

Out Smart



MAY 2008

Praise the Punk

**Pro-gay preacher Jay Bakker wants to be
part of Joel Osteen's Oasis of Love**

ALSO INSIDE

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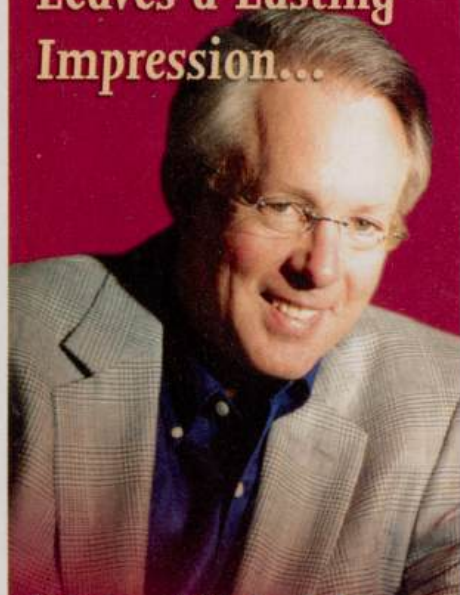
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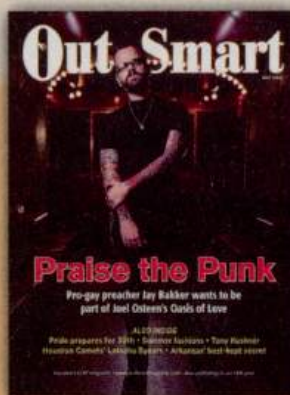
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About the cover:

Jay Bakker. See page 38.

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Rivendell Media - 212/242-6863



Publishers of OutSmart Magazine
3406 Audubon Place • Houston, TX 77006
713/520-7237 • 713/522-3275 Fax

Subscriptions: \$27/12 Issues, \$48/24 Issues

E-mail address: letters@outsartmagazine.com

Website address: www.outsmartmagazine.com

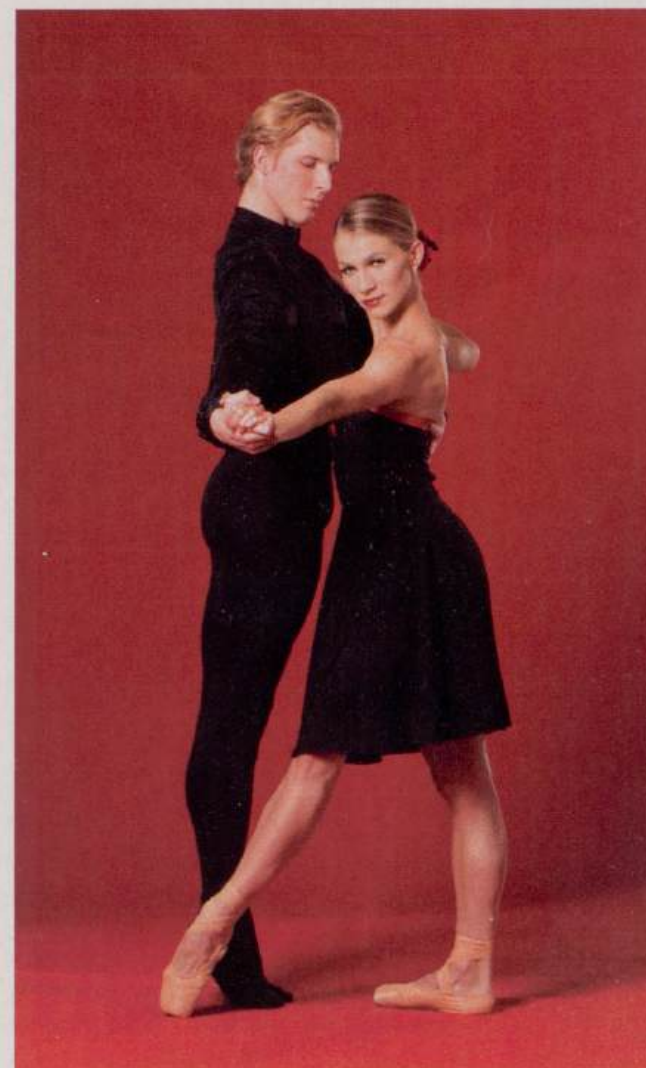
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Left Image: Kelly Myernick & Christopher Coomer in
FIVE TANGOS Right Image: James Gotesky & Connor Walsh
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Letters

POINT OF ORDER

It may seem like I am splitting hairs, but I must take some issue with the caption under Annise Parker's piece on Louie Welch in the March *OutSmart* ["InsideOut at City Hall"]. It identifies her as the highest GLBT elected official in the top 10 U.S. cities.

While I have the utmost respect for Ms. Parker and value her as a role model not only for Houstonians but all Americans, I would argue that the "title" should probably go to Christine Quinn of New York City. As you may know, Ms. Quinn is speaker of New York's City Council—a bona fide legislature with responsibility over a budget equal to or greater than that of the state of Texas. It is comprised of 51 members who collectively represent the citizens of America's largest city.

Of course, it should not be a competition and to a certain extent comparing a city controller to a City Council president (speaker) may be like comparing apples to oranges, since Houston's City Council does not really have an equivalent position. I just think that if one does the math (scope of influence, position of authority, size of constituency, etc.), it is probably safer to say that Ms. Quinn, as essentially the Nancy Pelosi of New York City, is probably best suited for the current title of highest elected GLBT official of any major U.S. city. But again, it may be a matter of opinion.

Glenn Bayron
Houston

PROUD AND RELIEVED

Hot damn! Our upcoming Pride Parade will remain in the Montrose, at least for this year.

Last year, the Pride Committee was considering relocating the parade to downtown and [to] September. Or at least that was the scuttlebutt.

I went into a tailspin and my blood pressure skyrocketed to 185 over 90. When I came to, I called the Pride Committee, *OutSmart*, and the bars to get the truth. My prayers were answered. The Pride Parade would stay in the Montrose!

I am looking forward to the celebration this year, and I'm proud to be a party of this great gay community.

Nancy Driskell
Houston

EDITOR'S NOTE: Read a Pride month preview on page 18. The June OutSmart will highlight events and activities of the annual GLBT celebrations.

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- Be taken with or without food
- Reduce viral load and increase CD4 cell count

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TRUVADA does not cure HIV infection or prevent passing HIV-1 to others.

USE OF TRUVADA:

TRUVADA is indicated in combination with other antiretroviral agents (such as non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors or protease inhibitors) for the treatment of HIV-1 infection in adults.

TRUVADA must be used as part of combination therapy. TRUVADA should not be used with ATRIPLA® (efavirenz 600 mg/emtricitabine 200 mg/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate [DF] 300 mg), VIREAD® (tenofovir DF), EMTRIVA® (emtricitabine), Combivir® (lamivudine/zidovudine), Epivir® or Epivir-HBV® (lamivudine), Epzicom® (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine), or Trizivir® (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine/zidovudine).

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:

Contact your healthcare provider right away if you experience any of the following side effects or conditions while taking TRUVADA:

- Nausea, vomiting, unusual muscle pain, and/or weakness. These may be signs of a buildup of acid in the blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious medical condition
- Light colored stools, dark colored urine, and/or if your skin or the whites of your eyes turn yellow. These may be signs of serious liver problems (hepatotoxicity), with liver enlargement (hepatomegaly), and fat in the liver (steatosis)
- If you have HIV and hepatitis B virus (HBV) and stop taking TRUVADA, your liver disease may suddenly get worse. Do not stop taking TRUVADA unless directed by your healthcare provider

- If you have had kidney problems or take other medicines that can cause kidney problems, your healthcare provider should do regular blood tests to check your kidneys
- It is not known whether long-term use of TRUVADA causes damage to your bones. If you have had bone problems in the past, talk to your healthcare provider before taking TRUVADA

Changes in body fat have been seen in some people taking TRUVADA and other anti-HIV medicines.

The most common side effects of the medicines in TRUVADA when taken with other anti-HIV medicines are dizziness, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, headache, rash, and gas. Skin discoloration (spots and freckles) may also occur.

Discuss all medicines you take with your healthcare provider and be aware:

- Your healthcare provider may need to follow you more closely or adjust your therapy if you are taking Videx® or Videx® EC (didanosine), Reyataz® (atazanavir sulfate), or Kaletra® (lopinavir/ritonavir) with TRUVADA

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Please see Patient Information on next page, including "What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA?"

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*Based on data from PHAST retail monthly data: September 2005–January 2008; Wolters Kluwer Health.

Patient Information

TRUVADA® (tru-VAH-dah) Tablets

Generic name: emtricitabine and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate
(em tri SIT uh bean and te NOE' to veer dye soe PROX il FYOU mar ate)

Read the Patient Information that comes with TRUVADA before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking to your healthcare provider about your medical condition or treatment. You should stay under a healthcare provider's care when taking TRUVADA. **Do not change or stop your medicine without first talking with your healthcare provider.** Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you have any questions about TRUVADA.

What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA?

- **Some people who have taken medicine like TRUVADA (nucleoside analogs) have developed a serious condition called lactic acidosis** (build up of an acid in the blood). Lactic acidosis can be a medical emergency and may need to be treated in the hospital. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get the following signs or symptoms of lactic acidosis.**
 - You feel very weak or tired.
 - You have unusual (not normal) muscle pain.
 - You have trouble breathing.
 - You have stomach pain with nausea and vomiting.
 - You feel cold, especially in your arms and legs.
 - You feel dizzy or lightheaded.
 - You have a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Some people who have taken medicines like TRUVADA have developed serious liver problems called hepatotoxicity**, with liver enlargement (hepatomegaly) and fat in the liver (steatosis). **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get the following signs or symptoms of liver problems.**
 - Your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice).
 - Your urine turns dark.
 - Your bowel movements (stools) turn light in color.
 - You don't feel like eating food for several days or longer.
 - You feel sick to your stomach (nausea).
 - You have lower stomach area (abdominal) pain.
- **You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or liver problems** if you are female, very overweight (obese), or have been taking nucleoside analog medicines, like TRUVADA, for a long time.
- **If you are also infected with the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV)**, you need close medical follow-up for several months after stopping treatment with TRUVADA. Follow-up includes medical exams and blood tests to check for HBV that could be getting worse. **Patients with Hepatitis B Virus infection, who take TRUVADA and then stop it, may get "flare-ups" of their hepatitis. A "flare-up" is when the disease suddenly returns in a worse way than before.**

What is TRUVADA?

TRUVADA is a type of medicine called an HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) nucleoside analog reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NRTI). TRUVADA contains 2 medicines, EMTRIVA® (emtricitabine) and VIREAD® (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate, or tenofovir DF) combined in one pill. TRUVADA is always used with other anti-HIV medicines to treat people with HIV infection. TRUVADA is for adults age 18 and older. TRUVADA has not been studied in children under age 18 or adults over age 65.

HIV infection destroys CD4 (T) cells, which are important to the immune system. The immune system helps fight infection. After a large number of T cells are destroyed, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) develops.

TRUVADA helps block HIV reverse transcriptase, a chemical in your body (enzyme) that is needed for HIV to multiply. TRUVADA lowers the amount of HIV in the blood (viral load). TRUVADA may also help to increase the number of T cells (CD4 cells). Lowering the amount of HIV in the blood lowers the chance of death or infections that happen when your immune system is weak (opportunistic infections).

TRUVADA does not cure HIV infection or AIDS. The long-term effects of TRUVADA are not known at this time. People taking TRUVADA may still get opportunistic infections or other conditions that happen with HIV infection. Opportunistic infections are infections that develop because the immune system is weak. Some of these conditions are pneumonia, herpes virus infections, and *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC) infection. **It is very important that you see your healthcare provider regularly while taking TRUVADA.**

TRUVADA does not lower your chance of passing HIV to other people through sexual contact, sharing needles, or being exposed to your blood. For your health and the health of others, it is important to always practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom or other barrier to lower the chance of sexual contact with semen, vaginal secretions, or blood. Never use or share dirty needles.

Who should not take TRUVADA?

- Do not take TRUVADA if you are allergic to TRUVADA or any of its ingredients. The active ingredients of TRUVADA are emtricitabine and tenofovir DF. See the end of this leaflet for a complete list of ingredients.
- Do not take TRUVADA if you are already taking ATRIPLA™, Combivir (lamivudine/zidovudine), EMTRIVA, EpiVir or EpiVir-HBV (lamivudine), Epzicom (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine), Trizivir (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine/zidovudine), or VIREAD because these medicines contain the same or similar active ingredients.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking TRUVADA?

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- **are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.** We do not know if TRUVADA can harm your unborn child. You and your healthcare provider will need to decide if TRUVADA is right for you. If you use TRUVADA while you are pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider about how you can be on the TRUVADA Antiviral Pregnancy Registry.
- **are breast-feeding.** You should not breast feed if you are HIV-positive because of the chance of passing the HIV virus to your baby. Also, it is not known if TRUVADA can pass into your breast milk and if it can harm your baby. If you are a woman who has or will have a baby, talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.
- **have kidney problems or are undergoing kidney dialysis treatment.**
- **have bone problems.**
- **have liver problems including Hepatitis B Virus infection.**

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Especially tell your healthcare provider if you take:

- Videx, Videx EC (didanosine), Tenofovir DF (a component of TRUVADA) may increase the amount of Videx in your blood. **You may need to be followed more carefully if you are taking TRUVADA and Videx together.** Also, the dose of didanosine may need to be reduced.
- Reyataz (atazanavir sulfate) or Kaletra (zalcitabine/tritonavir). These medicines may increase the amount of tenofovir DF (a component of TRUVADA) in your blood, which could result in more side effects. You may need to be followed more carefully if you are taking TRUVADA and Reyataz or Kaletra together. TRUVADA may decrease the amount of Reyataz in your blood. If you are taking TRUVADA and Reyataz together, you should also be taking Norvir (ritonavir).

Keep a complete list of all the medicines that you take. Make a new list when medicines are added or stopped. Give copies of this list to all of your healthcare providers and pharmacist every time you visit your healthcare provider or fill a prescription.

How should I take TRUVADA?

- Take TRUVADA exactly as your healthcare provider prescribed it. Follow the directions from your healthcare provider, exactly as written on the label.
- The usual dose of TRUVADA is 1 tablet once a day. TRUVADA is always used with other anti-HIV medicines. If you have kidney problems, you may need to take TRUVADA less often.
- TRUVADA may be taken with or without a meal. Food does not affect how TRUVADA works. Take TRUVADA at the same time each day.
- If you forget to take TRUVADA, take it as soon as you remember that day. **Do not take more than 1 dose of TRUVADA in a day. Do not take 2 doses at the same time.** Call your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you are not sure what to do. **It is important that you do not miss any doses of TRUVADA or your anti-HIV medicines.**
- When your TRUVADA supply starts to run low, get more from your healthcare provider or pharmacy. This is very important because the amount of virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time. The virus may develop resistance to TRUVADA and become harder to treat.
- Do not change your dose or stop taking TRUVADA without first talking with your healthcare provider. Stay under a healthcare provider's care when taking TRUVADA.
- If you take too much TRUVADA, call your local poison control center or emergency room right away.

What should I avoid while taking TRUVADA?

- **Do not breast-feed.** See "What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking TRUVADA?"
- **Avoid doing things that can spread HIV infection** since TRUVADA does not stop you from passing the HIV infection to others.
 - **Do not share needles or other injection equipment.**
 - **Do not share personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them, like toothbrushes or razor blades.**
 - **Do not have any kind of sex without protection.** Always practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom or other barrier to reduce the chance of sexual contact with semen, vaginal secretions, or blood.
- ATRIPLA, Combivir (lamivudine/zidovudine), EMTRIVA, EpiVir or EpiVir-HBV (lamivudine), Epzicom (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine), Trizivir (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine/zidovudine), or VIREAD. **TRUVADA should not be used with these medicines.**

What are the possible side effects of TRUVADA?

TRUVADA may cause the following serious side effects (see "What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA?"):

- **Lactic acidosis** (buildup of an acid in the blood). Lactic acidosis can be a medical emergency and may need to be treated in the hospital. **Call your doctor right away if you get signs of lactic acidosis.** (See "What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA?")
- **Serious liver problems (hepatotoxicity)**, with liver enlargement (hepatomegaly) and fat in the liver (steatosis). Call your healthcare provider right away if you get any signs of liver problems. (See "What is the most important information I should know about TRUVADA?")
- **"Flare-ups" of Hepatitis B Virus infection**, in which the disease suddenly returns in a worse way than before, can occur if you stop taking TRUVADA. Your healthcare provider will monitor your condition for several months after stopping TRUVADA if you have both HIV and HBV infection. TRUVADA is not approved for the treatment of Hepatitis B Virus infection.
- **Kidney problems.** If you have had kidney problems in the past or take other medicines that can cause kidney problems, your healthcare provider should do regular blood tests to check your kidneys.

- **Changes in bone mineral density (thinning bones).** It is not known whether long-term use of TRUVADA will cause damage to your bones. If you have had bone problems in the past, your healthcare provider may need to do tests to check your bone mineral density or may prescribe medicines to help your bone mineral density.

Other side effects with TRUVADA when used with other anti-HIV medicines include:

- Changes in body fat have been seen in some patients taking TRUVADA and other anti-HIV medicines. These changes may include increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck ("buffalo hump"), breast, and around the main part of your body (trunk). Loss of fat from the legs, arms and face may also happen. The cause and long term health effect of these conditions are not known at this time.

The most common side effects of EMTRIVA or VIREAD when used with other anti-HIV medicines are: dizziness, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, headache, rash, and gas. Skin discoloration (small spots or freckles) may also happen with TRUVADA.

These are not all the side effects of TRUVADA. This list of side effects with TRUVADA is **not complete** at this time because TRUVADA is still being studied. If you have questions about side effects, ask your healthcare provider. Report any new or continuing symptoms to your healthcare provider right away. Your healthcare provider may be able to help you manage these side effects.

How do I store TRUVADA?

- **Keep TRUVADA and all other medicines out of reach of children.**
- Store TRUVADA at room temperature 77 °F (25 °C).
- Keep TRUVADA in its original container and keep the container tightly closed.
- Do not keep medicine that is out of date or that you no longer need. If you throw any medicines away make sure that children will not find them.

General information about TRUVADA:

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for conditions that are not mentioned in patient information leaflets. Do not use TRUVADA for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give TRUVADA to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

This leaflet summarizes the most important information about TRUVADA. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for information about TRUVADA that is written for health professionals. For more information, you may also call 1-800-GILEAD-5 or access the TRUVADA website at www.TRUVADA.com.

Do not use TRUVADA if seal over bottle opening is broken or missing.

What are the ingredients of TRUVADA?

Active Ingredients: emtricitabine and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate

Inactive Ingredients: Croscarmellose sodium, lactose monohydrate, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, and pregelatinized starch (gluten free). The tablets are coated with Opadry II Blue Y-30-10701 containing FD&C Blue #2 aluminum lake, hydroxypropyl methylcellulose 2910, lactose monohydrate, titanium dioxide, and triacetin.

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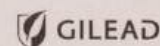
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HURRAY FOR LOVE! Every spring, Carl Han hosts his Love Party to celebrate the season and, well, love. This year, his event is also a fundraiser for HATCH, the invaluable support group for our younger generation. Han's guest of honor and featured performer is Yna Nova (a.k.a. Noel Boada), pictured here. The 7:30–9:30 p.m. party at Meteor (\$10 requested donation) also includes performances by two additional Houston divas, China Doll and Christina Lee, and the belly-dancing group Tribal Lillies. About two of his stars, Han explains, "Yna Nova and Christina Lee are two very popular Filipino drag performers in the Asian community. When Christina was young years ago, she belonged to a famous drag troupe in the Philippines." At his event, Han, who is a filmmaker as well as a community advocate and blogger (www.carlsjourney), premieres two new videos, *The Love Train* and *Hungry for Love*.

Photographed by David Lewis





URSA MAJOR
Is BearWatch 9 expected to be the biggest and best gathering ever of hairy and hearty men (and the men who love them)? Does a bear poo in the woods? • Scheduled May 16-18, the Houston Area Bears-hosted annual weekend brings together that inter-community within the larger community of gay men who revere the image of the hirsute hunk built more for comfort than for speed. • What does it take to be a bear, besides hair and heft? • "It's really a frame of mind," says BearWatch 9 chairman, Patrick Gay (yes, that's his real name)—pictured here with (l-r) Meynard Patacsil, Ray Priest, and Tony Stegal—at Tony's Corner Pocket, home of the Bears' monthly beer bust. "It's not just for bears. It's for anyone who wants to come and just have fun. Lots of people show up for our day at the beach." • As many as 225 men are expected to join the furry fun this year, traveling from as far away as California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Florida. • With "Booty Call" as the military theme, BearWatch 9 (www.bearwatch.net) occurs in Galveston, with Groove as the host bar and Inn at the Waterpark as the host hotel. A wet boxers contest, an obstacle course, the beach party, and more round out the weekend. Proceeds in part benefit HATCH, the support group for GLBT and questioning youth. • "I believe it is incumbent on every community to give back to their community," Gay adds. "Even small events like this can play a part in helping out other people."

Photographed by
Henry Yau

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by Nancy Ford

WE ARE FAMILY: PLANS WELL UNDER WAY FOR 30th ANNIVERSARY OF PRIDE IN MONTROSE

Celebrating 30 years since Houston's first Pride parade made its mark as the signature annual gathering of the local gay community, Pride Houston's 2008 GLBT Pride Parade and Festival are scheduled June 28 in Montrose.

Following a couple of starts, including an informal gathering in June 1978, Houston's first official Gay Pride Parade rolled down Westheimer Road in June 1979, led by grand marshal "Disco Gramma" Thelma Hansel. Themed "United We Stand," the parade was followed by a rally at Spotts Park, where 5,000 community members enjoyed music, speeches, dancing, and fireworks.

"1978 was kind of this limbo year; there was a commemorative march," explained Brad Odom, Pride Houston president. "It's the year we count as Number One."

Thirty years later, 2008's colorful disco theme, "We Are Family," intends to bring the celebration back to its united spirit.

Last year, a push to move the traditional June Pride festivities from its base in Montrose to a downtown location in September divided community members who eventually voted overwhelmingly to keep the celebration in Montrose, in June.

The 2007 controversy has continued into 2008. "Apparently an e-mail went out that said Pride isn't going to happen," Odom said. "There's absolutely no question that we're going to have a very nice, yet a very simple parade. We're going back to basics."

"The reality is, it's been a dire struggle to get money this year," Odom continued. "But the fact is that we have pretty much our entire budget covered right now, so we're way ahead of the game."

Odom said nearly 60 parade entries were already confirmed and paid.

"Normally we don't have that many this far out from the parade," he said. "Most parade entries' money comes in June. We have 100 percent of our funds identified, with more sponsors coming in every day. We've paid back all past debts, and are free and clear in rent and phone and everything through February of next year."

Sponsors for this year's celebration include KRBE radio, Clear Channel, Charles Armstrong Investments, Archstone Communities, Bud Light, Washington Mutual, Southwest Airlines, Ameriprise, and OutSmart.

A full weekend of official Pride events begins June 27 with a kickoff party at Meteor Lounge.

Beginning at 11 a.m. on June 28, the Pride Festival, located on Yoakum Street in the heart of Montrose, features local

entertainers on two stages, commercial and nonprofit vendor booths, and the Pride Oasis where patrons may enjoy refreshments. As a special 30th birthday gift to the community, there is no charge to attend the festival.

Two popular mainstays return to the festival, including the popular GLBT history project, featuring historical memorabilia from RMCC's archives and Gulf Coast Museum and Archives. Washington Mutual Bank (4313 Montrose Blvd.) displays the project throughout the month of June, prior to its moving to the festival site.

Additionally, the winner of "Pride Idol," Pride Houston's weekly, vocal talent competitions based on *American Idol*, is scheduled to entertain. "Pride Idol" begins May 14 at Guava Lamp.

Following a month-long round of community voting, Pride Houston announced the grand marshals elected to lead the 30th anniversary parade, which begins at 8:45 p.m. on June 28. AIDS Foundation Houston (AFH) chief executive officer Kelly McCann was elected as female grand marshal; photographer Dalton DeHart, serves as male grand marshal; AIDS Foundation Houston was tapped as organization grand marshal; and former AFH employee, Julie Eberly was elected honorary grand marshal.

Due to new city regulations, the parade route proceeds east on Westheimer to Crocker, and has been shortened. The parade now steps off at the intersection of Westheimer and Dunlavy at 8:45 p.m. instead of Woodhead as in previous years.

Immediately following the parade, the day concludes with an after-party at South Beach.

Pride Weekend's finale is Sunday, June 29, at ROC Bar with the presentation of *Broadway Bares*, a musical burlesque fundraiser benefiting AIDS Foundation Houston and Pride Houston.

Odom said Pride Houston needs about 200 volunteers to help produce the festival and parade, which hosts more than 150,000 people. To volunteer, call 713/529-6979 or log on to www.pridehouston.org.

"I'm always amazed about the power of Pride," Odom says. "As we get closer to parade day, more and more people give their energy over and step up to the plate, and there's no doubt that it's going to be a wonderful year."

Be sure to pick up OutSmart's June issue for complete coverage of events celebrating 30 years of Pride in Houston.

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HOUSTON ATTORNEY JOINS EQUALITY TEXAS BOARD

Equality Texas, the state's GLBT lobbying group, has announced the election of Rob Scamardo to its board of directors.

Scamardo is an attorney with the Houston-based Simoneaux and Frye, PLLC, law firm. Scamardo also serves as chairman of the board of the Houston Equal Rights Alliance and is responsible for facilitating the integration of the programs of HERA with Equality Texas to form Equality Texas-Houston.



Rob Scamardo

"I have tremendous respect for the outstanding leadership that Equality Texas provides in our cause for equal rights for LGBT persons. This is an opportunity to strengthen and expand our efforts in the Houston metro area as we continue to build alliances through advocacy and education while supporting broader equality efforts across Texas," stated Scamardo.

Paul Scott, executive director, praised Scamardo's commitment to equality, stating, "I have had the fortunate experience of working with Rob Scamardo through our partnership with HERA, and I know that his expertise will greatly benefit our work in Houston and Texas."

Details: www.equalitytexas.org.

OUT EQUAL, HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN CHAPTERS PRESENT GLBT WORKPLACE EQUALITY SUMMIT

Representatives from Dallas/Ft. Worth and Houston Human Rights Campaign Steering Committees and the North Texas Chapter of Out Equal have announced Texas' first statewide workplace equality summit. The summit is scheduled Wednesday, May 14, at Rice University's Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Management in Houston.

The GLBT summit precedes the fourth annual Diversity Leadership Conference Exposition scheduled May 15 and 16 at the Westin Galleria Hotel in Houston.

"This summit is focused on people from corporate and private companies who are interested and involved with valuing and including the diversity of GLBT people," said Paul Guillory, a conference organizer.

The half-day conference begins with a luncheon featuring Chastity Bono, two training tracks of six distinct workshops, and concludes with a reception and Equality Texas movie screening of *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

Also participating and leading workshops are Selisse Berry, executive director of Out Equal Workplace Advocates; Eric Bloem, deputy director of the Human Rights Campaign Workplace Project; and Paul Scott, executive director, Equality Texas.

Workshops are designed to address topics on activism and advocacy in the workplace, gender identity expression, employee network group strategies, and more.

Other conference organizers include Ron Ausemus, Vanessa Benavides, Janine Johnson, Jim Price, Robb Puckett, and Paul von Wupperfeld. Details: www.glbtsummit.com.

TRANSGENDER WOMAN SUES FORMER EMPLOYER

A Jefferson County refinery worker is suing her former employer on grounds that the company discriminated against her because she is transgender.

According to the *Southeast Texas Record* legal journal, Gerald Jeanmard, a male-to-female transgendered woman, claims KT Maintenance Co. "refused to recognize his gender identity, engaged in sexual stereotyping, and refused to provide him with a bathroom at the job site."

Jeanmard filed suit on April 10 in the Jefferson County District Court, claiming KT Maintenance was fully aware of her gender identity but chose to terminate her rather than accommodate additional restroom needs.

"Initially, Jeanmard was using the men's bathroom at the refinery, but his presence was objected to by other male workers," the suit states. "This prompted him to begin using the ladies' bathroom, which was then objected to by the female workers."

Jeanmard says the company ultimately instructed her to use neither restroom; she is also suing for past and future mental anguish and lost wages.

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Milestones

Hired Tammi Wallace as district director for state representative Ellen Cohen (District 134). Wallace (on right, with Cohen) is the co-founder and former executive director of the Houston Equal Rights Foundation.



Rep. Ellen Cohen (D) and Tammi Wallace

Died I. W. Marks Legendary business and philanthropic leader I. W. Marks passed away at the age of 73 on February 27.

A respected Houston businessman, philanthropist, and civic citizen, Marks was known for his larger-than-life presence and the host of charitable organizations to which he gave generously, including GLBT-supportive causes. His philanthropic net extended to projects and programs for Houston Grand Opera, Houston Symphony, Society for the Performing Arts, and TIRR (The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research), Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo Crime Stoppers, Better Business Bureau and Community National Bank in Bellaire, the Jewish Community Center, and countless charity and school auctions.



I.W. Marks

Born in Chicago in 1934, Marks was predeceased by his parents and his first wife, Diane Golman Marks. His survivors are his wife Shelly Ann Marks, his son and daughter-in-law Daniel and Susan Marks, and their sons William and Andrew, his son and daughter-in-law Bradley and Melissa Marks, his sister Ruth Silver, numerous nieces and nephews, and his dedicated employees.

Died Elmer Lavon Shehane, 47, whose drag name was Stella Link Seville, died unexpectedly of a stroke on March 20.

Shehane was a popular performer in Houston's gay community. He had been president of the Garden Party Inc. organization and presented the annual Mr., Ms. and Miss Pride pageants. He was also a board member of the Empire of Royal Sovereign and Imperial Court of the Single Star of Houston and was elected "empress" in the fundraising social group.

His funeral was held March 26, at Rosewood Funeral Home Chapel, with interment in Rosewood Memorial Park. Close friends later

held a celebration of life to honor his memory.

Shehane is survived by his mother; brother, Michael; sisters, Brenda and Linda; sister-in-law, Donna; nephew, Todd; son, John, friends Joe and Ronnie, stepfather, Eddie; and a multitude of friends whose lives he enriched.

News Briefs

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Jeanmard says the company ultimately instructed her to use neither restroom; she is also suing for past and future mental anguish and lost wages.

SETTLEMENT REACHED IN LOPEZ CASE

Following a court ruling that permitted Izza Lopez, a male-to-female transgendered woman, to proceed in a case against River Oaks Imaging for rescinding a job offer to her, a settlement has been reached between involved parties.

According to the *Houston Chronicle*, U.S. District Judge Nancy Atlas entered an order on April 22 dismissing the lawsuit following mediation.

In early April, the District Court for the Southern District of Texas denied motions for summary judgment from both sides in the case in which Lopez claimed her job offer from a Houston medical clinic was withdrawn after a background check disclosed her sex as male.

Both Lambda Legal, representing 27-year-old Izza Lopez, and attorneys for River Oaks Imaging and Diagnostic had asked the judge for summary judgment, a ruling issued without trial based on undisputed facts.

The court also rejected River Oaks' claim that "any person who dresses in a manner inconsistent with traditional gender stereotypes is necessarily deceptive."

ORAL GONORRHEA TREATMENT BECOMES AVAILABLE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has informed health-care providers that cefixime in 400 milligram tablet-form is a viable, additional option for treatment of urogenital and rectal gonorrhea.

"The availability of cefixime tablets this month will have tremendous impact in fighting gonorrhea," said Kevin Fenton, M.D., director of CDC's National Center

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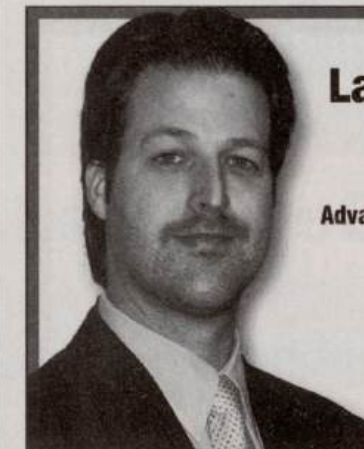
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Cefixime is the only CDC-recommended oral treatment for this disease, and since 2002, it has not been available in tablet form. Cefixime tablets are again being distributed in the United States and available to clinicians as of this month for prescribing to patients.

TOP 50 COMPANIES FOR DIVERSITY ANNOUNCED BY DIVERSITYINC

DiversityInc, a publication addressing corporate diversity, has announced its 2008 Top 50 Companies for Diversity.

The top-10 companies on the list are IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Wachovia, PepsiCo, Toyota Motor North America, Eastman Kodak Co., Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers Merrill Lynch, and Ernst & Young.

Companies are chosen for the annual honor based on their demonstrated consistent strength in areas, including CEO commitment, human capital, corporate and organizational communications, and supplier diversity.

For a complete listing of this year's Top 50 Companies for Diversity, please visit www.DiversityInc.com/top50.

STUDY: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE WOULD HAVE POSITIVE IMPACT ON STATES' INCOME, TAX REVENUE

Proponents of same-sex marriage have a new tool to use in their quest for marriage equality.

According to a new research study conducted by Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, same-sex marriage in Iowa, if permitted, would have a positive impact on the state budget of approximately \$5.3 million annually. This net impact will be the result of an increase in state income and sales tax revenue as well as savings in expenditures on state means-tested public

benefit programs.

"This study demonstrates that equal marriage rights for same-sex couples are not only good for those couples, but they're good for the state budget," noted co-author Lee Badgett, the research director of the Williams Institute. "Iowa's policymakers do not need to worry about the impact of this policy change on the state's fiscal health."

In calculating the net benefit to the state, the study approximates that half of Iowa's 5,833 same-sex couples, or 2,917 couples, would marry in the first three years of being able. The study estimates that the state would see an increase in income tax revenue of over \$1.2 million per year, but a loss of approximately \$1.4 million in inheritance tax revenue. The study also finds that same-sex weddings and associated tourism would generate \$160 million in spending over three years, providing a boon to the state economy.

Further due to this spending, the state would see an increase in sales tax revenue of about \$2.7 million per year.

In addition to overall increased tax revenue, the study finds that same-sex marriage in Iowa would result in a decrease in state expenditures on means-tested public benefits programs, saving the State at least \$100,000 per year and as much as \$2.8 million. ■

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McDONALD'S AND THE GAY AGENDA

Look who's slamming the Pearly Gates on the Golden Arches

Guess what the Extreme Evangelicals are up in arms about this month!

The atrocities of Darfur? Please.

The reported 48-percent increase in HIV infections in the U.S. between 2005 and 2006?

Wrongaroo.

Rampant teen pregnancy? No, again. There's no need for alarm, now that Jamie Lynn Spears is officially engaged to boy toy Casey Aldridge.

No, it seems that Richard Ellis, vice president of communications for McDonald's USA, recently joined the board of directors of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. By its own description, the NGLCC aims to "stay on the forefront of legislative issues and provide strong lobbying efforts for LGBT business causes and nondiscriminatory affairs."

"I'm thrilled to join the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce team and ready to get to work," Ellis said. "I share the NGLCC's passion for business growth and development within the LGBT community, and I look forward to playing a role in moving these important initiatives forward."

That's right, the gays have infiltrated McDonald's. So by all means, sound the trumpet. It's the End Times.

"By joining the NGLCC, they [McDonald's] are endorsing a lifestyle we believe many of their customers would oppose," Randy Sharp, director of special projects for the American Family Association (AFA), told Cybercast News Service.

"Once corporate America gets involved in promoting homosexuality, it's just a matter of time until it starts endorsing same-sex marriage," Sharp continued, his

McMuffin all in a twist. "We are calling on McDonald's to resign their position on the board of directors and not to renew their membership next year."

"This is so strange," AFA chairman Donald Wildmon chimed in, "because it's the family that McDonald's appeals to, [with their] children's playland, you know, all the little toys, all of that. And they are promoting a lifestyle that would utterly destroy the traditional family."

How's that for a Kroc?

Apparently Mr. Wildmon is forgetting that more families are destroyed by the arteriosclerosis a diet of McDonald's menu items induces than that nefarious Gay Agenda we've all heard so much about.

Admittedly, it is no secret that I love a Happy Meal. Happy Meals are largely responsible for the woman I am today. Specifically, the big butt part.

Second only to McDonald's legendary fries on my own personal Happy Meter rates the concept of getting a free toy to emotionally offset the physical damage to my own arteries as they slam shut. Chest pains? Who cares? There are 101 Dalmations, after all, and I'm not about to stop at only 98. My momma didn't raise a quitter.

If organizations like AFA can tell McDonald's what organizations it can and cannot join, how long will it be until it starts dictating what toys its Happy Meals will contain? Will they start limiting the prizes to biblical depictions? I can hear it now: "The Plagues of Egypt action figures—collect all seven!" And there go our appetites.

But don't expect the EE's deific demands to stop at Happy Meal toys. In-

stead of a traditional McDonald's Playland jungle gym, will we soon see a net full of colorful balls suspended from three crosses? Inside, will the restaurant's ubiquitous wall murals be church-ed-up with renditions of DaVinci's *The Last Supper*, with a grinning Ronald McDonald seated in the center? Will a Dollar Menu version of the McRib, the Adam's McRib Jr., be available for a limited time only with plans to rename it in November (c'mon, take the leap with me), the McCain?

How long will it be before Zaccheus Zucchini Bread, the What a Friend We Have in Cheeses Burger, or Fried Cal-Mary Rings are added to McDonald's menu? Imagine what a creative holy manager could do with just a few loaves and fishes.

Instead of chastising McDonald's for its inclusive policy of caring about all its customers, maybe the AFA should do what the gay community did a few years back. In 1991, Cracker Barrel restaurants practiced blatant antigay discrimination when the chain fired 11 gay and lesbian employees "whose sexual preferences fail to demonstrate normal heterosexual values which have been the foundation of families in our society." Predictably, the gay community simply stopped stopping at the Barrel, instead opting to pack tasteful Ina Garten-like picnics when embarking on long interstate car trips.

It took 11 years of no homo dollars before the Barrel capitulated, finally adding sexual orientation to the chain's nondiscrimination policy. So what if biblically based boycotts usually fail, like the ones the AFA recently dropped against Disney theme parks and Ford Motor Company? Maybe a few years' worth of skipping a few cholesterol-laden Happy Meals might be exactly what those EEs need to clear their thinking, along with their arteries.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ellis and the gang at NGLCC could convince McDonald's to increase its queer customer base by offering super-sized prizes in their Happy Meals. Like a Willie Wonka-like golden ticket to an RSVP cruise vacation. Or life-size inflatable action figures from *The L Word*.

See you in the drive-thru.

It is no secret that I love a Happy Meal. Happy Meals are largely responsible for the woman I am today. Specifically, the big butt part.

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Barack has his vote, but Hillary has his heart

The 2008 Democratic Primary is the most contentious nomination battle that I personally have ever witnessed. Candidate loyalty runs deep, and at times the differences between opposing camps have erupted into bitter rhetoric. My personal support is behind Senator Obama, but I have deeply felt admiration for Senator Clinton. Her list of accomplishments from four decades of public service is long and impressive. However, when I think fondly of Hillary Clinton, it's always the issue of AIDS that first comes to my mind.

I've remained HIV-negative all these years—which I attribute to luck, and not intelligence or virtue. I deal with a high level of survivor guilt, but I know that's minimal to deal with compared to the virus itself.

Ironically, HIV is the real reason why I have such a strong sense of loyalty to the Clintons. My memories of living life openly as a gay man for the past four decades are permeated with AIDS.

I recently gave a copy of the *Houston Chronicle* to GCAM (Gulf Coast Archive and Museum) that I saved for years—it has an article in it about "the new gay cancer." This was the first I'd ever heard of it. At the time it was called GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency). The first theory was that this new disease was caused by poppers. I read that statement, and the newspaper tumbled from my grip.

Information was slow to arrive to the general public, but I latched on to every bit that I could find. Years before it became common knowledge that AIDS first incubated in Zaire, as a result of human beings infected with the simian version of AIDS, I was aware of the role that "green monkeys" played (biting humans who were also scavenging trash piles). I can still hear the laughter from people who thought I was nuts talking about green monkeys. Unfortunately, the laughter of most of those people has been stilled for eternity.

I was able to stay on the sidelines until the late '80s, and by then, it was all around me—and I could no longer ignore it. In early 1991, my late partner Michael Cole was diagnosed with AIDS. In late 1991, his younger brother Roger Cole died of AIDS. Michael finally succumbed on January 6, 1993 (the same day that ballet superstar Rudolph Nureyev died).

I remember well the total silence from the Reagans and the Reagan administration. Their attitude was easy to discern—gay men had no reason to complain, because their sins had brought this upon them.

The Bushes were no better. Barbara never visited an AIDS ward, never wore a red ribbon, never spoke up. She did attend the funeral of Ryan White. But by that time, it was already clear that heterosexuals with AIDS were "innocent victims."

After 12 years of silence and neglect, along came the Clinton/Gores. Tipper

continued on page 30

A HOPE FOR AUDACITY

Who better deserves the gay Democrats' vote—Clinton or Obama?

Who's better for gay equality, Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama? The answer depends on a consideration of three main factors: the issues, actual legislative records, and likely commitment.

On the issues, both Clinton and Obama broadly support equality for gay Americans. Both support a hate crimes law, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT), and same-sex domestic-partners benefits for federal employees. Both oppose a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

There's only one difference between them on gay issues. Clinton supports repeal of the section of the Defense of Marriage (DOMA) that bars federal benefits for same-sex couples who get married or enter civil unions in their own state. Because it prohibits the federal legal protections that would otherwise be available to tens of thousands of gay families in several states, repealing this section of DOMA is a top priority.

Obama goes one step further. He would repeal DOMA in its entirety, including the section of the law that authorizes states to refuse to recognize gay marriages and civil unions performed elsewhere.

While this sounds important, its practical effect is minimal. Even without DOMA, states may refuse to recognize gay marriages from other states. All but five have done so. Still, the interstate provision in DOMA discriminates against gay couples and should be repealed.

Clinton defends her position by saying that DOMA was a valuable political tool in defeating a federal constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. That's doubtful. She even goes so far as to say that DOMA was originally passed as a way to head off a federal amendment. That's dishonest. When her husband championed DOMA in 1996 it was not as a favor to gays, but as a way to maximize his chances for reelection.

On the issues: slight advantage to Obama.

A candidate's positions on the issues matter little if they aren't translated into legislative action. Legislative success depends, in turn, on actual legislative ability and commitment to the cause.

On legislative ability, we don't have much of a record for either candidate. Obama has been an undistinguished first-term senator, neither more nor less impressive than most others in a legislative body where seniority is power.

In an open letter to gays issued shortly before the Texas primary, Obama touted his co-sponsorship of legislation banning antigay discrimination when he served as an Illinois state senator. He also mentioned his co-sponsorship of a couple of pro-gay bills in the U.S. Senate.

Yet co-sponsoring bills involves nothing more than formally declaring support for them; it's not a test of legislative skill. What matters is lobbying colleagues for the bill,

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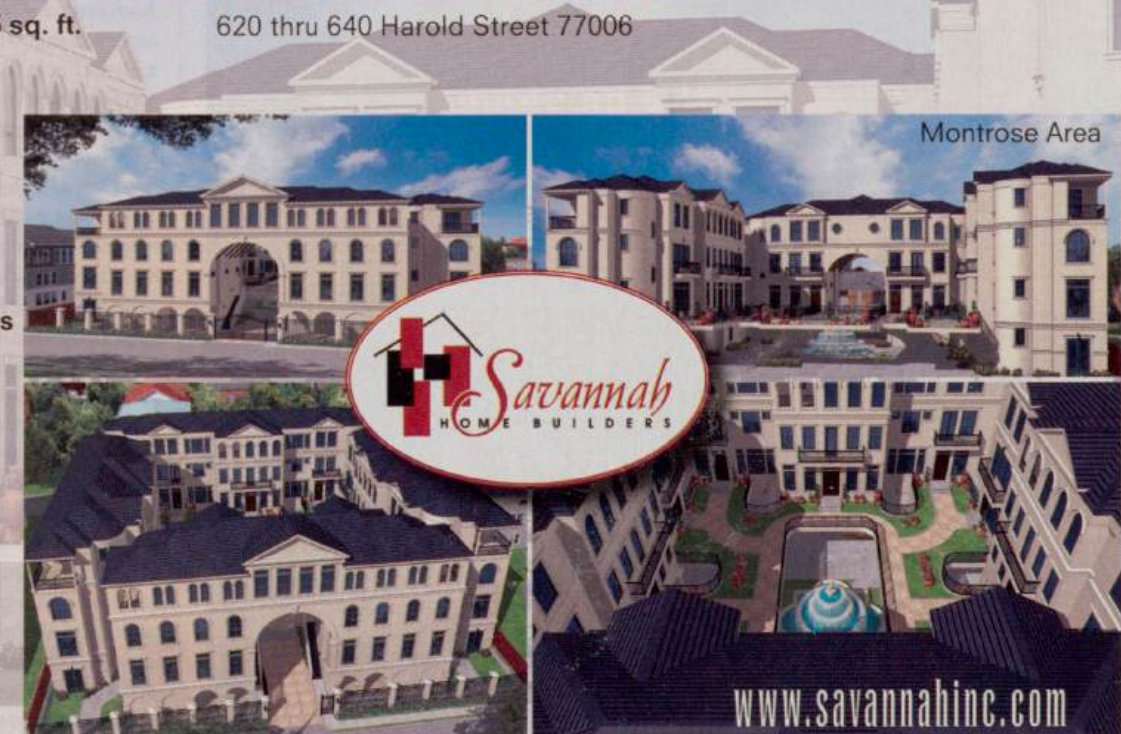
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LeftOut

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read names at the unfolding of the Quilt in DC. Hillary turned off the White House lights on World AIDS Day. Bill and Hillary rose at dawn to visit the Quilt display on the Mall in DC. The Clinton/Gores made speeches, attended workshops, wore ribbons, you name it. They were there for us.

Michael was in Casa, an AIDS hospice, in November 1992. But he was determined to cast his vote for Bill Clinton. Late

one afternoon, I took him to vote at the downtown early voting location. I fully expected people to give us cruel looks—it was obvious by then that Michael was very, very sick. Instead, it was like the parting of the Red Sea—the crowd moved aside and indicated to us that they wanted him to go ahead and go to the head of the line.

Bill Clinton was elected. But Michael missed the inauguration by two weeks. The grief was deep and raw that day, and the tears flowed when Maya Angelou read her poem for the event, and mentioned

gays. Finally, the silence had ended. (And with it, the noise of our detractors rose to a crescendo.)

It's true Bill dragged his feet. He promised a Manhattan Project and instead gave us a postage stamp. I remember the ActUp posters with his face and a Pinocchio nose. But at least he tried. And once he got used to it, he sat and listened and quieted the booing crowd when demonstrators invaded his public meetings and screamed at him about his lack of action.

The hatred for the Bushes was so intense that when they returned to Houston, they withdrew their names as honorary chairs of a local AIDS fundraiser, because activists protested so loudly.

Is this a reason to support Hillary's run for the Oval Office? I'm sure that some would dismiss my loyalty as utter foolishness, arguing that wearing a red ribbon has little to do with fixing the economy. But we each have our own souls to answer to, and my soul tends to be a grateful one toward people who reach out to those who are clearly the underdogs and who have little support from others.

In the same vein, I will be deeply saddened when the tragic day comes that Elizabeth Taylor is taken from this world. And I can say the same for actress Judith Light and two of our past Miss Americas (Leanza Cornett 1993 and Kate Shindle 1998) who took up the cause of championing AIDS awareness.

When Princess Diana died, all I could think of was the pictures of her shaking hands with an AIDS patient—for which she had purposely removed her "royal gloves" (something that British royalty just did not do back then). To me, it's those people who go the extra steps, and who take on the wrath of the mainstream, that are the real heroes in life.

Did all these people really care? I've been told before that Liz and Judith just wanted to further their careers. That Liz was already old and fat and needed a new thing to tantalize the public with. That the Clinton/Gores were just pimping for votes. That Diana nursed her self-esteem problems by championing society's casteoffs. Everyone has a right to their own opinion, but I'm glad my soul isn't in such bad shape that it can no longer believe that good still exists in people.

Even Barack Obama, in his *Audacity* book, mentions this cynicism. How, he ponders, can people really tell anymore, if a candidate/politician really cares about issues—or if they are just concerned about the sound bites and the photo ops? I guess it all comes back to being a personal thing. I have my own heroes, and despite the fact

that it hurts when others deride them, I continue to keep that sense of hope alive inside me that good people still exist, that they still care, and that the disadvantaged can still count on them when they are needed the most.

Brandon Wolf founded the online group *Houston Activist Network (Han-Net)*, which is now *LoneStarActivists*.

OutRight

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securing hearings on the need for it, compromising and horse-trading, and getting an actual vote.

While Obama talks a good game of bringing Republicans and Democrats together for positive change, his actual legislative record demonstrates little ability to do so. That might change when he becomes president, and a president's role is different than a legislator's, but so far we have little to go on other than hope. GOP support will be needed in the Senate to overcome filibusters of pro-gay legislation.

Clinton's legislative record is somewhat more impressive. She has surprised and delighted her Republican colleagues with her bipartisanship and work ethic.

On legislative record: slight advantage to Clinton.

Finally, which of the two is likely to be more committed to gay equality as president? Commitment is critical. Recall that Bill Clinton came into the presidency with all the right stands on gay issues for a man of his time. He also had an impressive record of legislative accomplishment as a governor. The problem was that he utterly lacked commitment to gay equality, wilting at the first sign of resistance. As Melissa Etheridge put it at a Democratic debate last year, he threw gays under the bus.

Neither Obama nor Clinton is perfect. Obama campaigned last fall with a homophobic minister. Both hesitated when confronted with the remarks of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Peter Pace that DADT is justified because homosexuality is immoral. As if testing the political winds, they denounced Pace only after Senator John Warner (R-VA) flatly declared that homosexuality is not immoral.

But Obama speaks movingly of gay equality, and not just before gay audiences. He has raised the issue among white farmers and in black churches, where the message is both unwelcome and needed.

Hillary Clinton, by contrast, rarely raises the issue on her own, never does so before unfriendly audiences, and seems reluctant even to say the word "gay."

Obama "gets it" in a way that no previous

candidate for president has. Part of this is generational, but it is nonetheless real.

On commitment: strong advantage to Obama.

Lyndon Johnson changed forever the tone of the debate over racial equality when he told the nation, "We shall overcome." Gay Americans need a transformative moment like that. Obama understands the importance of using the "bully pulpit" of the presidency to be a moral leader as well as a legislative one.

That's no guarantee he'll be a great president for gay equality. On the biggest

issues, like repealing DADT and DOMA, it's doubtful any Democratic president will succeed in a first or even second term. Obama may prove just as cowardly, weak, and perfidious as that previous Clinton.

And gay issues are by no means the only ones that matter in this election. But on gay equality, Obama's the better bet.

Writing from the conservative side, Dale Carpenter began his column for OutSmart in 1994, when he lived in Houston. Now residing in Minneapolis, Carpenter is a University of Minnesota Law School professor.

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by Annise D. Parker

OF, BY, AND FOR THE PEOPLE

Dealing with the loco part of local government

I love local government. I absolutely believe it's the most important level of government because it's the one that touches people's lives most directly. Remember: if you have tap water to drink, the toilets flush, your garbage is picked up, and you have a street to drive to work on, there's probably a local government to thank.

But why is governing so difficult? Why can't the city just fix problems and move on? Why do we need so many ordinances?

Well, if everyone were conscientious and reasonable, if everyone resolved to be a good neighbor and civic-minded citizen, things would be easier. Let me describe a real world problem. Think about how I tried to solve it, and what you might have done instead.

PROBLEM The owner of a local restaurant

contacts me and complains that he is being harassed by city inspectors. For months, someone has been calling in anonymous complaints. The restaurant has been visited

If everyone were conscientious and reasonable, if everyone resolved to be a good neighbor and civic-minded citizen, things would be easier.

by the health department, the fire marshals, parking management, the solid waste department, etc. Each time the inspectors come (sometimes just days apart), the restaurant is shut down during the inspection, costing time and money. Nothing but a few minor

technical violations have ever been found, and most inspections find no violations.

RESPONSE I contact the various inspectors, and they confirm the restaurateur's story. They believe the calls come from the same source and feel someone is using the various city inspection divisions to harass the restaurant owner, but they are required to respond to all "legitimate" complaints and cannot ignore the calls.

SOLUTIONS No business should be exempt from regulation, but it costs the city time and money to conduct an inspection. The initial complaints were anonymous. I ask that, in the future, only sworn complaints be taken for this location and that a supervisor approve all inspections. City officials agree.

PROBLEM After a lull, the city begins to receive sworn complaints (where the complainant must identify himself) that →

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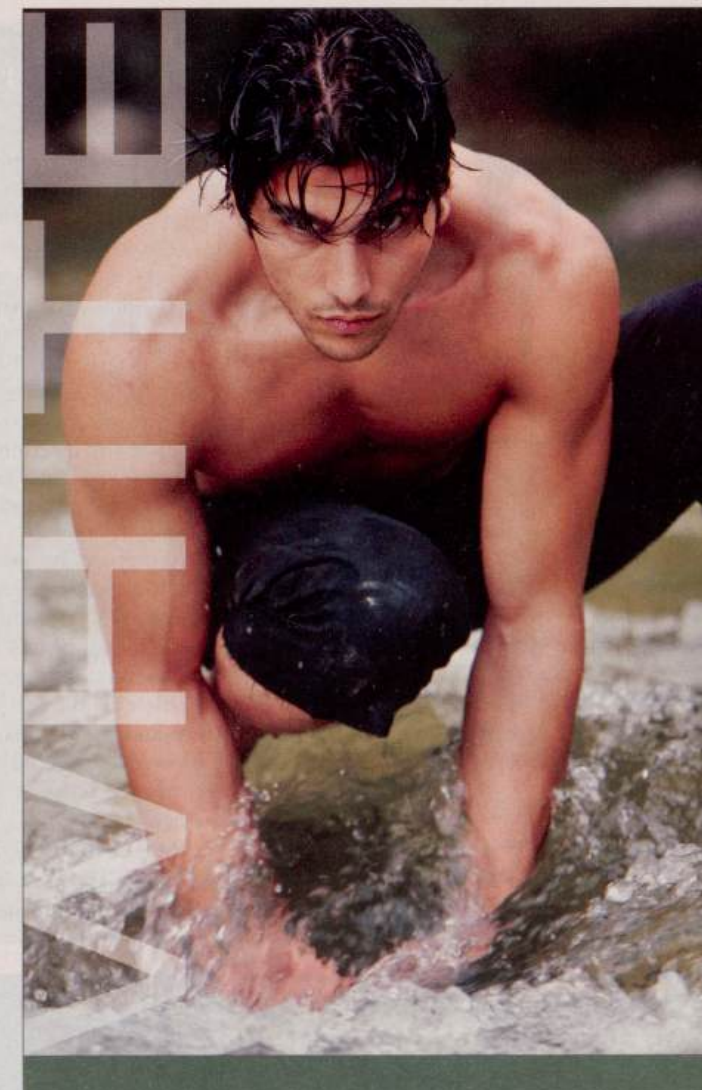
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InsideOut continued from page 32

gradually escalate in frequency. I am contacted again.

RESPONSE We can now confirm that the complaints are coming from a neighbor who has made multiple offers to purchase the property on which the restaurant sits. His land surrounds and abuts the restaurant property on three sides. If the restaurant were to close, the property owner might be more inclined to sell the land. There are still no violations of health or safety codes being found during inspections.

SOLUTION I ask that the restaurant be put on an inspection schedule of no more than one visit per department per calendar year, unless significant violations are found.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION A city employee (and frequent political candidate) who has worked with the neighbor appears at a city council meeting and blasts me for interfering with the complaint process. He charges that I am shielding the restaurant from inspection. He asks for an investigation of my actions. I have documented the steps taken, and city council takes no action. The restaurant changes hands.

PROBLEM The neighbor puts up "no parking" signs. They are on his property, but look like they apply to the city street in front of

them. This cuts into the already limited street parking for the restaurant.

SOLUTION I ask that city signs be placed on the city right-of-way, in front of his signs, indicating that parallel parking is allowed along the curb.

PROBLEM The neighbor files official complaints for violations of our building code, a new area of attack.

SOLUTION The city forces the restaurant to remove an outdoor deck used for al fresco dining that does encroach slightly into city right-of-way and to make other exterior modifications. The deck had been in place for several years. Nearby restaurants with similar violations are not cited because our system is complaint-driven.

PROBLEM An existing city right-of-way runs beside the restaurant, perpendicular to the main street. The right-of-way looks like a dirt driveway but is, in fact, an old city street that was never paved. The neighbor claims he needs it to access his property but that it is frequently blocked by restaurant patrons parking on the main street.

SOLUTION The district council member and I meet with both parties and various city officials. We mark the right-of-way so it isn't blocked, but tell the neighbor that people can drive down the dirt road and park on each side. He has been using it as part of

his property. Now he can't block the street, either. The neighbor is furious.

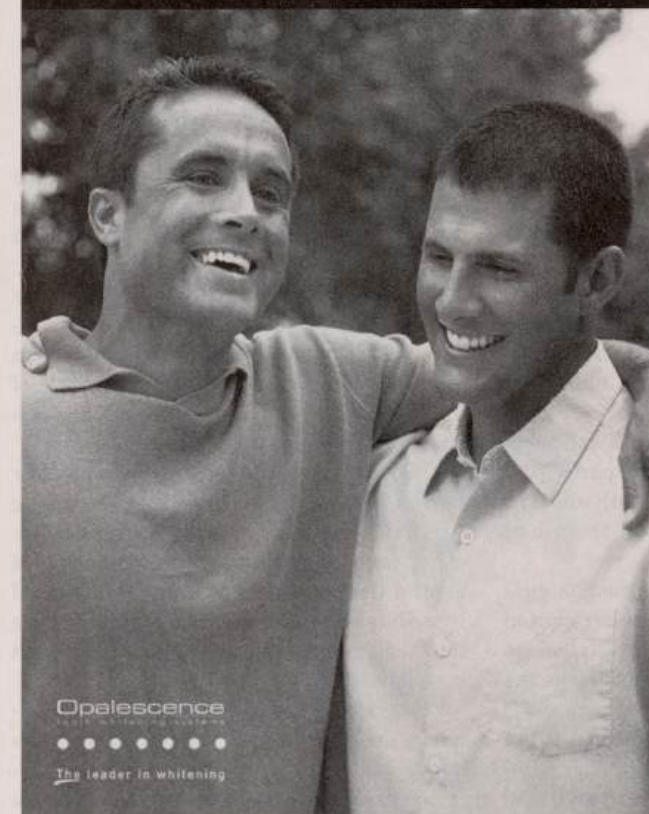
ADDITIONAL ISSUES The neighbor, a businessman, also is an immigrant. The two successive restaurant owners have been gay. The neighbor claims discrimination because the city won't take his complaints any longer. The two gay restaurant owners claim discrimination because they feel they're being inspected out of business.

Similar issues play out every day. It's a tough job to balance the competing interests and needs of all our citizens. People turn to us for help: barking dogs, car alarms, loud music from the outdoor patio of the bar down the street, tall weeds, abandoned houses.

In order for cities to work, we all have to agree to a social compact that curtails some of our rights to our own property, but allows us to turn to government for help.

Annise D. Parker is Houston's third-term city controller and one of the highest-ranking openly GLBT-elected municipal official in any of the 10 largest U.S. cities. Her website is www.houstoncontroller.org. Parker's television program, Money Matters, airs Monday on the Municipal Channel (Comcast) at 2 and 8 a.m. and 2 and 8 p.m. The City Controller's webpage is www.houstontx.gov/controller/index.html. To receive the controller's newsletter, send an email to cicely.wynne@cityofhouston.net.

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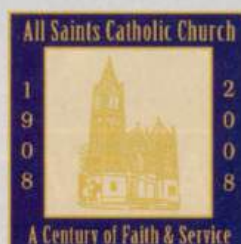
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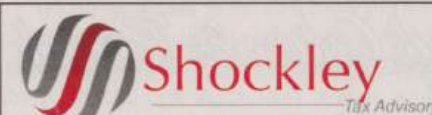
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FOR THE GIRLS

The ABCs of STDs

On March 11, 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced results of a nationwide study that examined the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in teenage girls. The study looked at 838 girls between the ages of 14 and 19, testing them for four STDs: Human Papilloma Virus, Chlamydia, trichomoniasis, and genital herpes.

The results were shocking. Twenty-six percent of all these teenage girls participating in the study were infected with an STD. More disturbing, 15 percent of them had more than one!

And it gets even worse. Of the 838 girls in the study, only about half of them reported they were sexually active. So, if we look at just those girls who were sexually active, the percentage of them with at least one STD increases to 40 percent! Examination of the African-American girls in the study showed 50 percent of them were infected with an STD!

Whoa. Those statistics certainly give one pause. I am troubled by the numbers of young girls engaging in sexual activity. I'm worried about their mental and physical well-being. And I worry all this sex could lead to increases in teenage pregnancies. But I fear the numbers of STD infections within that population may foretell an even more troubling tale of increasing HIV infection rates among girls and young women and their partners.

Having HPV, Chlamydia, trich, and/or herpes increases one's chances of becoming infected with HIV. That's because STDs often cause sores and/or inflammation of genital tissues which, along with increased leukocytes or immune cells at the site of the infection, make it easier for HIV to infect and invade your body.

For example, in a 2007 study by researchers at the University of Washington, it was suggested "that a woman with trichomoniasis is at about 50 percent greater risk

for acquiring HIV than a woman without trichomoniasis." And women with Chlamydia are two to five times more likely to contract HIV if exposed to the virus.

HIV aside, STDs can cause a variety of other health problems. Let's review their stats, symptoms, and potential health consequences.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States with about 20 million Americans currently infected. Another 6.2 million of our citizens become infected each year, and it is estimated that approximately 50 percent of sexually active men and women will be infected with HPV during their lifetime!

Within the HPV family of viruses, there are more than forty of them that can infect genital and anal tissues. Most of those viruses do not cause serious health problems, but some can cause genital or anal warts that may have to be removed. But the good news is, in 90 percent of all HPV cases, the

body's immune system will clear the infection within two years.

However, other HPV types can lead to persistent infection and, potentially, they can cause cancer, especially cervical cancer. Studies conservatively estimate that HPV is the cause of at least 70 percent of the cervical cancers seen in women.

Due to the insidious presence of HPV in our society and the serious health issues related to certain types of the virus, a vaccine called Gardasil has been developed. This vaccine, consisting of three doses over six months, is recommended for use in girls and young women between the ages of 11 and 26 in order to protect them from the HPV types that cause cervical cancer.

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection that is transmitted through mucous membrane contact with infected sexual fluids. According to the National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention, Chlamydia is so common in sexually active young women that by the time they reach 30, half of them will have had the disease!

Females often experience no symptoms and therefore go undiagnosed and untreated for long periods of time. That's a shame, because this infection is easily treated with antibiotics, and long-term infection with Chlamydia can lead to serious medical problems such as a painful arthritic condition, pelvic inflammatory disease, and even infertility.

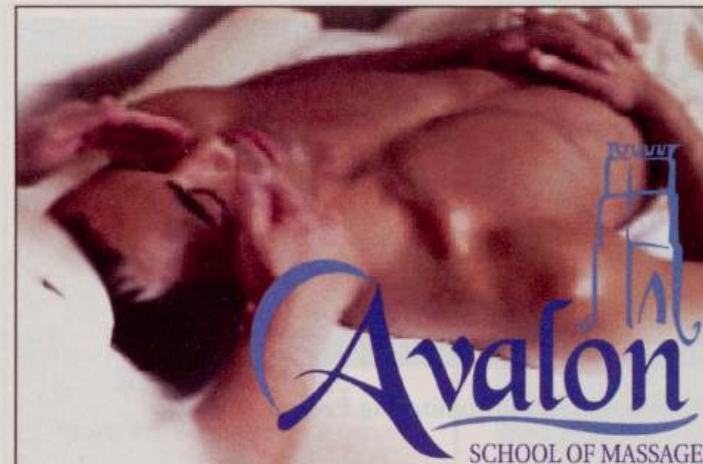
Trichomoniasis is caused by a parasite and results in a vaginal discharge and an unpleasant smell. (Trich is the reason for the long-standing myth that women smell like fish. Women don't smell like fish, trich smells like fish.) While it doesn't lead to the same sorts of serious health issues we see with other STDs, trich can definitely lead to loneliness!

Genital herpes is a viral infection that causes painful blisters. Other serious health issues are rare, but genital herpes can cause a potentially fatal infection in newborns. There is no cure for herpes, but several medications on the market can help eliminate outbreaks or reduce their severity.

Bottom line is this: if you are a sexually active young woman, regardless of the gender of your partners, protect yourself. Use condoms and other barrier methods when you have sex. Get regular check-ups and Pap smears. Consider getting the Gardasil vaccine. And most importantly, find a doctor you can really talk to. It will be your best weapon in the battle to stay healthy in a world of STDs.

For more information, call the CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/std.

Kelly A. McCann is the chief executive officer of AIDS Foundation Houston, which recently marked 25 years of service. Details: www.aidshep.org.



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Genital warts are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which is the same virus responsible for cervical cancer in women. These warts can occur in the anal canal and perianal area, especially in individuals who engage in ano-receptive intercourse. Left untreated anal warts can grow larger and become **cancer** in some cases. Anal warts are difficult to **cure**, since once the virus infects the skin cells they are impossible to eliminate. Warts can be treated with topical medication, office procedures and/or surgery based on size and location. **Regular examinations** and treatment can keep this annoying and potentially dangerous problem in check.

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The **gay**-affirming gospel according to Jay Bakker

A Chip Off Another Block

by Leigh Bell

Photograph by Casey Curry

His name is forever linked to a seven-deadly-sins scandal that rocked Christian faith and captivated secular media. But Jay wears his last name like a purple heart. The name Bakker is pinned to his heart. He overcame Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's infamously fallen ministry to evangelize Christianity very differently than his parents did on *The PTL Club*, their 1980s television show that reached nearly 13 million viewers.

The Bakkers were an empire that we watched crumple like an aluminum can underfoot. A jury indicted Jim Bakker for defrauding his followers, and Christians condemned him for sins, including sleeping with church secretary Jessica Hahn and paying her \$279,000 from ministry funds to keep quiet about it. The Bakker scandal made news headlines and late-night punch lines for years. Then it died down, like even the juiciest scandals do.

Years later, here came a grown-up Jay Bakker to excavate the past. Jay brought the Bakker name back, this time in a young man who thumps a loving, forgiving God of grace. A God who embraces everyone: sinners, Bible beaters, prostitutes, brain surgeons, and yes, even gays. But each time Jay appears, we remember the Bakker family's downfall.

Time passes so slowly

Jay Bakker. Given name Jamie Charles Bakker. An ex-druggie and alcoholic. A high-school dropout.

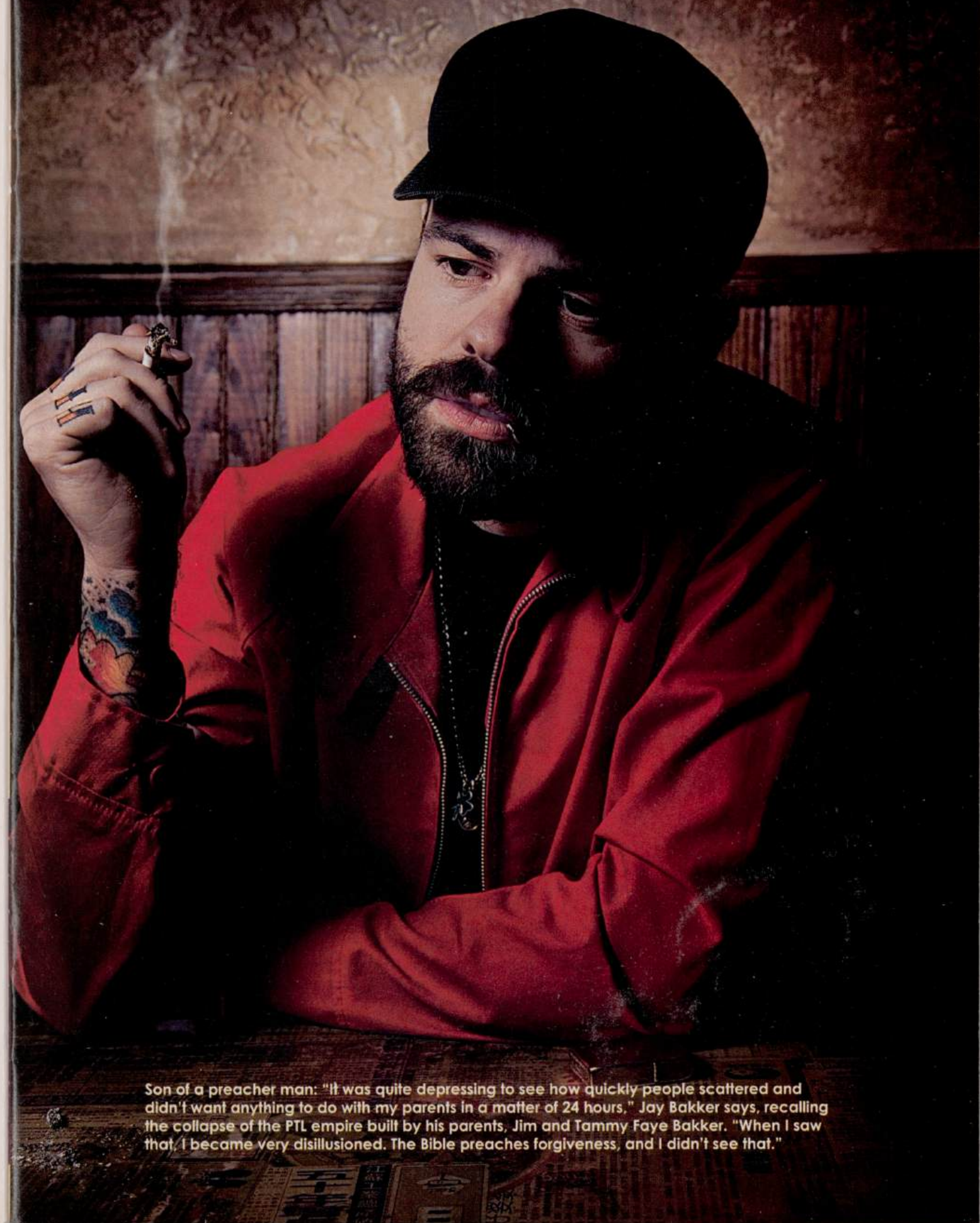
A 32-year-old with piercings, a lit cigarette, and tattoos that cover his arms like a tight shirt. Here is the punk-rock-pastor son of the deviant Jim Bakker. And this kid wants to talk about Jesus? Damn right.

"I wanted to end the dos and don'ts of Christianity, rather than Christianity based on faith," Jay says when I finally reach him at home in Brooklyn.

In 1994, Jay Bakker and two like-minded friends started an anarchist church called Revolution, in Phoenix, where his imprisoned and broken father had sent a shackled and broken son to stop drinking and doping. It was eight years after his father's ministry caved. America had nearly forgotten the Bakkers.

But Jay reminded us. And we reminded Jay. He wasn't afraid. The name Jim Bakker opened doors, and Jay sung it out loud. After clearing clouds of rejection and addiction, in 2001 Jay wrote *Son of a Preacher Man: My Search for Grace in the Shadows*, an autobiography about growing up a Bakker, facing the best and worst of Christianity, and founding the Revolution Church.

He starred in Sundance Channel's 2006 documentary *One Punk Under God*, during which cameras followed unreturned phone calls to his father (they're speaking again) and his heart-wrenching decision to announce Revolution a "gay-affirming" church. →



Son of a preacher man: "It was quite depressing to see how quickly people scattered and didn't want anything to do with my parents in a matter of 24 hours," Jay Bakker says, recalling the collapse of the PTL empire built by his parents, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. "When I saw that, I became very disillusioned. The Bible preaches forgiveness, and I didn't see that."

Jay did interviews with Larry King and reporters from *Mother Jones*, *Time*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*. In every instance, Jay was asked some question about his parents and "the scandal." Skeletons flew from the closet. Somewhere between drinking and finding God's grace, Jay realized the Bakker name is a platform of sorts.

"I found out that the fame or the interest from the media has allowed me to talk about grace and allowed me to talk about my convictions," Jay says. The demons are finally working for him.

What we forget

I didn't know what to expect when I dialed Jay's number. Would he be preachy like his father or flagrantly emotional like his mother, who died of pancreatic cancer last year? Strangely enough, I never knew of Jay Bakker until *OutSmart* gave me this assignment. I certainly knew his parents.

My mom sometimes watched Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker on *The PTL Club*. What people remember about the Bakkers is the fall and, before that, an extravagant lifestyle, a belief that giving money would bring you more—Jim Bakker has since renounced this theory—and of course, Tammy Faye's makeup.

What people forget is another message the Bakkers preached early on: acceptance of everyone, regardless of race, creed, or sexual orientation. They forget that

"As Christians, we're sorry for being self-righteous, judgmental bastards."

Tammy Faye met with, prayed over, and supported HIV-positive people and people with AIDS in the early 1980s, long before Elizabeth Taylor and Bono made it chic.

Perhaps this is why Jim and Tammy Faye gathered a colossal following. One devotee was my parent's friend, who invited our family to visit his home in Heritage USA, a huge Disneyland-found-Jesus theme park the Bakkers opened in 1978. At the zenith of the Bakkers' ministry, Heritage USA had six million annual visitors. It was the top vacation destination behind Disney World and Disneyland. It was also where Jay grew up.

I was maybe 9 or 10 when we visited. I remember water slides and the Passion



Churched people: Jay Bakker (c) and life partners Jose Ortiz (l) and Steve Parelli are involved with the American Family Outing effort this month, during which openly GLBT couples and allies will attend some of the largest mega-churches in the nation.

Play and a huge make-believe city. Everything was big. So were the Bakkers. I thought their kids (Jay has an older sister) were the luckiest kids in the world to live there. Then a year or two later, it all imploded.

At that point, I wouldn't have traded places with the Bakkers' kids for anything.

When is judgment day?

Before a U.S. District Judge sentenced Jim Bakker to 45 years in prison, this is what he said: "Those of us who do have a religion are sick of being saps for money-grubbing preachers and priests."

Jay Bakker, who was just 11 years old

look at the Bible on my own, and I took other people's actions out of the equation, and I took it for what it was," Jay says. "I was happy with what I found in the Bible. Rather than seeing it as religious bondage, I found grace. I wanted to take that out to people, take the message of inclusive love and inclusive grace."

Graceful living

Jay packages the message very differently than most preachers. Revolution's website welcomes you with these words: "As Christians, we're sorry for being self-righteous, judgmental bastards." Members have buttons and T-shirts that say "Religion kills." But they believe God revives.

"I guess all I can say is that I fell in love with God's grace," Jay says.

He invites the wayward, the sinful, the uncertain, the lost, and the defeated. He invites them because he knows them. They are his father. They are Jay Bakker.

Between 40 and 70 of the "Revolutionists" gather every Sunday afternoon in a dark Brooklyn bar called Pete's Candy Store. The bar is open and Jay asks everybody to tip the wait staff well, although he hasn't had a drink in 12 years. The Revolutionists talk about God and love and Jesus between swigs of Heineken.

People say they come to Revolution as a last hope for God. They follow a humbled young man who admits he doesn't have all the answers or a back door into heaven. They trust him because he isn't perfect. They trust him for reasons many conservative Christians wouldn't.

And this is why Jay Bakker is proud of his family name. ■

HELLO, JOEL OSTEEN

Soulforce brings the American Family Outing to Houston's Lakewood Church. Ready or not

by Leigh Bell

Silence can say harsh things. Joel Osteen's refusal to speak an opinion on God and homosexuality has ruffled either side of the issue—those who say it's a sin and those who believe it's not. Both opinions mostly agree on this. A man who reaches more than 40,000 people at Lakewood each week and another 200 million television viewers worldwide (not to mention those who bought his best-selling books) should take a stand on one of today's most pressing societal issues.

Osteen has said little about homosexuality, gay marriage, and how it all sits with his church.

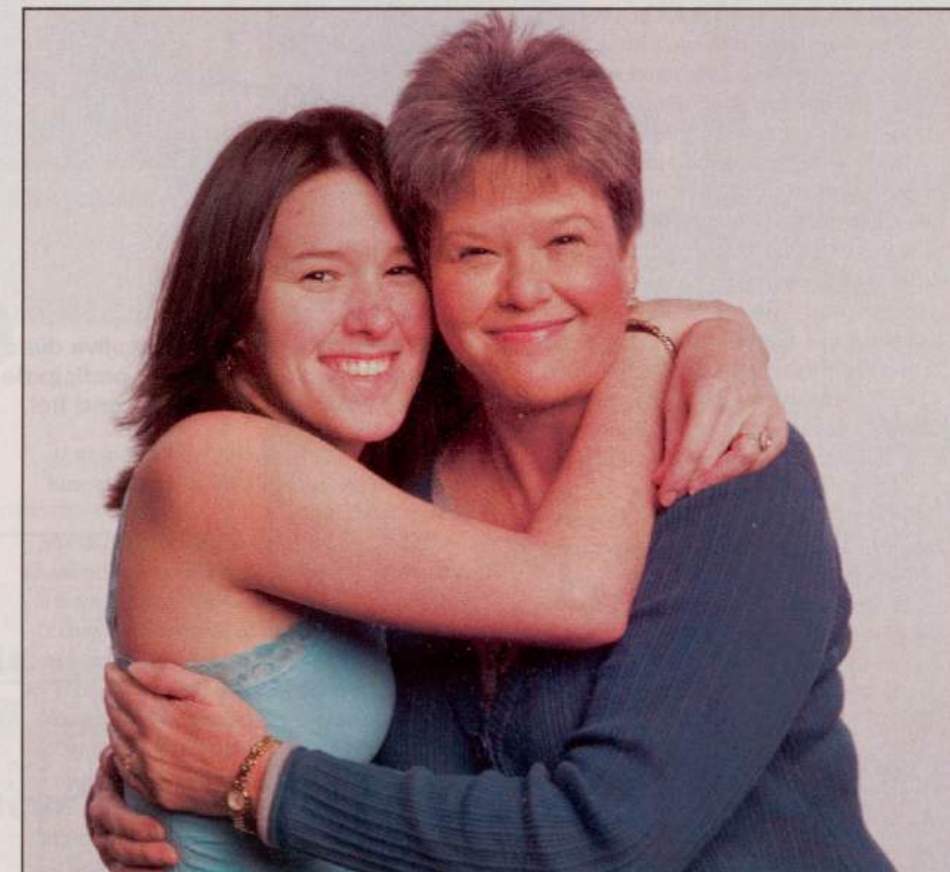
Mr. Osteen, if you care to do so, my e-mail is leighbell@outsmartmagazine.com. Meanwhile, expect a group of at least two dozen gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders, along with their families and supportive church leaders, to visit Lakewood on Mother's Day.

Lakewood is the first of six mega-churches that The American Family Outing will attend through Father's Day hoping to address family, faith, and sexual orientation in friendly sit-down conversations with members of those congregations. If you want to learn more, you can visit www.soulforce.org/afo.

The American Family Outing is the idea of Jeff Lutes, Soulforce executive director, a gay man who has three children with his partner. Lutes saw a new generation of evangelical leaders emerging, and with their large audiences and global reach, he realized their influence.

"These mega-churches are all about family," Lutes says from Austin, where Soulforce is based. "We have families, too. What would it look like if we set up a meeting where they could see that, too? I just want to humanize the issue. . . . Like any dad, I'm proud of my family and my children, and I know families in these churches are equally as proud."

Leaders of The American Family Outing have tried to arrange such a meeting with Lakewood members for several months, starting with a letter to the church on December 3, 2007, Lutes says. They



Mother-daughter team: GLBT families and their allies, including Kim Beggs (r) and her daughter, Laura Pursell, will attend mega-churches across the nation as part of American Family Outing, a program organized by Soulforce.

have since sent more letters and made a few phone calls. No one has responded.

"It's disappointing, and it obviously says something," Lutes says.

As a reporter, I contacted Lakewood Church to request an interview with Osteen or another representative of the congregation to discuss The American Family Outing. After my second attempt, I received an e-mail from Andrea Davis of Lakewood Church that reads, in part: "No one seems to know about this [The American Family Outing], but perhaps their request went to our group scheduling office. We get hundreds of requests from groups as you may know. Sometimes they get a bit overwhelmed."

Mr. Osteen, if your church has responded since this article went to print, I apologize and Laura Pursell probably thanks you. Her mother is a lesbian, and the 21-year-old wants to tell Lakewood Church members her story.

"I got through school, and my friends and family accepted it," Pursell says. "If other kids have this issue, I want to let them know they're not the only ones out there. If I did it, they can, too."

Maybe if churchgoers see that gays and lesbians can raise loving, Christian, and yes, straight children like Pursell, they'll view sexual orientation and God with new light. →

Search for an Oasis

continued from page 41

"Joel [Osteen] is inspirational and influences a lot of people," says Kim Beggs, Pursell's mother. "If they see that we have family, that we are strong Christians, that Jesus loves us just the same, then we have made a big step."

Historically, Osteen gives non-answers when asked publicly about homosexuality and same-sex marriage. He told Larry King, "I don't go there."

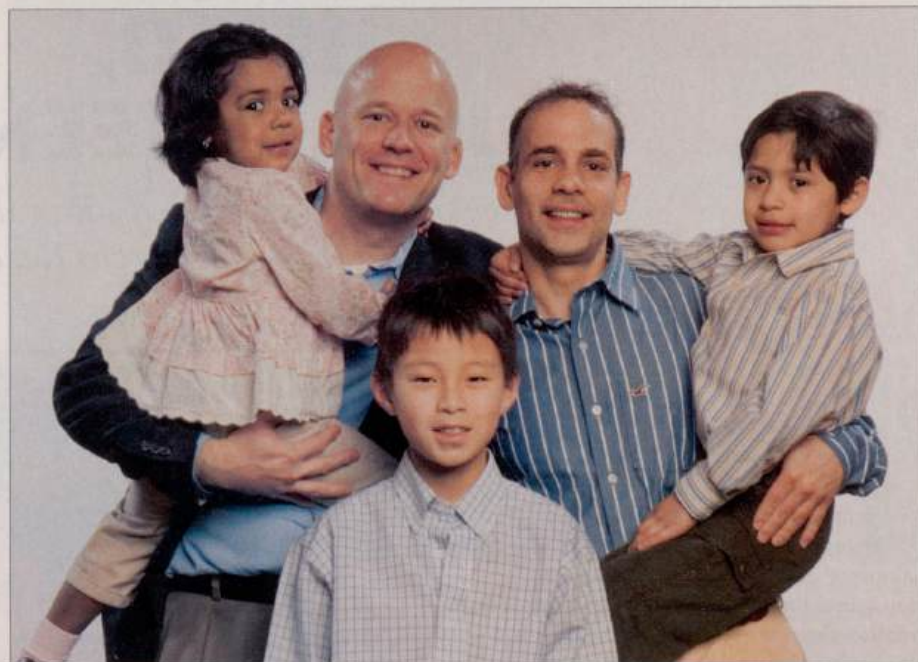
However, Osteen doesn't jump right on the evangelical bandwagon with James Dobson and Tony Perkins, who strongly oppose gay marriage.

"On one hand, it gives me some hope," Lutes says. "I have hope, but I also have sadness that he doesn't seem ready to use his influence to make a real difference to people."

Apparently, the closest Osteen has come to a public statement on homosexuality was in September 2006 when he was asked about gay marriage during a visit to Massachusetts, the only U.S. state to allow same-sex nuptials.

"I don't think it's God's best," Osteen said, according to the *Boston Herald*. "I never feel like homosexuality is God's best."

A reporter pressed Osteen, who appeared to backpedal and said, according to the *Herald*, "I don't feel like that's my thrust . . . you know, some of



This is a family: Soulforce executive director Jeff Lutes (the adult on the left) and partner Gary Stein are set to participate in American Family Outing with their children Jolé, Niko (standing), and Trei.

the issues that divide us, and I'm here to let people know that God is for them and he's on their side."

"What is God's best?" asks Jay Bakker, co-founder of Revolution Church, who leads families to Lakewood on Mother's Day.

"We are not going to discuss that with him [Osteen]. We just want to see if we can have some compassionate dialogue, and if we are in the same room with each other, it takes that fear away."

Bakker has met the unforgiving side of Christianity. Not because he's gay. He's straight. But because he's the son of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, who were tossed out by many Christians after Jim Bakker's dishonesty with funds and infidelity in marriage came out in the 1980s.

Unlike Osteen, Bakker very publicly discusses his belief that homosexuality is not a sin and has labeled his church in New York a gay-affirming one.

"I think the church has been wrong on the issue," Jay Bakker says. "I encourage them to take a deeper look [at the Bible], and when you're ready to do that, we can sit down and talk. There is a majority of Christians who say that I'm compromising. . . . I don't think we're going to get anywhere if we just make quotes to newspapers or magazines or on television. We have to sit down and have a conversation. That is what we're trying to do."

Mr. Osteen, if you'd like arrange this, let us know.

Leigh Bell is a Houston freelance writer. This is her first contribution to OutSmart.

The American Family Outing (AFO) campaign from Mother's Day to Father's Day is made of GLBT families and supportive straight families seeking peaceful dialogue about faith, family, and sexual orientation with six of today's most influential evangelical leaders and their mega-churches. AFO is a collaboration of Soulforce, The National Black Justice Coalition, COLAGE, and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. AFO still wants families to participate. If you are interested, visit www.soulforce.org/afo.

The scheduled church visits are: May 9-11: Joel Osteen and Lakewood Church, Houston • May 16-18: Bishop T.D. Jakes and The Potter's House, Dallas • May 23-25: Bishop Harry Jackson Jr. and Hope Christian Church, Beltsville, Md. • May 30-June 1: Bishop Eddie Long and New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Lithonia, Ga. • June 6-8: Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Ill. • June 13-15: Dr. Rick Warren and Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, Calif.

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From the desk of
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January 17th, 2008

Rev. Joel Osteen
Lakewood Church
3700 Southwest Freeway
Houston, TX 77027

Subject: The American Family Outing

Dear Rev. Osteen and the congregation of Lakewood Church,

My name is Jay Bakker. I am pastor of Revolution Church in Brooklyn, New York. You may know me as the son of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker.

As you might have heard, I lost my mother this year after a long battle with cancer. This has led me to reflect on the importance of family, as well as the lessons my mother taught me regarding the unconditional love of God. It is in her memory that I write you this letter today.

As a child growing up, I saw a side of the church that to me did not always reflect God's grace. This experience has led me to be concerned for our brothers and sisters in Christ who sometimes may feel rejected and left out of the church.

It is for these reasons that I have decided to be a part of a plan to bring dozens of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families from around the country, as well as heterosexual families that support them, to visit your congregation on Mother's Day Weekend (Saturday May 10 and Sunday May 11th, 2008) to create meaningful dialogue about homosexuality and Christianity.

This visit is part of the *American Family Outing*, a collaborative project between Soulforce, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the National Black Justice Coalition, and COLAGE. It is my understanding that the Executive Director of Soulforce, Jeff Lutes, sent you an initial letter, dated December 3, 2007.

A Kushner Conversation

The renowned writer Tony Kushner, who speaks in Houston this month, chats about his masterwork, *'Angels in America,'* politics, comics, and the meaning of fabulousness

by Neil Ellis Orts

Tony Kushner needs little introduction. Preeminent American playwright; winner of Pulitzer, Tony, Emmy, and Obie awards; forever immortal as the creator of *Angels in America*, the grandly epic stage play and HBO television presentation—ringing any bells? On May 19, Inprint, the local literary organization, presents an evening at the Alley Theatre with Kushner, whose recent works also include the 2002 musical *Caroline, or Change* (music by Jeanine Tesori), the dramas *Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall Be Unhappy* and *Homebody/Kabul*, and a new translation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In 2006, the feature-length documentary *Wrestling With Angels: Playwright Tony Kushner* premiered at Sundance Film Festival and was recently broadcast on PBS.

In anticipation of his Houston appearance, I asked Kushner what he would be reading. "If there's something that I've just been working on that day that I want to try out, sometimes I do that," he responded. "I have my little pieces that I know work, mostly stuff from the plays. It really depends upon what's going on at the moment."

After the reading, Alley artistic director Gregory Boyd conducts an on-stage conversation with Kushner. What follows may give you an idea of how broad and stimulating a conversation with Kushner can be.



Neil Ellis Orts: I want to talk to you a little bit as a practicing artist and theorist. In a conversation you had with Michael Cunningham [author of *The Hours* and *A Home at the End of the World*], you stated that you believe there is a gay aesthetic and you named it *fabulousness*.

Tony Kushner: That's a very long time ago, and I really haven't thought about that in a long time. I was a really great admirer of Charles Ludlam and the Theatre of the Ridiculous. I felt that at the time of the Theatre of the Ridiculous, which was certainly a gay aesthetic—I don't know that I'd ever say there was only one gay aesthetic—but the Theatre of the Ridiculous was certainly part of a nascent, emerging aesthetic and political personality. It was a part of the grand coming out of the closet of the whole gay community. It sort of originates in the '50s and then emerges into a higher form in the early to mid-'70s. I think that by the time people like me or Michael—and we're very different writers, obviously—were coming

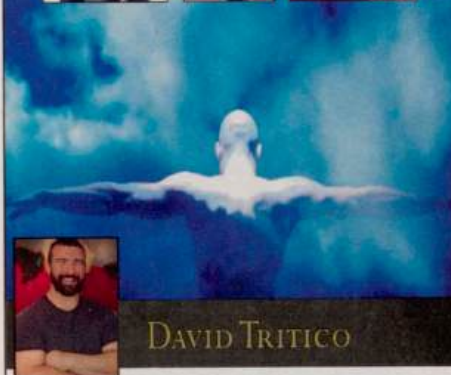
along, there was a new kind of gay sensibility emerging.

In fact, the principle difference between the ridiculous and the fabulous has to do with irony, that irony is, among many other things, a coping mechanism. It provides you with a distance between what you really want in your heart of hearts and what you know the world is going to allow you to have. And when the world is not going to allow you to have very much of what you really want, you develop an ironic stance to your own oppression. It's a survival mechanism. It's also a way of expressing discontent and, in that sense, surviving discontent. In some cases, you need the expression of your own discontent because you'll be crushed by external forces, but also you can be crushed by internal forces if you give too full a voice to what you really want when there's no hope of getting it. When that distance is narrowed by liberation, by emancipation, by a successful liberation movement, irony is perhaps not as necessary as a strategy for survival. →

On writing: "The more experience I've gotten as a playwright, the more likely it is that the characters are going to surprise me," says Tony Kushner, who speaks more about his work in an evening presented by Inprint on May 17.

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A Kushner Conversation

continued from
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It becomes more possible to say directly what you want because you have the hope of actually attaining it. So I think that is what I was talking about, which is not in any way to demonize irony, which I enjoy immensely, or to say that we're done with that now, we shouldn't be ironic anymore. Irony is a very complicated phenomenon and there are all sorts of reasons for its manifestation.

But I think I was also playing a little bit on the word *fabulous*. I mean, it's a very gay word. If you're trying to sound straight, you don't say "Oh, that's fabulous." There is a certain sense in which fabulous is also a kind of a riff on the idea of historicity. One of the prizes you win when you set yourself free as a community is the luxury and authority and freedom to begin to unearth where you come from and what people who were like you were like in very, very different times.

In *Angels in America*, you took the gay couple—one who is advancing through AIDS—and instead of having the brave partner who cares for the ailing one, you choose the harder thing of him saying, "I'm out of here." And in *Caroline, or Change*, instead of the surrogate mother maid, you chose to write about this woman who very much wants none of that. Do these characters come to you and you start learning about them as you write, or do you construct the characters more intentionally, crafting them?

Well, I certainly learn about the characters as I'm writing. The more experience I've gotten as a playwright, the more likely it is that the characters are going to surprise me, and that's a nice thing. But usually when I start I'm thinking about both the characters and also sort of intuiting the kind of play I want it to be—I mean, most writers would want to avoid, as much as possible, clichés because they're boring.

Even if the audience is fooling itself that it's having a good time because the show is doing exactly what it has expected a show to do, I think the audience is actually bored. It's like eating a lot of junk food and slowly starving to death. I think that for the most part what people want is complexity and surprise and contradiction and their expectations challenged. So you tend to think, as a writer, "What stories and situations and people will take you surprising places?" In the case of *Angels*, at the time I started working on the play, I was intrigued by the fact that men were suddenly being asked to take care of very, very sick people and deal with a lot of illness and mortality that I think men have a hard time with. I think women are conditioned to deal with those sorts of situations better.

It was also a time when Reaganism was in its first flowering, and we were being told every day that the way to take care of other people is to be as selfish as you possibly can be and to take care of yourself, first and foremost. And I thought that was a kind of terrifying and fascinating irony, the fact that at the moment when people were being told every day how wonderful selfishness was and how we should all read Ayn Rand and we should all be trickle-down types, my community was being asked to learn skills at caretaking that did not come easily. And I thought it would be interesting to dramatize that by showing somebody who actually has a very, very hard time dealing with disease, as is true of many of us, and who actually can't handle it at first and learned.

When you say that people want complexity and the difficult storyline, do you think



'Angels' in Fort Worth

This month, Fort Worth Opera presents a new production of *Angels in America*, an adaptation of the Tony Kushner play by composer Peter Eötvös and librettist Mari Mezei. The opera (production poster, above), on stage at the Scott Theatre May 17–June 7, is part of "More Life: The Art and Science of AIDS," a series of performances, exhibitions, and programs organized by the three AIDS service organizations in Fort Worth: the AIDS Outreach Center, Samaritan House, Tarrant County AIDS Interfaith Network. Details: www.morelifetexas.org, www.fwopera.org.

Houstonian John Painter is one of the artists invited to show work at the Fort Worth Community Arts Center during the "More Life" series (the title derives from one of the final lines in Kushner's play).

that's especially true of the theater audience? Because there's evidence in the culture that suggests that there are a lot of people who don't want that.

Well, I think that there are a lot of people who, of course, don't want that—what I would say rather is that there are people who think they don't want it. I mean, if you ask them, "Do you want to go to a film or to a play or pick up a novel and have all your most dearly held assumptions challenged?" most people will say, "No, I want to have a good time."

I'm not kidding myself, I mean yes, of course, it's much easier to find a theater audience that's interested in difficulty and complexity, but there are a lot of movies that—it's been a very good year for film. You look at the films that were nominated for the Oscar, and you know, *There Will Be Blood* is a very, very, very hard movie, and it didn't make as much money as *Horton Hears a Who*, but it's made a good deal of money, I think the most money a Paul Thomas Anderson film has ever made, and it's a very tough, very upsetting experience. But I think people went to it because of the sort of astonishing integrity of the thing. The success of *The Sopranos*, the success of a movie like *There Will Be Blood*, I think suggests that there's an appetite for difficulty. It's never going to be, probably, as enormous as the appetite for pabulum, but I don't think that pabulum is all that people want.

On a much lighter note, you have a history with comic books, as do many of our generation. And so I have to have my comic-book geek conversation. What were some of your favorite comics as a kid growing up?

I was a big Marvel Comics fan. When I was a little kid—God, I can barely remember—I think Casper, the Friendly Ghost, and Wendy, the Good Little Witch, and what was the devil? Hot Stuff, I guess was his name. I liked those. By the time I got to be about nine years old or so, I discovered superhero comics—not the DC Comics, Batman, Superman bunch—and I really loved Marvel. I loved Spider-Man. I loved Fantastic Four. I loved Doctor Strange, Daredevil. I thought those were great. I liked those until I was like 11 or 12, I think.

Well, we clearly have nothing more to talk about because I was always a DC fan.

The man I'm married to was a DC fan. When Mark was a kid, he only read DC, so we've argued about this. It's just two different worlds. I maintain that the Marvel stuff was just more interesting, because there were all sort of anti-heroes. I mean they were always in trouble with the law. Batman has →

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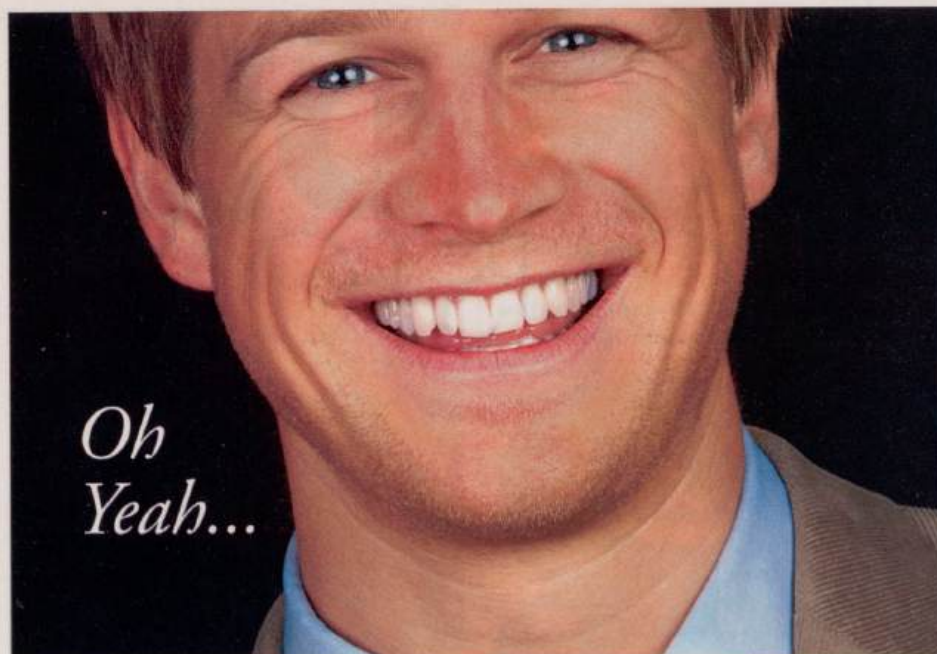
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A Kushner Conversation continued from previous page

this great dark side now that they've done so much work in recent times, but when I was a kid, he was just—I mean he had a great costume, but other than that, another DC goody-goody. And Superman, who was unbelievably tedious, compared to the sort of psycho-pathology of Spider-Man. It wasn't very interesting, I thought.

I was reminded earlier today that you wrote the introduction to Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby*.

Yeah! I love Howard's work very much, and I love *Stuck Rubber Baby*. I think it's a wonderful work. I felt it's never really gotten the audience that it deserved. I think he was a little ahead of his time. I own several of the original pages.

I actually at one point asked Howard if he'd like to do a comic book version of the play, of *Angels in America*, because in a certain sense graphic novels are plays—you write dialogue. But he was in the middle of *Stuck Rubber Baby* and he said, "Mmm, no thanks." I think it was somebody at DC maybe—I was asked at some point to maybe contribute to some sort of anthology comic book thing, and at some point I would love to try it.

There's one thing I didn't want to lead with because then we'd spend the whole time on. How are you feeling about the '08 election process so far?

I'm feeling basically OK about it. I think I'm like every Democrat. I'm concerned about the way that the primary battle between Clinton and Obama is playing out. I'm a little worried that if it goes on uninterrupted for another two or three months, that there's the possibility that they're going to start to do damage to one another, and at this point I have to honestly say that she's getting a little more reckless about it than he is. . . .

I think that both of them would make absolutely superb presidents. I think McCain will be pandering as he has in the last few years increasingly to the crazy part of his crazy party. . . . You know, he's an infinitely smarter person than George Bush and a worthier person, but he's got terrible problems. I can't imagine that either Obama or Clinton, barring some sort of scandal or something—I can't imagine that either one of them could lose to him. The most important thing right now is that whoever wins by the convention, everybody has to get behind them and everyone has to remember that no matter what you feel about the person who wins, no matter how angry you are that your person didn't win, it's immensely important that a Democrat is in the White House next year. I mean, I think the fate of

the world—not to be too Marvel comic book about it—but I think the fate of the world depends upon it, I really do. I think we can't afford another disaster like this.

I feel hopeful. I think one thing is that anyone who is running for president needs to really, really want to be president. And to really want to be president, you have to really believe that you are the person who should be in that place. So you can always wind up telling yourself—and your advisors are certainly going to say it to you—it doesn't matter if we destroy this other guy in the process. What matters is that you get the nomination. And when they start thinking like that, that's when you get into a problem situation.

Writer and performer Neil Ellis Orts interviewed choreographer Bill T. Jones for the March Out-Smart. Orts recently had work included in the 2008 issue of MO: Writings from the River, published by Montana State University, and the anthologies Charmed Lives (Lethe Press) and Able To... (neoNoma Arts).

Kusher on Stage

Inprint, the nonprofit literary organization affiliated with the University of Houston creative writing program, presents an evening with Tony Kushner on Monday, May 17, 7:30 p.m., at the Alley Theatre. Tickets are \$20. Details: 713/521-2026, www.inprint.houston.org.



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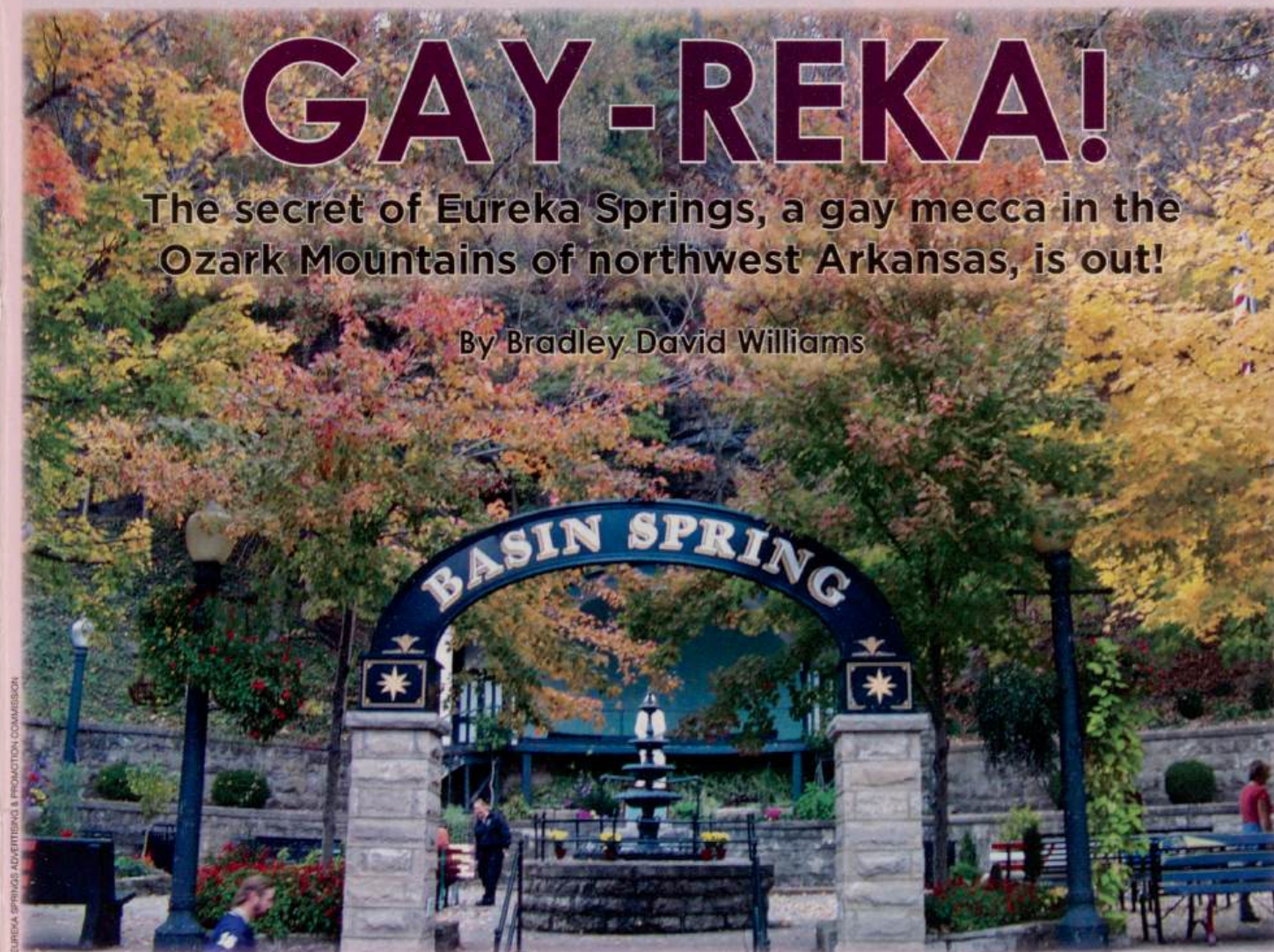
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GAY-REKA!

The secret of Eureka Springs, a gay mecca in the Ozark Mountains of northwest Arkansas, is out!

By Bradley David Williams



Park it here: The entrance to Basin Springs Park, site of the place where Eureka Springs began.

While exploring the steep, crooked streets of this "town that time forgot," you will feel as if you are in some surreal Victorian theme park. The charming architecture includes elegant, pastel-hued "Painted Lady" mansions and gorgeous buildings constructed from native Arkansas limestone. The entire town is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Even the local McDonald's is housed in a Victorian-style building, painted several shades of lavender with gingerbread trim. For many, the appeal of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, lies in the odd but wonderful sense you feel here of having escaped the real world.

The City That Water Built

Eureka Springs has been attracting visitors from all over the world for over 125

years. While not discovered by the white man until the 1800s, the healing waters in the area had been a sacred gathering spot for Native Americans for eons.

Legend has it that a blind Sioux princess regained her sight at the springs. The site that is now Basin Spring—Eureka Springs's epicenter today—was so revered, it is said, that warring tribes of Osage, Cherokee, and Delaware Indians would lay down their arms to drink from and soak in the pure, cool waters together.

The town was officially founded July 4, 1879, and named Eureka Springs (Greek for "I have found it"). Within a year, the population ballooned from 400 to 10,000. Eureka Springs quickly became one of America's most thriving spa towns. The population, and flow of visitors, began to dwindle over time as

modern medicine pooh-pooed the curative powers of the water. Today it is a village of just 2,300.

Getting Domesticated

Long a hotspot for the hetero wedding industry—wedding chapels and honeymoon suites with heart-shaped bathtubs abound—the town made national headlines last May when the city council unanimously voted to establish a domestic partnership registry open to gay and straight couples. Openly gay city clerk Mary Jean "M.J." Sell, who maintains the registry, is also an ordained minister who often officiates unions. Since the domestic partnership registry took effect last June, more than 150 couples from 11 states have paid the \$35 fee and received certificates. Domestic-partnership status

Gay-reka! continued from page 51

is not the equivalent of marriage—in 2004, Arkansas voters approved a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage—but the certificate has symbolic value for many couples and may help couples obtain partner benefits from employers that offer them.

National media attention on the domestic-partnership registry made many people aware of gay Eureka for the first time. One local preacher inadvertently helped the cause of gay tourism by declaring Eureka Springs "the most homosexual city in the South."

Last December, the dreaded American Family Association (AFA) released a 28-minute, gay-bashing documentary about Eureka Springs titled *They're Coming To Your Town*. Gay News Bureau asserts that the American Family Association may have actually boosted queer tourism to Eureka Springs: "Conversely, in a way, the AFA is one of the best ad agencies we've ever had. Thanks to the attention the video has generated in the blogosphere, a great many more potential tourists now know about this progressive, enlightened, inclusive off-beat little town." In March, Oklahoma legislator Sally Kern gave Eureka more free publicity, when she condemned the town in her antigay diatribe that went around the world.

Diversity Events

With four distinct yet mild seasons, Eureka Springs is a fabulous place to vacation any time, but gay travelers particularly like to visit for the Diversity Weekends staged throughout the year—in spring, summer, and fall (supplemented by other queer weekends, including the Eureka Gras Extravaganza in February). Throngs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender folk from near and far descend on Eureka Springs, and the hills come alive with the sound of partying. There are two more Diversity Weekends in 2008, August 1–3 and October 30–November 2.

Of course, a significant percentage of Diversity Weekend revelers are straight. The youth of today, even those living in the Ozarks, grew up on *Will & Grace*. This queer-hip Internet generation is more sophisticated than we can probably grasp. The youngsters have tons of gay friends, they *Tivo Ellen*



We are family: A crowd of queer and queer-friendly Eureka Springers (including the writer, on the far right) revel in front of the historic Basin Park Hotel.

DeGeneres, and they know where the best party is.

Many visitors are surprised to learn there are no gay bars in Eureka Springs. As in some parts of Europe, there just isn't much need for them here. In the alternate universe that is Eureka Springs,

and other creative types. Long before the hippies arrived in the '60s—and they are still here, evidenced by a referendum passed by the town two years ago making marijuana a "low priority" for law enforcement—Eureka was known for its live-and-let-live culture. And wherever you have art and music and tourism and flower children, you have an abundance of homos.

The astounding array of cultural offerings has definitely attracted the gays. The nationally acclaimed Opera in the Ozarks presents its 58th season this summer with *Così Fan Tutte*, *La Bohème*, and *The Mikado*. Once designated a "top 25 arts destination" by *American Style* magazine, Eureka Springs stands to benefit enormously from the 2010 opening of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, located an hour away in Bentonville and founded and funded by Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton.

Eureka Springs celebrates its May Festival of the Arts with events and activities, gallery walks, and special exhibits every day throughout the month. Any time of year, visitors to the Art Colony can see a dozen artists at work and purchase pieces directly from

the artist. The Eureka Springs School of the Arts offers summer workshops taught by local artists. The Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow provides fellowships to visiting scribes—which recently included this author—and presents public readings and other events. On May 9, the Writers' Colony and a local bookstore will host an evening with Texas musician, writer, and former gubernatorial hopeful Kinky Friedman. Then, on May 17, Eureka Springs Theatre Company will stage a town talent show.

The Sights

Eureka sightseeing attractions include Onyx Cave Park, which marks the site where the Cherokee people stopped on the Trail of Tears-forced march from Georgia in 1839; Quigley's Castle, a singular nature-inspired residence and garden; Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge, a big-cat home; the world's largest wind chimes, built at Celestial Windz Harmonic Bazaar; Keels Creek Winery; and the Eureka Springs & North Arkansas Railway excursion train. The most popular tourist activity in Eureka Springs, however, is just piddling around town, exploring the narrow, winding streets of this small burg (which has no stoplights and only two four-way stops). Browse the specialty shops and art galleries downtown, and hang out at Eureka's epicenter, Basin Park, the site of everyone's favorite Diversity Weekend ritual—a mass public display of affection.

Cartoonist/entrepreneur Robert Ripley immortalized the landmark Basin Park Hotel, built in 1905, in his "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" newspaper panel series as the eight-floor hotel with every floor at ground level. (The hotel is built against the side of a hill, and walkways on the rear of the building connect each floor to terra firma.)

The Crescent Hotel & Spa, built in 1886, is a stately limestone "Castle in the Air" with its own fascinating history—which includes one-time ownership by the notorious medical charlatan Norman Baker. Supposedly haunted, both the Crescent and Basin Park offer ghost tours.

A 67-foot Jesus

Along with the many GLBT travelers who visit and spend their dollars in Eureka Springs, religious tourists are also important to the area. Christian attractions include May–October productions of *The Great Passion Play*, a Bible museum, another museum →

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devoted to debunking evolution, and a garish 67-foot statue of Jesus, Christ of the Ozarks, which can be seen from miles around. Local wags have dubbed the boxy, white, seven-story figure the Milk Carton of the Ozarks; others say it looks like Willie Nelson in a dress. All of this was the vision of villainous white supremacist and anti-Semite Gerald L. K. Smith, who is buried at the foot of the statue, making it the world's largest gravestone.

All is not lost, though, for GLBT churchgoers. More ecumenical and lacking offensive racist baggage is Thorncrown Chapel, a popular site for weddings and other ceremonies. The stunning glass-and-wood structure designed by architect E. Fay Jones has been ranked fourth on an American Institute of Architects list of the greatest buildings of the 20th century.

Many gay Christians in Eureka attend the Metropolitan Community Church of the Living Spring, which recently weathered an embezzlement scandal. The MCC congregation worships in the facility of another GLBT-affirming church, the Eureka Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

Where's the Gay Bar?

Though there are no gay bars, per se, in Eureka Springs, there are no straight bars, either. Gay and straight residents and visitors mingle comfortably in a handful of nightspots catering to all.

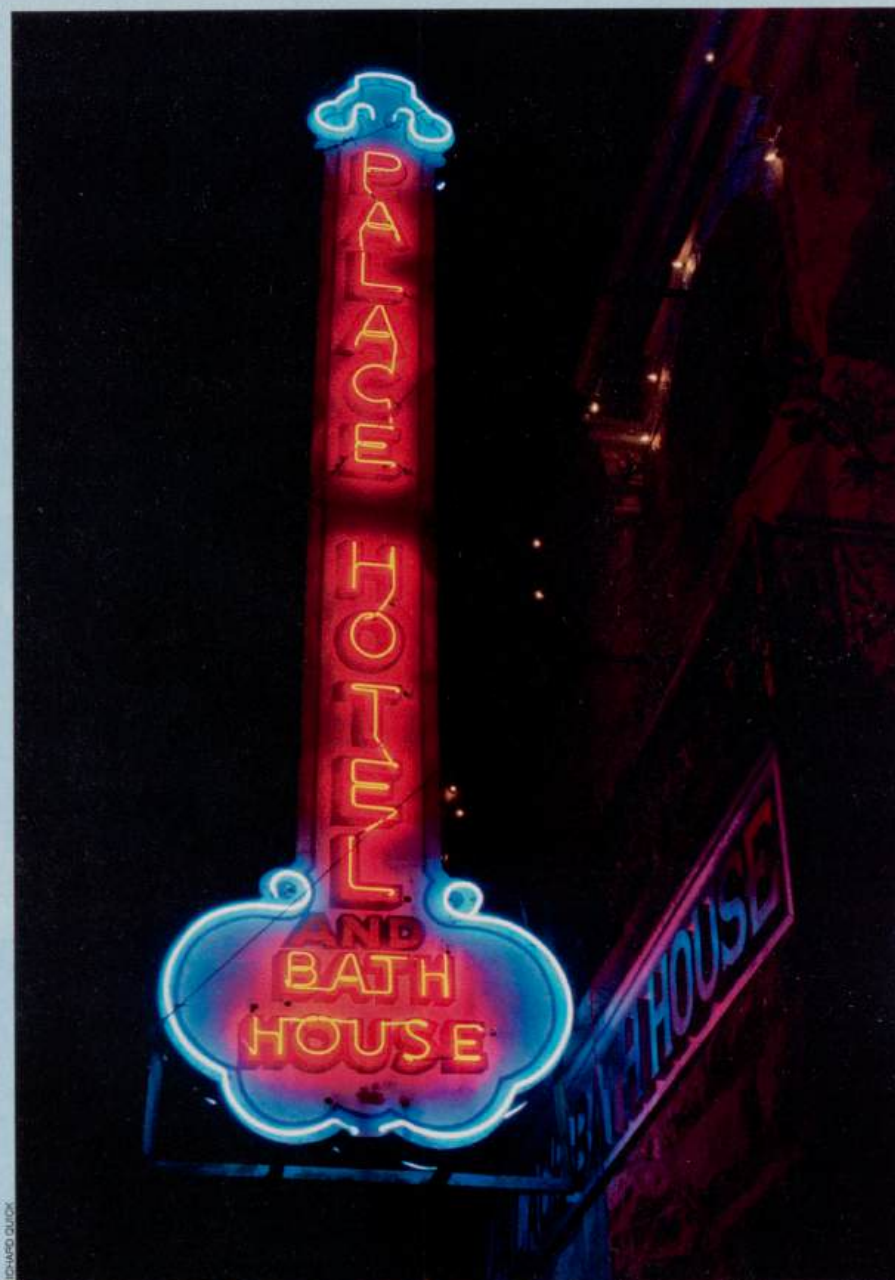
The cozy underground nightclub Eureka Live (35 N. Main St., 479/253-7020, www.eurekalive.net) may not be a gay bar, but it comes awfully close.

Five other bars are considered especially gay-friendly: Jack's Place (37 Spring St., 479/253-2219), a favorite for karaoke; Henri's Just One More (19½ Spring St., 479/253-5795), a martini bar; Tiki Torch (75 S. Main, 479/253-2305, www.tikitorchclub.com).

continued on page 56

For more information about queer Eureka:

- **Eureka Pride**
www.eurekapride.com
- **Diversity Pride Events**
www.diversitypride.com
- **Eureka Springs Tourist Center**
www.eurekasprings.com/alternative
- **Gay Of' Arkansas**
www.arkansasvacation.com
- **Gay News Bureau**
www.gaynewsbureau.com/gay-travel-guide
- **ES Folk: Progressive News Online**
www.esfolk.wordpress.com
- **Northwest Arkansas GLBT Community Center**
(in nearby Bentonville)
www.nwaglbtc.org



Is that a sign on your street or...? While quite suggestive, the sign on the Palace Hotel and Bath House also reminds visitors that the spot was once a brothel.

Pampering—a Eureka tradition

While nobody comes here to "take the cure" anymore, the spa-town tradition continues at the Palace Hotel and Bath House (135 Spring St., 479/253-7474, www.palacehotelbathhouse.com), built in 1901. Enjoy a mineral bath in one of the original clawfoot tubs or a eucalyptus steam bath in an antique wooden barrel steam cabinet.

In its heyday, the Palace was not just a hotel, but a brothel as well. Nowadays, the Palace is sometimes called The Phallus. You can understand that moniker when you take a gander at the hilariously

suggestive vertical sign, said to be the first neon sign west of the Mississippi.

Massage is hugely popular in Eureka. The practitioner considered the best in town by many is Dominic Fabis at the Eureka Massage Center (117 Wall St., 479/253-5498, www.eurekamassagecenter.net). Après massage, treat yourself next door at North Star (119 Wall St., 479/244-6200, www.northstarjuicebar.com), an excellent vegetarian restaurant and juice bar.

A number of other day spas around town can satisfy your pamper-me needs. For a list, check out www.eurekasprings.com/healing.

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Gay News Bureau: www.gaynewsbureau.com

Eureka Pride: www.eurekapride.com

Where to stay, play, cruise, dance, drink, dine and shop in the gayest city in the South.

where all the kids come to dance; The Lumberyard (105 E. Van Buren/Hwy. 62, 479/253-0400), a lesbian-owned venue that hosts Diversity Weekend drag shows; and The Cat House Lounge (82 Armstrong at Main St., 866/363-9976), where popular local bluegrass band Mountain Sprout often plays.

Eat, Drink, and Be Mary...

Eureka prides itself on its incredible restaurants, and some of the very best happen to be gay-owned: Ermilio's (26 White St., 479/253-8004), Katherine's Café Amore (2070 E. Van Buren/Hwy. 62, 479/253-7192), Gaskin's Cabin (2883 Hwy. 23 N., 479/253-5466), and Sonny's Pizza (119 N. Main, 479/253-2307).

New Delhi Café (2 N. Main St., 479/253-2525), which serves an Indian food buffet and deli sandwiches, is one of the hottest live music venues in town. (Eureka singer/songwriter Rachel Fields, an occasional performer, is a superstar waiting to happen.)

Falling in the "gay-friendly" category are Local Flavor (71 Main St., 479/253-9522, www.localflavorcafe.net) and Caribe (309 Van Buren/Hwy. 62 E., 479/253-8102).

Getting There

Continental Express offers daily non-stop flights from Bush Intercontinental to Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport near Bentonville. Allow a good hour and a half for the winding drive from Bentonville to Eureka Springs. The lowest advance purchase round-trip economy fare (at press time) was \$356, listed at www.continental.com.

Another option: Southwest Airlines (www.southwest.com) offers service from Houston Hobby to Tulsa, Oklahoma, which is about 155 miles from Eureka Springs, with its "Wanna Get Away" fares that start at \$189 roundtrip (via Dallas). Continental Express offers nonstop service from Houston Intercontinental to Tulsa (the lowest advance-purchase round-trip fare at press time was \$226).

Gay-owned Eureka Springs Limousine (479/244-6320, www.eurekalimo.com) serves both the Bentonville and Tulsa airports. Fares start at \$55.

Greyhound offers regular service to Bentonville. The round-trip fare at press time was \$202.

Eureka Springs is located in the northwest corner of Arkansas, just south of the Missouri border, and is about 628 miles from Houston. Don't rely on Mapquest's



Shop till they drop: Small Wonder (17A Spring St.) is one of several gay-owned businesses in Eureka Springs.

Shopper's Paradise

Among the numerous gay-owned shops is A Byrd's Eye View (36 N. Main St., 479/253-0200, www.abyrdayview.com), which features a gay section with gifts and personal items.

Gourmet Eureka (123 Spring St., 888/838-0838, www.gourmet-eureka.com) is a specialty food shop owned by Danny Abraham and Bill White, who moved there from Houston four years ago.

Easily the most unique shop in town is the gay-owned Mountain Eclectic (104 N. Main, 479/363-9059), where an active spring flows inside the store. The dwelling was originally a cave-cooled residence built around Gadd Spring.

Other gay-owned retailers include The Cherokee Store (164 W. Van Buren, 479/253-5656, www.cherokeestore.com), Fusion Squared (84 Spring St., 479/253-4999), Regalia (128 Spring St., 479/253-2202, www.regaliahandmade.com), Out on Main (269 N. Main, 479/253-8449), Fain's Herbacy (61 N. Main St., 479/253-5687), and Sweet Spring Antiques (2 Pine St., 479/253-6644).

Patronize "Family"-Operated Lodgings:

Twenty percent of the 3,000 rooms in Eureka Springs are gay owned. Tradewinds Motel offers a discount of \$35 to any couple who visits to take advantage of the registry and stays two or more nights (with its campy Rock Hudson Suite and cute 1940s motor court, perhaps the gayest place in town).

For the quintessential bed-and-breakfast experience, try the beautifully appointed Heart of the Hills Inn. Located high above downtown is The Woods Resort, a secluded property with 23-foot-high tree-house bungalows that feature Jacuzzi tubs and fireplaces. Owner Frank Green, a rare Eureka native (most residents hail from somewhere else), can arrange commitment ceremonies, which start at \$50. The quaint Candlestick Cottage Inn is located near downtown. Under the same ownership is Autumn Moon, a vacation house at nearby Lake Lucerne (sometimes called Lake Lesbian). Innkeeper Denise Coleman, an ordained minister, is available for anybody who wants to get hitched. Pond Mountain Lodge and Resort, once the estate of the man who invented the Toni home perm, offers horseback riding and fishing ponds. Owner Judy Jones welcomes non-guests who just want to stop by for a trail ride on horseback. Eureka House is a spacious two-bedroom vacation rental on 12 acres, perfect for a group.

10-hour estimate. Given the mountain roads in Arkansas, you should expect at least 12 hours of drive time.

With all it has to offer the GLBT traveler, Eureka Springs should be considered on par with Key West, Provincetown, and Palm Springs as a gay vacation paradise. Once you visit, you will definitely

want to return. And who knows? You may have a "Eureka moment," as I did, and decide to stay. ■

Bradley David Williams is a longtime contributor to OutSmart. He lives in Eureka Springs and maintains a blog at www.emailfromtheozarks.blogspot.com.



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Think pink: Sarah goes sheer in a Gia tank, \$27, and Go Softwear brief, \$17.50, from Male UWear.

Styling: Jeff Smith
Hair and makeup:
Carol Wagener/Page.713
Models: Sarah
Bindhammer/Page.713,
Aaron Thorpe/Neal Hamil

Back to the tropics:
Aaron wears a RA
floral shirt, \$124, and
Sixty pink shorts,
\$160, from M2M
Style Lounge.
Sunglasses
from M2M.



Guard on duty:
Sarah lounges in an
Andrew Christian lifeguard
tank, \$32.50, Pistol Pete
shorts with yellow belt, \$54,
and Killerbeads necklace,
\$10.50, from Male UWear.



Out of the water:
Aaron dries off in a
Go Softwear red brief,
\$17.50, from Male
UWear and a Report
Collection shirt tied at
the waist, \$98, from
M2M Style Lounge.



Après pool: Sarah dons a dress by Diesel, \$170, from M2M Style Lounge.



White party: Aaron faces the sun in a Sixty sweater, \$151, and white Hugo Boss pants, \$175, from M2M Style Lounge. Sunglasses from M2M.

Store information: see www.outsmartmagazine.com.



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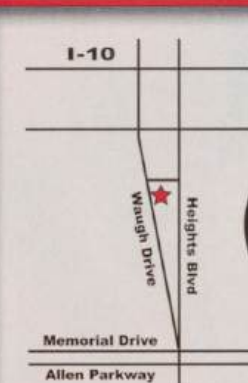



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A candid and surprising chat with the at-times controversial Latasha Byears of the Houston Comets

by Nancy Ford

Photo by Bill Baptist/NBAE/Getty Images

Inflate your plastic slappy tubes and pull those red and blue jerseys out of winter storage. WNBA game time has arrived.

But first, a look back.

Our hometown team, the Houston Comets, was introduced in 1997 with a preseason game on the boards of Autry Court at Rice University prior to their debut in Compaq Center. The audience watching the play



On the rebound: Latasha Byears, in the white jersey, begins her second season with the Houston Comets this month. The hometown team begins its 12th WNBA season with a preseason game May 1 in San Antonio against the Silver Stars.

then was representative of the audience that watches now: mothers or fathers (usually, either/or) accompanying their elementary school-aged daughters (some sons, but mostly daughters).

The young girls were visibly excited to see, possibly for the first time, professional B-ballers whose bodies resembled their own. Title IX, the 1972 federal legislation that requires schools to provide equal athletic op-

portunity to both male and female students, had taught these young girls that they too could grow up to become leaders and stars in a profession previously dominated by men.

The other pervasive component of the audience: the lesbians. Old, young, coupled, in packs, alone, the lesbians came out to the Compaq Center. In droves. By the hundreds. By the thousands. At halftime, the Sapphic smokers among them would descend to →

the lower-level puffing area, packing in like it was last call at Lesbo Lounge. Cruiser and more estrogenically laden than a women-only camping festival, it was a sight to behold.

Television cameras spanning the crowd broadcast us in all of our sisterly splendor, easily recognizable to those of us watching from home.

"There's one, and there's another, and oh, look at all *those* sisters!" we would squeal at the screen.

It wasn't until 2002, five years into the league's existence, that a WNBA player first came out of the closet, with Sue Wicks of the New York Liberty publicly declaring her lesbianism.

Closer to home, Houston Comet and the league's perennial most valuable player, Sheryl Swoopes, followed suit in 2005 with a much-publicized interview in *ESPN Magazine*.

That same year, long-time WNBA power forward Latasha Byears was dealing with publicity of a different sort entirely.

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1973, Latasha Byears began her WNBA career with the Sacramento Monarchs in 1997, moving on to the Los Angeles Sparks in 2001. By 2003, she ranked among the top ten rebounders in league history.

Despite her expertise on the court, Byears was becoming more famous for her aggressive style of play, including throwing a ball at the face of an opposing player

during one game. In 2003, she told *GQ* magazine that she was the toughest player in the WNBA.

Five years later, when asked if she is still the toughest player in the league, Byears presents a much different image.

"Hmm," she ponders the question. "I'm not tough. I'm the smartest now."

This wizened attitude belies the thug reputation Byears is said to possess, bolstered by an incident in Los Angeles in 2003 in which she was accused, with three men, of sexual assaulting a woman.

A doppelganger-like scandal was occurring simultaneously with another basketball star on another L.A. team. However, despite the rape accusation levied against him at the time, superstar Kobe Bryant continued to play, receiving support from the Lakers and the team's front office.

Byears? Not so much.

The Lakers-owned Sparks cut the now-undeniably-out Byears at the start of the season, prompting her to sue the Lakers for imposing a double standard on its players.

In 2005 prosecutors dropped the charges against Byears based on lack of evidence, her lawsuit was settled, and she rejoined the WNBA, this time playing with the Washington Mystics.

In 2007, Byears signed on with Houston Comets as a free agent, while continuing to play in the off-season in Europe.

Latasha Byears was eating dinner around seven o'clock Turkey time with her partner, Brankica, who is from Serbia, when we spoke by telephone.

In this candid interview, Byears talks about her rough reputation, other (alleged) lesbians in the WNBA, and a softer side of the woman her fans might be surprised to know exists.

Nancy Ford: When I found out you were in Turkey, I don't know why I was so surprised, but that just doesn't seem like a place that would welcome women's basketball.

Latasha Byears: Mmm-hmm. Women's basketball is actually big here in Turkey. I'm playing for Samsun Sports, right here on the Black Sea. I've been playing in Turkey now for the last six or seven years.

What's it like waking up every morning as an American in Turkey?

You know, to me, it's not as interesting anymore, because now I'm somewhat used to it. I know I'm in a foreign country, but I don't look at it in that way. Growing up, I never thought I'd be able to see the countries that I've been able to see, coming where I come from.

Amazing. Can you be out of the closet there?

Yes. As a matter of fact I'm sitting with my baby right now.

This is going to be your second season in Houston. Do you see much difference playing for the Comets than playing for the Sparks or the Monarchs?

Umm, yes, it's different. There are different styles, you know. The team we had with the Sparks was just an incredible team. In Sacramento, we were just starting out. It →

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When the Toyota Center opened in 2003 to accommodate the overflowing fans of the Houston Rockets, the Comets (in those years owned by the Rockets organization) naturally packed up and followed the men.

Unfortunately, much of the Comets' lesbian fan base didn't. Citing reasons such as a distaste for downtown, increased parking and concession fees, and a sense

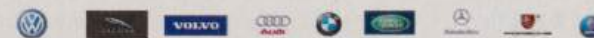


of disconnectedness from other fans in the massive arena, many women stayed away. Attendance fell with the team's number of wins. Barely 6,000 viewed one game during the 2007 season, according to WomensBasketballOnline.com.

When the Houston Comets return to the boards on May 27 to face the Minnesota Lynx for the first home game of the season, they will be welcomed by approximately the same number of fans that used to be dwarfed by the massive Toyota Center, which requires 20,000 butts to fill. Team owner and furniture purveyor Hilton Koch, who bought the Comets in January 2007, announced last

December that he would move the team to the 24,000-ish-square-foot Reliant Arena, a far cozier venue that seats a maximum of 8,500 people.

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was the beginning of the league. It was just like a growing thing in Sacramento.

Right, right. Well, obviously, there are big changes in Houston this year, going from the Toyota Center to Reliant Arena. A lot of

At the end of the day, you have to sit back and look at the people who are coming to our games. It's not just people with their "friends." It's gays and lesbians that are in the stands. Once the league starts to recognize that, I think the league will be better off.

the women I've talked to are happy about the change in venue because they think it's going to enhance the socialization and the party spirit among the fans. What do you think?

I think it's great, too. Smaller venue, right? I feel like the fans could feel like they're closer with a smaller venue, as opposed to the Toyota Center, because it's so big. You know, the fan support has been down, so

maybe this is a chance to pick up the fan support again.

I see it as a very positive situation. And of course, Swoopes is gone. What do you suppose is going to be the Comets' biggest challenge with her taking off to Seattle? Well, Sheryl is a legend. Everyone knows

It was somewhat of a surprise. Sheryl has been a Houston player forever. You say "Houston Comets" and you think "Sheryl Swoopes."

When Swoopes came out in 2005, she had already signed a deal, or was about to, with Olivia Cruises for lesbians. Do you have any similar endorsements or deals?

[Snickers] Nawww. When I started, there were no deals like that. It's funny. You know, I've been like this [a lesbian] my whole life. This is the lifestyle that I live. I don't know any other way to live or whatever, or be in the closet and all of this stuff. That's never been my situation. My situation is like being too real, and being open-like. Basically, [I've always had an] I-don't-give-a-f**k-type attitude.

The people who know me understand me. For the people on the outside looking in, sometimes they don't understand. They just go off on stories that they've heard about me.

I never once cried about the WNBA marketing me, or anything like that. I just make it happen elsewhere, you know what I mean? Olivia Cruises? If they were to endorse me, man, you know that whole ship would be rockin'! [Laughs] →

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Well, I'll tell you what—I'd buy a ticket!
[Laughs] That's what I'm saying! You know, if they were to endorse me, I guarantee you they wouldn't have an empty seat on that ship.

I've got a feeling you're right. So you've always been out of the closet, as long as you can remember?
Mmm-hmm.

Amazing. What was that like, growing up?
It was an easy transition for me, because my aunt has been gay her whole life, also. So I looked up to her a lot. And I really never cared, really. I mean, it was just natural.

Well, you've got so much visibility in the WNBA. It's a lot of responsibility.
It's a lot of responsibility, but at the end of the day, you have to sit back and look at the people who are coming to our games. It's not just people with their "friends." It's gays and lesbians that are in the stands. Once the league starts to recognize that, I think the league will be better off.
I just wish every lesbian in the WNBA—I just wish everybody—would come out. It would be better. Don't be afraid for your job.

I mean, hey, this is you! I can't tell everyone when to come out and when not to come out. But I know it would make them feel better.

Right, right. Give me a ballpark figure: What do you think is the percentage of lesbians in the WNBA?

Oh, wow. You know what? I can't give you an accurate percentage, but I know that percentage is pretty high.

That's my feeling too. Well, just take a look at the players! The gaydar screams!

Well, I really appreciate your integrity coming forth with this information and how you feel about being a lesbian. It's a big deal.

I'm proud to be one, really, to tell you the truth, because in my eyes it's one of the most difficult lifestyles to live. People are always judging you, and over the years you just grow a thick skin, you know?

What would you say to the young people, the young kids about coming out? There seems to be a big audience, a big fan base, not just with the lesbians but also with the young kids.

Well, what I would say to the young kids is, I think you have to sit down with your parents. I understand it is not easy to come

out of the closet when you're young. I guess my childhood was just different. My mom just showed me that love, and didn't have discrepancies about, "Well, you can't do this and you can't wear your hair a certain length and you can't dress this way." I didn't have any of that.

So I just respect that from my childhood, and I would just say it depends on your family. That's why a lot of the girls haven't come out—because of their family, their job, and what people say about them.

But Latasha? I never had that problem. My only problem is just dealing with the critics and the naysayers and the people who hate. But the people who hate are just the people who are ignorant. There are people who are doing the same thing I'm doing, but they're in the closet. So that's why I sit back and I laugh.

It's really hard to understand, isn't it? It's almost like deceit is encouraged.

Mmm-hmm. Well, you know, I've been an underdog my whole life, so this is not new to me. And I never quit. I never give up. I don't believe in that.

So you'll get back to Houston when training starts. What do you do to relax when you're here?

When I'm in Houston? Oh, I've matured a lot. I'm not really into partying or clubs or stuff like that anymore. I just chill with friends. My baby came last summer, so we just spent a lot of time together.

Per your interview in 2003 with USAToday, do you still have plans to eventually open a restaurant or nightclub?

Yes, and I started my own entertainment company, Can't Stop a Diamond from Shining Entertainment, and I have a DVD coming out of my life story. It's very inspirational for kids growing up who have been through something. We're looking for it to drop this summer sometime. I'm producing it along with my [business] partner, Mike Marangu [Snoop Dogg—Puff Puff Pass Tour]. No one in the WNBA has ever put out anything like this.

And I just want to say—and you can put this in the magazine—to all of these Internet bloggers who have nothing else to do with their time but chop up Latasha Byears: tell 'em thank you. I just want to thank them for all of the press. [Laughs] Just keep it up. Tell 'em to keep up the good work, because I know they have nothing else to do with their time but just sit around at home on the computer all day.

Well, like the old saying goes, there's no such thing as bad publicity. If you have your name out there, it's a chance to impact people. What would you most like Houston fans or any fans to know about Latasha Byears?

That I have a big heart. I have the Latasha Byears Foundation, which gives kids a chance to go to basketball camps. We give away shoes, we give away turkeys at Thanksgiving. A lot of people don't know these things—that's why I'm talking to you to get this message out. People will see, when this DVD drops, the real side of Latasha Byears.

There's nothing I wouldn't do for my teammates or anybody. That's just how I was raised. Besides all the tattoos and all of that, I'm a great person, and sometimes my playing on the court doesn't show that. But, you know, it's a business. It's all entertainment. And that's what I do. I entertain.

And tell Olivia if they want a real entrepreneur, tell 'em to call Latasha Byears. [Laughs] Tell 'em I got some great ideas!

Nancy Ford interviewed Judy Shepard for OutSmart's April issue.

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James Kudelka

Through his work, the gay choreographer of a ballet that premieres this month considers questions that may surprise dance aficionados

by Marene Gustin

Photo by Amitava Sarkar/Houston Ballet

Even as a dancer I was never really athletic. I grew up on a farm, and I went away to ballet school at 10 to get out of having to join a baseball team," says Canadian choreographer James Kudelka with a laugh. "That whole hockey thing on the Canadian five-dollar bill just doesn't turn my crank."

The ballet world should be grateful to baseball for that.

After graduating from the National Ballet School in 1972, Kudelka joined the National Ballet of Canada as a dancer. He soon began choreographing his own dances. In 1981 Kudelka switched to Les Grand Ballets Canadiens in Montreal as a principal dancer and became the resident choreographer of that company in 1984. He returned to the National in 1992 as artist in residence and was chosen as artistic director in 1996. He stayed with the National until 2005, the same year he received the Order of Canada, that nation's highest civilian honor. These

days, the 52-year-old artist spends most of his time with his partner, Jim Wies, in an Ontario hamlet of 600 called Vittoria with their two dogs and three cats. Next month, the couple will open a bread company, where Kudelka—a graduate of the bread-baking course at the French Culinary Institute in New York, as well as one of the preeminent ballet choreographers today—plans to spend his days. "You really feel like you are doing something useful if you can make a good croissant," he says.

Luckily for ballet-goers, Kudelka will still spend the winter months, when the snows are high, doing something else really useful: choreographing one or two new dances a season. This year Kudelka created *The Ruins Proclaim the Building Was Beautiful* for the San Francisco Ballet and is now polishing his *Little Dancer* for Houston Ballet. The world premiere of the latter work will take place on May 22 during a repertory evening titled *Three Classics, Five Tangos*.

"It's in three sections set to Philip Glass's Eighth Symphony," Kudelka says of his new work. "I was attracted to it because it gets slower and slower as it goes on. It has a lot of rhythm and harmonic changes."

Kudelka has amassed a body of work of more than 70 ballets in a variety of styles. He has tackled everything from full-length classics (such as a new *Nutcracker* and a controversial updating of *Swan Lake*, which introduced gender politics to the warhorse) to intimate

solos and contemporary short works. The first work he choreographed was a solo for a ballerina at the National, and he says he once always viewed himself through the female dancers. "But now I find I can relate to groups of men," he says. "Women en pointe, the ethereal muse, is not as interesting to me anymore."

Kudelka's new work for Houston Ballet begins with a 20-minute ensemble for 12 men. "I find the dynamics of how men work together is very interesting," he says. "Are men the new women? Are women the new men? I always try to look at ideas. Ballet isn't just a form of entertainment that costs more

than a movie. It's a powerful thing, particularly with the men. I didn't have a lot of friends growing up. So I'm fascinated by how men work together and bond. It's what they do in the army. Those men have such camaraderie, such a need for each other—even heterosexual men who would rather hang around with their buddies than be with their women. This just fascinates me."

Marene Gustin, who writes about the arts and dining, reported on new restaurants for the April OutSmart.

AT THE BALLET

Houston Ballet presents *Three Classics, Five Tangos* at the Wortham Theater Center May 22, 24, 30, and 31 at 7:30 p.m. and May 25 and June 1 at 2 p.m. For tickets (\$34–\$120): 713/227-2787, 800.828.2787, or www.houstonballet.org. • In addition to the world premiere of James Kudelka's *Little Dancer*, the evening includes the Houston premiere of *Falling*, a work created by Houston Ballet artistic director Stanton Welch ("Dancing King," February 2003 OutSmart).



In training: James Kudelka (center) rehearses members of the Houston Ballet company in preparation for the world premiere this month of his new work, *Little Dancer*, at Wortham Center.

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OutSmart at Home

by Tim Brookover

LOOK AND LISTEN

From innovative doors to high-tech toys to local art, these ideas can make home a better place to see and hear

IT'S AUTOMATIC

Want to upgrade your home but not quite ready for a 100-inch TV set? Will Breux of Audio Video Designs offers other ideas:

- "Flat panel plasmas and LCDs continue to improve, get slimmer, and get larger. The newest generation can be only 1.5 inches thick." New sets from Hitachi (like the model, right) in store this spring range from 32 (\$1,999.95) to 47 inches (price not announced at press time).

- "Home automation continues to be a growing trend. Even the lower-priced systems have added features comparable to much more expensive systems, bringing the price to a much more attainable level.
- "Lighting control is another area that is growing. Newer systems can be added to any house without changing or adding any additional wiring. This allows huge flexibility to anyone with a home for a relatively small amount. Tie that in with an automation system, and everything can run seamlessly and conveniently. Both home automation and lighting control have the potential to pay for themselves in energy savings."
- "Distributed audio is quickly changing from a luxury to a standard in many new homes. Newer, less expensive, and more energy-efficient systems give you the ability to dock an iPod and control it from any room of the house. Listen to satellite radio in one room and scan your computer's



BIG PICTURE

"Projection technology is one trend that continues to amaze people," says Will Breux, one of the owners of Audio Video Designs. "Projectors have been good for a few years now, but with the prices continuing to become more affordable and the quality continuing to improve, many people are using projectors in places that would have been previously reserved for smaller TVs. Outside of a media room, projectors are showing up in living rooms because new screen technology allows projectors to be used in rooms with more ambient light. Rear-projection setups are also being used in more unconventional ways. Many people are spending a great deal of time outside around the pool or barbecue. Why not put a 100-inch rear-projection system in the back yard to give you the best backyard TV any of your friends have ever seen?"

Who not indeed? The system pictured is by Stewart's Starglass. Other brands are Vutec and Stewart Filmscreens. Breux advises, "If you are thinking that is a bit over the top, consider that a 100-inch television system like this can start under \$5K installed."

Audio Video Designs, 7300 Southwest Frwy, 713/776-8444, www.avdesignshouston.com.

A GLASS ACT

Sliding-glass room dividers from SpaceMan Home & Office offer an elegant solution for homeowners who want to wall off an area but maintain a sense of light and openness (or renters for whom a construction project isn't an option). The glass-in-aluminum-frame doors can be custom made to order, but SpaceMan stocks doors—manufactured by Houston-based Sliding Glass Door Company—in various standard widths, says owner and president David Linda. Doors range from \$500 to \$800 each, depending on the size and type of glass (plus installation costs). The four doors for the 12-foot span pictured would cost about \$3,500, a sum that includes installation. "If you were to actually frame, Sheetrock, and paint, it's really not that different," Linda says of the cost comparison. "So you've got a completely dif-



music for your favorite song in another. All of this can happen on a small screen that fits in the space of a standard light switch." The Essentia system by Nuvo (above) is one brand. "This system is also the only system of its kind to be EnergyStar certified for energy efficiency," Breux says.

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OutSmart at Home

continued from page 74

ferent look and a different style. Besides, we're in and out in about half a day with no mess."

In addition to the frosted glass pictured, other types of glass are available, including clear, mirrored, and milky. Clients appreciate the convenience and the ease of operation of the glass doors, Linda reports. "You literally flick it with your finger and they go flying across."

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ARTFULLY SPEAKING

Art is not as high tech as a 100-inch television set, but it can spruce up a home. The trend of collecting art is stronger than ever, observes Karen Derr, owner of Karen Derr & Associates Realty (713/862-1600, www.karenderr.com)—"even if you don't know much about art, have much money, or care if it ever appreciates," she says. "You may not think it is all good, but you have to admit this proliferation of artists working breeds an atmosphere of innovation and inspiration that Houston is perfect for."

Local talents include the two openly gay artists, Nicholas Kersulis and Gabriela Trzebinski, whose work was selected for the prestigious Houston Area Exhibition at Blaffer Gallery, the art gallery at the University of Houston (713/743-9530, www.blaffergallery.org). The annual juried show opens on May 9 and remains on view through August 2. Trzebinski is represented by her painting, *Big Foot* (above). ■



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Roseanne Barr

(Out, 5/08)

On what every homo should know about his hetero gal pals:
“Are you sure you want the right to marry? Haven’t you suffered enough?”

“Judy’s dead. Get over it.”

George Michael

(Entertainment Weekly, 4/4/08, Adam Markovitz)

Adam Markovitz: What made you want to write a memoir?

George Michael: I’ve done too many stupid things for there not to be movies made about me when I’m dead, so I might as well write the script.

Alan Cumming

(Out, 5/08)

Out: What do you hide when your parents come over?

Alan Cumming: I think everyone’s happier when parents stay in hotels.

Kylie Minogue

(Entertainment Weekly, 3/28/08, Shirley Halperin)

Shirley Halperin: Conquering America still isn’t a priority for you—but what about your huge gay following here?

Kylie Minogue: Can I just apologize to them? They’re always saying, “Will you please come back?” with that pleading look. As soon as I can, I will. It might not be a huge tour, but I’m trying. . . . I’m also working on a film musical, just getting the story line done. That’s a tall mountain to climb.

Bill O'Reilly

(The O'Reilly Factor, 4/3/08, Fox)

Re: Transgender man’s (Thomas Beatie) pregnancy.

Bill O'Reilly: Jane, what do you think?

Jane Hall (Fox News contributor): Well, you know, I think it is something of an oddity; I suppose Oprah’s women audience would love to know what a man being pregnant actually feels like, thinks like. I don’t consider it as bad as all the interviews with pimps that we saw after the Eliot Spitzer scandal. I mean, the man hasn’t done anything immoral. He’s done something very odd, and that’s what they’re cashing in on. . . .

O'Reilly: Do you want a 13-year-old watching this kind of stuff, and you’ve got to explain all this crazy stuff?

Hall: I’m more bothered by stuff that looks pretty darn pornographic. This looks like a medical oddity. I would say it’s not as bad as some other stuff.

O'Reilly: All right. So neither of you [Jane Hall and Bernard Goldberg] are upset about this.

Bernard Goldberg (Fox News contributor): Well, I don’t think it’s good. I think it’s one more example of how crummy television can be, and frankly, more than television, the whole culture. She’s born a woman, she becomes a guy, but she still has ovaries and a womb. She marries some guy and she has a baby. . . .

O'Reilly: She married a girl. . . . It’s hard to keep track, Bernie. It is. You imagine a poor kid getting born into that family going, “Hey, whoa. Who are you today?”

Goldberg: That’s the real tragedy.

Luke MacFarlane

(TVGuide.com, 4/16/08, Matt Webb Mitovich)

Re: his coming out, in Canada’s Globe and Mail.

I don’t know what will happen professionally—that is the fear, but I guess I can’t really be concerned about what will happen, because it’s my truth. . . . There is this desire in L.A. to wonder who you are, and what’s been blaring for me for the last three years is how can I be most authentic to myself. So this is the first time I am speaking about it in this way. . . .

From a standing-outside perspective, and also as someone who is gay, I think that it’s a very exciting time [SPOILER ALERT: the characters played by MacFarlane (Scotty) and Matthew Rhys (Kevin) are getting married]. How exciting that we’re saying, “This can be part of the cultural fabric, now,” because it is two series regulars, two people that you invite into your home and you see every week. It’s telling of the beginning of more waves, and I’m very proud of that.



Luke MacFarlane (r), pictured here with Matthew Rhys in ABC’s *Brothers & Sisters*: Would you invite him into your home every week?

Doris Day

(Doris Day: The Untold Story of the Girl Next Door by David Kaufman, via Vanity Fair, 5/08)

Over dinner one evening, [Doris] Day divulged to Paul Brogan, a childhood fan of hers who had become a friend and confidant, at least one reason she continued to see [her ex-husband, Barry] Comden after they had supposedly broken up. Having met a number of Brogan’s potential boyfriends, Day was discussing his problems maintaining a relationship and asked him what he looked for in a man. After Brogan’s litany of positive qualities, Day, sipping her third Dewar’s on the rocks, said, “Don’t you also think he should be well hung? You know, Barry was, and it made up for a lot of other deficiencies.”

Doris Day, seen here in the 1964 comedy *Send Me No Flowers*: What did she talk about when she was hanging out with her close gay friend?



Nathan Lane

(The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, 4/7/08, Comedy Central)

Jon Stewart: Did you see the Oprah show with the fella . . .

Nathan Lane: The pregnant man?

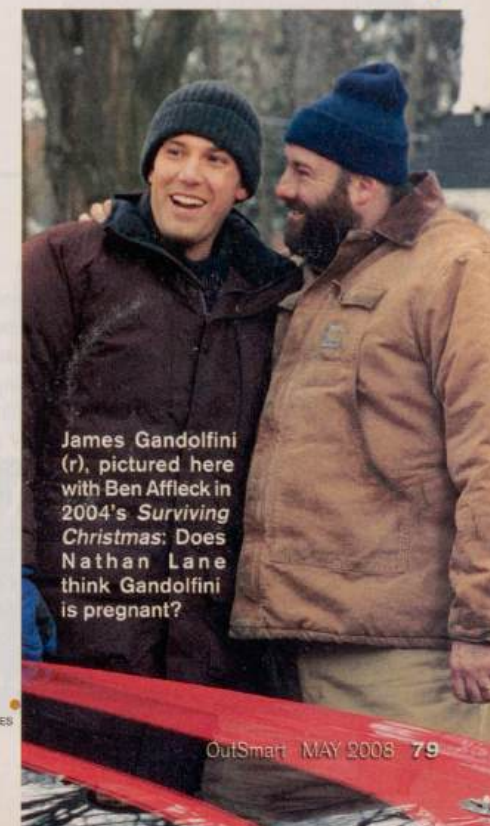
Yes.

I was mistaken for the pregnant man backstage. [Faces the audience:] I gotta get back to the gym, ladies and gentleman.

No, that was so disappointing, because he’s a transsexual. It’s not like James Gandolfini woke up with morning sickness and said, “I declare, I’m having twins.”



Compiled by Blase DiStefano



James Gandolfini (r), pictured here with Ben Affleck in 2004’s *Surviving Christmas*: Does Nathan Lane think Gandolfini is pregnant?

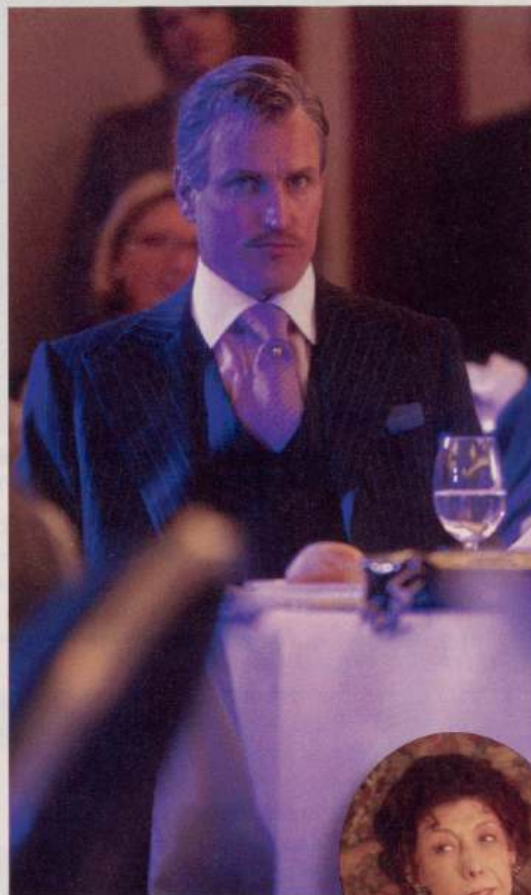
WALKING THE LINE

Scandal can be so delicious, until it's served on your plate. 'The Walker' comes to DVD

With a fantastic supporting cast (Lauren Bacall, *OutSmart* cover girl Lily Tomlin, Kristin Scott Thomas, Willem Dafoe, and more), Woody Harrelson takes the lead role as Carter Page III, a Tennessee Williams-styled Southern homosexual living in the shadow of his father, a man who played a significant role in uncovering the Watergate scandal. A Washington, DC, socialite, Page's only foray into politics is his role as confidant, card partner, and platonic escort to the wives of some of the most powerful men in the country.

He leads a fastidious life, everything in its place, whether it's his expensive toupee or the people in his life. He keeps his relationship with his lover to himself, though he is open about his sexuality, to the amusement of his jet-setting canasta partners. He puts off finding a gallery for his lover, a fine-art photographer who makes his living as a paparazzo.

When Page drops his close friend (Scott Thomas) off for a rendezvous, the friend finds her lover murdered. Protecting her from scandal, Page comes to her aid. Instantly, he becomes the chief suspect in a very serious criminal investigation. Frustrated, he chides his boyfriend for being part of a system that could easily discredit him forever. Even



Walk like a man: Woody Harrelson as Carter Page III is the gay escort of characters played by Lauren Bacall, Kristen Scott Thomas, and Lily Tomlin (inset) in *The Walker*.



though his many connections begin to deteriorate in no time at all, Page maintains his cool, spouting off clever Southern-sounding witticisms throughout. He, with his partner's help, must take it upon himself to clear his own name, and save himself from the humiliating transition of socialite to outcast.

Ironically, his paparazzo papi's very trade helps to save the day. As the real murderer flees the two, the boyfriend, with a small digital camera, snaps shots of him as they chase after him. The flash is enough to blind him, preventing him from seeing a car just before it collides with him. Oh, paparazzi, we hate that we love you.

Harrelson plays a flamboyant homosexual without the expected flamboyant affectations. Moreover, he shows us a strong individual who astutely conceals his vulnerabilities. There are few moments when his weakness surfaces, but when they do, we see someone as human and afraid as the rest of us. Tomlin does a fantastic job as a friend who seems unconditional at first, but merely fair-weathered and, in the end, just as political with her relationships as the city in which the film is set.

2007. Written and directed by Paul Schrader.

From THINKFilm (www.ThinkFilmCompany.com).

DVD/VHS Shorts

Forgiving the Franklins



What happens when a born-again Christian family has a collective near-death experience and meets Jesus who then strips away the trappings of original sin? They awake to find themselves staring as innocently at the world as Adam and Eve. But their jaded moral-majority neighbors are not ready for purity and innocence free of the confines of right-wing dogma. And when the son (of legal age) explores homosexuality with his gym coach, coach is not prepared for the boy to be so open about their relationship. The suburbs will not allow a return to the Garden of Eden. • 2006. Written, directed, and shot by Jay Floyd. • From Indie-Pictures (www.indie-pictures.com). —Preview: Eric A.T. Dieckman

Spider Lilies



wolfevideo.com). —Preview: Nancy Ford

Boys Love



Conservatives find love through unexpected romances with reckless free spirits, regardless of language or culture. In this case, young magazine editor Akira (uptight) interviews teen model Kisaragi (wild). The interview begins at Kisaragi's home where Akira is taken by

Kisa's paintings. The interview continues over dinner, then moves steamily to a bathroom stall. But the demands of Akira's career and jealousy from Kisa's compatriots put their passion to the test. • 2006. Co-written and directed by Kohtaru Terauchi. Japanese with English subtitles. • From Picture This! Home Entertainment (www.picturethisent.com). —Preview: E.D.

Sonja



What's cuter than a young brunette girl dancing around in her underwear? A young brunette girl dancing around in her underwear who speaks German in a soft voice. In this award-winning coming-of-age story, 16-year-old Sonja finds a friend and confidant in the scooter-riding Julia. The more their friendship grows, the more they realize their mutual love is more than platonic. And they →



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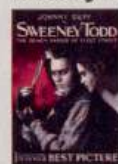


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DVD/VHS Shorts

continued from page 80
dance in a locker room in their skivvies, too. • 2006. Written and directed by Kirsu Marie Liimatainen. German with English subtitles. • From Picture This! Home Entertainment (www.picturethisent.com). —Review: E.D.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street



Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award-winning musical becomes bloody resplendent under the guiding hands of Tim Burton, Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Sacha Baron Cohen, and more. (Well, it's resplendent, and bloody, very bloody.) If you've ever wondered if Depp can sing, he can, and quite well. His duet with Carter is both hilarious and touching. • 2007. Directed by Tim Burton. • From Paramount Home Entertainment (www.paramount.com). —Review: E.D.

A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila



MTV made the first reality dating show wherein lesbians compete (alongside straight men) for the love of a bisexual woman, cyber-sexpot Tila Tequila. Unfortunately, reality shows are not known for making anyone look good. The lesbians exhibit themselves as pernicious man-haters, and Tequila comes off as more dilettantish and fashionably bi than legitimately gay. The show also makes VH1's *The Flavor of Love* look like PBS' *Masterpiece Theater*. • From Paramount Home Entertainment (www.paramount.com). —Review: E.D.

Last Request



Despite a promising cast (Danny Aiello, openly gay Mario Cantone, Mary Birdsong of *Reno 911*, Frank Vincent, and Vincent Pastore, both of *The Sopranos*), this screwball comedy is just plain terrible. Pop (Aiello) is on his deathbed. His dying request: a grandchild on the way before he croaks. Son Jeff bungles his plans to find wife and impregnate her in time. • 2006. Written and directed by John DeBellis. • From MTI Home Video (www.mtvideo.com). —Review: E.D.

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Classic Musicals from the Dream Factory Vol. 3 and The Bette Davis Collection



The new *Classic Musicals from the Dream Factory Volume 3* mines the MGM vaults once again and comes up with an assortment of films that probably won't impress the casual (read: nonobsessed) movie viewer, but may induce something like nirvana in those of us who actually exist for, say, obscure Ann Sothern movies. Yes, Miss Sothern turns up in at least two of these not-quite-classics, 1941's *Lady Be Good* and 1950's *Nancy Goes to Rio*, while the nearly forgotten Eleanor Powell tap dances her way into our hearts and damn through the floor in three of them, namely 1936's *Born to Dance* and the *Broadway Melody* extravaganzas of 1936 and 1938, the latter featuring Judy Garland's legendary "Dear Mr. Gable." Other goodies include *Two Weeks with Love* (1950), *Deep in My Heart* (1954), and *Hit the Deck* (1955). Perhaps the real standout of this set is 1955's *Kismet*, with Howard Keel, Ann Blyth, Vic Damone, and Dolores Grey alternately shouting, screeching, and steam-rolling those lovely melodies of Alexander Borodin. . . .



Meanwhile, a new *Bette Davis Collection* showcases the iconic actress in her post-Warner Bros. period, with films ranging from 1950's classic *All About Eve* to 1965's not-quite-so-classic *The Nanny*. This is perhaps the third or fourth release of *All About Eve* on DVD, but the new two-disc special edition boasts extras that hardcore obsessives won't be able to live without. (Don't miss the featurette on the real Eve Herrington!) Other titles include 1955's *The Virgin Queen*, making its DVD debut here, plus *Phone Call From a Stranger* (1952) and *Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964). If you must know, there is also a *Bette Davis Collection Volume 3* that has just been released by another company and not sent to us for preview. Miss Davis, it appears, will always be with us. • *Classic Musicals from the Dream Factory* (www.warnerbros.com). • *Bette Davis* from Fox Home Entertainment (www.foxhome.com). —Reviews: Jack Varsi ■

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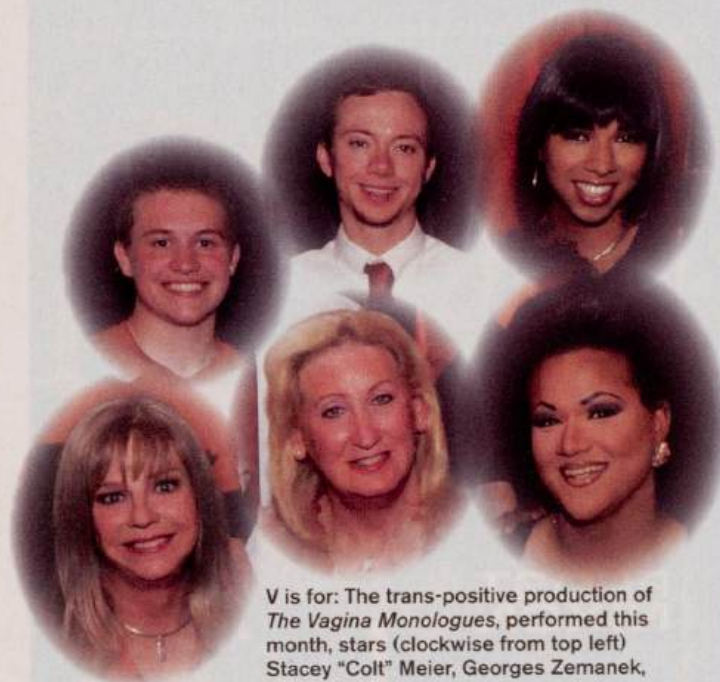
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Out in the Arts

by Tim Brookover

'VAGINA' GOES TRANS

A new production gives a different spin to 'The Vagina Monologues'



V is for: The trans-positive production of *The Vagina Monologues*, performed this month, stars (clockwise from top left) Stacey "Colt" Meier, Georges Zemanek, Rafael Aparicio, Jasmen Pierce, Julia Oliver, and Jenifer Pool.

Since it premiered in 1996, Eve Ensler's celebration of female sexuality, *The Vagina Monologues*, has been performed around the world. Her stage work has even spawned V-Day, a global action to stop violence against women and girls. Now an unusual production brings a different twist to the show—a trans-gressive cast of transgender women and men and one man that performs as a drag queen. (Audience test: you figure it out.)

The director is Joe Watts, whose Theatre New West company has played a pivotal role in history of culture in GLBT Houston. After mounting the first play dealing with AIDS (*One*) and many shows both comic (*Fruit Cocktail* and others) and somber (including a noteworthy production of *Bent* at Holocaust Museum Houston), Watts has tackled what may be his most innovative project.

"When I watched a documentary of a Los Angeles production that was presented with transgenders, I became passionate about producing a production in Houston," Watts says. "My intent is in no way to sensationalize the transgender community, but to give them a voice, one of better understanding, acceptance, clarity, and beauty."

The trans-positive production of *Vagina Monologues* will be performed on Fridays and Saturdays, May 9-31, 8 p.m., at the new home of the Montrose Counseling Center (401 Branard). Tickets are \$20. Reservations: 713/522-2204, theatrenewwest@att.com. A May 8 preview performance is a benefit for the center. Tickets for the benefit are \$35 (which includes two drink tickets).

THE DIVINE ST. A.

Tenor Kenneth Gayle ("In Tune With Houston," August 2005 *OutSmart*) performs the title role this month in the Houston premiere of *Fragments from St. Augustine the Saint*, a musical drama by Beverly Grigsby, a pioneer in electronic music. Rothko Chapel hosts the May 21 and 22 production. Former Houston Ballet star Lauren Anderson also performs. Details: www.rothko.org.

Augustine, an intellectual and something of a rake before he transformed into a highly quotable father of the early Christian church, may be popularly remembered for his prayerful plea, "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."

ON THE FRINGE

Gerald LaBita, founder of the innovative, always gay-positive Theater LaB Houston, has written to announce that he is coordinating theatrical events for the 2008 Houston Fringe Festival, organized by the FrenetiCore Performance Space in the East End. The festival will take place during the weekends of August 15 and August 30, followed by an event called "Anything Goes" on August 31.

FrenetiCore is seeking film, music, dance, and theater events for juried competition. For the theater component, LaBita is seeking 30-minute and 60-minute works. The deadline for submissions is May 15. Mail submissions to FrenetiCore, 2008 Houston Fringe Theater Festival, 5102 Navigation, Houston 77011.

THE REAL 'BILLY BUDD'

When most of us were schooled in *Billy Budd* during senior year, we probably were taught the short novel along the standard high school English themes: good versus evil, light versus dark, the Christ figure versus the satanic. Bollocks. Even a gayling novice reading *Billy Budd* can recognize that Herman Melville's stark, beautifully written tale drips with homoeroticism. After all, the all-male cast is packed with working-class blokes. The main character is a young, handsome sailor pressed into service. Though beloved by his fellow crewmates (who nickname him Baby Budd), the innocent Billy is confronted by a dark-hearted older officer with terrible consequences.

I know. That reads like your early visits to the Ripcord. More artistically speaking, the great gay composer Benjamin Britten transformed Melville's posthumously published story into one of the classics of modern opera. The closeted gay novelist E.M. Forster co-wrote the libretto, and the first production in 1951 featured Britten's long-time spouse, the tenor Peter Pears, as the officer who seals Billy's fate.

If you hurry, you can catch the Houston Grand Opera production of *Billy Budd*, which is on stage through May 9 and launches a multi-year celebration of Britten's work. Houston Grand Opera Studio alum Daniel Belcher sings the title role. Details: www.houstongrandopera.org.



All male: A tense moment from the Houston Grand Opera production of *Billy Budd*.

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by John Stiles

GIMME 'SHELTER'

This is not your father's same old coming-out, coming-of-age story

Good, low-budget films often seem effortless. They're not. Like the polished public speaker or the unkempt drop-dead gorgeous object of your desire, much work goes into slick or sexy. To pull off a finished product as compelling as *Shelter*, quite a lot of work is required.

Start with a story that is worth telling, generate a script that tells that story well, add actors that can convince you they are who they pretend, include a cinematographer who can capture the scene and the actors, and bring it all together in the editing room.

The story is about coming of age and coming out, and courtesy of Jonah Markowitz's script and direction, it broadens to touch universally accessible issues of family, parenting, and sacrifice.

Zach is torn between his art, his nephew, his long-time girlfriend and his best friend's older brother. Tina Holmes, a familiar face for fans of *Six Feet Under* and her 1998 debut *Edge of Seventeen*, keeps it real as Zach's single-mom older sister.

Trevor Wright as surfing, skate-board-ing, tag artist Zach and Brad Rowe as Shaun, the older brother of Zach's testosterone-fueled best friend, make for two characters about whom we care and care deeply. The story is deep, the script smart,



Let the sunshine in: Zach (Trevor Wright, left) and Shaun (Brad Rowe) take time to bask in *Shelter*. Others Rowe has basked with onscreen include Janeane Garofalo (*Nadine* in *Dateland*, 2005) and Sean Hayes (*Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss*, 1998). Watch for Rowe to act again with Garofalo, this time in *For Better or Worse*, an upcoming improvisational film about gay marriage.

the acting compelling, and the cinematography brilliant. The opening sequence of Zach skateboarding through San Pedro is beautiful.

Shelter is the all-too-rare film where each of the parts is polished to perfection and

the finished product shines like a diamond.

Shelter airs on here! TV (www.hereTV.com) throughout May, before landing on DVD on May 27.

John Stiles (www.johnwstiles.com) writes regularly for OutSmart magazine.



Katherine Moennig

What's next—'The M Word'?

Breast cancer. Transgender issues. Don't ask, don't tell. Little controversial territory was left untouched by *The L Word*'s femme friends since debuting on Showtime in 2004. Accordingly, its sixth season will be its last. "I am thrilled that Showtime has given us this final opportunity to conclude this journey we have all taken together," says *TLW* creator and executive producer, Ilene Chaiken. It may be even more thrilling to see if Bette and Tina settle in, if Shane settles down, and if Jenny just settles. The swan song season premieres in early 2009. Details: www.sho.com. —Nancy Ford

'John Waters: This Filthy World'

We all know about his favorite star eating dog poo, the chicken-snuffing story, and his other auteur atrocities. But did you know John Waters also filmed *The Diane Linkletter Story* a mere day after Art Linkletter's daughter (allegedly) committed LSD-induced suicide? Tune in to learn these dirty details and more about the King of Trash in this one-man show filmed live in New York. Airs May 8, 10 p.m., on Showtime (www.sho.com). —N.F. ■



John Waters

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CLEARLY OUT

Aussie singer/songwriter Missy Higgins releases her sophomore CD, 'On a Clear Night'

Missy Higgins is definitely on the rise. The 2005 debut disc, *The Sound of White*, earned the out lesbian singer/songwriter a devoted following. The exceptional follow-up, *On a Clear Night* (Reprise), has the potential to keep the momentum rolling in her favor. Songs such as "Where I Stood," "Steer," "Warm Whispers," and "Peachy" display both her versatility and her knack for writing memorable tunes. My interview with the in-demand Australian was pushed back a couple of times during the course of an afternoon, indicating that I wasn't the only journalist eager to speak with her. As Higgins said at the beginning of our interview, "It's really good that things are starting to pick up for me over here. I know that if people want interviews, it's obviously a good thing."

Higgins is currently performing on a U.S. tour, which will take her to Austin this fall. On September 5, she will perform at La Zona Rosa. More info: www.missyhiggins.com.

Gregg Shapiro: A couple of years have passed between the release of your debut album, *The Sound of White*, and *On a Clear Night*. How would you say that you have changed personally during that time, if at all?



Missy Higgins: "I've had people come up to me at shows and thank me for coming out and say that it was inspiring for them to see a role model be so comfortable with her sexuality."



Missy Higgins: I think that, as a person, I've definitely grown up, to say the least. [Laughs] When I wrote some of the songs for the first album, I started writing when I was 15, basically. I'm 24 now, so a lot of time has passed. The issues that I've touched on for this album come from, I'd have to say, a more mature and maybe self-assured place.

How would you say that you changed as a musician during that time?

I'm not sure how much I've changed as a musician. I've definitely been leaning much more toward the guitar these days than the piano, just because the guitar is a much more portable instrument than the piano. A lot of this album was written on the guitar, because I can take it into hotel rooms and on the tour bus and that kind of thing.

I'm glad that you mentioned that because you continue to play piano and guitar on *On a Clear Night*. Do you prefer one instrument over the other when you are writing songs?

In the beginning, I was essentially a piano player because I started playing piano when I was about six. I didn't pick up the guitar until I was 13 or 14. I was much stronger at piano than I was at guitar →

GrooveOut Shorts

George Michael
Twenty Five



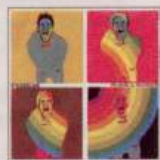
All warmed up after playing 80 shows in Europe, the tearoom darling brings his July 14 show to Houston's Toyota Center in support of this delightful hits retrospective. Contains six new selections, including a faboo re-do of Stevie Wonder's "As" with Mary J. Blige. Epic (www.epicrecords.com). Details: www.georgemichael.com. —Review: Nancy Ford

God-des and She
Stand Up



The Advocate predicted this lesbian duo would someday be crowned superstars of homo hip-hop; their sophomore album definitely propels them a step closer to the coronation. Includes "Lick It," which brought them instant recognition a couple of seasons ago on *The L Word*. Gentry Music Group (www.gentrymusicgroup.com). Details: www.god-des.com. —Preview: N.F.

Ferras
Aliens and Rainbows



You've probably heard this gay-ish young hunk's poppy, plaintive "Hollywood Is Not America," the theme song for *American Idol* losers. With tunes like "Liberation Day" and "Everybody Bleeds the Same," if he's not gay, he at least has a very gay soul. Virgin Records America (www.virginrecords.com). —Review: N.F.

Kylie Minogue
X



Divatronic! Using Madonna's *Confessions on a Dance Floor* and Britney's *Blackout* for inspiration, Kylie put together this sensational collection of fabulous beats. The Aussie vixen has not released anything since 2002, and with *X*, she makes up for lost time. Kylie's sound may not be new, but she still puts the locomotion in the disco ball. EMI Group (www.emigroup.com). —Review: David Goldberg

Moby
Last Night



Dancey and playful, the electronica king's sixth studio album tries to recreate "a night out in New York, with all of the sex and the weirdness and the disorientation and the celebration and the compelling chaos," he says. It succeeds. Mute (www.mute.com). —Review: N.F.

The B-52s
Funplex



It may seem a bit amazing that those wiggly B-52s have been around for more than three decades, until you remind yourself that those crotchety Rolling Stones have been around since, well, before the invention of the wheel. However, with the newly released *Funplex*, their first studio album in sixteen years, the wiggly ones demonstrate that mentalities clever enough to have come up with "Rock Lobster" and "Private Idaho" in the first place are probably capable of dancing →

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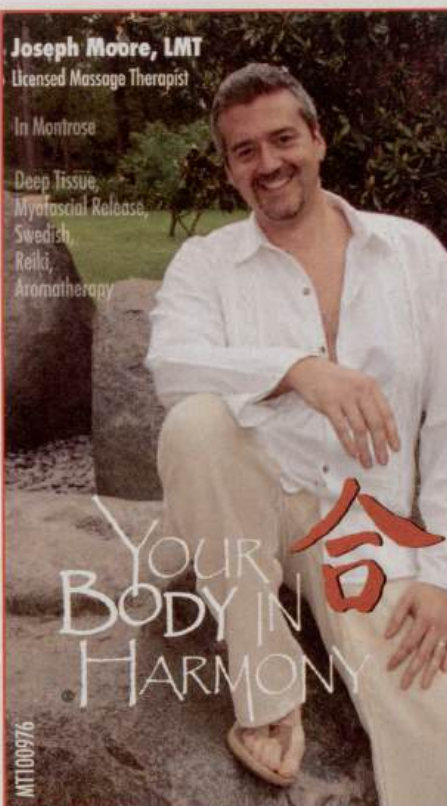
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GrooveOut continued from page 88

because I'd been playing it a lot longer. But then my lifestyle made it much easier to play guitar, so I went more toward that. I actually quit piano when I was 14 because I decided that it wasn't cool enough. My parents had wanted me to play it for so long and tried to make me practice, and it just felt a little bit forced and like it was a chore. Guitar was much cooler, and I was starting to get into the grunge bands like Nirvana and Hole and all that kind of stuff, so I got an electric guitar.

You've had an amazing amount of success in Australia. Are you able to walk down the street without being recognized, or is that a thing of the past?

I usually get recognized, but it's not a massive thing in Australia to be famous. It's definitely not like being a celebrity in America. It's much more small time, in other words. [Laughs] I don't get mobbed or anything. Nobody really cares.

What would it mean to you to be mobbed in the States?

That would mean that I'd either made some really bad choices and become famous without being successful or that I'd become really successful. Because, in the States, to be that famous and to be at the level where you're being mobbed on the streets means that you have to be selling an incredible amount of records, just because your country is so huge.

The songs on *On A Clear Night* retain the essence of what made *The Sound of White* so wonderful, prominently displaying your

GrooveOut Shorts

continued from page 88

their mess around for at least three more decades. The new music features more electronica and a sexier vibe, but is instantly recognizable as quintessential B-52s. Tunes like "Pump," "Love in the Year 3000," "Deviant Ingredient," and "Keep This Party Going," may shatter the walls of your, uh, love shack. Astralwerks (www.astralwerks.com). —Review: Jack Varsi

**Willie Nelson
One Hell of a Ride**



Starting in Galveston, get in the car, and head up I-45N. Don't stop driving across Texas until you've listened to all 100 tracks of this four-disc collection spanning the Red-Headed Stranger's incomparable and genre-defining musical career. Sadly though, Willie's "He Was a Friend of Mine" from *Brokeback Mountain* is curiously absent. Columbia/Legacy (www.legacyrecordings.com). —Preview: N.F.

distinctive singing and songwriting and musicianship. But there are some noticeable differences, including the presence of producer/musician Mitchell Froom and Neil Finn of Split Enz and Crowded House fame. **How did you come to work with both of them?**

I'd done a support tour of The Finn Brothers in Australia, and I'd met Neil Finn a couple of times. That's how I knew him, and obviously I was a huge fan. So I knew of him before I'd actually met him.

Mitchell Froom—when I was looking around for producers, I had been listening to a lot of albums. The ones that stood out were the ones that Mitchell had produced. I met up with him in L.A., and with a few other people. With Mitchell, I just got along with him really well, and we seemed to have a lot of the same ideas as to what the album should sound like. He put forward his ideas, and I put forward mine, and they were definitely along the same lines that the album should just be very simply recorded. And the musicians that he wanted to work with—one of them was Matt Chamberlain on the drums, who I was a big fan of. And I thought, wow! [Laughs] I hadn't heard of any of the other musicians, but I thought, if he wants to work with Matt Chamberlain, then I will trust every single other decision he makes in the musician department.

Wise decision. The song "100 Round the Bends" opens with the line "I follow complications like a bloodhound." Is that just a great opening line or a spot-on description of who you are?

It definitely doesn't sum up who I am, but I've been known to go through phases of chasing the hard route instead of going the

**Lizz Wright
The Orchard**



Dyke blues great, Toshi Reagon, co-penned a full half of the dozen songs for Wright's third R&B offering, including the smoldering "Coming Home." Killer covers follow, peaking with Led Zeppelin's "Thank You" and Patsy Cline's "Strange." Verve Music Group (www.verveforecast.com). —Review: N.F.

**Anna Stafford
Staring at the Sky**



Here we have the second album from the rock/classical violinist who backed Kanye West's electrifying performance at this year's Grammy Awards. Her blend of classical instrumental style with the driving intensity of rock delivers the best of both worlds, particularly on the title cut and Fall Out Boys' "Dance, Dance." San Gabriel Music (www.annastafford.com). —Review: N.F.

easy way. I guess, essentially, that I'm an artist at heart. So I enjoy a bit of a struggle. And when I'm down, I tend to kind of roll around in it rather than try to claw my way out. And my favorite thing to do is explore the darkest parts of my mind and go in there and embrace it and see where it can take me. Lots of time it can take me to the guitar or my piano, and that gives me literally an instrument to let go of something that's been troubling me.

Speaking of piano, the song "Secret" made me think of Fiona Apple, who is also known for her piano playing. Is she someone that you would consider to be an influence on your work?

Yeah, she definitely is an influence on me. When I was writing for my first album, I had a lot of people say to me that I sounded a bit like Fiona Apple, but I'd never heard of her at the time. Because so many people said that I sounded like her, I thought, I'm gonna check this girl out, because maybe we're quite similar and maybe she could be an influence on me. [Laughs] I listened to her music, and I just loved it. Sarah McLachlan was another big influence on me when I was starting out.

It's been a few months since you did your coming-out interview, and I was wondering how you would describe the reception you've gotten since that time.

I didn't really consider it so much a coming-out issue. I guess I was just being honest with how I felt about my sexuality and how I didn't necessarily define myself as anything. But then I guess everyone took it as a coming-out issue, so I thought, OK. [Laughs] I guess it was then, sure. I just wrote a statement →

**Estelle
Shine**



Kanye West, Swizz Beatz, Wyclef Jean, Will.i.am, Marc Ronson, and Cee-Lo contribute to Shine's unique blend of hip-hop, pop, reggae, and soul on her second album. Produced by John Legend. Atlantic Records (www.atlanticrecords.com). —Preview: N.F.

**Heloise & The Savoir Faire
Trash, Rats and Microphones**



Blondie mama, Debbie Harry, likes Heloise et al. so much that she consented to guesting on "Canadian Chans" and the chaotic "Downtown," possibly providing this CD's finest moments. Yep Roc Records (www.yeproc.com). —Review: N.F.

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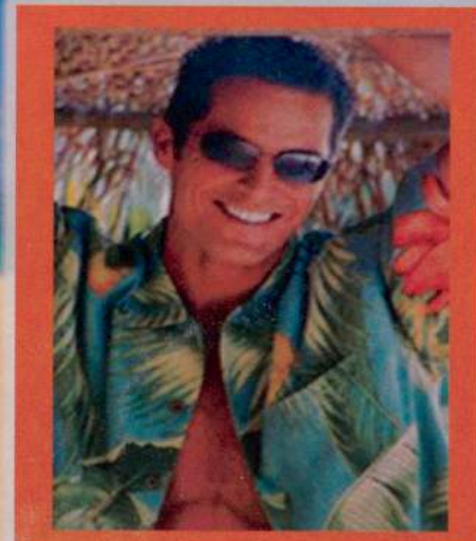
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GrooveOut continued from previous page

on my website clarifying for those who were a bit confused by it all, because my sexuality is not really a big deal to me. I'm very comfortable with it, and I'm very open about it with everyone around me—my family and my friends. The reception I've gotten since has been great! I've had people come up to me at shows and thank me for coming out and say that it was inspiring for them to see a role model be so comfortable with [her] sexuality and the idea that it's not really that big a deal. I've been really happy with it, and I haven't had any negative feedback. And, if I did, I wouldn't take any notice of it anyway.

That's great. Have you been invited to play any gay Pride festivals?

I've been invited to play on the Olivia Cruises, actually. I think that might be happening, but it's not locked in yet, so I won't promise anything. But I think that would be a lot of fun. I don't really know what to expect. I've never been on a cruise before. But some great musicians have played on it.

Gregg Shapiro is a past recipient of the annual OutMusic award that recognizes contributions by non-musicians in furthering the work of GLBT performers.

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GONE MISSING

'Mysterious Skin' author Scott Heim follows up with a new novel, 'We Disappear'

We Disappear is the apropos title for Scott Heim's new novel, the first book from the openly gay author in 11 years. Best known for his 1995 debut novel, *Mysterious Skin*—adapted into the acclaimed, daring 2005 film by director Gregg Araki—Heim's latest fiction tome follows his sophomore effort, *In Awe*, published in 1997.

The tale of Scott, a drug-addicted New York writer whose cancer-stricken mother, Donna, becomes obsessed with missing children, *We Disappear* (HarperCollins) is a fine return to form and pet themes—of buried and obscured memories, of lost youth, of self-destructive behavior—for the Kansas-raised, Boston-based Heim (www.heim.etherweave.com). By phone, we discussed his disappearance, the book's blurring of fact and fiction, and online predators.

Lawrence Ferber: Why has this book been such a long time coming?

Scott Heim: Well, where to start? I think after my second book came out, I got disillusioned with publishing in general. A lot of my friends were losing their book contracts. Publishing changed a lot, and it didn't seem they were invested in their authors as much if you weren't making them a zillion dollars.

I started writing *We Disappear*, although it existed in a different form. I went to London and did this teaching gig, and when back, I started freelance work [for school



Author Scott Heim: "My mom died similar to the way it happens in the book. When I went home to Kansas to take care of her, I knew she didn't have long to live. There was a lot about her life I still wanted to know more about, so creating all this fiction about her childhood and life was my substitute for the time I thought we were going to have before she died."

textbooks]. I went through serious depression problems and doing drugs, but certainly not as much as the character [of Scott] in the book. The thing about having a drug problem is you think it's going to make you creative or more exciting, and it doesn't. And if you're depressed already, it only fuels that depression. My boyfriend and I started having problems. My mom was dying. Finally in 2002 or so, more uplifting, positive things happened in my life. I moved to Boston and started working on the book again. [My boyfriend] Michael and I were going strong again. But there were a number of years where it felt like everything was at a standstill.

You actually named the characters after yourself and your mother, Donna. Talk about thinly veiled portraits! Talk about this decision.

I worked on the book so long, I wasn't excited about it anymore. As I revised, I realized it was easier and I felt more drive or inspiration to write the characters more like us. My mom died similar to the way it happens in the book. When I went home to Kansas to take care of her, I knew she didn't have long to live. There was a lot about her life I still wanted to know more about, so creating all this fiction about her childhood and life was my substitute for the time I thought we were going to have before she died. It sounds very Dr. Phil to say it was part of the healing process, but it helped me come to terms with what was happening—channeling that energy into creative work got me through that period a lot easier. So I took this whole fictional thing and blended this memoir portion, and it completely jump-started the book for me again.

So it could be called a *fictoir*?

Yeah. You're not the first person to say that to me. I did this writing workshop fellowship thing in Minneapolis at this place called The Loft, and this woman said the same thing. Maybe I should have them change the book cover and put that on it instead of *novel*.

As the book cover gives away in its synopsis, Scott discovers a boy named Otis handcuffed in a secret basement room. Where did Otis come from?

It's funny. I think at some point I wanted →

ReadOut Shorts

Tales from the Town of Widows
James Cañón

Harper Perennial (www.harpercollins.com)



An isolated Colombian village's men are taken away by Communist guerrillas. After a long, hungry struggle, the remaining women find a way to step out of their traditional roles to build a culture that mirrors the ideology that took away their men. After sixteen years a few of the men return, but they find that the price of staying is to live by the women's rules. It would be easy to say that "this is a female utopia book that really works," but

that would minimize the brilliance of this major work. I'm sure I won't be the only person comparing Cañón to Allende and Marquez. —Review: Angel Curtis

Making Waves: Navy Women of World War II
Evan Bachner

Abrams (www.abramsbooks.com)



This beautiful book pulls you in with its cover: strong women in work clothes, in repose. Bachner has assembled over 150 not-seen-before photographs of World War II WAVES and aircraft plant workers. What immedi-

ately struck me is the respect the photographers of the time showed their subjects. Instead of seeing anything at all exploitive, we see pictures that brilliantly showcase the strength, commitment, and work of American women. This is more than a coffee-table book—it is a slice of history we're starting to forget. —Review: A.C.

Straight Acting
Angelo Pezzote

Kensington (www.kensingtonbooks.com)

The askangelo.com advice columnist confronts the "no fems" attitude of M2M personals and the subsequent pressure to "butch it up." Much of what he says is common-sense in that "well, now that you say it" kind →

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THE METROPOLITAN
KELLER WILLIAMS



ReadOut continued from page 94

there to be a blur between what was actually happening—realistic fiction—and the fiction that generates from an unreliable narrator. That's one of the tricks of the book—the narrator and the other lead character are unreliable in a way. She's dying and losing her mind, and he's so screwed up with drugs and all that. I wanted Otis to represent something physical and real for some readers, but he is also a representation of the narrator's childhood and this past he can no longer reclaim. And I love playing with ghost stories and psychological thrillers. I wanted an element of that also.

What is it about abused or abducted kids that you find so interesting?

I don't know. You just have your obsessions and don't realize until someone says, in all three books you've done this. I realize all my favorite writers have their own obsessions. You can pick up anything and read a paragraph and say, this is Flannery O'Connor or Dennis Cooper. It's not like they write the same book over and over, but they have their thing. I guess it was something I always was obsessed with. My mom and I [were both] obsessed. There was some kid missing in my town, and I remember my mom collecting articles and newspaper clippings about him. I started reading early, and the idea excited my parents—whatever I was interested in they would foster. Instead of *The Wizard of Oz*, they would bring home true-crime books that I would read at seven years old.

Do you watch MSNBC's *To Catch a Predator* series, where they entrap adults who think they're hooking up with someone underage online?

You know, that is one of my hugest pet peeves. It's total entrapment, and I hate how there's this idea that's going to make someone better. The way to rehabilitate them is not to humiliate them and ruin their lives on national TV. I hate how the host and producers act holier than thou, as if they don't have any skeletons in their closets.

So what's your dream cast for the movie version?

That's a tough one. Weird. I don't know that I thought about it that much. Since the book is so close to home and I used the same names, when I saw the book in my head it felt like I was writing a memoir in some ways. I doubt it will ever be a movie. I'm still amazed *Mysterious Skin* was made.

Lawrence Ferber profiled director Kimberly Peirce and her movie *Stop-Loss* for the April OutSmart.

ReadOut Shorts continued from page 94

of way, but he often says it repeatedly. (I get it—relax and be yourself!) It's full of good advice . . . it's just too long by half. Skim through the repetition for the parts that could benefit you.

—Review: Neil Ellis Orts

Fool on the Hill Morgan Hunt

Alyson Books (www.alysan.com)

Morgan Hunt continues to delight with this new offering. Tess finds her ex-lover and roommate's musical idol crucified during her morning walk. She then works to find the killer before the killer finds her. This one is the whole package—characters who continue to grow, a great story, wonderful writing, and wicked humor. —Review: A.C.

Purple Panties Edited by Zane

Strebtor/Atria Books (www.simonsays.com)

Women, light the candles, pour the wine, and get ready to rumble! Zane pulls together stories from some of the world's top erotic writers to produce a "can't sit still" collection of pure delight. When I sat down to write this review, I wanted to simply pull out my thesaurus and list every word for hot, sexy, and steamy. It's that good. —Review: A.C. ■

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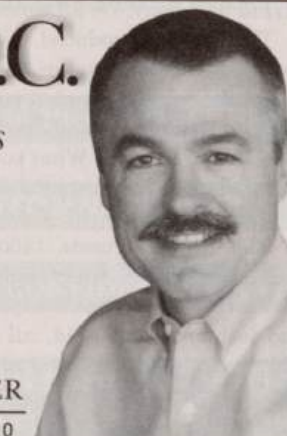
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SEX OBSESSED

Sally tries to keep the focus on our daily lives and equal rights for all

I'll never forget the first time I saw lesbians on TV (if you don't count Wimbledon). In the early 1980s—years before our goddess Ellen cracked daytime TV's lavender ceiling—Phil Donahue hosted a panel of unabashed, openly lesbian lesbians on his talk show. The Amazon grapevine buzzed like crazy. We all tuned in.

The host introduced his guests, all groomed and smiling in the TV studio's swivel chairs, ready to chat with the affable, white-haired husband of *Free to Be You and Me*'s Marlo Thomas. What could go wrong? Donahue was a respectable show. Phil would keep things civil. Wouldn't he?

The lesbian guests talked eloquently about themselves, their communities, how they were people like everyone else. Gays and lesbians, they said, all too often lost jobs, custody, homes—and sometimes their lives—because certain people considered queers a danger to society (just the same

as now, only there were fewer allies then to raise a stink).

What a thrill to watch confident, out-of-the-closet lesbians advance our militant homosexual agenda of getting folks to stick up for us when our basic human rights are violated. Ya gotta give Donahue props for bringing it to daytime TV.

He turned to his studio audience. Someone in the back row had a question. Phil jogged up the theater steps and reached his mic across the row. The camera zoomed in on a husky, 30-something guy in a baseball cap. The whole world was watching. His question? "Is cunnilingus still the main deal?"

I kid you not.

Keep in mind this was back in the pre-wardrobe-malfunction day, a time of unbleepable, non-delay, live TV broadcast. Poor Phil Donahue. He was stunned. His erudite discussion had just plummeted

straight into the gutter.

Here was the chance of a lifetime to explore the insights of these amazing women into human dignity, equality, and justice. Then some tool reduces their entire life experience to genital stimulation. Hello? "I'm gay" does not mean "Let's talk about sex."

That mentality should have been scrapped decades ago. But no.

Just last week, the Honorable Gary George explained why he is cosponsoring a bill to repeal Oregon's antidiscrimination law. And I quote, "My advice to the gay community is SHUT UP—just don't talk about it. If you walk around talking about what you do in the bedroom, you should be on the pervert channel."

Again, I kid you not.

The Pervert Channel? Here is a supposed representative of the people pushing an initiative to take away peoples'

protection from discrimination, and he calls us perverts?

It's so not about what we do in the bedroom, Senator. A law dictating what my domestic partner and I do in our bedroom would have to regulate folding laundry, working crossword puzzles, and flea-combing cats.

Senator George and his Republican co-sponsors have a bad case of xenophobia. Difference freaks these people out. What differentiates gay from straight, by definition, is the gender of who we have sex with—even though that criterion has its exceptions (Senator Wide-Stance "I'm-not-gay!" Larry Craig, for example). Still, you don't see us obsessing over what heterosexuals do sexually. We don't have to. That information is everywhere—one recent case in point being Eliot Spitzer, New York's now ex-governor, who joins the pantheon of heterosexual public officials whose sex habits dominate the media. As I understand it, though, those antics didn't take place in the governor's bedroom.

Even so, curiosity is human nature. You can find lesbian sex info on *The L Word* (fiction), bad porn (sexist), and Dan Savage (gay man), but when can you really ask a lesbian? I kinda see where the Donahue-audience guy was coming from. In honor of Senator George telling me to shut up, I'll tell you what I know.

Besides our struggle to end antigay discrimination, hate crimes, rejection from relatives, and religious condemnation, I would say most lesbians' main deal is groceries, dishes, health care, work, family, and community. OK, OK, and maybe sometimes, on a good day, cunnilingus.

Award-winning columnist Sally Sheklow satisfies curiosity from her home in Eugene, Oregon.



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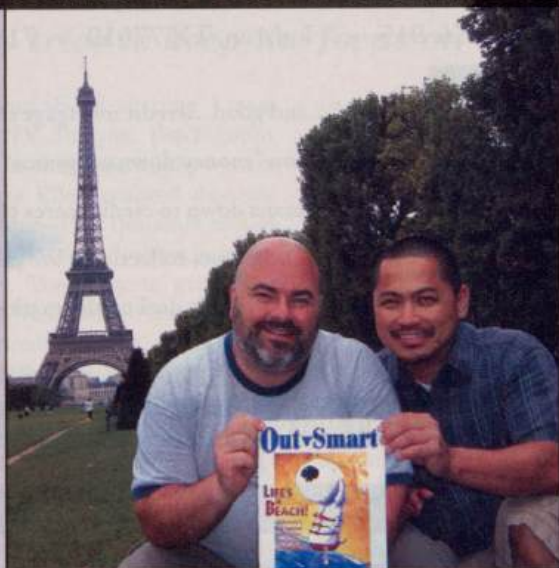
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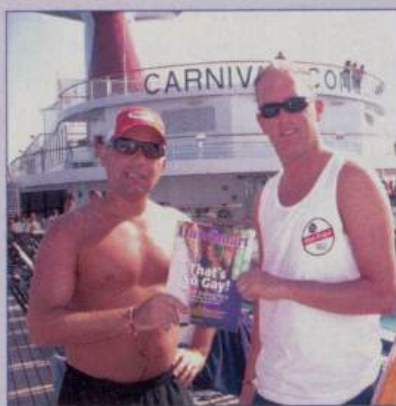
Mike Adams (l) and Meynard Patacsil in Paris.



Cody Bowman (l) and partner Gary Nagler in Sydney.



Michael Ruggerio (l) and partner Anthony Campos in San Miguel de Allende.



Roy Burchett (l) and Chris Whatley celebrating their 11th anniversary while aboard a Halloween cruise hosted by Houston drag diva Anita Bump.



Kiki Neumann in Santa Fe.



Shane Frederick (l) and Walter Campo celebrating their second anniversary in Pisa.

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FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Check out these events supported by OUTSMART:

May 8: ActOut, the Alley Theatre pre-show mixer for *An American in Paris* with GLBT theater fans. Info: www.alleytheatre.org.

May 10: Comdia y Amigos, a dining fundraiser for Brazos Abiertos, a nonprofit AIDS/HIV health clinic in the Yucatan. Info: www.hivyucatan.org.

May 17 & 20: Echoes, performed by the Bayou City Women's Chorus. Info: www.bayoucityperformingarts.org.

May 18: The Purple Party, benefitting Planned Parenthood's outreach, education, and HIV programs. Info: www.pphouston.org/purple.

May 22: Out@TUTS night. After *The Drowsy Chaperone*, enjoy live cabaret music, mingle and sing with the cast members, and enjoy hors d'oeuvres and drinks at happy-hour prices in Artista Restaurant. Info: www.TUTS.com.

June 13: The 16th Annual HATCH Alternative Prom, Info: 713/529-3590.

June 27-29: Pride Week, Houston's GLBT Pride Week celebrations. Info: www.PrideHouston.org.

They Need Your Help**Darla's School****For Adults with Mental Disabilities**

Tucked away in downtown Houston is a small private non-profit school founded exclusively for adults with mental disabilities. The school which opened its doors to students five years ago is in desperate need of money in order to keep its doors open. You might have seen the recent outdoor board campaign about Darla's School encouraging people to log onto the school's web site to make an online donation.

Although the students range in age from 24 to 50 most are very child like and function at a 5 to 10 year old level. Most of the students graduated from high school they were only reading at a first grade level when they started at Darla's. Darla's is the first educational facility for this special population of adults to open in Harris County.

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— Cody

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The softest cloud, the whitest dove
Upon the wind of heaven's love
Past the planets and the stars
Leave this lonely world of ours
Escape the sorrow and the pain
And fly again
Fly, fly precious one
Your endless journey has begun
Take your gentle happiness
Far too beautiful for this
Cross over to the other shore
There is peace forevermore
But hold this memory bittersweet
Until we meet
Fly, fly do not fear
Don't waste a breath, don't shed a tear
Your heart is pure, your soul is free
Be on your way, don't wait for me
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On beyond the hands of time
The moon will rise, the sun will set
But I won't forget
Fly, fly little wing
Fly where only angels sing
Fly away, the time is right
Go now, find the light

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**HUSTLE DOWN TO FUNKY TOWN****The 16th Annual HATCH Alternative Prom**

Friday, June 13, 2008
7 p.m. - Midnight

Montrose Counseling Center
401 Branard St., First Floor

DRESS AS YOU WISH! WEAR A COSTUME!
WEAR A TUX OR GOWN! COME IN DRAG!

Bring a date or bring a friend!

Free for youth ages 13 - 20
\$25 at the door for 21 & older

For more information or to reserve tickets, please call 713.529.3590

Calendar of Events

by Sheri Taylor Bockelman

MAY

Deadline for *OutSmart's* May issue is 5 p.m., Friday, May 9.

Daily (Mon.-Fri.)
HIV Testing. HCHD Thomas Street Clinic is offering HIV testing free to the public, 9 am-1 pm. There is no need to establish eligibility ("gold-card"), no donation will be asked of the person seeking testing, and the test is free. Thomas Street Clinic, 2015 Thomas, 713/873-4157 or 713/873-4026.

Daily (Sun.-Fri.)
HIV Testing. Legacy Community Health Services offers free confidential rapid HIV testing using the OraQuick-Advance collection method with results available within 20 minutes at the following community-based locations: **611 HYDE PARK PUB**, 611 Hyde Park, Tues. 4-8pm; **ALL STAR NEWS AND VIDEO EMPORIUM**, 3415 Katy Freeway & Studewood, Thurs. 4-8pm; **BRAZOS RIVER BOTTOM**, 2400 Brazos, Thurs. 8pm-12am; **CLUB 1415**, 1415 California, Thurs. 10pm-1am; **CLUB HOUSTON**, 2205 Fannin, Tues. & Wed. 8pm-12am; **COUSIN'S**, 817 Fairview, Thurs. 8pm-12am; **DECADES**, 1205 Richmond, Wed. 6-10pm; **EJ'S**, 2517 Ralph, Wed. & Fri. 10pm-1am; **EROS 1207 BOUTIQUE**, 7330 Southwest Frwy, Wed. 3-7pm; **GEORGE SPORTS BAR**, 617 Fairview, Mon. 6-10pm; **IN & OUT**, 1537 N. Shepherd, Thurs. 4-8pm; **MARY'S, NATURALLY**, 1022 Westheimer, Wed. 4-8pm; **MICHAEL'S OUTPOST**, 1419 Richmond, Tues. 4-8pm; **MIDTOWN SPA**, 3100 Fannin, Tues. 4-8pm & Fri. 10pm-1am; **RIPCORD**, 715 Fairview, Wed. 9pm-12am; **TONY'S CORNER POCKET**, 817 W. Dallas, Thurs. 8pm-12am. • A complete listing of locations is also available by calling 713/830-3070. Free confidential syphilis testing is also offered. HIV & syphilis testing is offered at the main clinic located at 215 Westheimer, Mon.-Thurs. 11am-7pm and Fri. 11am-5pm.

Daily (Sun.-Fri.)
HIV Testing. Planned Parenthood offers free anonymous or confidential testing at clinic locations throughout the area. To speak with an HIV counselor: 1-800-230-PLAN, Dickinson: 281/337-7725, Fannin: 713/831-6543, FM1960: 281/587-8081, Greenspoint: 281/445-4553, Huntsville: 936/295-6396, Lufkin: 936/634-8446 x223, Rosenberg: 281/342-3950, Stafford: 281/494-9848.

Weekly (Mondays)
TG Support Group. The transgender support group, "HTGA," is open to any transgender-identifying individual, friend, or family member. Free. 7-9 pm at the Haven's Center, 1827 W. Alabama. More info: 713/526-0555 x 228 (ask for Cristian) or www.transhouston.com.

Weekly (Thursdays)
TG Potluck Social. The "Transgender Potluck Social" offers friendship, support, fellowship, and a hot meal to transgender-identifying individuals, friends, and family. Please remember to bring food to share. Free. 7-9 pm, at the GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose, Ste. 207. More info: 713/526-0555 x228 (ask for Cristian) or www.transhouston.com.

Weekly (Thursdays)
Depression & Bipolar Support Group. Don't let depression or bipolar disorder dig its bleak claws into what little hope you've managed to hide from the shadows. Bering Support Network helps those in need to connect with others who are learning to cope. You are not alone and can benefit from the experience of others. GLBT friendly. Free. Groups meet at Bering Memorial United Methodist Church, 1440 Harold, Room 232, 7:15-8:30 pm. Info: 713/526-1018.

Weekly (Sun., Wed., Sat.)
Love and Rackets. Tennis players and enthusiasts of all levels are invited to join the Houston Tennis Club at Memorial Park tennis center. The club gathers Sundays from 9 am-noon, Wednesdays from 7:30-9 pm, and offers clinics every Saturday from 9-10:30 am. There are also social activities throughout the year. Annual membership \$30, court fees \$3 per session. More info: www.houstontennisclub.org.

Monthly (Every 4th Saturday)
FTM TG Support Group. The Female-To-Male transgender support group, "STAG," welcomes all female-to-male transgender-identifying individuals, friends, and family members. All new attendees must first contact Georges prior to attending. Free. 5-6 pm. More information (including location): 713/526-0555 x228 (ask for Georges) or www.transhouston.com.

INFO NEEDED FOR YOUR EVENT LISTING:

a few lines of info about your event; date/time; cost; location/address; organization name; AND two phone numbers—one for *OutSmart* to reach you for questions and one for *OutSmart* readers to get more info on your event. **MAIL INFO TO:** OutSmart Magazine, 3406 Audubon Place, Houston, TX 77006. **FAX INFO TO:** 713/522-3275. **E-MAIL INFO TO:** calendar@outsmartmagazine.com. **NO LISTINGS CAN BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DEADLINE DATE—FRIDAY, MAY 9.**

Monthly (Every 4th Saturday)
TG Support Group. TS Support Group. The transsexual support group, "TATS," welcomes all transsexual-identifying individuals, friends, and family members. All new attendees must first contact the Cristian prior to attending. Free. 4 to 5 pm. More information (including location): 713/526-0555 x228 (ask for Cristian) or www.transhouston.com.

Monthly (Saturdays)
Second Saturdays at Winter St. Studios. It's open-door policy at Winter St. Studios every second Saturday of the month. This is a great way to meet and hang with the varied artists working in many different media and styles in their studios. Participating artists have a large red dot on or near the door of their studio. All are welcome between 1 and 6 pm. Winter St. Studios, 2101 Winter St. More info: 713/862-0082 or www.winterstreetstudios.net.

Monthly (Sundays)
Read On. Want to spend at least one afternoon each month sharing with other titillating women like yourself? The Exchange meets the first Sunday of each month, 2 p.m. at Baba Vega Restaurant. Bring your favorite nonfiction and/or fiction to this new book club to ruminate, and even cogitate, in public. Details: ycnightheron@gmail.com.

Monthly (Tuesdays)
The Houston SPCA Pet Loss Support Group provides a professionally facilitated, supportive, and safe environment for people to grieve the loss of a beloved companion. Free. First

HISTORICAL VISION

Summer in the city



Bent?: Rufio (Rachel Hill) is one of the performers in Gendernyn's *Summer Lovin': One Decade at a Time*, coming to Numbers on June 7.

The benders of gender are back. Houston's own gender performance troupe, Gendernyn, is staging another fine show, lovingly called *Summer Lovin': One Decade at a Time*. • "Don't let the title fool you—this is not a throw-back to *Grease*," says Gendernyn co-founder Jessica Mays. "Instead, this show challenges the gender spectrum along a space/time continuum. *One Decade at a Time* presents period pieces throughout different decades; contemporary music with historical looks is the vision." • Expect performances from GM member Rufio (pictured here) and the rest of crew depicting Victorian genderqueers, '20s-era's Josephine Baker's banana dance, '30s queer glamour, and everything in between. • More than 500 people packed into Numbers for *Cirque du SoGay*, the GM's last show; expect no less for this next foray scheduled June 7, 9 p.m., at Numbers Nightclub, 300 Westheimer. • When they aren't busy "challenging the gender continuum," Gendernyn members devote time to community projects, including helping out last month with the transgender Unity Banquet. The 'myn also perform May 18 for Planned Parenthood's Purple Party at Meteor, and travel to Austin on May 30 to play the Kings N Things' birthday show at the Elysium, 705 Red River. Details: www.myspace.com/bayoucitygendernyn. —Nancy Ford

Tuesday of the month, 7 pm, at the Houston SPCA, 900 Portway Dr. Info: 713/869-7722, ext. 127, or www.houstonspca.org.

2 (Fri.)
Ritmo Latino, featuring the Spanish Harlem Orchestra, a Grammy Award-winning 13-member salsa and Latin music band, presented by Society for Performing Arts. 8 pm, Miller Outdoor Theatre in Hermann Park. Free. Info: www.milleroutdoortheatre.com or 281/373-3386.

3 (Sat.)
Express Yourself. Learn how to build inner confidence and self-esteem from Denise O'Doherty, licensed professional counselor/therapist. Techniques that help improve your health, relationships, work performance, and attitude toward others. \$30. 10 am-noon. Unitarian Universalist Church, 1900 Bering Dr. Info: www.llu.com or 713/529-4414.

After Einstein: Music and the Relativity of Time. Nobel winner Albert Einstein's studies of time and passion for the violin inspired Da Camera's 20th anniversary season finale. The great scientist's beloved Mozart, represented by the *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in A Major, K. 581*, alongside Olivier Messiaen, whose monumental *Quartet for the End of Time* transports the audience to a spiritual dimension far beyond ordinary time. 8 pm. \$22-\$38. Students/seniors half price with ID. Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Tickets/info: www.dacamera.com or 713/524-5050.

3 & 4 (Sat. & Sun.), 10 & 11 (Sat. & Sun.)
34th Annual Galveston Historic Foundation's Homes Tour. Ten houses dating from 1839 to 1912 will be on view, with seven special events and, for the first time, a showcase house featuring the work of professional interior designer teams in The Williams House, the island's second-oldest home. \$25. 10 am-6 pm. Tickets/info: www.galvestonhistory.org or 409-765-7834/1-877-772-5425.

4 (Sun.)
Brad Sayles' Echoes of Invention. Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens is the quintessential setting for River Oaks Chamber Orchestra's world premiere of this Houston composer, featuring narration by NPR host John Lienhard. In the last two years, the historic 14-acre estate has hosted outdoor jazz and opera performances under the stars in its elegant Diana Garden. The 40-piece orchestra will perform under a tent with seating for 500. Preview reception, 5:30 pm; concert, 6:30 pm. \$25; \$20, MFAH/ROCO members; \$10, students. Tickets/info: www.rocohoustan.org or 713/665-2700. Bayou Bend is located at 1 Westcott Street off Memorial Drive.

7 (Wed.)
A Little Day Music features the Fischer Duo. Da Camera's free lunchtime series includes drawings for tickets to an upcoming Da Camera concert. Grab lunch to-go and enjoy live music. Noon. Grand Foyer, Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Info: www.dacamera.com or 713/524-5050.

8 (Thurs.)
ActOUT at the Alley. The Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. Houston's premiere theater group for GLBT fans and friends celebrate the hilarious new musical comedy. Hear some of the best-loved songs by George and Ira Gershwin including: "S Wonderful," "They All Laughed," "Stairway to Paradise," and many more. Tickets start at \$40. 7:30 pm. Hubbard Stage at Alley Theatre, 615 Louisiana St. More info: www.alleytheatre.org or 713/220-5700 and mention ActOUT.

9 (Fri.)
Alley Theatre Ball 2008, An American in Paris, with a special performance by Frank Sinatra Jr. Enjoy a night of dinner and dancing to benefit the Alley Theatre. The extravagant event celebrates the world premiere of the Gershwin comedy musical *An American in Paris*. 7 pm, University Business Park Movie Studios, An American in Paris Set #7, 5000 Gulf Freeway, Bldg. #7. Reservations/tickets/info: e-mail sheriff@alleytheatre.org or call Sheri Forman at 713/315-3332.

Kara Hearn: A Problem of Courage. Artist opening reception at DiverseWorks displays video and other works that examine how travesties large and small, imagined and real, mediated and lived hang about. Free. 6-8 pm. DiverseWorks, 1117 East Frwy. Info: www.diverseworks.org or 713/223-8346.

Stephen Vitiello's Four Color Sound. An artist known for creating powerful, beautiful, and immersive installations that transform incidental atmospheric noises into mesmerizing soundscapes, Vitiello's latest project transform the gallery space into a virtual meditation chamber. Free. Opening reception 6-8 pm. DiverseWorks, 1117 East Frwy. Info: www.diverseworks.org or 713/223-8346.

OUT at the Opera: Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*. An all-male cast performs Hermann Melville's nautical allegory, which tells of the destruction of innocence at sea. A timeless tale of the inner conflict between personal morality and public duty, *Billy Budd* features British tenor Andrew Kennedy as Captain Vere. Stars Daniel Belcher as Billy, baritone Liam Bonner as Redburn, bass-baritone Ryan McKinny as Flint, and Canadian bass Phillip

TEARS OF A CLOWN

'The King and the Clown' join forces at the museum

Dubbed the Korean *Brokeback Mountain* because of its homoeroticism, *The King and the Clown*, which screens on June 1 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is actually more chaste than the Ang Lee-directed American film. An intimate relationship between one of two itinerant male clowns and the tyrannical 16th-century ruler who takes a fancy to him is never depicted but definitely implied (and there is a king-on-clown kiss). Even that suggestion created a sensation upon the 2005 premiere of the film. Loosely based on historical events, the film is part of Korean Cinema Now (and Then) at the museum. \$7 general admission; museum members, seniors, and students with identification receive a \$1 discount. More info: 713/639-7515, www.mfah.org/film. —Tim Brookover



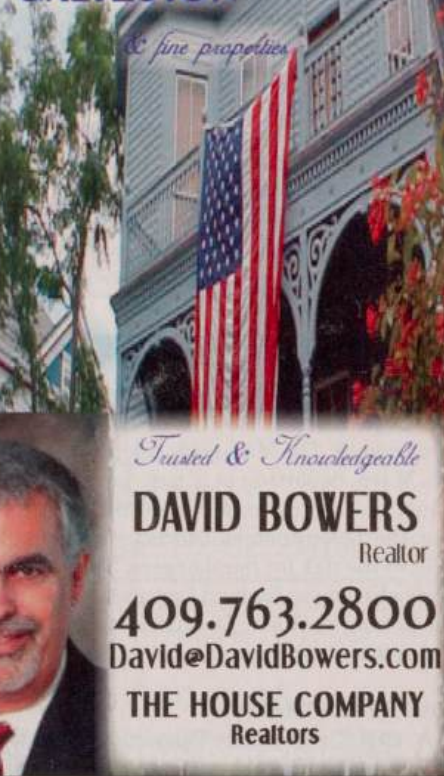
Menage a trois?: Well, not in the more obvious interpretation. But for a Korean film, maybe so. Jun-gi Lee (l) plays the clown, Jin-yeong Jeong is the king, and Seong-Yeon Kang is the concubine.

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LOOK OUT

YMSM

Since 2001, The Houston area has seen a 100-percent increase of new HIV diagnoses among "young men [who have] sex with men." Accordingly, a health summit is being convened by the Houston Department of Health and Human Services and related agencies. Club 2020, 2020 Leeland St. May 1, 8 a.m. 'til 2 p.m. Details: www.houstontx.gov/health/HIV-STD.

UHHH... WHERE?

Uh Huh Her, the indie/electro/pop duo fronted by Leisha Hailey (*The L Word*'s Alice Piezecki), plays Walter's on Washington this month. We were surprised, too. May 5, 9 p.m. 4215 Washington Ave. Tickets: \$10. 713/862-2513.

EXPERT ADVICE

Denise O'Doherty, a licensed professional and couples therapy counselor for over 20 years, discusses Effective Confrontation at AssistHers' monthly meeting. May 10, 10:30 a.m. Bering United Methodist Church, 1411 Harold St. (Look for O'Doherty's ad in this issue about her upcoming Leisure Learning Unlimited classes.) Details: www.relationshiptherapistn.com.

YOU RANG?

Applications are being accepted for the Gay & Lesbian Switchboard training scheduled May 3-4, May 10, and May 17-18. Volunteers provide information about GLBT organizations and businesses, coming out issues, suicide prevention, sexual assault, hate crimes, and more. Details: www.montrosecounselingcenter.org.

RIDE ON

Montrose Bicycle Club (formerly Pink Flamigos) has two rides scheduled this month. The May 4 ride celebrates Cinco de Mayo, departing at 1 p.m. from The 611 club, proceeding to Miller Outdoor Theatre for the Latin-themed concert, and returning to the 611 for hamburgers. The May 18 ride also leaves from and returns to the 611, beginning at 11 a.m. Details: montrosebicyclub@hotmail.com.

OUT IN THE THEATRE

ActOUT at the Alley Theatre presents *The Gershwins: An American in Paris*, a mu-

sical behind-the-scenes look at the making of the movie. Montrose Counseling Center's SPRY program is the evening's community partner. May 8, with reception at 6:30 p.m.; show at 7:30 p.m. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas St. Details: 713/220-5700, ext. 1.

COURT SHOWS

ERSICSS presents *Small, Tall & Everything in Between*, benefiting Montrose Counseling Center's SPRY program for seniors. May 9, 9 p.m. George's, 617 Fairview. Later, ERSICSS's Marcia Mink Gill celebrates her birthday with *Passover on Drag Time*. Benefits Montrose Counseling Center's building fund. May 16, 8:30 p.m. EJ's, 2517 Ralph St.

WINE, GLASS

Artist Kerry Cleaver exhibits fused glass fountains, wind chimes, and more at a wine tasting provided by La Fuente Winery. A signed gift accompanies purchases of her products at the receptions. May 9 and 10, noon 'til 5 p.m. Surprises, 6100 Westheimer. Details: 713/266-9400.

DOUBLE FEATURE

The Bayou City Performing Arts' Bayou City Women's Chorus presents *Strength and Solidarity: Echoes of Women*, a two-part, two-night concert series. The May 17 concert features selections by Carole King, Marvin Hamlisch, and others. The May 20 show finds the women in '40s costume, singing hits of that era. Both shows start at 7:30 p.m. Bering Memorial United Methodist Church, 1440 Harold St. Tickets: \$25. Details: www.bayoucityperformingarts.org • 713/521-7464.

POWER TO THE PURPLE

The Purple Party is Planned Parenthood's inaugural spring fundraiser benefiting its GLBT-focused outreach, education, and HIV programs. Features a performance by Houston Gendermyn. May 18, 2-5 p.m. \$25. Meteor Lounge, 2306 Genesee. Details: www.pphouston.org/purple.

BOYS OF ALMOST SUMMER

The Montrose Softball League presents the 20th annual Lone Star Classic softball tournament, themed *Everything Is Bigger 'n Texas*. May 24-25. Houston Sportsplex, 12631 S. Main. Details: www.montrosesoftballleague.com.

GET CRACKIN'

Women In Power Society, also known as WIPS, is Houston's pansexual, leather, Levi, BDSM, fetish, legal adult entertainment and social club. This month the women

and their friends celebrate 10 years since founders Eva and Elizabeth hung the club's colors at Mary's, Naturally. WIPS' next chapter begins May 25 with a 10th anniversary celebration. A full brunch with drink specials starts at 10 a.m. at Mary's. The party continues at 7 p.m. with the hanging of WIPS' new colors at Tony's Corner Pocket, with dinner and a cocktail reception. Tickets: \$10-\$15. Details: www.wipsociety.net.

BEND IT AS MUCH LIKE BECKHAM AS POSSIBLE

Montrose Soccer Club is seeking new players for a men's team in the Houston Football Association, a local, amateur soccer league. "If a player hasn't played in years, but knows the game and has experience, he's welcome to practice with us and join the team," says co-founder Kevin Taylor. Details: www.montrosesoccer.org • 713/862-9491.

BUNNY-CURIOUS?

Bunnies on the Bayou, that fun, charitable group of friends that produces the downtown outdoor gala each Easter afternoon, seeks new members. The bunnies also seek former members of their 30-year-old group to participate in the 2008 Pride Parade. Details: 713/523-2566 • info@bunniesonthebayou.org.

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH SOFTBALL

The Houston Women's Softball League plays each Sunday on Memorial Park Fields 4 and 5, 10:30 a.m. 'til 3 p.m. with teams representing AssistHers, Houston Women's Festival, and others. Details: www.hwsl.org.

RAW THEATRICALS

Country Playhouse Black Box Productions presents *bare* (formerly, *bare—a pop opera*), directed by O'Dell Hutchison. June 6-7, 12-14, 19-21. 8 p.m. 12802 Queensbury Ln. Details: 713/467-4497.

WELL WOMEN

Reservations for Lesbian Health Initiative-Houston's Rainbow Health Fair's free mammograms and Pap smears go fast. Those seeking appointments are asked to call 713/426-3356 asap. Also offered that day are HIV tests, total cholesterol, blood sugar, A1C for diabetics, blood typing, oral screening for cancer, nutrition counseling, information about living wills, and related legal matters, as well as health education and materials. June 7, 8:15 a.m. 'til 3:15 p.m. Legacy Community Health Services, 215 Westheimer. Details: www.lhi-houston.org.

Ens as black-hearted John Claggart. Performed in English with English surtitles. Tickets start at \$20. 7:30 pm. Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Tickets/info: www.houstongrandopera.org or 713-228-OPERA (6737).

10 (Sat)

Wine and Dine fundraiser for Brazos Abiertos. "Comida y Amigos" features special guests of honor, Oscar de la Rosa and La Mafía. Event includes a silent auction. Proceeds benefit Brazos Abiertos, whose mission is to provide AIDS education and health services to HIV+ persons in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. Benefit dinner will be held in an Afton Oaks private home, 7-11 pm. \$100 per person. Tickets/more info: www.hivyucatan.org or john@brazosabiertosyucatan.org.

One Shot. Inspired by the beauty, sense of community, and legacy captured by the great African-American artist, photographer, and Pittsburgh native, Charles "Teenie" Harris, nicknamed "One Shot," Brown blends African, modern, ballet, and contemporary dance styles to tell stories of the African Diaspora. *One Shot* delves into the essence of family, hope, dignity, and celebration at the heart of Teenie's art in seven sections: "First Glance," "Bellows," "Free Spirits," "The Meeting Room," "Faith & Decadence," "Poinciana," and "The Crossroads." Part of a citywide collaboration: The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston, DiverseWorks, Society for the Performing Arts, Blaffer Gallery, and Project Row Houses. 8 pm at Cullen Theater, Wortham Center, 501 Texas Ave. Info: www.diverseworks.org. Tickets: www.spahouston.org.

11 (Sun.)

Duelling Divas, presented by Ars Lyrica, is an experimental mix of old and new, with an *American Idol*-style singing contest and an instrumental concerto likewise conceived as a competition between multiple soloists. See PERFORMING ARTS category for more details. \$25/\$20 seniors/\$15 students. 5 pm at Zilkha Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby. Tickets/info: www.thehobbycenter.org or 713/315-2525.

14, 16, & 17 (Wed., Fri., & Sat.)

Tree Care and the Environment. The Houston Arboretum & Nature Center presents an adult class designed to teach the basic biology of woody plants, pruning practices, and to explore current and historical myths and philosophies related to tree care. Saturday outdoor session includes discussion on proper tree selection, planting techniques, and maintenance practices. Instructor: Phil Coker, certified arborist. \$75 members; \$95 non-members. Pre-registration required. Wed., May 14 and Fri., May 16, 7-9 pm. Outdoor class: Sat., May 17, 10 am-11:30 am. 4501 Woodway Dr. Info: www.houstonarboretum.org or 713/681-8433.

15 (Thurs.)

POZ Social for Gay Men invites you to socialize in a relaxing atmosphere. Organized as an opportunity for conversation and friendship for HIV+ and gay men at a designated local bar, planned monthly every third Thursday. Upon arrival, ask for hosts Kevin or Albert. Time/location/info: PozSocialHouston@gmail.com or 713/529-8864 and leave message.

17 (Sat.)

Canoe Down the Bayou. Spend the afternoon in a canoe on Buffalo Bayou and explore its natural history. This stretch of bayou flows between I-610 and Shepherd Dr., one of the wildest portions of the bayou, and includes the Arboretum and Memorial Park. Attend pre-trip mandatory Thursday evening orientation at the Arboretum, 4501 Woodway Dr., and then plan for an incredible learning experience. \$85 members; \$95 non-members. Pre-registration required. 1-5 pm. Info: www.houstonarboretum.org/canoetrip.asp or call Bill Eley at 713/681-8433.

A Push to End Poverty. Annual 5K Run/Walk-a-Thon benefits the nonprofit Gulf Coast Community Services Association, the largest community action agency in Texas. GCCSA operates 25 head-start centers and 12 community outreach centers, helping to transition individuals and families out of poverty. Pre-registration until May 14, \$15; late/race-day registration, \$20. Register online: www.active.com/event_id=1562775. Race begins at 8 am. MacGregor Park, 5225 Calhoun St. More info: 713/393-4703 or 713/393-4741.

Grand Re-Opening benefit for Houston Central Public Library: The renovations have lifted Central Library up for future generations with the most up-to-date technology for accessing information. The event includes a progressive dinner with food, drink, and entertainment surprises throughout the building. Preview all the new amenities, including a larger children's room, teen loft, cafe, and park-view meeting space, plus a collection of books in more languages than ever. Glimpse behind-the-scenes operations and chat with local authors. Regular ticket: \$250; Next Chapter ticket: \$100 (ages 35 and under). 7 pm at Houston Central Library, 500 McKinney. Tickets/info: Susan Bischoff, president of Houston Public Library Foundation at 832/393-1450 or e-mail sbischoff@houstonlibraryfoundation.org.

Power of Puccini. Hear the United Nations Association International Choir (UNAIC) celebrate the sesquicentennial



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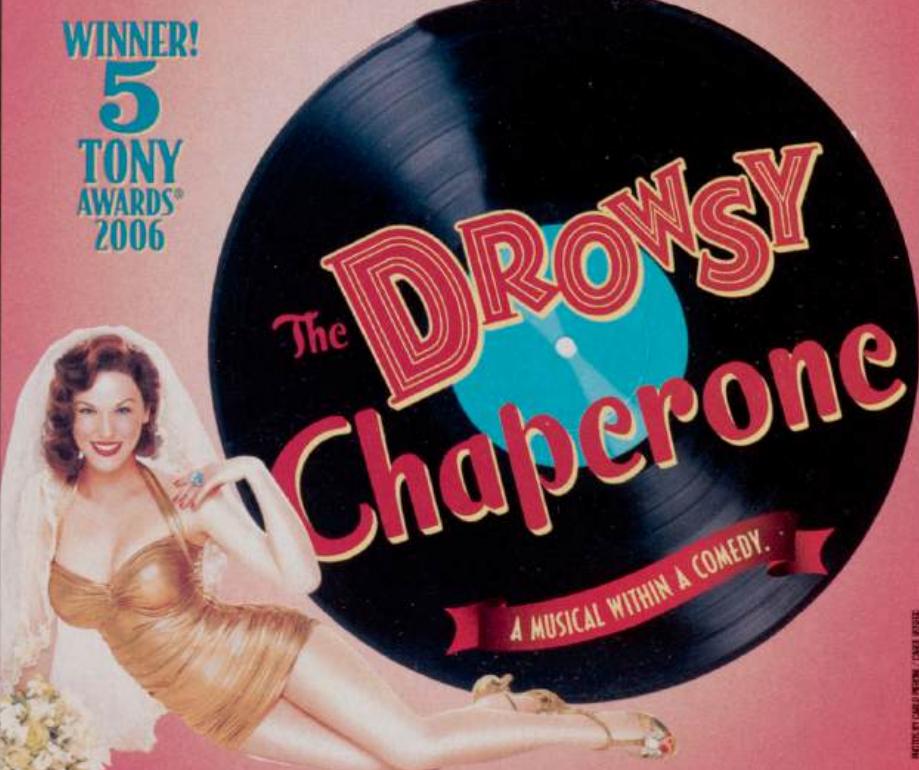
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Se Habla Español

of the birth of composer Giacomo Puccini, with a program of some of his choral, operatic, and orchestral music. The 90-voice choir and professional orchestra thrills the audience with Puccini's seldom-heard masterpiece, *Messa a Quattro Voci con Orchestra* (Mass for Four Voices with Orchestra), sung in Latin. Additional works include arias from many of his operas, such as *La Bohème* and *Tosca*. The program is produced with support and encouragement from the Honorable Cristiano Maggipinto, consul general of Italy in Houston, and that of the Italian Institute of Culture, Los Angeles. The consulate hosts a post-performance wine reception, included with admission. 5 pm. Advance Tickets: \$20-\$30 (\$5 discount for kids under 6/students/seniors). Concert day: \$25-\$35. Rice University's Stude Concert Hall, 6100 Main St. Info/tickets: www.tix.com or www.unahouston.org/unachoir.

18 (Sun.)

Ride On! The Montrose Bicycle Club hits the pedals at 11 am from 611 Club, returning at 2 pm, where you cook your own burgers! 611 Hyde Park Blvd.

19 (Mon.)

Finely Orchestrated in *Contrasting Moods: Shostakovich & Bizet*. The Houston Chamber Orchestra presents Dmitri Shostakovich's introspective *Cello Concerto* in a stark contrast with Georges Bizet's light and lively *Symphony in C Major*. Popular among local audiences, Houston Symphony cellist Jeffrey Butler is soloist in the Shostakovich piece. \$30; students, \$10; seniors/KUHF members: 20% discount. 7:30 pm in Zilkha Hall at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby. Tickets/info: www.houstonchamberorchestra.org or 713/515-2525.

24 (Sat.)

Pernicious Pink Wrestling. Who will claw their way through the ropes into the steel-cage match against the head-to-toe pink-clad, gender-neutral fiend Precious Jules? In this wildly comedic scream-fest of audience participation, who's to say? It could be Herschel Moskowitz, aka The Kosher Killer. Then again, it could be go-go boy tag team The Adonis Explosion. Or maybe Frenchy, who unabashedly bashes his foes with a baguette. At time of publication, ticket prices estimated at \$15. Doors open 9 pm at Fitzgerald's, 2706 White Oak Dr. Info/reservations: 713/862-7469, www.doomsdaywrestling.com, or www.fitslive.com.

Assert Yourself. Denise O'Doherty, licensed professional counselor/therapist, presents a class on Personal Boundaries and Effective Confrontation. Discussion includes effective communication methods, identifying ways to overcome being manipulated, controlled, and intimidated due to differences in personalities, and how personal boundaries are essential to healthy relationships. \$30. 10 am-noon. Unitarian Universalist Church, 1900 Bering Dr. Info: www.llu.com or 713/529-4414.

Last Weekend to tour historic Williams House in Galveston. Twelve teams of designers worked on the dwelling and will show it off as the Spring Designer Showcase, a community service project of the Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). \$15. Tours Sat.-Sun., noon-4 pm. Tickets/more info: www.galvestonhistory.org or 409-765-7834/1-877-772-5425.

PLANNING AHEAD

Attorneys on Stage: Law of the Sea. This year's hilarious production of *Night Court*, HBA's annual all-lawyer musical comedy, will have the audience laughing hook, line and sinker. Don't wait to get tickets—they're going fast! Benefits the Houston Bar Association charitable works. Wed., June 4, 8 pm, \$21 (free commemorative pirate stein); Thurs., June 5, 8 pm, \$29 (Buy 3, get 1 free); Fri., June 6, 8 pm, \$29; Sat., June 7, 8 pm, \$29; Sat., June 5, 2 pm, \$15 (dress like a pirate matinee). Tickets/info: www.hba.org.

Gay Men's Chorus of Houston. The third installment of the musical trilogy by contemporary composer Robert Seeley, *Metamorphosis* will leave you mesmerized. The second half features a mix of contemporary choral pieces from composers like Steven Sondheim, Ronald Nelson, and Cole Porter. *Metamorphosis* is an emotionally powerful work written in eight movements and follows a young man's journey from early childhood to young adulthood and his first love. Torn between the expectations of his family and his true identity, he comes out, learns self-acceptance, and reconciles with his family. \$19-\$39. 7:30 pm. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. Tickets/info: www.bayoucityperformingarts.org.

Free Polka Party at Miller Outdoor Theatre. Celebrating the Czech, German, and Polish heritage of South Texas, the evening's performances will be tied together by polka music, performed live by Harry Czarnek & The Texas Dutchmen. Several Dancers Core choreographer and artistic director Sue Schroeder will also collaborate with the dancers of CORE Performance Company and members of the "Red and Whites," the local chapter of the Polka Lovers Klub of America. Join in pre-show polka lessons, 7:30 pm; performance, 8 pm. Have fun with bingo and prizes during intermission, and dance the polka after ward! Fri., June 6.

Info: www.severaldancerscore.org or 713/862-5530.

Bravissimo '08 includes a dinner concert featuring famous arias and duets presented by some of the nation's finest young operatic voices. Take part in an incredible silent auction, and enjoy an evening among museum quality art, while benefiting Opera in the Heights. Fri., June 6, 6:30-10 pm at The Houston Club, 811 Rusk Ave. Invitation/info: email midge@operaintheheights.org or call 713/861-5303. More: www.operaintheheights.org.

History in Motion. Houston Ballet caps its 2007-2008 season by pairing one of the oldest ballets in existence with one of the newest. Celebrated Danish ballet master Johnny Eliassen brings his staging of August Bournonville's 1836 masterpiece, *La Sylphide*, one of the landmark works of the Romantic era, to Houston Ballet's repertoire. Set in Scotland in the 1830s, the ballet dramatizes the romance of the farmer James and the Sylph, an ethereally beautiful, winged, fairy creature who visits him in his dreams. Inspired by the distinctive Japanese anime style, Stanton Welch's *A Doll's House* depicts a pitched battle that breaks out between the dolls in a toy store after the owner of the shop leaves, a reflection in futility. 7:30 pm on June 5, 7, 13, and 14; 2 pm on June 8, 14, and 15. Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Tickets/info: www.houstonballet.org or 713/227-ARTS(2787).

FOR THE SUMMER

City Critters Class for Kids. The Houston Arboretum & Nature Center has a fun week-long workshop for students ages 5-12, designed to give him/her knowledge on ecology with an urban twist. Learn about the creatures who manage to live close to humans while still staying wild. You'll see how everyone can make their yard a miniature wildlife preserve to attract some of these intriguing critters. Mon.-Fri., 9 am-9 pm on June 9-13 or July 14-18. \$230 members; \$270 non-members. Half-day mornings, \$120 members; \$150 non-members. Pre-registration required. 4501 Woodway Dr. Info: www.houstonarboretum.org or 713/681-8433.

Hike Amid Botanicals and Wildlife. The Houston Arboretum & Nature Center is home to more than 160 species of birds and 33 kinds of butterflies, where you can explore five miles of trees, botanicals, and native wildlife along walking trails. Located in Memorial Park, 4501 Woodway Dr. Arboretum grounds open to the public, 7 am-7 pm; the Nature Center hours 9 am-5 pm; the Discovery Room houses interactive educational exhibits such as aquariums, touch screens, a 15-ft. model learning tree, and microscopes with video monitor displays, open 10 am-4 pm (closed Mon.). Free admission. Info: www.houstonarboretum.org or 713/681-8433.

Volunteer to Teach Dangers of Hate. Holocaust Museum Houston depends on the assistance of volunteers to help teach the dangers of prejudice and hatred against the backdrop of the Holocaust. In preparation for this fall's busy tour schedule, HMH needs tour guides, commonly called docents, to help with those tasks. Docents must commit for a one-year period; weekday docents generally give one 2-hour tour per week; weekend volunteers typically give one tour every other week. Held at Holocaust Museum Houston's Morgan Family Center, attend a 7-week class in Holocaust history and tour-training: Aug. 12-Sept. 25 on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 am-noon. Applications due by June 15. Info: contact Suzanne Sutherland at ssutherland@hnh.org or 713-942-8000, ext. 102. Using the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides, the museum teaches the dangers of hatred, prejudice, and apathy. Holocaust Museum Houston is free and open to the public and is located in Houston's Museum District at 5401 Caroline St. More: www.hnh.org.

RADIO

After Hours. Sunday mornings, 1-4 am. Featuring the QMZ (Queer Music Zone) with Jimmy Carper. KPFT 90.1 FM, 713/526-5738.

Queer Voices. Mondays, 8-10 pm. Features, news, music, interviews, reviews, and commentary. KPFT 90.1 FM, 713/526-4000.

Reach Out in the Darkness. Houston's only transgender radio host and her partner present selected music from the '60s, played like it was in the '60s, exclusively from vinyl pressings. Every Wednesday morning, 3-6 am, KPFT Pacifica radio (90.1 FM).

PERFORMING ARTS

Duelling Divas, presented by Ars Lyrica. The 2007-2008 grand season finale features two major works from the Baroque era premised on the idea of an *American Idol*-style singing contest, plus an instrumental concerto likewise conceived as a competition between multiple soloists. G. F. Handel's *Il duello amoroso* involves two lovers, each of whom claims to be superior at both love and song, while J. S. Bach's *Dispute between Phoebus and Pan* calls for six mythological characters, who engage in a battle

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Billy Budd is Hermann Melville's nautical allegory, a timeless tale of moral conscious versus public duty. When Billy, an enthusiastic new sailor who is liked by his crewmates, is falsely accused of mutiny by the evil master-at-arms Claggart, there is only tragedy for Billy, and Captain Vere is conflicted with the decision he must make. Powerful all-male cast stars baritone Daniel Belcher as Billy, baritone Liam Bonner as Redburn, bass-baritone Ryan McKinny as Flint, British tenor Andrew Kennedy as Captain Vere, and Canadian bass Phillip Ens as black-hearted John Claggart. Performed in English with English surtitles. Tickets start at \$20. Fri., May 2, 7:30 pm, Sun., May 4, 2 pm, and Fri., May 9, 7:30 pm (OUT at the Opera). Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Tickets/info: www.houstongrandopera.org or 713-228-OPERA(6737).

Cemetery Club. Three elderly Jewish women who have lost their husbands visit the cemetery together, and all is just dandy until a widower is thrown into the mix. A delightful blend of humor and pathos that shouldn't be missed! \$14; \$12 students/seniors. Fri.-Sat., 8 pm; Sun., 2:30 pm., May 30-June 15. Clear Creek Community Theatre, Nassau Bay. Reservations/info: 281/335-5228.

Dido and Aeneas. Passion, evil plots, tragedy, and sorrow are told as baroque music, contemporary ballet, and theater merge in an innovative opera production. The tale of Dido and Aeneas comes to life with the magical sound of the Mercury Baroque ensemble led by Antoine Plante and breathtaking choreography of Dominic Walsh performed by the Dominic Walsh Dance Theater dancers. \$22-\$47. Sat., May 17, 8 pm. at Cullen Theater, Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Tickets/info: www.MercuryBaroque.org or 832/251-0706. Also in concert version: Sun., May 18, 2 pm, at the University of Houston, Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd. Tickets to Sunday's concert: 281/283-2560.

The Drowsy Chaperone. The new musical comedy swoops into Houston with tons of laughs and the most 2006 Tony Awards of any musical on Broadway! When a die-hard musical fan sets the hi-fi needle on his favorite album, a 1928 smash hit called "The Drowsy Chaperone," the show magically bursts to life. Be instantly immersed in the glamorous, hilarious tale of a celebrity bride and her uproarious wedding day, complete with thrills and surprises that take both the cast (literally) and the audience (metaphorically) soaring into the rafters. May 20-June 1. Sarofim Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby St. Tickets/info: www.tuts.com or call 713.558.TUTS(8887).

Houston Ballet Spring Repertory Program. World premiere by acclaimed Canadian choreographer James Kudelka, who created the program for the Houston Ballet Hans van Manen's *Five Tangos* (1977) is a unique mix of the power and sensuality of tango and the cool abstraction of classical ballet. And Stanton Welch's *Falling* (2005) is a showcase for five couples, a delight in shades of pastel set to Mozart's Salzburg Symphonies. 7:30 pm, May 22, 24, 30, and 31; 2 pm, May 25, June 1. Wortham Theater Center, 500 Texas Ave. Tickets/info: www.houstonballet.org or 713/227-ARTS(2787).

Miller Outdoor Theatre. Free cultural, musical, and theatrical entertainment is always on stage at Miller Outdoor Theatre in Hermann Park. One-hour daytime performances specially geared toward children offer an excellent opportunity to expose youngsters to the delights of performing arts. 11 am. No tickets necessary; seating first come, first served. Evening shows are family-friendly. Admission is free for all performances, but some evening shows require reserved tickets for covered seating, available only on day of performance, 11:30 am-1:00 pm at the Miller Theatre box office. • The Asian Pacific American Heritage Association invites you to the APAHA Heritage Festival all afternoon on Sat., May 3, followed by a free evening concert. • On Sun., May 4, join Comité Patriótico Mexicano de Houston for Cinco de Mayo festivities, with artists from Mexico, mariachis, folkloric dances, and more. • The classic fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* comes to life in an adaptation from the Tchaikovsky ballet score in this enchanting opera for young people, where a winter fairy appears and puts all of Russia in a snowy sleep. Free. Mon., May 5-Fri., May 9, 11 am. • Houston Ballet presents *Madame Butterfly*. Set to Puccini's memorable score, this full-scale story ballet chronicles the tragic love story of the beautiful geisha Cio-Cio San and American Lt. Pinkerton. Free. Fri., May 9-Sun., May 11, 8 pm. • Houston Grand Opera presents an encore engagement of *The Refuge*, the acclaimed oratorio chronicling stories of immigrants from seven different communities who journeyed to Houston in search of a new home and better life. Free. Fri. & Sat., May 16 & 17, 8:30 pm. • *Dancin' in the Street... Motown & More Revue*. Explosive soul production features the legendary music of the Motown era, by Midtown Arts Center and BACE Productions. Free. Thurs.-Sun., May 22-25, 8:15 pm. • *Tribute* is an energetic

cross-cultural performance by the MECA Mariachis and the Dallas Black Dance Theatre. Free. Fri., May 30, 8 pm. • *Best in Ten*, by the Sandra Organ Dance Company, reprises the best of 10 years of contemporary ballet programming. Sat., May 31, 8:15 pm. • Info: www.milleroutdoortheatre.com or 281/373-3386.

The Wedding Singer is the new romantic comedy based on the hit movie. It's 1985 and every night is a totally rad reception for rock-star wannabe Robbie Hart and friends, until he's left at the altar. Enter the girl of his dreams—only she's about to marry a Wall Street shark. Can Robbie win her heart? Go back to a time when hair was big, greed was good, collars were up, and a wedding singer sporting a mullet might be the coolest guy in the room. May 16-18. Sarofim Hall, Hobby Center, 800 Bagby St. Tickets/info: www.thehobbycenter.org or 713/622-SHOW (7469).

Young and Fertile. A class reunion sends members of the Fertle family reminiscing through their favorite moments of the '70s. \$22. Through May 10 at Radio Music Theatre, 2623 Colquitt. More info: 713/522-7722 or www.radiomusictheatre.com.

PERFORMING ARTS
For Young People

Hansel and Gretel. Getting lost in the woods is only the start of Hansel and Gretel's adventure. When they find a delicious gingerbread house and begin to eat it, a silly witch shows up to spoil their snack. An unexpected turn of events teaches them about jumping to conclusions and how to treat others. \$8. Sat., May 3, 10, 17, and 24 at 2 pm. Express Theatre, 446 Northwest Mall. Tickets/info: www.expresstheatre.com or 713/682-5044.

Sleeping Beauty. The classic fairy tale comes to life in a vocal adaptation from the Tchaikovsky ballet score in this enchanting opera for children, where a winter fairy appears and puts all of Russia in a snowy sleep. Produced by Houston Grand Opera. Free, no tickets necessary; seating first come, first served. Mon.-Fri., May 5-9, 11 am. Miller Outdoor Theatre in Hermann Park. Info: www.milleroutdoortheatre.com or 281/373-3386.

ART/PHOTOGRAPHY

City on the Bayou: Houston's History through Floods. Take a visual tour of Houston's historic weather events through vintage photographs of past floods from the museum's collection and contemporary weather photographs taken by local photographers. John C. Freeman Weather Museum. Mon.-Sat., 10 am-4 pm. \$5 adults, \$3 children/seniors. Free for all on Thursday afternoons, noon-4 pm. Guided tours available. More info: www.weathermuseum.org or 713/529-3076.

Class Pictures: Photographs by Dawoud Bey is comprised of large-scale portraits of American teenagers that refute false stereotypes and reveal the individual strengths of this age group. Bey photographed young adults from all economic, racial, and ethnic spectrums in both public and private high schools in major cities including Detroit, Chicago, Orlando, San Francisco, and New York City. To complement Bey's exhibition, The Teen Council, a select group of high school students employed by the museum to design public programs specifically for young people, organized an exhibition of Polaroid photography by local teenagers. *Polarized* is on view in the Cullen Education Resource Room. See both exhibitions through May 11. Contemporary Arts Museum, 5216 Montrose Blvd. Info: www.camh.org or 713/284-8250.

Eye on Third Ward: Jack Yates High School Photography. The annual exhibition of works by students from the Magnet School of Communication at Jack Yates High School in collaboration with Museum of Fine Arts is designed to express the distinctive identity of Houston's historic Third Ward and focuses for the first time on photographs from the teens' personal lives. The project was founded in 1995 to encourage students to hone their talents, skills, and powers of observation to capture the world around them, documenting this historic neighborhood and its residents. \$7 adults; \$3.50 kids 6-18/students/seniors. Through May 26 at the Caroline Wiess Law Building, 1001 Bissonnet St. Info: www.mfah.org or 713/639-7300 (en Español: 713/639-7379, TDD/TYY for hearing impaired: 713/639-7390).

Folklore Art: The Old, Weird America is the first museum exhibition to explore the resurgence of folk imagery and mythic history in recent art from the U.S., featuring 18 artists who explore native, idiomatic, and communal subjects from America's past. From the first Thanksgiving in 1621 to the beginning of the Space Age in 1957, colorful story-telling works illustrate the creative composition of fact and myth. Opening reception Fri., May 9, 9-11 pm; through July 20. Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 5216 Montrose Blvd. Info: www.camh.org or 713/284-8250.

Form, Color, Illumination: Suzan Frecon Painting. Approximately 10 oil paintings and 30 watercolors ranging from the '90s to now demonstrate the prowess of this oft-overlooked artist. Through May 11 at the Menil Collection, 1515 Sul Ross. More info: www.menil.org or 713/525-9400. →

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John Alexander: A Retrospective. This Texas native's evocative oil paintings and drawings convey humor, rage, and an intimate appreciation of nature, habitat, and ecology. Through June 22 at The Audrey Jones Beck Building, 5601 Main St. \$7 adults; \$3.50 kids ages 6-18/students/seniors. More info: www.mfah.org or 713/639-7300 (en Español: 713/639-7379, TDD/TTY for hearing impaired: 713/639-7390).

Kara Hearn: A Problem of Courage. The artist uses video and other works to build intimate and absurd narratives, animating the ways that fear, regret, grief, horror, and humiliation play themselves out before and after the fact, shifting in and out of consciousness, repeating endlessly, and being re-made along the way. May 9-June 14; opening reception, Fri., May 9, 6-8 pm. DiverseWorks, 1117 East Frwy. Info: www.diverseworks.org or 713/223-8346.

LAUNCH: Rice Student Art Exhibition 45. View a collection of outstanding works by undergraduate art students, selected by the Department of Visual and Dramatic Art and reviewed by guest curator Nancy Hixon. Mon.-Fri., 11 am-5 pm, in the VADA Gallery at the Rice Media Center, located at Rice University, entrance 8, intersection of University Blvd. and Stockton St. Info: www.rice.edu.

Making the Unfamiliar Familiar: A Program for High School Students. Twenty students who participated in an ongoing education program at the Museum of Fine Arts exhibit artworks that include canine portraits inspired by *Best in Show: The Dog in Art* and geometric compositions inspired by the work of Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica. \$7, \$3.50 kids 6-18/students/seniors. Through June 29 at the Audrey Jones Beck Building, 5601 Main St. Info: www.mfah.org or 713/639-7300, (en Español: 713/639-7379; TDD/TTY for hearing impaired: 713/639-7390).

Max Neuhaus: Circumscription Drawings. A pioneer in the use of sound in the visual arts, Neuhaus invented the term "sound installation" to describe his practice based on the creation of unique sounds for specific locations. As opposed to the temporal experience of hearing a piece of music, his work presents sound as a continuous material used to engage our perception of the physical space around us. The Texas native has been invited to create a site-specific work for the exterior of The Menil building, and will be the artist's second permanent installation at a museum in the U.S. View his collection of drawings for this and earlier projects May 4-Aug. 10 at The Menil Collection, 1515 Sul Ross. Info: www.menil.org or 713/525-9400.

Observer's Event Horizon: Glass Art by Stacey Neff. An exhibition of sculptural souvenirs from a fancifully imagined territory of malleable time and space, this is Neff's first opening in Houston. Her unusual glass works pair supplies found in automotive and nautical factories with the ancient material of glass, combining multiple units hand-blown in a traditional glass style into singular large forms. Through June 13 at Art League Houston, 1953 Montrose Blvd. Info: www.artleaguehouston.org or 713/523-9530.

Of Winter to Spring: New Works by Suzanne Manns. Manns' newest work is influenced by her garden and the landscape directly surrounding her Houston Heights bungalow. Recording bits and fragments from this environ of which she is so intimately familiar, Manns creates highly individualized imagery

that result in her works becoming like a visual diary of intimate experience. Through June 13 at Art League Houston, 1953 Montrose Blvd. Info: www.artleaguehouston.org or 713/523-9530.

The Poetry of Process: A Celebration of Drawing. Some of the greatest drawings at the Menil commingle with a selection of exceptional works from private collections. Look for intriguing works from the likes of Jasper Johns, Mark Rothko, Georgia O'Keefe, among others. Through May 25 at the Menil Collection, 1515 Sul Ross. Info: www.menil.org or 713/525-9400.

Pompeii: Tales from an Eruption. In their final terrifying hours on Aug. 24 and 25, A.D. 79, residents of Pompeii and the nearby coastal towns of Herculaneum, Oplontis, and Terzigno in southern Italy gathered objects precious to them and tried to escape the fury of Mount Vesuvius. The thriving, prosperous communities lay buried—silenced and forgotten for 1,700 years. The exhibit's bronze and marble sculptures, large-scale frescoes, jewelry, tools, table silver, armor, coins, skeletons, and plaster casts of the bodies of the victims now tell the stories of life at the Bay of Naples in the days of the early Roman Empire. See the exciting 58-minute documentary *In the Shadow of Vesuvius* in Brown Auditorium Theater; check museum schedule for viewing times. Admission to this film is free with an MFAH Pompeii exhibition ticket stub. Pompeii requires special admission: tickets range from \$7-\$25. Through June 22 at the Museum of Fine Arts' Caroline Wiess Law Building, 1001 Bissonnet St. Tickets/info: www.mfah.org or 713/639-7300 (en Español: 713/639-7379, TDD/TTY for hearing impaired, call 713/639-7390).

Stephen Vitiello: Four Color Sound. Sound pioneer Vitiello, known for creating powerful, beautiful, and immersive installations, has combined modulated light and audio that subtly morph and shift, transforming the gallery space into a virtual meditation chamber. May 9-June 14; opening reception, Fri., May 9, 6-8 pm. DiverseWorks, 1117 East Frwy. Info: www.diverseworks.org or 713/223-8346.

Sterne and Steinberg: Critics Within. Romanian-born artists Saul Steinberg (1914-1999) and Hedda Sterne (b. 1910), who met in New York City in 1943 after the Nazi occupation forced them to flee Europe, became U.S. citizens and married in 1944. The couple exhibited at the same gallery, yet as artists had little aesthetic ground in common: most art historians and critics would be hard pressed to trace stylistic influences between the two. Still, they shared an important artistic perspective: each questioned the ability of an artist's personal aesthetic style to communicate a stable identity. By placing a small number of works by Sterne and Steinberg in dialogue with one another, this exhibition amplifies the artists' joint (and unique) position as critics within their artistic milieu. May 23-Sept. 7 at the Menil Collection, 1515 Sul Ross. Info: www.menil.org or 713/525-9400.

Tales. Imaginative local artist Constance Braden draws around a story—a fairy tale, myth, or dream. From there, the works tend to take on lives of their own, seemingly creating worlds inside the edges of the paper. Six pieces in *Tales* were inspired by fairy-tale poems Braden's friend Stella Brice has collected in her new book *Outgrow*; two were influenced from the biblical story of the annunciation and veer considerably from traditional iconography. Her vision is magical, as also seen in five charcoal drawings derived from the Hindu myths of Kali and Sati. Through May 24. Gallery 1724, 1724 Bissonnet. Info: www.gallery1724.com. ■

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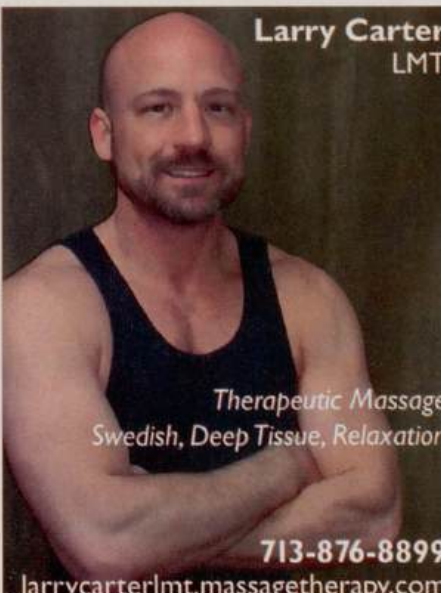
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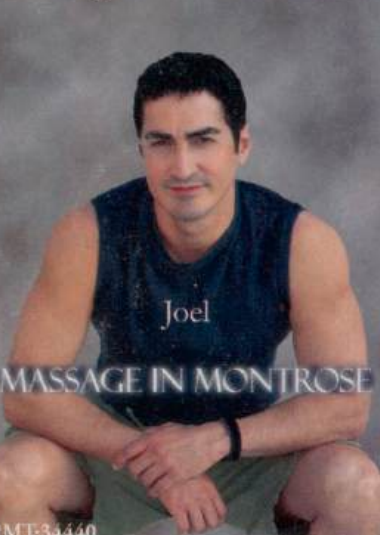


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Business News

by Nancy Ford

Perez Joins Schmerler Rob Schmerler has announced that Rachael Perez has joined the Schmerler Agency as a licensed agent for property and casualty insurance as well as life and health insurance. Specializing in personal service, the Schmerler Agency represents various companies providing car insurance, homeowners and renters insurance, life and health, commercial insurance and more. Details: 713/661-7700.



Rachael Perez

Gay Chamber Comes to San Antonio Cristina Martinez, publisher of the *Gay & Lesbian Rainbow Pages*, says "it's about time" San Antonio had a chamber of commerce for its gay and lesbian citizens.

Martinez says the gay chamber not only would host monthly dinners, networking opportunities, and other special events to foster business relationships, but also could help promote other social outreach programs, including creating scholarships for area students.

The first edition of the *San Antonio Rainbow Pages* is scheduled for release in June, Martinez says. Details: 210/212-4700.

Mortgage Associates Receives Dependability Honor Mortgage Associates of Texas has been selected by Goldline Research as one of the 10 Most Dependable Mortgage Brokers of Texas. The list, naming the top brokers among a field of 2,600 mortgage professionals, was published in the April issue of *Texas Monthly* magazine.

"A consumer needs to work with a stable, qualified broker to gain access to as many products and options as there are available," says John Frels, Mortgage Associates president.

The firm celebrates its 14th anniversary in business in May. Details: 713/524-1850.

Gillman Gets New COO The Gillman Companies, a 70-year-old family owned and operated institution with 14 dealerships in Texas, has announced the appointment of Patrick York as chief operating officer. York formerly served as vice president of marketing for Service Group, an organization providing training and dealer profit programs to automobile dealerships.



Patrick York

AssistHers Opens High-end E-shop AssistHers representatives have announced its Little Shop

of Wonders is open for business. Compliments of an anonymous supporter, a number of high-quality items including new Waterford tumblers, Wedgwood pieces, and other fine collectibles are available at reasonable prices. All proceeds benefit AssistHers programs of in-home, non-medical assistance for lesbians with life-threatening illnesses.

Details: www.assisthersshop.googlepages.com/home.

Sweet Honor Sara Brook, owner of Dessert Gallery Bakery & Café, has been selected the 2008 Women in Business Champion of the Year in Houston by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

A top dessert purveyor since 1983, Brook launched Dessert Gallery Bakery & Café in 1995. Today the company is consistently recognized for having the "Best Desserts in Houston" in a wide variety of publications.

Dessert Gallery is located at 3200 Kirby Drive, 1616 Post Oak Boulevard, and 2260 Lone Star Drive in Sugar Land Town Square. Details: www.dessertgallery.com.

Send your business news to OutSmart, 3406 Audubon Place, Houston, TX 77006, or e-mail to letters@outsmartmagazine.com.

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- Copyedit manuscripts; write editorials, articles, and miscellaneous copy as appropriate; in print and online writing responsibilities are required.
- Train, coach, and provide feedback to freelance writers as well as editorial staff members and act in a management capacity.
- Confer directly with publisher to formulate publication strategies, plan production, develop budgets; discuss topics for self-generated articles and other projects; and brainstorm business development opportunities. Attend events and represent OutSmart magazine within the community.

REQUIRED:</

BAR & CLUB GUIDE

HOUSTON

LA ACADEMIA

Hot salsa and Latin flavor rule at this dance bar for both men and women on the southwest side of Houston. Weekends often offer high-production drag shows, drink specials. 5829 S. Gessner Rd. • 713/334-5422 • www.myspace.com/laacademiadance.

BARTINI

This club near the Westheimer curve now features a second ladies' nights, Passionate Sundays on the second and fourth Sunday, in addition to the Exquisite Wednesdays ladies' night. 1318 Westheimer • 713/526-2271.

BELLA AIDA GARDENS

Lady Barbara and MC Zip (of Bartini fame) host True Unity parties in this southwest Houston club every Saturday night for "everyone in the community," the women say. "We welcome lesbians, gays, transgenders, and bisexuals of all ethnic backgrounds." 9371 Richmond • 832/230-3739.

BLUR

This multi-level dance club features an expansive patio upstairs lounge, and balconies that overlook the busy Pacific St. traffic. The ladies enjoy Wet and Wild Wednesdays, 18-year-olds are welcome on Thursday, resident DJ Lorenzo spins Wednesday through Saturday nights, DJ Pollo spins Kumbia Latin night on Sundays. Happy hour, 8 'til 10 p.m.; free cover before 11 p.m. 710 Pacific St. • www.blurbar.com.

BOCADOS

Each Wednesday, women pack this Mexican restaurant for dancing and socializing preceded by open mic sessions on last Wednesdays, 7-9 p.m. Sunday brunch starts at 11 a.m. and lasts 'til 3 p.m. 1312 W. Alabama • 713/523-5230.

BOOM BOOM ROOM

Manager/chef Kat Mims says business at this new Heights-area lounge is going great (even booming?), but "something was missing." So they introduced "Gay Night" on Tuesdays, with drink specials and tasty munchies. 2518 Yale • 713/868-3740.

BRAZOS RIVER BOTTOM

The BRB, Houston's leading gay country-western bar, is located in Midtown, just outside Montrose. Expect to see some fast and fancy two-stepping. Southern Country dance club offers lessons on Thursday night. 2400 Brazos • 713/528-9192.

CHANCES/THE NEW BARN/G-SPOT

Houston lesbians and those who love them enjoy three separate clubs under one roof, satisfying their C&W, urban dance, and live chick-music needs. Last year's fire resulted in hot upgrades including expanded and renovated bars, multiple video screens, banquet seating, and more. 1100 Westheimer • 713/523-7217 • www.chancesbar.com.

CLUB 2020

Located downtown near the Toyota Center, this plush dance-and-more nightclub is a natural for après Comets games. Its 6,400 square feet offer theater-sized viewing screens and VIP rooms. 2020 Leeland • 713/227-9667 • www.club2020houston.com.

CLUB CRYSTAL

If you miss the now-closed Inergy, you'll find many of its former staff, management and décor at this two-room Latin/hip-hop club. Sunday evening drag shows rule the roost. 6680 Southwest Fwy, next to Colorado. www.crystaltheclub.com • 713-278-2582.

The upstairs martini bar offers a quiet retreat. 2517 Ralph • 713/527-9071 • www.ejsbar.com.

GUAVA LAMP

The club left Shepherd Plaza and reopened with a larger space near Allen Parkway. Guava Lamp presents karaoke nights on Sunday and Wednesday and offers a free happy hour buffet on Friday. 570 Waugh • 713/524-3359.

GEORGE

Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar, just like most other neighborhood sports bars in town. But George's occasional benefit drag shows make it a wonderful, campy alternative. Sports Saturdays start at 3 p.m. with dart and pool.

MARY'S, NATURALLY

The oldest gay club in Houston, this is a legendary nightspot, though not as notorious as in days past. Mary's hosts many community fundraisers, including the Imperial Court of Houston's Jukebox Wednesdays event. 1022 Westheimer • 713/527-9669.

METEOR

This posh yet comfy lounge on the downtown edge of Montrose has reopened to the glee of the martini crowd. Updates to the spacious double-roomed bar include the addition of numerous plasma video screens and a new and improved smokers' patio. The lovely and talented Tod Dvorak spins on the weekends. 2306 Genesee • 713/521-0123 • www.meteorlounge.com.

MICHAEL'S OUTPOST

This neighborhood hangout has become a sing-along piano bar. A regular roster of keyboardists, including Phil Hooper and Lauri Gage, performs nightly. Tuesday-Saturday. 1419 Richmond • 713/520-8446.

MO MONG

Every Wednesday night, the guys and gals pack this Vietnamese restaurant to enjoy the martini specials. 1201 Westheimer #B • 713/524-5664.

MONTROSE MINING COMPANY

Study male dancers bump and grind every night at this leather/denim spot. The two-tier back patio bar provides a perch for viewing the Pacific Street scenery. 805 Pacific • 713/529-7488.

ORBIT 1

Sunday night is "family night" for "mature" gays and lesbians at this southeast neighborhood bar off Scott Street, offering a free buffet, door prizes, and drink set-ups for your own bottle. 3901 Lockhart St.

THE PEACOCK INTERNATIONAL

Following a brief period as a piano bar and other incarnations, this comfy neighborhood spot is helmed by local Latina legend, Melo Contreras. The musical theme is Tejano, of course, in addition to classic Latin favorites. 2324 Crocker St.

PRIVÉ

The patio at this second-floor spot overlooks the lively Westheimer/Montrose intersection. The mixed crowd includes smartly dressed gays as well as nongays. 910 Westheimer • 713/522-2542.

PÜR

Party promoter Lauren Vogel takes over Poshua each Wednesday night at 9 p.m., turning the upscale venue located directly behind George R. Brown Convention Center into an "ultra lesbian lounge." Gorgeous women, no cover. 2010 McKinney Ave. 713/344-0305 • www.myspace.com/pureposha.

RAINBOW ROOM

Every Thursday, Heather Moon hosts karaoke at this North Houston club. DJ Kenny supplies music on Friday and Saturday. 527 Barry Springs • 281/872-0215 • www.rainbowroombar.com.

BEHIND THE BAR

WHO:
Randall Jobe
WHERE:
JR's Bar and Grill,
808 Pacific,
713/521-2519



WHAT'S UP:
JR's serves up its perpetually award-winning margarita on Cinco de Mayo and every day of the month.

YVONNE FEECE

tournaments; Steak Night is Sunday, 3-7 p.m. 617 Fairview • 713/528-8102.

HOUSTON MOSAIC/ROCKBAR

The boys meet on Sunday evenings for a deck party at this spacious downtown Bayou Place location for dancing, drinking, and people watching. Occasionally, the soirée benefits or promotes a community charity. 503 Texas Ave. • www.mosaicbar.com.

IN-N-OUT

Heights residents appreciate this nearby alternative to Montrose haunts with state-of-the-art large digital displays, Internet jukebox, comfy seating, and daily drink specials. 1537 N. Shepherd Dr. • 713/589-9780.

JR'S BAR & GRILL

With house emcee Kofi, OutSmart's Gayest and Greatest reigning drag champion, this Montrose standard offers shows Sunday through Wednesday, as well as pool tables, go-go boys, and karaoke. 808 Pacific St. • 713/521-2519.

MANGO VIDEO LOUNGE

Located next to Club Inergy, this Wednesday-Saturday spot has a 15-ft. video screen, dance floor, and pool tables. DJ Kenny Jammz hosts karaoke night on Wednesday. 5742 Chimney Rock • 713/666-7472.

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RIPCORD

Named best place to show off your leather in the 2005 Gayest & Greatest poll. The Black Hawk Leather shop is located inside the club. Another big draw is the Houston Big Men's Club's bi-weekly hamburger BBQ fundraiser. 715 Fairview • 713/521-2792 • www.theripcord.com.

THE 611

This neighborhood club is a popular spot with pool sharks. On Friday and Saturday, the 611 dishes up buffet dinners. Features include a garden-style patio. 611 Hyde Park • 713/526-7070.

SOCIAL ROOM

Open Wednesdays and Sundays, featuring R&B, hip-hop, soul, and pop music. DJs on Wednesdays whappy hour pricing 5-7 pm; women get in free 'til 9 pm. Live music with no cover, Sundays. 1417 Westheimer.

SOUTH BEACH

This expansive, ultra chic dance club is a frequent winner of OutSmart's Gayest & Greatest awards with DJ Jimmy Skinner, local spin legends, DJ Rocky B, spins for Goddess Wednesdays. The club also offers frequent high-production-value drag shows. 810 Pacific • 713/529-SOBE • www.southbeachthenightclub.com.

TONY'S CORNER POCKET

Includes "Booze & Cruise Night" on Thursday, when "shirtless, in-shape guys" enjoy \$1 well drinks. Sunday Brunch starts at 11 a.m. 817 W. Dallas • www.tonyscornerpocket.com.

VEGAS NIGHTCLUB

DJ Rocky B's Throb Parties, the popular Friday night traveling club for lesbians and their friends, has moved to this spacious southwest location, featuring drink specials, contests for cash, and hard-pumping music. 5720 Harwin Dr. • www.throbpatties.info.

VIVIANA'S

This club, in a new location, appeals to fans of Latino music and drag alike. 4624 Dacoma • 713/681-4104.

Spring

RANCH HILL SALOON

The gayest spot on the north side has a new owner, a new website, and a new storefront for your GLBT gift-giving needs. With its two pool tables, 52-inch plasma televisions, and large dance floor, the club still also accommodates private parties, holy unions, and receptions. 24704 I-45 N, Suite 103 • 281/298-9035 • www.ranchhill.com • www.myspace.com/theranchhillsaloon.

Humble

WHISPERS

Northerly GLBTs meet at this comfy neighborhood bar that offers pool, darts, video games, karaoke Thursday, dancing to the Internet jukebox and live DJ on Friday and Saturday, and Steak night on Sunday. 226 First St. • 281/359-2900 • www.whispersbar.com.

Galveston

3RD COAST BEACH BAR

OutSmart readers voted this Seawall spot the Island bar with the best happy hour in the 2005 Gayest & Greatest poll. Thursday is karaoke night, with cabaret/variety shows on Friday and Saturday nights. 31st and Seawall Blvd. • 409/765-6911 • www.3rdcoastbeachbar.com.

GROOVE

Located in the purple building that was formerly a carriage house, Groove boasts a 5,000 square-foot dance floor, with live DJs and male and female dancers on the weekends. 2416 Postoffice St. • 409/766-7771.

THE PINK DOLPHIN

Opened by Eldridge Langlinis, formerly the Paradise Guest House proprietor, this club in the former 3rd Coast Beach Bar location offers an expansive Gulf view. 9th and Seawall Boulevard • 409/621-1808.

ROBERT'S LAFITTE

A neighborhood bar, the Island institution attracts a colorful crowd of regulars and travelers. The private patio includes a swimming pool. On Saturday and Sunday nights, the Ladies of Lafitte show takes the stage. 2501 Avenue Q (at 25th) • 409/765-9092.

THE TREMONT HOUSE

Smart Island visitors stop by the atrium bar in the Strand district hotel to enjoy cabaret music at the grand piano. 2300 Ship's Mechanic Row • 409/763-0300.

Beaumont

THE COPA

The hangout for Lamar University students, this two-story dance club has pool tables, a spacious stage, and a staircase that would make Norma Desmond green with envy. 304 Orleans • 409/832-4206.

ORLEANS STREET PUB AND PATIO

The place to hang for food, fun, and booze in a newly renovated pub, in good weather or bad. Open every night from 7 pm-2 am. 650 Orleans • 409/835-4243.

Bryan/College Station

HALO VIDEO BAR

The only GLBT dance club in Bryan/College station, this sleek spot is open Thursday-Saturday. Smack in the middle of Aggieland, "our venue is always packed with the hotties," the owners promise. 121 North Main • 979/823-6174 • www.halobcs.com.

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SignOut

by Lilly Roddy

Our good friend Mercury is going retrograde on the 22nd. Let's get all of our new projects started, cars bought, and computers purchased before that date. After that date, you will have to wait until June 22 to purchase things. Saturn, planet of work and discipline, goes direct on the 2nd, and Jupiter goes retrograde on the 9th. Both of these planets tend to affect the economy. Saturn will slow things down a bit, and Jupiter won't be able to help stimulate people to overcome things. Neptune will also go retrograde on the 26th, influencing us to look within for our spiritual connections. • The new Moon on Cinco De Mayo will be in Taurus, reminding us to indulge our physical pleasures and take care of our desire nature. The full Moon on the 18th in Scorpio will remind us to share with others and reflect on the way we feel about those who don't. • The Sun begins the month in Taurus and moves into Gemini on the 20th. Mercury begins the month in Taurus but quickly moves into Gemini on the 2nd and remains there until July. Venus is in Taurus, her home sign, until she also moves into Gemini on the 24th. Mars finally finishes his journey through Cancer and moves into fiery Leo on the 9th. The rest of the planets are happy in the signs they are in.

ARIES (March 21–April 19). The focus for you this month is on finances and personal resources. You will get a handle on what you spend and what you make. There will be a strong tendency to overspend on the 4th and 5th. Many of you will be considering what you make and potentially seeking a raise. Your creative skills are very good, and your career should flow more smoothly than it has in a while. Continue to pay attention to diet and health. You are still more motivated than usual to do something about this part of your life.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21). This month you need to take a more reserved or background position. You are more sensitive than usual. Crowds and stress will take a greater toll on you. Your ruling planet, Mercury, will go retrograde in your sign at the end of the month. Be sure you get your projects started. With Mercury retrograde, you will be examining things about your past after the 22nd. Old friends and past events will come back into your life. Keep an open mind during this time, in order to bring closure over long-ago events.

CANCER (June 22–July 22). Friendships and relationships are the two ships that are sailing into your port this month. This is an excellent time to do some networking or join some groups that can help your career. Friends are more excited to see you, and your presence will have a strong impact on those around you. Personal relationships are in a good phase. If you are single, this is an excellent time to get out there and meet someone new. If you are involved, this period will make the time you spend with your partner even more pleasant. Take some time to get away or do something out of the ordinary with someone special.

LEO (July 23–August 22). Career seems to be at the top of the list this month. With the new moon



TAURUS (April 20–May 20). This is your birthday month or solar return time, which is always a good time to look back over the last year and consider new plans for the next. With your ruler, Venus, joining the Sun, you will be rather self-indulgent. What better time for this than your birthday? Relationships are better. Both of you are able to find compromise earlier in any difficult situations. Career plans can be successful if you find the energy to motivate yourself. Activity at home will pick up after the 10th. Family relationships could be more tense. Tempers will flare.

there as well, you could seek some promotion, take a leadership position, or even start your own business. Old friends are coming back to visit after the 22nd. After the 10th, and for the next 45 days, you have more energy than usual. This would be a great time to start an exercise program or to engage in something that challenges you. Get all this done before the 22nd. Relationships can be confusing, so you may not want to make too many assumptions this month.

VIRGO (August 23–September 22). This month, two things dominate your horoscope: creativity and application. If you choose to apply this energy, you can use your analytical and problem-solving skills to the maximum. You really have the big picture in view. Since you are not putting up with anybody wasting your time, you are a force to be reckoned with. Relationships can be more difficult because you are very critical of yourself and your partner. Your expectations may be somewhat unrealistic, and instead of making things better, they actually drive you further apart. By the end of the month, it is time to take a very close look at business.

LIBRA (September 23–October 23). Particularly drawn to intimacy issues this month, you want to forge closer bonds between yourself and those closest to you. Truth and honesty must be held up in the light. With a positive attitude, you and your partner can work together to find common ground. Avoiding that work will only drive a deeper wedge between you and your partner. Home life is busy and can provide a break from some of the seriousness that you are dealing with. Some of you could be moving or doing some remodeling. You could meet some new people this month after the 10th.

SCORPIO (October 24–November 21). You are all about relationships this month. If you are in one, you are getting closer and looking for ways

to feel more connected. If you are single, this is an excellent time to attract someone new. Do this before the 22nd or you will be attracting someone who is—egads—just like the partner you got rid of. If you are having a problem in any relationship, business or personal, this month will bring it to the surface so that it can be dealt with. After the 10th, new business opportunities are on the horizon. Keep your temper at work so that you don't say something you may regret.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22–December 21). Get that workplace in order. You have been wading through too many piles, and now even you can't stand it. Efficiency is the word of the month. Don't worry about exercise or that diet. You are just not in the mood. A relationship will be more and more important as the month progresses. With Mercury going retrograde, be prepared to hear from lovers from the past. Career is moving slowly as you make the necessary changes to upgrade or change. Either way, you must focus there.

CAPRICORN (December 22–January 19). This month is all about relaxing and self-indulgence. Normally, we would never use the word *lazy* with Capricorn, but you are certainly not very motivated. That will all change near the end of the month, so take the time to pamper yourself. Getting massages, eating lots of chocolate, and having people wait on you hand and foot will do wonders for your self-esteem. You can worry about the guilt later. By the end of the month, it is time to get back to those routines.

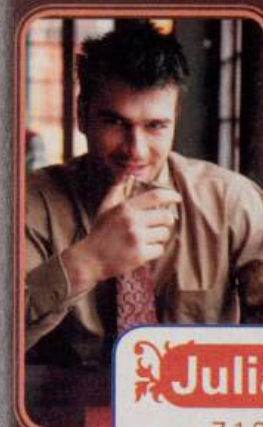
AQUARIUS (January 20–February 18). You are concentrating on making your home and family life much more comfortable. You may even do some entertaining, but only for the nicest of your friends and family. Some of you may be more enterprising and do some easy remodeling or painting. In the first two-thirds of the month, your communication skills improve. Interaction with relationship partners can be more tense if you aren't getting the attention you need. A good adventure or travel to a new place could really revive your sexual energies. Otherwise, they could be wasted in fighting and bickering. Choose the first option.

PISCES (February 19–March 20). The Mermaids and Mermen continue to be more serious than usual. They are trying to find their way in the social maze of hierarchy and self-esteem tied to what they produce. Your practical side does show up in the first two-thirds of the month. So that is when you can get the most done, particularly associated with career or goal orientation. By the end of the month, you are ready for a break, and freedom will be beckoning you to the seashore. Don't let those previous commitments stand in your way or you could be unhappy and resentful.

Read Lilly Roddy's annual forecast for 2008, which appeared in our January issue ("The Planets Say"), at www.outsmartmagazine.com. Roddy recently launched a new podcast, "City of Ladies," at www.lillyroddy.com.

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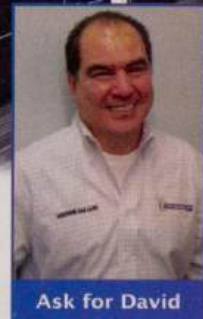
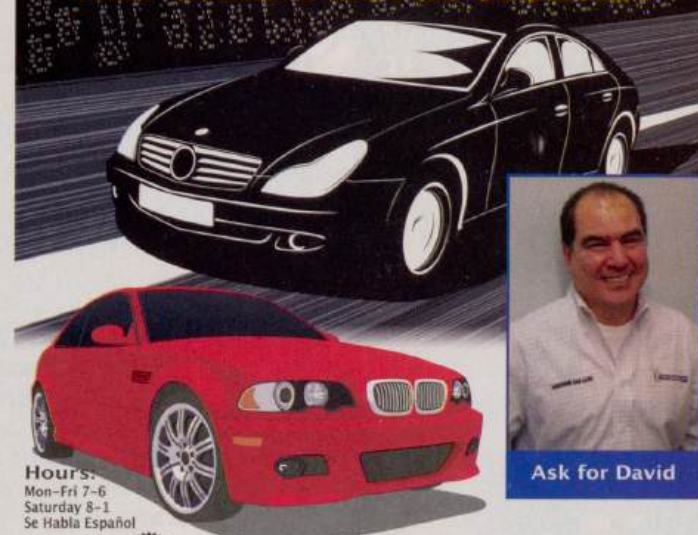
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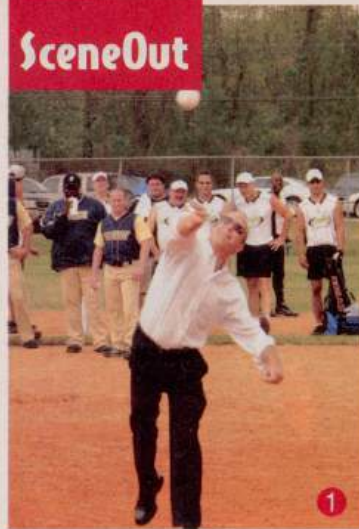
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OUT IN HOUSTON

1 Judge **Steven Kirkland** throws out the first ball for the Montrose Softball League on opening day, March 30, at Memorial Park.

2 **Nancy Wintle** enjoys the sun at AssistHers' annual softball tournament, held March 8 in Memorial Park.

3 **Ronnie Siebert** (l) and **Melissa Flores** honor the memory of Stella Link Seville at a Celebration of Life—A Garden Party, held April 5 in Montrose.

4 Attorneys for Simoneaux & Frye Law firm, **Phyllis Frye** (l), **Jerry Simoneaux**, **Douglas Caddy**, **Rob Scamardo**, **Patricia Cantú**, and **Lalana Pundisto** were among the cyber-revelers at a party held March 28 at Commerce Towers celebrating the law firm's new website, www.SimFrye.com. Simoneaux & Frye employees not pictured are Tracie Jackson, Jeffrey Forbes (office manager), and Tracey Johnson (legal assistant).

5 Pianist **Roger Woest** (l), **Tricia Lynn**, **John Danielson III**, and Kindred Spirits founder **Marion Coleman** at the Kindred Spirits Celebration Kickoff, held March 23 at Ovation Nightclub. Lynn and Danielson were honored by the group for their generosity and dedication to the annual event that supports women's charities.

6 **John Heinzerling** (l) and **Mark Brown** at *Diana Foundation at 55: The Show Goes On*, held March 29 at the Houston City Club.

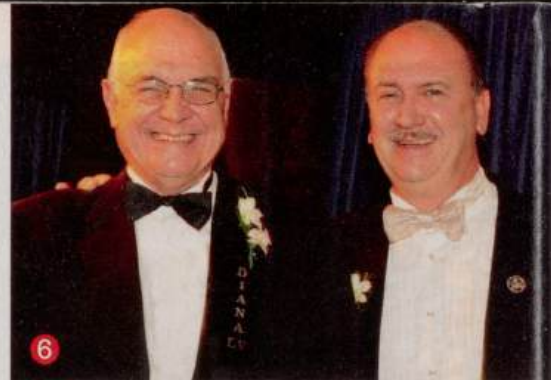
7 **Michael Pearce** (l), **Bridgett Chambers**, and **Ian Eastveld** served as trichairs of Human Rights Campaign's annual Houston gala, *The Art of Equality*, held April 12 at Hilton Americas.

8 Bayou City Performing Arts' Gay Men's Chorus of Houston performs their colorful *Totally Awesome Echoes of the '80s* concert, held March 31 at Jones Hall.

9 Charitable partiers prepared for Jungle 16, the Bayou City Boys Club's big dance party held annually on Easter weekend benefiting local AIDS service organizations.

10 The Best Little Hutch in Texas took prize-winning honors at Bunnies on the Bayou, held downtown March 23.

PHOTOS: 1, 3-10, DALTON DEHART; 2, NANCY FORD



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