers video game. "I was happy to wear the dress and tiara," he laughs.

"Nerdy Bear" follows the release of Tom Goss's full-length album, *Territories*, that included six music videos and his first Spanish-language



single. He promoted the album last winter with a nationwide and European tour.

Since the pandemic, he has spent his time in quarantine working on new material, for himself and for other artists. "I'm excited for the opportunity

to give back to the community and help other queer artists tell their unique stories," Tom says, adding optimistically that, "It's going to be a fun 2020."

For more on Tom visit <http://tomgossmusic.com>

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POSITIVE THOUGHTS

HIV

HIV Organizations Putting Out Statements Supporting #BLM: Show Me the Receipts

By Ace Robinson

Next year, it will have been 40 years since the world became aware of AIDS and its ability to wreak havoc throughout humankind. We learned quickly that HIV did not discriminate in how aggressively it would impact an individual. But shortly thereafter, we learned that HIV did discriminate in how aggressively it would impact a community.

In response to the AIDS crisis, storied advocates mobilized and created systems and structures to save their lives and those that they loved. Then came the birth of HIV service organizations (HSOs). Many of those organizations have undeniable legacies of serving people living with HIV at a time when countless clinicians refused to even touch them. The advocates pushed, kicked, screamed and shoved until the powers-that-be began to respond. And when public health officials responded in lackluster fashion, these public health heroes pushed even harder.

Decades later, numerous books, movies and even plays have been produced highlighting the work done by this collection of individuals who would eventually come to lead or choose the leaders of HSOs. I, like many of my colleagues, have read or seen nearly all of these productions in one form or another. And one thing is clear to me in these biographic pieces: Almost no one looks like me.

Black people are often a footnote in the history of the AIDS movement. One of the first suspected cases of AIDS was in a Black teenager named Robert Rayford from St. Louis, Missouri, who died of what seemingly were HIV-related causes at the age of 16 in 1969—i.e., Kaposi's sarcoma, pneumonia and an advanced chlamydia infection. Twelve years later, Michael Gottlieb, M.D., was one of the leading authors of a seminal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* detailing the symptoms of five white gay men living with pneumocystis pneumonia in 1981. His report led to the beginning of the world's awareness of HIV. But there were two major omissions in that report: two more documented cases of Black men—one gay, and one a heterosexual Haitian. Thinking back, Gottlieb shared, "I wouldn't have thought it mattered. But in retrospect, I think it might've made a

difference among gay Black men." The misconception that HIV was a white gay man's disease started from the very beginning.

Today in America, Black gay, bisexual, and same-gender-loving adolescent boys and men are the most HIV-impacted population by scope and scale, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). What does that mean within the Black gay community? The HIV response in America has utterly failed this population.

There is daily proof of the failure of HIV, Inc. to service Black gay men. Go into an HIV clinic in most parts of America, and you will see a disproportionate number of Black gay, bisexual, and same-gender-loving men sitting in the waiting room. These are the same people who typically do not see themselves in HIV prevention messaging, on the Gay Pride billboards across America every June, or sitting across from themselves while in the doctor's offices. Black gay men do see themselves on the front page of newspapers being charged under HIV criminalization statutes or on CDC reports stating once again that they make up the highest number of new HIV infections in the country.

Due to overwhelming stigma, prejudice and systemic racism and homophobia, Black gay men living with and/or impacted by HIV have hurdle after hurdle to overcome. Unfortunately, they are not always successful due to all the obvious reasons. They fall out of care (racist doctors). They don't trust treatment options (racist researchers). They don't trust HIV service organizations (racist hiring practices). All of these realities are simply unacceptable.

"It's your passion and dream job and then you look around the field and Black Gay CEO's leading HIV / AIDS organizations are far and few between, a reality that is hard to swallow when you look at the disparate impact of HIV on our lives," says Tyler TerMeer, PhD, M.S., CEO



of Cascade AIDS Project. "If we are truly committed to a tomorrow that values all Black and Brown lives and one that improves the lived experience of our Black, Indigenous, and people of color clients and community through health equity and racial justice, then our organizations need to make investments in Black leadership."

Black Gay Lives Matter

For decades, fingers constantly pointed at Black men living with HIV, stating that they were to blame for the systems in which they acquired, progressed, and sometimes died from the virus. Many Black people have been repeatedly admonished for not utilizing available resources to prevent and/or treat HIV. Thankfully, those days of victim-blaming are coming to an end, albeit way too late for way too many. Those storied HIV organizations that have existed for over three decades have been successful at turning the epidemic around—for white gay men. But they have historically failed Black people. Larry Scott-Walker, co-founder and executive director of THRIVE SS, has been offering solutions for Black gay men since 2015, geared toward turning the epidemic around. His organization has received international attention for successfully providing culturally responsive services to primarily Black gay, bisexual, and same-gender-loving men in metro Atlanta.

"When Black gay men are not included in the C-suite, the efforts of an organization lack the cultural reflection and responsiveness required to adequately address the needs of Black people and ultimately end up doing more harm than good in these vital communities," he says.

Changing the system is easier said than done. The best-funded HIV service organizations have two things in common: 1) their C-suites lack Black gay men or even Black people of any gender identity or sexuality, and 2) due to their white leadership structure, they have increased access to capital. You will often see at these same organizations Black gay men tokenized to serve as outreach specialists or program managers for services exclusively focused on Black people or other racial and ethnic minorities. As one executive director, who asked to remain anonymous, shared, "Most HIV organizations only want Black people as their building's decoration and not as the support beams."

Within Black communities, certain organizations are very well-known for their anti-Black hiring practices, work culture, and subsequent abysmal treatment of clientele. Black people who work in HIV at all levels have stories of real harm that's occurred. Black employees are often made to keep quiet about these issues for fear of being seen as a troublemaker and "hard to work with" and therefore become unable to work anywhere in the field. Livelihoods

have been destroyed, and some talented and committed people have left the field altogether. Some of the offending agencies have even had Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) complaints filed against them, and the findings have landed on their desk. Without fail, the same routine follows those findings:

- An external consultant trained in race humility comes to the organization.
- The remaining Black staff are interviewed.
- An airing of grievances about the agency's systemic racism occurs.
- A final report of suggested activities to address diversity and inclusion is created.
- Typically, a Black woman is hired as the human resources director of diversity and inclusion.

Fast forward to one year later, those same organizations still lack any Black people in executive leadership; the director of diversity and inclusion has resigned; and disgruntled Black staff and clientele hope for a better day.

"Black gay men must be in the C-suite to remove the cloak of invisibility,"

says Stephen Lee, M.D., M.B.A., executive director of NASTAD. "HIV organizations that live their values aggressively also recruit and support minorities and LGBTQ+ leaders to make our communities and workplaces stronger, more creative, and resilient. They actively create seats at the leadership table for difference, innovative solutions, and diverse perspectives. Without this, they are doomed to a culture that stifles different viewpoints and voices." Successful HIV service organizations that are doing

the necessary work to support the communities disproportionately impacted by HIV have been able to create an equitable business model, starting with their board of directors through the executive team and their staff. Through intentional design, HIV service organizations such as TruEvolution in Southern California have been able to sustainably engage the very "hard-to-reach populations" that other agencies have failed to support.

"As the world becomes more complicated and health disparities layer themselves deeper in our culture and community, Black gay men are the critical resources to the leadership of the HIV movement," says Gabriel Maldonado, M.B.A., CEO of TruEvolution. "Our roles are to not only implement programs and execute services, but to stay connected to the community and generate solutions that speak to the culture, history, and language of the people we serve. As embedded and trusted community members, we are best able to address our interwoven and unmet cultural needs."

In reference to the rhetoric about Black same-gender-loving men, David Malebranche, M.D., M.P.H., once famously stated a general response to white HIV researchers and administrators: "They are not a hard-to-reach population just because you do not know how to reach them."

At this exact moment in the story of America, we are seeing non-Black people pay more attention to the systems that have endangered the lives of Black men from a variety of angles. In response, we are seeing many industries, including the field of HIV, begin to do a deeper level of self-reflection on their role in perpetuating a world that sees Black men die earlier and with less support than their peers. And we are also seeing numerous HIV-focused agencies releasing #BlackLivesMatter statements.

But let's be clear. The Black community does not want hollow words written on the screen. The community wants to see the receipts. We want to see who is sitting on your board of directors and who is sitting in your C-suites. If those people do not look like the epidemic in your community, change must come. And come now.

Ace Robinson is a leading HIV advocate and population health expert residing in Los Angeles. He is a board director of the Avielle Foundation, which combats violence through brain health research, and a co-chair of the LA County HIV Commission's Standards & Best Practices Committee. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBT 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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ANOTHER YEAR UNKNOWN SHARES NEW SINGLE "LOVE"



Alternative rock band Another Year Unknown shares their latest single "Love" premiering last week with *New Noise Magazine*. On the inspiration behind the song vocalist/guitarist **Ashton Hammill** shares, "being an artist always on the road and having that separation from your loved ones compared to most people is hard for developing relationships. When I sat down with the idea of Love, the song was in the forefront of my mind. It's something that speaks to my heart,

makes me happy, and I think getting this song out to the masses could help other people in the world. We all just need love."

"Our lyric video was inspired from a line in the song, 'cupids bombs come crashing down this evening' Another Year Unknown shares with New Noise. "The lyrics helped us decide on the artwork we wanted to use for the release and the style of the video. We wanted the lyrics to appear handwritten so the process of editing took a little bit longer, but it was worth it! In addition to that style, we wanted something creative and engaging as the background - with subtle hints of red because of the "love" theme. Overall, super stoked on the way the video turned out. We spent a lot of hours creating it so hopefully others are into it as well."

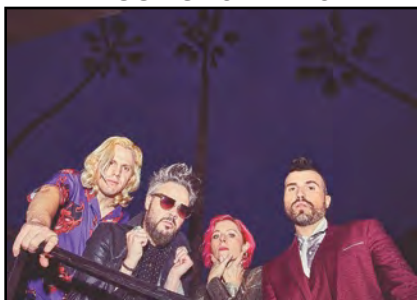
It's important to never lose sight of your dreams, especially in the face of uncertainty. Life is about going after what you're passionate about even in the most difficult of times. Atlanta-based band Another Year Unknown delves

deeper into this message with every release, on track to empower the local scene and beyond. Influenced by outspoken leaders of the punk rock realm such as *Sum 41*, *Blink-182*, *The Menzingers*, and *Anti-Flag*, the trio has been developing their unique sound since Fall 2018. Their debut EP *Stymie* is reminiscent of the early-2000s while packing a modern punch through its anthemic production and sing-along choruses. Its release drew the attention of listeners and bands alike, with two tracks receiving a powerful placement on Red Bull Motorsports' YouTube channel. With more music on the way soon, Another Year Unknown is sure to turn the routine of everyday life into something exciting.

Another Year Unknown is **Ashton Hammill** (Founder, Guitarist, Vocalist), **Chris Fail** (Bassist, Vocalist) and **Andrew Reynolds** (Drummer).

Fans can check out the single and lyric video now at newnoisemagazine.com/video-premiere-another-year-unknown-love/

MULTI-PLATINUM HITMAKERS NEON TREES RELEASE 'I CAN FEEL YOU FORGETTING ME'



The multi-platinum alternative quartet Neon Trees release their long awaited fourth studio album, *'I Can Feel You Forgetting Me'*, - via Thrill Forever. With over 750 million streams and preceded by Alternative Radio hit *'Used to Like'* and followed up by the infectious *'New Best Friend'* with most recently, the heartbreak anthem

'Nights', the album explores a myriad of introspective themes across isolation, personal relationships, self-discovery and fulfillment set to the band's signature sound cast in synth soul and rooted in robust guitars with unforgettable danceable beats.

"Writing this record was extremely cathartic," shares **Tyler Glenn**, who penned much of the album over several years from a deep place of reflection." I had ostensibly moved to LA to work on honing a body of work for this album, but also to get away from a relationship that was haunting me." Glenn spent much of that year alone, except for the LP's collaborators. Listeners will hear how much of the lyrics were inspired by personal memories and feelings pulled from Glenn's experience of being in a codependent relationship he needed resolve from. "I feel like the record encapsulates that journey," he expounds. "When I started writing I was still in that relationship, and about half way through writing, I had left it. I still

feel haunted by it, and just like all codependency, it's a journey to rid yourself completely of it."

"Ghosting culture is very much a modern part of how we interact as humans," continues Glenn on some of the more nuanced issues the album explores. "I have this phone in my hand with 7 or 8 different ways to reach a person, and yet in as many seconds as it takes to block a person, or unfriend them, I can't reach them anymore. I literally could feel him forgetting me."

Glenn's roaring and affirming vocals provide narration on a record that "sounds like one full night of reflection, alone at the bar, walking past the places you'd go with them, texting them when you shouldn't, and ultimately embracing the idea that no one else can complete you." The album rounds out with linings of hope, encouraging that "you must find completeness and joy in yourself."

For more information visit <https://www.neontrees.com/>

HAPPY. RELEASE NEW SINGLE/VIDEO "A CURE FOR WELLNESS"



Emo/pop-rock band Happy. have released their latest single/video "A

Cure For Wellness."

This song focuses on the story of someone very close to me that I love very much struggling with addiction," shares vocalist/guitarist, **Tate Logan**. "It describes the anger, frustration and resentment that I felt in the beginning and was an outlet for me surrounding the lies and manipulations that occurred during the darkest moments of the addiction. However, now my loved one is clean and has been for a while. They have completely regained control of their life and I couldn't be happier."

Happy. are **Tate Logan** (vocals), **Sean Bowick** (drums) and **John Palmer** (guitar). Formed in 2016 in Columbia, SC, the group launched with their 4-song EP, *The Endless Bummer*, which was later released on tapes

through Ohio's Real Life Cassette Girls Records.

"*A Cure For Wellness*" is the second single, following *"Sick is the New Sane"*, from the band's forthcoming new album, *Imposter Syndrome*, due out on October 30 via Rude Records. Produced by **Marc McClusky** (Weezer, Motion City Soundtrack, The Front Bottoms), the album is a narrative on the band's personal experience with the effects of Imposter Syndrome. They explain, "From the lows of depression, anxiety, and addiction, to the highs of traveling, making friends and living the dream, this record is our everlasting chase for 'success.'" The album is available for pre-order here: <https://happy.lnk.to/impostersyndrome>.

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Strawdog Theatre Company Artistic Director Leda Hoffmann To Step Down Ensemble Member Kamille Dawkins Named Interim AD



Strawdog Theatre Company's Board of Directors today announced Artistic Director **Leda Hoffmann** will step down effective August 15, 2020. Hoffmann, who joined the company in January 2019, has accepted a position as Artistic Director of CATCO in Columbus, Ohio. Ensemble member **Kamille Dawkins** will serve as the company's Interim Artistic Director.

Hoffmann will return to Chicago to direct Strawdog's world premiere of *Welcome to Keene, New Hampshire* by **Brian James Polak**. The production, originally slated for

spring 2020, was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. A new date will be announced for next season.

Strawdog Board President **Jennifer Nelson** comments, "It has been our pleasure at Strawdog to have Leda as our Artistic Director. Her leadership and vision were immediately apparent and impactful – and obviously other companies were taking notice. While we wish we could have worked together longer, Leda will always be a part of our artistic family and we wish her the very best. We are thrilled to have ensemble member Kamille Dawkins step in as interim Artistic Director and look forward to her leadership in this time of transition."

Leda Hoffmann adds, "I am so grateful for my time as Artistic Director at Strawdog and for the wonderful collaborators with whom I've had the pleasure to work. While I am thrilled about this new position and the opportunities it provides, I am sad to be leaving Strawdog and this theatre community. I look forward to returning to direct *Welcome to Keene, New Hampshire*."

Kamille Dawkins comments, "It is an honor to be entrusted with the role

of Interim Artistic Director. This transition is made all the much easier with the support and confidence of my fellow ensemble members. We are sad to see Leda go, but are looking forward to working with her again and watching her succeed in her new position."

Kamille Dawkins is a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, GA where she earned a BFA in both Performing Arts and in Film and Television. Originally from Kingston, Jamaica, Kamille moved to Chicago in 2016 after completing her nine month Emerging Professional Residency at The Milwaukee Repertory Theater. She has since joined the Chicago theatre community as an actor, musician, singer, writer and assistant director.

She was invited to join the Strawdog ensemble in 2017, shortly after performing in the company's production *Once in A Lifetime*. Since then, Kamille has performed in several Strawdog productions and has served as both Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair as well as Co-Ensemble Manager for the company. Kamille is also an ensemble member of One Year Chekhov.

Lambda Legal Sues New York State For Its Refusal To Allow Nonbinary Gender Markers on Driver's Licenses



Lambda Legal filed a lawsuit on behalf of **Sander Saba**, a nonbinary transgender New York resident who is seeking an accurate New York driver's license that reflects their nonbinary gender identity. The lawsuit challenges New York State's discriminatory policy that categorically prohibits nonbinary people from obtaining an accurate driver's license that reflects their gender identity, instead forcing them to choose either "male" or "female." Saba, a 25-year-old New York University Law School graduate, is seeking an accurate driver's license with an "X" marker.

"My request is simple – to have a driver's license that matches my identity," said Saba, who uses they/them pronouns. "It's demeaning to be forced to carry identity documentation that is inconsistent with my identity. The State of New York should respect who I am,

recognize me as nonbinary, and issue me an accurate driver's license."

Saba already has two identity documents with accurate "X" markers – their New York City birth certificate and an earlier driver's license issued by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. They need an accurate New York driver's license to ensure they are abiding by New York State law requiring its residents to exchange out-of-state license for a New York one and have fully congruent documentation.

"By prohibiting nonbinary people from obtaining a driver's license with an accurate gender marker, the State of New York is depriving them of an essential government identity document and compelling them to carry untruthful documentation about who they are," said **Carl Charles**, Staff Attorney at Lambda Legal. "Studies show that having inaccurate identification documents exposes nonbinary and transgender people to discrimination, harassment, and violence. By prohibiting nonbinary people from having accurate driver's licenses, one of the most commonly used and accessible forms of identity documents, New York is limiting their opportunities to fully participate in society and causing ongoing harm to their well-being."

"Possessing accurate identification documents is essential to everyone's health, economic and social well-being, but particularly for marginalized communities such as nonbinary and LGBTQ people," said **Omar Gonzalez-Pagan**, Senior Attorney at Lambda Legal. "A driver's license is an especially ubiquitous identification

document used to verify an individual's identity in almost every setting – including access to health care, hospitals, employment, education, housing, banking services, travel, and other government services. Denying nonbinary people documentation congruent with their gender identity undermines their ability to fully participate in all aspects of life."

There has been some progress already within the state to make policies more inclusive for nonbinary and transgender people. New York City already changed its law in 2019 to allow nonbinary people to correct the gender marker on their birth certificates. Furthermore, New York State also already allows transgender adults to correct the gender marker on their birth certificates, and just this year as a result of an earlier Lambda Legal lawsuit, implemented a new policy to allow those changes for transgender minors. Last month, in response to another lawsuit, New York State's Department of Health began to allow nonbinary people to obtain birth certificates with a gender neutral marker.

Handling the case on behalf of Lambda Legal are Staff Attorney Carl Charles and Senior Attorney Omar Gonzalez-Pagan and lawyers from the law firm O'Melveny & Myers LLP.

Explore Lambda Legal's "X" gender marker map: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/map/x-markers>

Read more about Lambda Legal's *Saba v Cuomo* lawsuit here: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/in-court/cases/saba-v-cuomo>



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