JAN. '19

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

Out Smart

LILLY RODDY'S 2019 ASTROCAST
Pg.41



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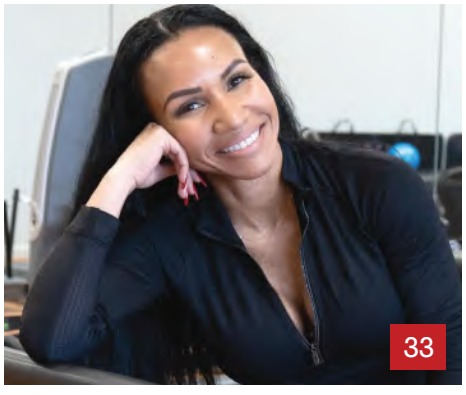
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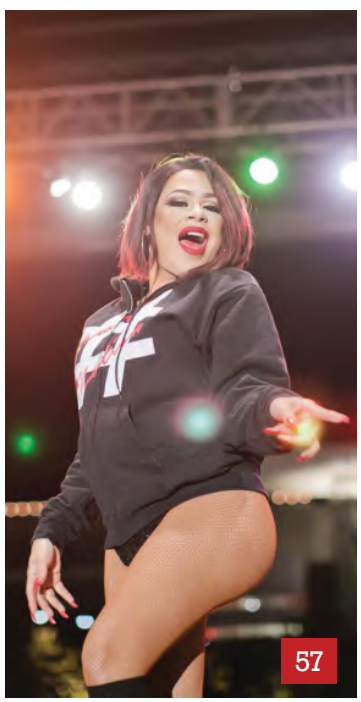
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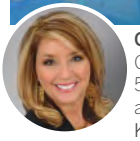
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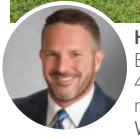
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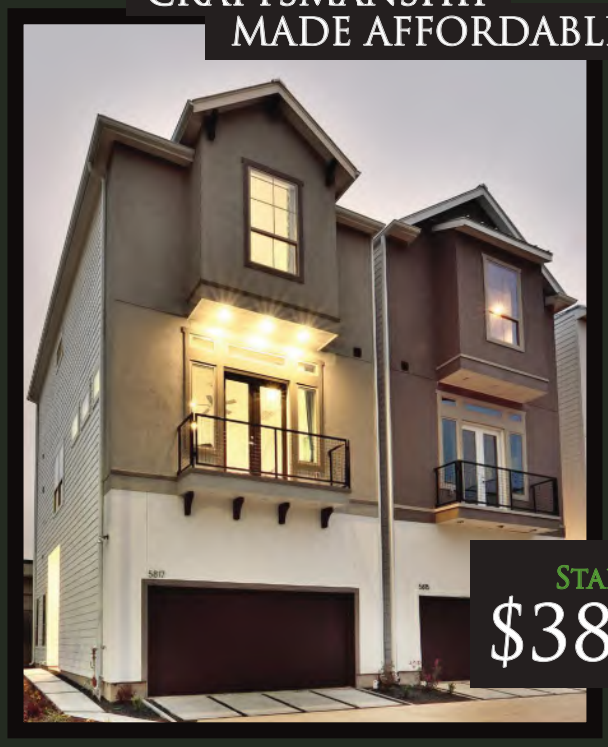
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In case you hadn't noticed, anti-LGBTQ bigots have launched a full-scale assault against the Houston Public Library's Drag Queen Storytime program.

In addition to protesting outside the Freed-Montrose Neighborhood Library during the monthly children's program, they've started spewing their hatred at Houston City Council meetings.

Among the groups leading the LGBTQ community's response to these attacks has been the Space City Sisters, a new convent of drag-queen nuns that recently became the first Houston mission of the international Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

But the Space City Sisters' activities are hardly limited to Drag Queen Storytime demonstrations. Read more about this welcome, colorful addition to Houston's panoply of LGBTQ community groups in writer Lourdes Zavaleta's January cover story.

And, speaking of "sisters" doing "big" things, don't miss writer Ryan Leach's piece on local LGBTQ mentors in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, which is expanding its outreach to the community. Among their mentor volunteers is Kristine Anthony, a commander with the Houston Police Department, and her wife, Kristy Miller, a clinic social-work manager at Legacy Community Health, who serve as a "Big Couple" to a 14-year-old girl.

As it turns out, Anthony is one of two police department employees featured in this issue. Writer Jenny Block profiles Mimi McCloud, who co-chairs the department's LGBT Committee and will soon be teaching free Pilates classes at the Montrose Center.

Elsewhere in this January issue, writer Don Maines chats with Jackson Neal, the queer teen who was recently named Houston's Youth Poet Laureate. Maines also sits down with Will Davis, the first transgender director in the Alley Theatre's history. Finally, Maines previews the Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival, which will feature bisexual dancer Honey Moonpie.

As usual, our inaugural issue of the year also includes astrologist Lilly Roddy's annual Astrocast. Roddy's 2019 horoscopes are complemented by the stunning Zodiac artwork of Janie Whateva, who discovered her gender identity through astrology—which she now uses to promote queer visibility.

And finally, while we're on the subject of queer visibility, writer Marene Gustin reports that Rainbow on Ice, the annual LGBTQ celebration at downtown's Discovery Green, is set for January 11.

Bundle up, and we'll see you there!

—John Wright





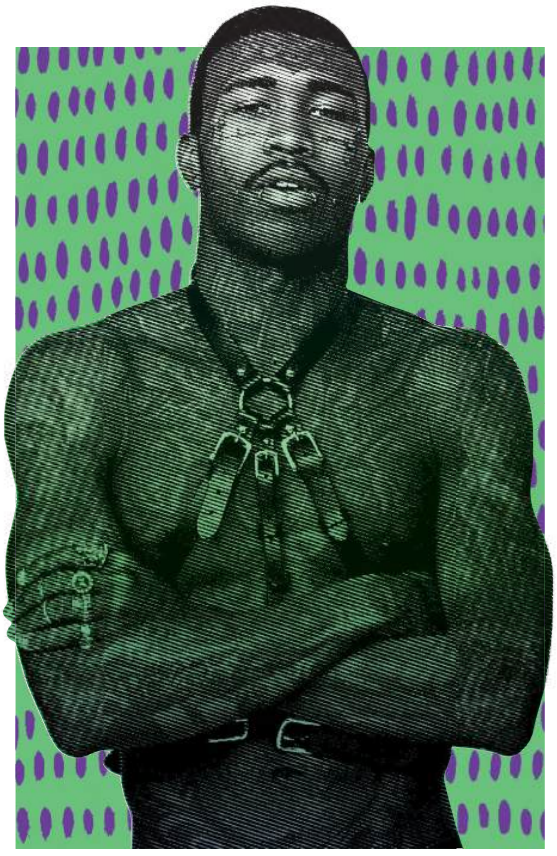
ON THE COVER

YOU GO, SISTERS!
Houston's Space City Sisters unite for charity and activism.(See page 28.)

Space City Sisters photo shoot at Discovery Green on November 26.

Photos by Ashkan Roayaee, art direction by Alex Rosa







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LGBTQ Texans Brace for Legislative Session

Advocates predict another barrage of discriminatory bills.

By Ryan M. Leach



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Circling the Wagons
Pro-LGBTQ demonstrators gather in the exterior rotunda of the Texas Capitol during the 2017 session, when more than two dozen discriminatory bills were filed. Advocates say the community should be prepared for a similar tsunami of hateful legislation in 2019.

The Republican-dominated Texas Legislature will convene January 8 for its 140-day biennial session that will determine how the state and its inhabitants will be governed for the next two years.

This means that LGBTQ Texans will once again be on edge, waiting to see if 2019 will be dominated by anti-LGBTQ legislation, or if the blue wave of 2018 had a dampening effect on the conservative appetite for LGBTQ blood.

In the wake of last year's Beto-mania, anti-LGBTQ statewide Republicans like lieutenant governor Dan Patrick held onto their seats by smaller margins than usual. Although the GOP will still rule the capitol roost from a numbers standpoint, they lost seats in both the House and Senate.

"The political map changed in Texas on Election Day," says Rebecca Robertson, chief programs officer for Equality Texas. "Candidates up and down the ballot who ran on pro-equality messages had unprecedented success. Openly LGBTQ candidates blazed new paths all over the Lone Star State, running in more than 30 competitive races and winning 13 key legislative and judicial races. There are now five openly LGBTQ women in the Texas House: incumbents Mary Gonzalez and Celia Israel, and newcomers Jessica Gonzalez, Julie Johnson, and Erin Zwiener."

In the 2017 session, Equality Texas and other groups helped defeat more than two dozen anti-LGBTQ bills. However, lawmakers did pass a "religious freedom" measure that allows religiously affiliated adoption and foster-care agencies to discriminate against LGBTQ people. Even if those agencies receive taxpayer funds, they are now free to turn away qualified LGBTQ parents or even discriminate →

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against LGBTQ children in their care.

The defeat of most discriminatory legislation in the 2017 session, which was dominated by anti-transgender "bathroom bills," was due in part to former House speaker Joe Straus, who expended considerable political capital to keep Texas from going the way of North Carolina.

But with Straus retiring, and before the outcome of the November 2018 midterm elections was known, things seemed bleak for the LGBTQ community last year. Although things now look less bleak due to the blue wave, as well as the likely election of Straus lieutenant Dennis Bonnen (R-Angleton) as speaker, there is still reason to be concerned.

During a legislative preview in November, sponsored by the *Texas Tribune*, Republican and Democratic state lawmakers seemed focused primarily on school finance reform. That system, which has not been modified since the early 1990s, is starting to buckle under the pressure of increased property values as wealthier districts are being forced to send millions of dollars back to Austin for redistribution across the state. Little was mentioned at the preview about resurrecting the more controversial aspects of the 2017 session, so for now it appears that the legislators might actually be focused on governing the state rather than dividing it. But Robertson remains cautious.

"I wouldn't take their silence as evidence that 2019 will be easy," she said. "I think it's very likely that we'll be fighting off efforts to repeal local nondiscrimination ordinances and pass more religious-refusal bills."

Although the session does not officially begin until January 8, bill filing commenced in November.

"We've already had a religious-refusal bill filed that would prevent employers and professional associations from disciplining counselors who discriminate on the basis of their personal religious views, and I expect we'll see many more religious-refusal bills filed in the coming weeks," Robertson said. "But we're also excited to see bills that would update the state's civil-rights laws to include LGBTQ people in protections against discrimination at work, in access to housing, and at the corner store. We'll be following these bills closely."

Groups like Equality Texas plan on being there every step of the way, blocking bad bills and promoting pro-LGBTQ equality bills—just as they do in every session.

"We can't do our work without the help of Texans who care about equality," Robertson said, adding that the easiest way to get involved is by visiting equalitytexas.org and signing up for action alerts.

Ryan Leach is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

Montrose Park to Include LGBTQ Memorial

Avondale Promenade, at 424 Westheimer, is slated to open in 2020.

By Brandon Wolf



Construction is scheduled to begin this summer on a pocket park in Montrose that includes a memorial to LGBTQ victims of violence.

Duncan Elliott, a representative from the City of Houston's General Services Department (GSD), said the Avondale Promenade Park at 424 Westheimer should be complete by early 2020.

The park will include the Montrose Remembrance Garden, an LGBTQ memorial dedicated in 2011 that currently sits at Hyde Park Boulevard and Commerce Street.

The City also plans interpretative panels in the park that will present a timeline of the neighborhood. Some of the panels may reflect the importance of Montrose to the LGBTQ community. Lisa Johnson, also with the GSD, said the panels are still in the planning stages.

Competitive bidding on the project will take place early this year, and by mid-2019 contracts are expected to go before the City Council.

The park has long been a goal of mayor pro-tem Ellen Cohen, a staunch LGBTQ ally whose district includes Montrose. Cohen began working in 2015 to make the park a reality, and meetings were held in 2016 to seek input from several neighborhood associations. The final plans reflect that input.

"It's been very refreshing working with a community that is so excited with the project," Johnson said, adding that from the time the City purchased the 9,988-square-foot parcel in 2015, the project has proceeded at a typical pace. "There are a lot of moving pieces."

Jim Patterson of White Oak Design made a presentation on the park's status to a November meeting of the Avondale Association. He showed construction plans and fielded questions. →

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News

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Patterson said that one of the park's unique features will be a nesting structure for chimney-swift birds. The structure will include polyester resin walls in the earth-tone colors of beet, cider, and basil.

Other features of the park will include a large pavilion, a dog run, a garden, and a play area that offers "fun for people of all ages."

A 12-foot promenade will bisect the park diagonally, and all features will be fully accessible to people with disabilities.

The park's structures will mirror the Craftsman architectural style of many homes along the streets near the site. The style was made popular by architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

For several years, Houston's annual Pride parade ended at Whitney and Westheimer—the southwest corner of the site.

Numerous gay bars, restaurants, and businesses have been situated within a few blocks of the site, including Dirty Sally's, Silver Bullet, and Numbers. Don's La Patois restaurant once occupied the parcel, and was later replaced by Michael's bar.

Brandon Wolf is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

Community

Photos by Dalton DeHart and Edgardo Aguilar



On November 30, Impulse Group Houston sponsored "Artdacity," a World AIDS Day tribute at Ballroom at Bayou Place. Pictured are members of the board and friends.



On Nov. 18, The T.R.U.T.H Project, Save Our Sisters United, and the Mahogany Project presented a weekend of honoring unity. Pictured are (front row, l to r): **John Nicklos**, **Rechatter Brady**, **Duchess Whitt**, **Crimson Jordan**, **Ebony Smith**, (middle row) **Jessica Zyrie**, **Tiffany Scales**, **Jayla Sylvester**, and **Anthony Randall**, (top row) **Kevin Anderson**, **Verniss McFarland**, and **Rylie Jefferson**.



On December 1, Bayou City Performing Arts presented its *Joy to the World* concert at Resurrection MCC. Pictured are the performers.



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Calendar of Events

Compiled by Marene Gustin



Dine Out, Do Good

Galveston Restaurant Week

"Filete de Pargo Simpatico" at Rudy & Paco Restaurant & Bar in Galveston.

BOTH PHOTOS - GALVESTON ISLAND CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



If you're a fan of Houston Restaurant Weeks—and you love seafood—best head down to the island later this month for that city's take on eating out for a cause. Galveston Restaurant Week runs from the 26th to February 10 and has some of the best eateries in Galveston participating. Sponsored by food delivery service WAITR, the event, in its eighth year, offers prix-fixe menus for diners who might otherwise not try a lot of new places. The two-course breakfasts, lunches, and brunches are $10 to $20, and two-and-three-course dinners are priced at $20 to $35. A portion of every meal this year will go to Access Care of Coastal Texas, Inc., a nonprofit that provides services to clients who are HIV-positive. The funds will go toward weekly meals for clients.

Some of your choices are BLVD Seafood, Little Daddy's Gumbo Bar, Saltwater Grill, Fisherman's Wharf, and Gaido's. Or you can go with Tex-Mex, steaks, or pasta at Taquilo's, Saltgrass Steakhouse, and Trattoria La Vigna.

And because you know you're going to be taking phone photos of that delicious food anyway, upload pictures to galvestonrestaurantweek.com for a chance to win a $500 grand prize. So do all the eating and snapping you want, because it's for a good cause. ***—Marene Gustin***

Galveston Restaurant Week
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GalvestonRestaurantWeek.com

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1 Tues.

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2 Wed.

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Royal portraits.
mfah.org
The Connoisseur's Eye *thru Feb 3*
Ceramics in the Rienzi Collection.
mfah.org

3 Thurs.

El Niño Jesus *thru 11*
A collection of Mexican Child Jesus artwork. **meca-houston.org**
Art in The Cistern *thru 13*
Site-specific art by Carlos Cuz-Diez.
buffalobayou.org

4 Fri.

Magical Winter Lights + *thru 6*
Holiday lights at Gulf Greyhound Park.
magicalwinterlights.com

5 Sat.

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Walls Turned Sideways *last day*
Artist confront the justice system.
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6 Sun.

Art in The Cistern *thru Jan 13*
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7 Mon.

I Love 3rd Ward *thru 12*
Art exhibit on historic Houston neighborhood.
artleaguehouston.org

8 Tues.

Shen Yun *thru 16*
The culture of ancient China.
shenyun.com

For ongoing events, visit outsmartmagazine.com

9 Wed.

Gust *thru Mar 20*
Interactive art at the park.
discoverygreeen.com

10 Thurs.

Pachamama ✚ Lecture on Andean Mother Goddess of Earth and Time.
archaeologynow.org
Luzia! ★ *thru Feb 3*
Cirque du Soleil 's dream of Mexico.
cirquedusoleil.com

11 Fri.

Diana 66th Kickoff Party ✚ Party at Hanover Montrose. (See page 20.)
thedianafoundation.org
Rebecca Morris: The Ache of Bright *thru Mar 16* New painting exhibit.
blafferartmuseum.org

12 Sat.

Czech Museum Open House ✚
czechcenter.org
Le Fleurs du Mal ★ Flowers of Evil concert. **mercuryhouston.org**
Consenting Bodies ★ *& 13* Play reading. **mildredsumbrella.com**

13 Sun.

Box 13 Artspace
thru Feb 2 Three new art exhibits at the Box. **box13artspace.com**

14 Mon.

The Condition of Being Here
thru 27 Jasper Johns exhibit at the new Menil Drawing Institute.
menil.org

15 Tues.

The Book of Mormon ★ *thru 20*
Who knew Mormons were funny?
houston.broadway.com

16 Wed.

Benito Huerta + Janet Chaffee
thru Feb 16 Latinx Art Now exhibit.
rudolphblume.com

17 Thurs.

Air Supply ★
Don't be all out of love . . . go see them!
staffordcentre.com

18 Fri.

Chili Fest & Bear Quest ✚ *& 19*
Eat and drink on the island.
yagaschiliquest.com

19 Sat.

Houston Women March On ✚
March for justice. (See page 20.)
houstonwomensmarch.org
The Secretary ★ *thru Feb 10*
A new comedy.
mainstreettheater.com

20 Sun.

MATCH Family Fun Day ✚
Free and open to the public.
matchouston.org
New Exhibits By Camp Bosworth, Miss Pussycat, and Quintron.
galvestonartscenter.org

21 Mon.

Ice *last day*
Skate at the park!
discoverygreen.com

22 Tues.

Justin Timberlake ★
With The Shadowboxers.
houstontoyotacenter.com

23 Wed.

The River Bride ★ *thru Feb 10*
A Brazilian folklore play.
stagestheatre.com

24 Thurs.

Cheryl Donegan: GRLZ + VEILS
thru Mar 31 The exhibition marks the artist's first solo exhibit devoted predominantly to her paintings.
camh.org

25 Fri.

Hansel & Gretel ★ *thru 28*
A family friendly opera.
uh.edu
The Pearl Fishers ★ *thru Feb 8*
An operatic love triangle.
hgo.org

26 Sat.

Amanda Shires ★
Singer/songwriter performs.
theheightstheater.com
Don Pasquale ★ One night only, an opera by Donizetti.
uh.edu

27 Sun.

Rent ★
A live production on Fox TV tonight.
fox.com/rent
Jackie & Me ★ *thru Feb 17* Coinciding with Jackie Robinson's 100th birthday.
mainstreettheater.com

28 Mon.

Disturbed ★
The band plays Toyota Center.
toyotacenterhouston.com

29 Tues.

Waitress ★ *thru Feb 3*
If you love pie . . .
houston.broadway.com

30 Wed.

Bucky Miller: Two Raccoons
thru Mar 31 Part of the Art on the Lawn series. **camh.org**

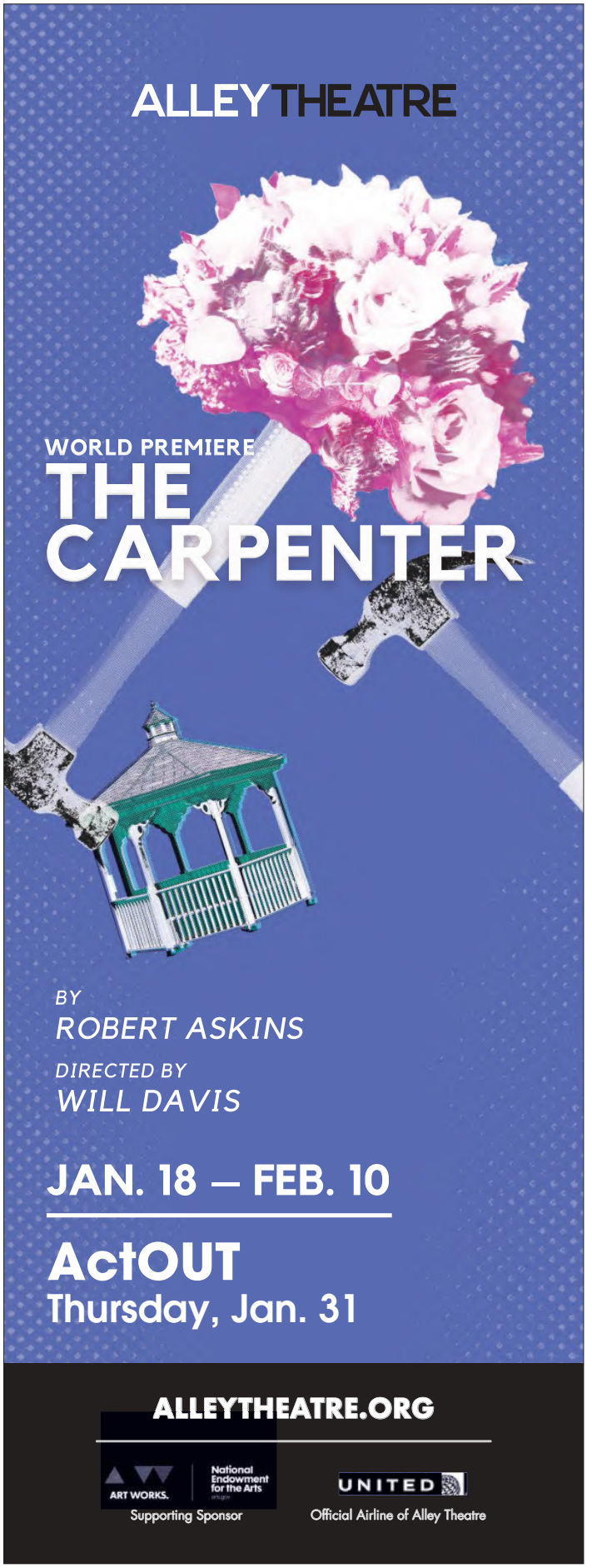
31 Thurs.

36th Annual International Piano Festival ★ Featuring Sean Chen.
uh.edu/pianofestival
The Seldoms: Dancing on Thin Ice ★
Chicago-based dance company at The Rothko. **diverseworks.org**

Save the Date

2nd Annual Lez Prom Houston
February 9 A special night dedicated to queer self-identified women and nonbinary folks. A safe space to dance, drink, and be freely you. **facebook.com/events/485949191815125**

More Calendar →



Calendar of Events

continued from previous page

Diana Awards Gala Kickoff Party 11

January 11

–

Join the party in the common room at Hanover Montrose as the Diana Foundation kicks off the 66th annual awards season. Festivities start at 6 p.m. This is a free event, and there will be food and beverages with valet parking provided. On a historical note, the common room at the apartment highrise was once the site of the Palace Club, where the 1971 and 1972 Diana Awards were held. The kickoff party is the place to learn all about the 66th Diana Awards, which will be March 23 at Rice's Crystal Ballroom. The Diana Foundation is a nonprofit recognized as the oldest continuously active gay organization in the United States. The annual Diana Awards is a comedic roast of Houston's finest, with proceeds supporting 2018–19 beneficiaries Out for Education, The Botts Collection, and the University of Houston's LGBT History Research Collection.

thedianafoundation.org

Houston Women March On 19

January 19

–



Get your sneakers out and march for justice. The independent Houston nonprofit is a way to make your voice heard. The march is about helping women in Houston and the surrounding counties rise up and elect progressive candidates on local, state, and national levels. Gathering and opening activities begin at 8 a.m. at the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, 105 Sabine St.; the march to City Hall starts at 10; the rally is at City Hall at 10:30.

houstonwomensmarch.org

Main Street Theater 19–Feb. 17

January 19–February 17

–

At Main Street Theater's two venues in Rice Village and at the MATCH, you've got two new plays to see this month. First up is *The Secretary* from Kyle John Schmidt. It's a dark comedy (for adults) about a small-town gun company and guns that start going off all over town, but no one is pulling the triggers! *The Secretary* runs from January 19 through February 10. Next up is *Jackie & Me* based on the book by Dan Gutman. The play is part of the theater's youth series and tells the tale of Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball. The play coincides with the 100th anniversary of Robinson's birth and runs from January 27 through February 17.

mainstreettheater.com

Snow Bunnies 20

January 20

–

Head on over to Rich's Houston starting at 5 p.m. Bunnies on the Bayou Snow Bunnies 39 is kicking off the new inside Sunday Funday at Rich's Houston with DJ Melle Mel with a hip hop/Latin feel and DJ Joe Ross spinning on the Patio. At 9 p.m. catch the kickoff of Dessie Love-Blake's Drag Spectacular featuring 20-plus entertainers, aerialists, drag queens, and more. And it's only a $5 cover fee! Bunnies on the Bayou, Inc. is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization dedicated to raising and distributing funds for various charitable, educational, and cultural programs that seek to improve the quality of life and promote education and awareness of human rights for individuals in the Houston LGBTQ community.

bunniesonthebayou.org ■


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By Grace S. Yung, CFP

Prospering in the New Year

Financial resolutions worth keeping in 2019.



With a new year upon us, you may have drawn up some resolutions such as starting a workout routine, getting a new job, or setting aside money.

The start of the year is always a good time to make changes, and with the new tax laws, now is a great time to take advantage of credits and/or deductions that you may be eligible for. That being said, before making any major financial moves, make sure that the tax laws will help, rather than hinder, your progress.

In the waning days of 2017, President Trump signed a long-promised tax bill that included several major changes: a reduction in the top federal income tax rate, doubling of the standard deduction, changes to personal exemptions, elimination or reduction of many itemized deductions, and elimination of the "Please Amendment" limitation on deductions.

In addition, the estate-tax exemption was increased to just under $11.2 million per taxpayer, with a 40 percent tax on transfers that exceed this amount. Likewise, the gift, estate, and generation-skipping tax exemptions increased from $5 million to $10 million per individual.

While not all of these changes impact everyone, it's important to be aware of where you could benefit. There are also ways to build up your retirement savings while taking advantage of tax deductions and/or deferrals, as well as tax-free income down the road.

If your employer offers a retirement savings plan, you can benefit in several ways. For instance, if you're a participant in a traditional 401(k) savings plan, you can defer your contribution in order to lower your taxable income.

Also, any growth in the account will be tax-deferred, meaning that you won't have to pay tax on the gains until the time of withdrawal. This can allow your money to compound exponentially over time.

You may also be able to contribute to a personal Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Traditional IRAs allow you to deduct some or all of your contribution. And, similar to a traditional 401(k), the money inside of a traditional IRA is allowed to grow tax-deferred.

With a Roth IRA, you won't be able to deduct your contributions. But since this money goes into the account after you've paid the tax on it, the earnings and withdrawals from a Roth IRA are tax-free.

If you haven't yet made your IRA contribution for 2018, it's still not too late. In fact, you have until the April 2019 tax filing date to do so.

What you don't spend is oftentimes just as important–if not more so–than what you save. A new year can be the perfect time to practice budgeting and making payments that you know you'll have later on.

For instance, if you know that you'll be purchasing a new car in the near future, start making "payments" now by setting aside a certain amount of money each month. By the end of the year, you'll have a nice-sized down payment for the vehicle–which, in turn, can make your monthly payments lower.

Putting funds away in an "attitude" money account is another great way to keep yourself on track financially, as well as to avoid credit-card expenses when you purchase something you want.

For instance, a weekend getaway, a new outfit, or a new big-screen TV could set you back quite a bit financially. But if you have an "attitude" account, you can use those funds to make fun, non-essential purchases.

It's important to keep in mind that "attitude money" is separate from the funds you set aside for your rent or mortgage, car payment, and other regular living expenses. Likewise, these dollars aren't the same as your emergency fund–an account you have for unexpected expenses like a leaky roof, a fender bender, or other potentially high-dollar, unanticipated needs. (Without an emergency fund, you could find yourself either dipping into your savings or using a credit card to pay for unexpected expenses–and neither of these is a very good option).

Ideally, you should aim to contribute 10 percent of your income to your attitude account. While this can take some discipline, you'll be happy you have this money when you're easily able to pay for vacations and other items you want.

Plus, you'll likely discover that you can still pay your regular living expenses even without the amount that you're contributing to your attitude fund. The new year is a great time to get started with your attitude fund if you haven't done so already.

Grace S. Yung, CFP, is a certified financial planner practitioner with experience in helping domestic partners plan their finances since 1994. She is a principal at Midtown Financial LLC in Houston and was recognized as a "Five-Star Wealth Manager" in the September 2017 issue of Texas Monthly. *Yung can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com.*

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By Monica Roberts

The Hart of the Matter

Dear black comedians: homophobic and transphobic jokes aren't funny.



Kevin Hart

ROY ROCHLIN/GETTY IMAGES

Happy New Year, dear readers! My hope and prayer for you is that 2019 is a fabulous year for you, and that you are blessed to achieve all your hopes and dreams in the next 12 months.

I have some hopes and dreams I'll be talking about in my 2019 columns, but first let's get to some unfinished business from 2018.

I've been observing the drama over comedian Kevin Hart stepping away from a chance to host the 2019 Oscars because he dug in his heels and stubbornly refused to apologize for some past homophobic comments.

Then D.L. Hughley's problematic butt poured gasoline on the public-relations fire when he tried to defend Hart on Twitter, and ended up making a derogatory comment about *Pose* actress Indya Moore.

And that's before I even start talking about all the black folks who, in their zeal to defend Kevin Hart, let loose with homophobic and transphobic slurs in comment threads all over the web.

It's not that I don't have a sense of humor. Everyone who spends quality time with me is quite aware that I have a wicked sense of humor. I enjoy going to comedy clubs. I love getting some much-needed laughs by watching comedians onstage and in their movies.

To me, the best comedians are people who can make you laugh without resorting to jokes that viciously demean people. That requires skill.

Where I draw the line is when "jokes" are demeaning or hurtful to my community. You will get your wig snatched by me for that.

Let me say this loudly, for all you people in the back: anti-TBLGQ rhetoric has ramped up, and hate crimes have been on the rise ever since this malignant presidential misadministration assumed power.

Demeaning transphobic and homophobic jokes aren't funny, and cisgender heterosexual people don't get to tell me or anyone in the TBLGQ world what should or shouldn't offend us.

Cisgender heterosexual people also don't get to decide if an apology is sincere and should be accepted by the offended party. We make that determination.

We currently have an administration chockfull of people who are being advised by the longtime professional haters at the Family Research Council and other anti-TBLGQ groups.

They are rolling back policies we fought hard to get, while pushing for new anti-gay and anti-trans policies.

Words matter. In this current political environment, you can understand why the TBLGQ world has an aversion to and zero tolerance for anti-TBLGQ jokes. These jokes not only reinforce stereotypes, bigotry, and hatred, but also lead to people in our community getting harmed. Witness the 24 trans people murdered in 2018 (as of this writing), and the others who have survived anti-trans hate attacks.

Witness the black gay couple ambushed at their Las Vegas home on November 29, with none of their neighbors coming to their aid.

Witness, one day later, a 20-year-old lesbian who suffered a fractured spine by a man who sucker-punched her while yelling anti-gay slurs after she kissed her girlfriend on a New York City subway.

Black comedians who tell transphobic and homophobic jokes like Dave Chappelle, Kevin Hart, D.L. Hughley, and Lil Duval have contributed to a toxicity that leads to violence being perpetrated against our community.

A joke is not "'just a joke," D.L. Hughley. A joke ceases to be humorous when it causes pain or is insulting to the community you're trying to make fun of. Our people's nearly two-century history of combating blackface should tell you that.

Speaking of community, the reason that many black TBLGQ folks are pissed about the Hart mess is that it's past time for the African-American community to have an honest discussion about transphobia and homophobia.

This discussion needs to leave a few things at the door that we hear far too often online, including misinterpretations of biblical scripture and fact-free anti-trans and anti-gay commentary.

Hate thoughts plus hate speech equals hate crimes and hate murders. These homophobic and transphobic "jokes" only serve to normalize anti-TBLGQ hatred and grease the skids for these crimes to be perpetrated against our community.

On top of that, they aren't funny.

Monica Roberts, a native Houstonian, is the founding editor of the GLAAD award-winning blog TransGriot. Her ongoing mission is to educate people on the lives of transgender people and fight for everyone's human rights.

PrEP WITH US



Here's to a wonderful and happy New Year.

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SAVE THE DATE

February 20: Out@TUTS Night presents *Mama Mia!* Get your seats for the first Wednesday night of every thrilling production in TUTS' 50th-anniversary season. After the curtain goes down, the party continues with free bites, drink specials, and live music. Mingle with the cast and crew members, sing a few show tunes, and celebrate an inclusive Houston. All are welcome! INFO tuts.com/out

February 24: Decadent Desserts & Dancing presented by the Montrose Center, benefitting AssistHers. MontroseCenter.org/ddd

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SISTERLY LOVE

Space City Sisters become Houston's first chapter in worldwide organization for drag-queen nuns.

By Lourdes Zavaleta
Photo by Ashkan Roayaee

When children arrived for Drag Queen Storytime at the Freed-Montrose Library on October 27, they were greeted by hateful protesters who held signs saying things like "This library perverts children" and "Homo sex is a sin."

Thanks to a new group called the Space City Sisters, those children and their parents simultaneously received a much warmer welcome to the library—from drag-queen "nuns" with painted white faces, along with other pro-LGBTQ demonstrators.

"We wanted to make sure that kids could get inside of the building without being scared," says Leah Jorgensen, co-founder of the Space City Sisters. "We thought that if they saw some friendly faces, they'd feel more comfortable attending the program."

The Drag Queen Storytime event was one of several acts of kindness performed by the Space City Sisters since the group's launch in August. The Sisters serve Houston's queer community through fundraising, promoting HIV/AIDS awareness, and volunteering. hey have collected donations for PWA Holiday Charities, visited bars to raise awareness about sexual health, and participated in Houston's second annual LGBTQ Latin Pride festival. →



Conventing Quintet The Space City Sisters' founders and current members are, clockwise from left, Sister Kitty Lickentwat, Sister Sneakin' d'Bone, Sister Jeff, Sister Candice B. Love, and Sister Gin Tervention.



"WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN INSPIRE EVERYONE TO WORK SIDE-BY-SIDE TOWARD EQUALITY."
—Leah Jorgensen, aka Sister Candice Bee Love

Sisterely Love

continued from page 28







"Parts of the LGBTQ community are hurting," says Jorgensen, a cisgender woman who identifies as bisexual. "The Space City Sisters were established to do something about it."

In December, the group's efforts were rewarded, when the Space City Sisters became the first-ever Houston mission of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (SPI). The SPI is the leading order of drag queen nuns worldwide, dedicated to promulgating universal joy and expiating stigmatic guilt.

"We are so grateful that our hard work finally paid off," Jorgensen says. "In the same breath, we are now realizing how much we have left to do. Now that we are affiliated with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, the real work begins."

While the Space City Sisters' presence is new to Houston, drag-queen nuns working to strengthen LGBTQ communities date back to 1979, when three queer men walked through the streets of San Francisco's Castro District to challenge bystanders' perceptions of gender and sexuality.

The San Francisco group became known as the SPI, which today has 46 branches in the U.S., including houses in Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio. Now, the Space City Sisters are Texas' fourth SPI group.

The Space City Sisters completed an SPI application, which required the group to compile a list of its monthly meetings, volunteer projects, beneficiaries, and photos, and submit the files to the United Nuns Privy Council (UNPC). The council, made up of senior nuns who set standards for and mentor new nuns, decided that the Houston group was fit to become an SPI mission on December 17.

Sister Faegala Tina Pfischzoot and Sister Unity, SPI group coaches who serve on the UNPC, guided the Space City Sisters through the application process.

"Since they first contacted us, Houston has hit the ground running," Unity says. "We can tell that the Sisters have much commitment and enthusiasm for what we practice, which is to reach communities through various types of activism."

The UNPC works with prospective groups to ensure that they have an understanding of SPI's history of activism.

SPI missions and houses should be reflections of their environments, so each group can be unique with its own habit styles, cultures, and rules, Unity says.

Jorgensen says the Space City Sisters welcome members of all genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and religions. The group's only requirements are that members be at least 18 years old and identify as LGBTQ or allies.

The Space City Sisters' founders and current members are Sister Candice Bee Love, Sister Sneakin' 'Da Bone, Sister Sister Gin Tervention, Sister Kitty Lickentwat, and Sister Jeff. As an SPI recognized mission, the group's founders now get to call themselves SPI novice sisters—new members of the organization who are closely monitored by the UNPC.

"Our group is made up of very diverse people," says Jorgensen, whose alter ego is Sister Candice Bee Love. "The Space City Sisters are pups, drag queens, into leather, and are gay, bi, and trans. Our different involvements in the LGBTQ community help us to recognize where we are needed."

The Space City Sisters have four aspirants who are working to become members of the organization. Before joining, aspirants must get to know the group and its mission by attending monthly meetings and events over a period of two to three months.

The next Space City Sisters membership meeting will be January 10.

Jorgensen, who works as a drag performer named Lily Von Tease, first learned about the Houston Public Library's Drag Queen Storytime in June when organizers Trent Lira and Devin Will asked her to read to a group of children for Pride Month.

Drag Queen Storytime went unnoticed by right-wing conservatives until KHOU-TV highlighted the events during a July 9 segment that featured Houston drag queen Blackberri at the Heights library branch.

Anti-LGBTQ activists urged the City to ban the program, even filing a lawsuit against mayor Sylvester Turner and the Houston Public Library director. Protesters, who spew fear-mongering lies about LGBTQ people, now stand outside of the Freed-Montrose branch each time the library hosts the monthly Drag Queen Storytime.

Jorgensen felt the Space City Sisters could make families feel more welcome at the library, in spite of protesters. The group invited LGBTQ advocates to stand outside the library and welcome families to the October edition of Drag Queen Storytime. Dozens of supporters showed up to the library wearing rainbow colors and holding Pride flags, leaving the anti-LGBTQ protesters outnumbered.

"We were honored to have the support of the Space City Sisters and our community," Will says. "They were a positive presence among all of the tension that has been surrounding Drag Queen Storytime. Most importantly, kids and their families felt safe because the Space City Sisters were looking out for them."

Jorgensen hopes that the Space City Sisters will continue to bring Houston's queer community together to make a difference.

"Our city's LGBTQ circles can be very cliquish," Jorgensen says. "The Space City Sisters want to blur those lines, because we are all fighting for the same rights. We believe that we can inspire everyone to work side-by-side toward equality."

The Space City Sisters will host a community coming out party at Ripcord on January 18.

For more info about the Space City Sisters, visit facebook.com/SpaceCitySisters.

Lourdes Zavaleta is a staff writer for OutSmart magazine.

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FIT TO SERVE

HPD manager and Pilates instructor Mimi McCloud gives back to the LGBTQ community.

By Jenny Block

For many years, Mimi McCloud didn't feel comfortable sharing details about her partner at work.

"Photos of us did not adorn my space, and my weekend recap on Mondays was guarded so as not to slip with pronouns. It's a miserable place to exist," McCloud explains. Assumed heterosexuality can be suffocating in a quasi- military environment like law enforcement, McCloud says. But she soon realized that she was doing herself a disservice.

"I was not me," she says. "It's important to me, because love has no standard look. Families are not cookie-cutter. Authenticity and standing in one's essence should not be turned on and off with a switch as you clock in for a shift. People need support. Families need support, no matter the gender or dynamic." →

continued from previous page



Today, the 46-year-old McCloud is out and proud at her job as a manager in the Office of Planning at the Houston Police Department (HPD). She also serves as co-chair of HPD's LGBT Committee, co-chair of the program and events committee for Mayor Sylvester Turner's LGBTQ Advisory Board, and membership ambassador for the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce.

McCloud, who is in a committed relationship with her life partner, Priscilla Peña, is also a fitness buff who teaches Pilates—which came to her during a dark period in her life.

"I'm a domestic-violence survivor, and it was—and still is—my therapy," she says. "I was taking Reformer classes daily, sometimes two 60-minute sessions back-to-back, and my mastery grew quickly."

She says the mind/body connection allowed her to cultivate razor-sharp clarity.

"It's the quintessential self care," she says. "I love the beauty of the Pilates body. The long, lean muscles and ability to engage the core to do wondrous feats is art in motion. Think of a ballet dancer—don't we find them breathtaking? When done properly, it's graceful and functional."

Although she's not teaching as much as she once did, McCloud will soon combine her love for Pilates, community service, and her LGBTQ family by teaching a weekly Mat Pilates session at the Montrose Center. "It's free to the community, and all are welcome to attend," she says.

From the Big Apple to Bellaire

McCloud is originally from New York City. But, she explains, "I've lived in Bellaire forever, so Houston is home to me." McCloud says when she moved to Texas she actually expected to see tumbleweeds everywhere.

Although that hasn't been the case, she says she has spotted the occasional armadillo. "So yeah, some Texas stereotypes are true for us Northern folk."

As a child, McCloud dreamed of becoming an ambassador to France. "As an exchange student many moons ago, I fell in love with the country and the city of Paris. I must have been a self-identified Francophile at a very young age. I was enthralled with the French culture, and still am. What a dream to be able to spend my summers in France." Although she didn't become an ambassador, McCloud began an equally impressive career.

Her path has been a non-traditional one, McCloud says, because she was a mother with three young children—who are now 26, 23, and 19—when she began her climb to professional success.

"THERE'S POWER IN VISIBILITY AS AN EXECUTIVE LGBTQ WOMAN, BECAUSE HISTORICALLY WE HAVEN'T BEEN INCLUDED AROUND THE TABLE."
—Mimi McCloud

She holds a master's degree in public administration, and worked on Capitol Hill for an elected official before returning to Houston to work for another member of Congress. It was then that she moved toward city government.

"My children were in three different schools with different schedules for a long time, and being an involved mother was very much a priority," she says.

McCloud struggled with not being able to pursue her career goals as ardently as she would have liked. "But I also knew that my presence was needed with the little people who depended on me. As with most working parents, something will always be off balance. We must be okay with it and not allow the guilt to override.

"Finding the harmony between your personal life, parental obligations, and work is constantly shifting," she adds. "On the other hand, being able to lead and develop a team in the workplace is a reward that keeps on giving."

Fighting for Equality

During her career, McCloud says she has encountered few out lesbians like herself in the workplace. But that is something she hopes will soon change. "Being gay or lesbian, queer, or whatever name we use, it's not a shameful thing to acknowledge or discuss. Hopefully, my message empowers others."

"There's power in visibility as an executive LGBTQ woman, because historically we haven't been included around the table," she says. "We are less supported by our male counterparts, and unfortunately a tremendous amount of energy is wasted by suppressing our identity."

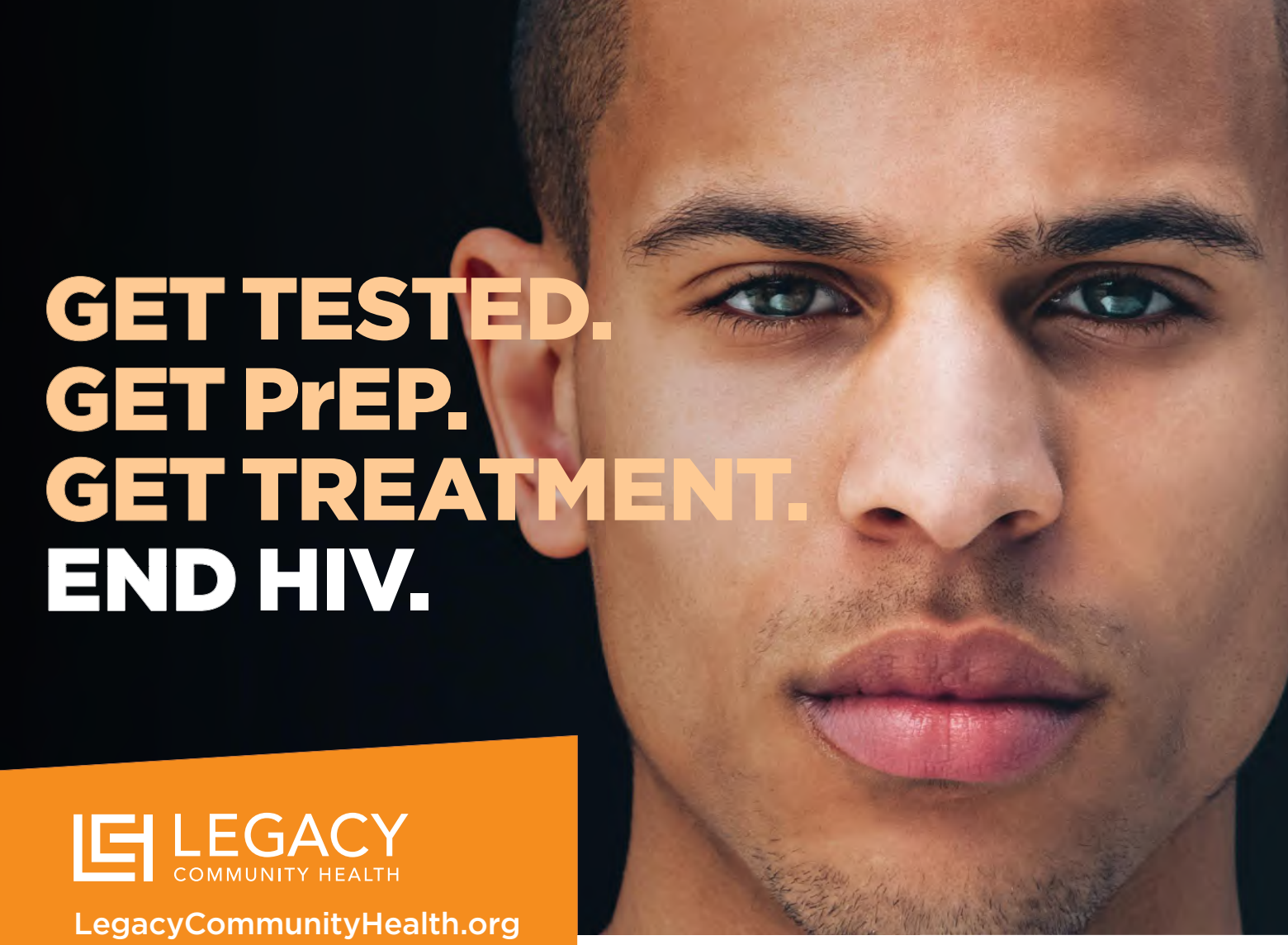
Serving on the mayor's LGBTQ advisory board is vital when it comes to making the city a better, more inclusive place for the community, she says.

"I have a responsibility to leverage my strengths and unique experiences for others in the community by accelerating and curating change," she says.

As for her position as co-chair of the Houston Police Department's LGBT Committee, she's excited about changes that are afoot. The issues she'll be working on include family support, domestic violence, mental health, and health and wellness. Her hope is to be a strong presence and resource for the LGBTQ community.

"Everyone at the Houston Police Department plays a role in bridging the gap with the community," she says. "I'm excited about the impact we are having with the department. If not for the support of our senior leadership, we wouldn't be growing and gaining momentum. I'm honored to have the platform to help."

Jenny Block is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



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Sweet Like Honey

Bisexual Houston dancer Honey Moonpie shakes up Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival.

By Don Maines

This is the year that bisexual burlesque tease Honey Moonpie hopes to pop a pastie in Paris.

But first, the world of timeless titillation will be on display in Houston this month during the fifth annual Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival at Warehouse Live on January 19.

"It's a damned entertaining show," says Moonpie, a bump-and-grinder who also serves as the stage manager and education liaison for the extravaganza. Moonpie lives in Richmond, enjoying an 11-year polyamorous relationship with a married husband and wife.

Festival producer KiKi Maroon promises a sexhibition of more than 40 stellar acts, including contortionists from California, acrobats from New York, and showgirls from Las Vegas. "You don't have to be a jet-setter with an unlimited budget to catch them all in one night; you just have to be in Houston this month," says Maroon. "The festival has given this city a reputation for curating the finest shows, featuring the most eclectic performers."

Maroon didn't have to look any farther than the stage door of a local bar to find Moonpie. The wide-eyed but inexperienced Moonpie showed up one night at Maroon's "varie-tease" show like an eager Eve Harrington, hungry to learn the ins and outs of burlesque.

"I had a thousand questions," says



The Full Moonpie
One of Honey Moonpie's signature routines involves putting two giant eyes on her butt and twerking. She currently lives in Richmond, where she enjoys an 11-year polyamorous relationship with a married husband and wife.

Moonpie. "I had seen it on TV—Las Vegas, Moulin Rouge, and the MTV Awards—and I loved the glamour and showiness of it. My biggest influence, to this day, is the movie *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Burlesque isn't drag, but it also brings sensuality to the stage and you personally own it. You own yourself and your sexuality."

Growing up by the railroad tracks in Rosenberg, 30 miles southwest of Houston, Moonpie was so shy as a youngster that she agonized over changing clothes in the school locker room. "I did a little bit of dance and got close to doing theater, but then I chickened out."

Burlesque became her last temptation.

"I saw someone do a handstand straight into a flip, and I decided that I needed to figure out how to get into this," Moonpie recalls. "I found basically any reason to be backstage. I got my girlfriend to draw a picture of KiKi so I could give it to her and meet her. I kind of pushed my way in, talking to performers, asking about this and that. I took classes in bump and grind, how to pose, how to strut, understanding what musicality is. I went full out."

After several years of training, she chose her stage name—"Something sweet, alluring, and sort of a cheap thrill. Honey Moonpie just kind of hit all the marks." She debuted in 2013 at a benefit show to raise money for a museum of burlesque collectibles that former exotic dancer Dixie Evans ran in Las Vegas. Anyone could perform. "It was a bar show in the year that Dixie Evans passed away, so it was meaningful to me. I had a table of friends there, and a friend and I created an old-school vaudeville act [with my friend playing] my manager who would tell me how bad a stripper I was, so just get out there and do it. I was not mentally ready. I had on these little cupcake pasties, and I took my gloves off; I stripped, but not everything."

Fast-forward three years to the Texas Queerlesque Festival in Dallas, where Moonpie performed her Madeline Kahn tribute number as Lili Von Shtupp from the 1974 Mel Brooks movie *Blazing Saddles*. "It's a burlesque festival entirely produced, staffed, and cast by members of the LGBTQ community. It's the only one of its kind in Texas."

In 2017, Moonpie returned to Texas Queerlesque with a tribute to the musical Little Shop of Horrors that has become a signature number for her.

Meanwhile, she says, "Every month, I am the stage manager and co-host of 'Burly Q Live' at Warehouse Live, so I have to up my game. I do silly, one-off things like putting these two giant eyes on my butt and twerking. They're like six inches in diameter, and I can isolate their movements. I have been saying for a while that I want to perform in Paris, so I guess it's going to be with eyeballs on my bottom. I want this to be a year of travel for me."

Moonpie is most proud of her association with the Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival because it includes workshops by world-renowned burlesque artists, whose acts range from Vegas-style cabaret to bizarre sideshow stunts and death-defying feats.

"Setting up the classes is a big passion project for me," says Moonpie. "This year's classes will include a man who sits on a chair 10 feet in the air, and can-can girls from cruise ships who will teach us little cowgirls how to kick our heels up."

Maoon says the festival has sold out four years in a row.

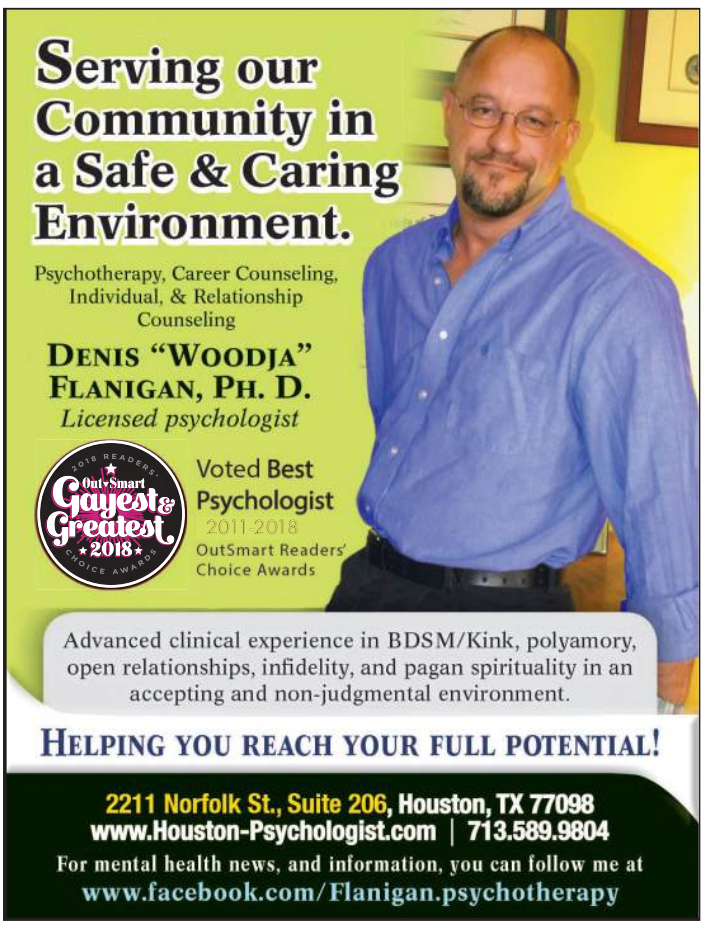
"Growing up doesn't mean you stop wanting to run away with the circus," Maroon says. "It just means that the circus now includes a woman bathing in a six-foot-tall martini glass. Who doesn't want to run away with that?"

What: Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival
When: 7 to 11 p.m., January 19
Where: Warehouse Live, 813 Saint Emanuel
Tickets and info: bcbcfestival.com

For tickets and further information, visit BCBCfestival.com

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.





'Will' Power

The Alley Theatre's first trans director, Will Davis, previews 'The Carpenter.'

By Don Maines



Transgender stage director Will Davis stepped outside his Houston hotel room and "took a big inhale" of Texas air.

"I was flooded with the warmest feelings and memories," he says, explaining that he began his transition while a graduate student at the University of Texas from 2009 to 2013.

Davis returned to Texas last month to begin rehearsals on the world premiere of Cypress native Robert Askins' new comedy, *The Carpenter*, which opens January 18 at the Alley Theatre.

As a freelance director, Davis works at theaters in cities across the country, and his arrival in Houston makes him the first trans director in Alley history. "They told me that it's exciting for them, and it's absolutely exciting for me. It is important for me to be really visible as a trans or genderqueer person and say to folks who think they have never met a trans person that you have met many, you just didn't realize it."

Davis says a major milestone came when he chose a new first name while living in Austin. "The idea for me picking 'Will' was its verb quality—the inherent promise that I 'will' do something through sheer 'will' power."

"I can almost grow a beard now," he adds. "It makes me less of a target, and I can do more to support people in the trans community who are targeted. Actually, I don't know how I look to other people. I get 'Thank you, sir' and 'Thank you, lady.' It's amazing and hilarious; I'm constantly reminded of how what a person sees comes from their own frame of reference."

Especially gratifying is for Davis to enter a community in a position of leadership, showing people that it's possible to succeed in the career of their choosing. "A rising tide lifts all boats," he says. "That is not to say that I can move mountains, but in a small way I am keeping a door open for the next person. If I run into a problem, we can resolve it so that it won't be a problem for whoever comes next. Which is not to say I've had a problem at the Alley. This has been an incredible company to work with; they are doing so much of their own work, and their inclusivity has been amazing."

The success Davis has achieved, including two years as the artistic director at American Theater Company in Chicago, demonstrates how he hasn't limited himself to simply telling queer stories. *The Carpenter*, for example, has no LGBTQ content, although Davis might be an ideal candidate (having studied at UT) to divine the play's pokes at the rivalry between Houston and Dallas.

"It's all being done with a twinkle in its →

eye," says Davis.

Press material summarizes the play as follows: "Dan is a self-made man from blue-collar Houston, while his fiancé is from Dallas—Highland Park, to be exact. As they arrive at her father's palatial mansion for their wedding, Dan receives a startling revelation about his family, his father, and the secret everybody has been trying to keep. And all the while, his college buddies are trying to get him drunk, his future father-in-law is shooting his rifle into the ceiling, and Google is trying to take over his business. When the carpenter shows up to build the wedding gazebo, all hell breaks loose. There are mistaken identities, accidental partner swaps, an angry stripper, and laughs."

"It is a big, awesome, social-commentary of a new play," says Davis, noting that he and the scenic designer have collaborated on a stage set "that is an irreverent homage to *Real Housewives of Dallas*, in all of its opulent, terrible marvelousness."

"IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO BE REALLY VISIBLE AS A TRANS OR GENDERQUEER PERSON AND SAY TO FOLKS WHO THINK THEY HAVE NEVER MET A TRANS PERSON THAT YOU HAVE MET MANY, YOU JUST DIDN'T REALIZE IT."

—Will Davis

Next up for Davis is a stop in Louisville, Kentucky, to direct another original script, *We've Come to Believe*, at the 43rd Humana Festival of New American Plays. Then he'll be collaborating with out musical-theater genius Stephen Sondheim on a concert staging of *Road Show* for the Encores! series at New York City Center, and directing a production of Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House, Part 2* at the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, that will probably be performed by "a cast made up entirely of people of color."

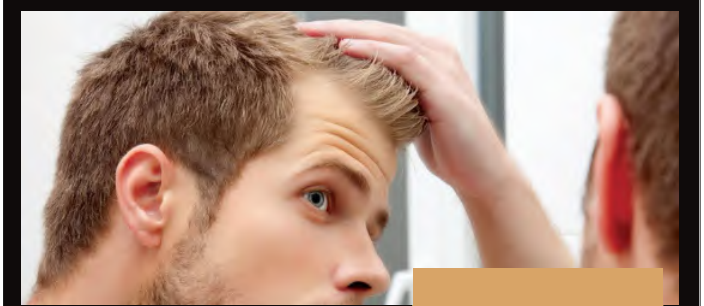
Creative casting enlightened one of Davis' greatest stage triumphs when he "cast a wide net" in tryouts for American Theater Company's 2017 production of *Picnic* by the late, closeted playwright William Inge. Actors were encouraged to audition for roles in which they self-identified, regardless of gender. For example, Hal (the role that William Holden portrayed in the 1955 movie version) was described by Inge as "a handsome drifter," says Davis, "so I wanted to cast the handsomest, 'drifterest' actor who auditioned. I was looking for soul qualities."

Offstage, Davis says, he feels "a joyful responsibility, but a responsibility nonetheless," to look out for fellow trans people, particularly those who can't easily put on and take off a gender identification by the clothes they wear or their hairstyle. "When you are white and trans-masculine, you are targeted much less than trans women. I feel the number of trans people who are killed or hurt is much, much higher than anyone knows because many crimes are not reported; in other cases, the gender of the victims is mis-recorded. There is also a great disadvantage for people who are doing jobs such as prostitution that put them in physical danger, so they face a double whammy or a triple whammy. I try to engage with community organizations and work to keep these folks visible."

What: *The Carpenter*
When: January 20–31
Where: The Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Ave.
Tickets and info: AlleyTheatre.org

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

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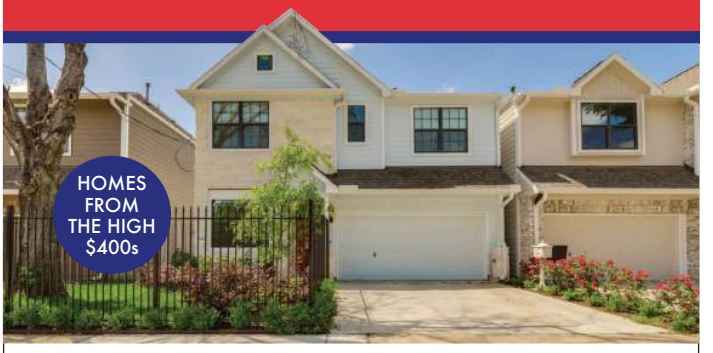
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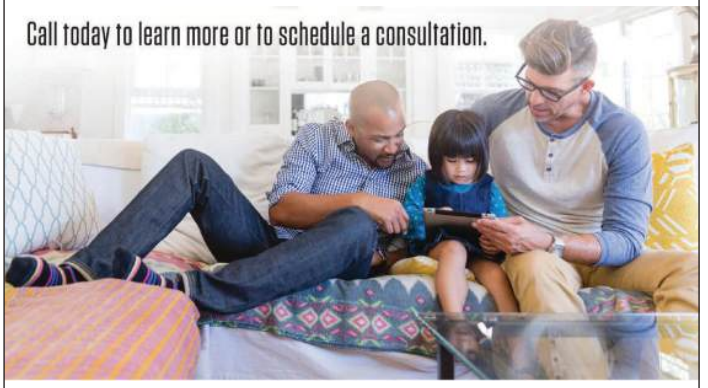
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ASTROCAST 2019 OVERVIEW

by Lilly Roddy



ALEX ROSA

WHAT DOES 2019 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

We continue in an active pattern that keeps our country and economy in a constant state of change. We should experience some rooting out of the sources of our difficulties and the complications that surround them.

In accordance with Mercury's usual annual pattern, we will have three Mercury retrogrades this year. Mercury retrograde is good for taking care of past issues, reconnecting with old friends, and enjoyment in recalling fond memories. It is never a good idea to start a new project, purchase a car, or buy electronics under Mercury retrograde. This year, the dates for Mercury retrogrades are February 26–April 7, July 1–August 7, and October 25–November 27. Make these dates work for you, instead of pushing against the flow.

The eclipses this year will have the strongest impact on Cancer, Capricorn, Aries, and Libra. Eclipse dates in 2019 are January 5 and January 20, July 2 and July 16, and December 25. The first eclipse in 2020 occurs on January 10. Eclipses are times in which doors open and new opportunities present themselves.

And finally, we have a huge planetary lineup that will really show itself after September. We will begin to feel this Saturn/Pluto lineup as early as the end of March. The pace will really pick up at the end of September. Saturn/Pluto will impact our economy, the stock market, and how the nation conducts itself with other countries. This should be a huge cleansing of toxins from our systems—personally, nationally, and worldwide. Get yourself clear of debt, reduce your stress, and find simpler ways to satisfy your needs! →

Lilly Roddy has been an astrologer for the last 35 years. She counsels individuals in personal, business, and financial matters, as well as lecturing on astrology. Her original interest in astrology, like most people's, was to come to a better understanding of who she was and how to make the most of her life. She continues to study all areas of astrology and metaphysics to expand her base of knowledge. Roddy's approach is to bring together a mental, physical, and spiritual combination that has real application in the world. Roddy can be contacted at 713.529.5842 or lillycath@aol.com.



ARIES
MARCH 21–APRIL 19

Winter. This is a challenging time, especially for career and long-term security. You may need to keep your résumé updated so you can adapt to an ever-changing work environment. Depending on your age, for some this can be a time of retirement, while others will feel the urge to start their own businesses. The pressure will build through April for you to take some action on your own behalf.
Spring. This is a decision-making time for you. You are trying to develop a game plan so you don't feel so stuck. You are reassessing your business and personal boundaries. There are new income sources opening up for you, but you will have to let go of what used to provide you with a sense of security. Your romantic relationship is needing some new long-term goals, so you can act more like a team. If you aren't able to adapt, you may have some hard choices to make.
Summer. Home and family get your attention this summer. The eclipses in July could be opening new doors for you to relocate or to make your nest more comfortable. Older relatives may have health crises during this time. Give them some extra time and attention. Career activity is also very stimulated during this time. There could be opportunities popping up! Mercury retrograde in July will definitely have you rethinking your long-term plans. You will feel the pressure to make decisions in August and September.
Fall. Forward movement is the theme for this fall. Career activities top the list. Be sure to seek the advice and support of friends and family during this time. Your partner's support can provide some sense of perspective about your life priorities. Money will feel tight, and you will need to pay close attention to spending and debt. You may need to pull back and conserve your resources, but don't give up on your plan. You will get there!



TAURUS
APRIL 20–MAY 20

Winter. There are big changes for the cows and bulls this year! Uranus, planet of reinvention, living in the present, and the freedom of self-expression, enters your sign in January for a seven-year visit. You will want to step beyond your previous limitations and fears. This will be super strong in the spring, and will continue through to the end of summer. You will be looking for new interests, new career directions, and a zest for living!
Spring. You are in an action period, and you can develop good strategies to make your life more interesting. Friends, business associates, and even community organizations can be especially helpful. Personal relationships will need more of your time. A short vacation can do wonders for your relationship! This is also a very good time for any type of additional training that will add weight to your résumé. This will help in the fall when you are focusing more on your career.
Summer. Come summer, you will slow down to review your actions. The economy will have you rethinking the decisions you made during the winter. You may feel that you have too many options, and you may feel stuck. Focus on what's most important, but don't give up on your plan. In business and personal relationships, make sure you are being heard. Your patience and tolerance levels will be very low.
Fall. Relationships are the theme for late 2019. You will find ways to renew connections while letting go of relationships that are restrictive or too demanding. The end of the year is another time of review. This will bring to a head any issues or decisions you will need to make. The next couple of years will open doors that will stimulate your mental side. The pace of change will speed up, but being more flexible may give you more time to make a decision you can live with.



GEMINI
MAY 21–JUNE 21

Winter. Although there continues to be a dampening effect in your life, you are slowly beginning to feel more social and adventurous. Relationships of all sorts should be feeling better. It should be easier to negotiate business transactions, generate new friends, and find time to get away from boring routines. Work can still be confusing, but you are looking for distractions. You have to focus on the work you enjoy so you don't feel dragged down. You will be rethinking your career directions in March! Friends and business groups can be very helpful.
Spring. This spring you will want to find a way to reduce your debts, re-examine your investments, put yourself on a budget, and get to the core of financial problems. The situation may seem overwhelming, but this is because you are taking action! Relationship opportunities are still positive, so if you are single, this is a very good time to meet that special someone! You are looking for greater intimacy in your relationships.
Summer. You are in a more internal place this summer. Improving your financial stability is still high on your list. If you invest, keep your money in safe, long-term funds. You will be pulling back from some of your relationships and social activities. Communicating may be more difficult, especially in July. It can be very easy to overload your agenda this summer.
Fall. Although you are usually more active and social during the fall, November could be a time of personal retreat. You return your focus to your relationships and expressing your feelings without fear of retribution. There are some changes in your office routines at the very end of the year that will work out in your favor. As the holidays approach, you will want some time to yourself. Only dance with those you want to! You will be more comfortable with your decisions in 2020.

More Astrocast on page 44

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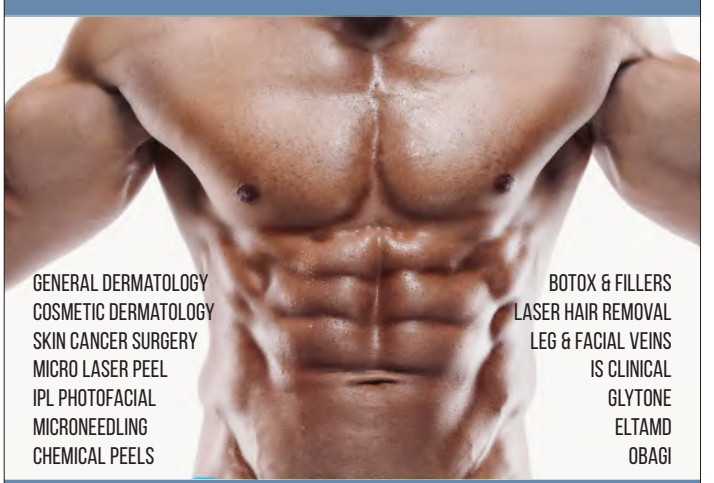
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 continued from page 42

CANCER
JUNE 22–JULY 22

Winter. Relationships and career goals are very active this year. You will be letting go of relationships that have outlived their usefulness. With others, you will set new goals and boundaries. You will be doing the same thing with your work. Is this the time for you to start a new career or business? Is this the time to retire? Don't overthink as you develop a good plan and stick with it. This is also a creative time. You may want to write, teach, or go back to school.



Spring. You are busy with work and household routines, so be aware that overworking can affect your health. With your career, you are still in a reassessment period. Changes in upper management are creating a shaky situation that makes you uncomfortable. Relationships are being improved as you and your partner move in the same direction—or decide to move on!
Summer. This is an especially active time. Try and get projects started in June so you can review them in July. There are new opportunities opening up in the early part of July, and Mercury retrograde will give you extra time to consider your choices. In the early part of August, you are in a better place to make decisions. Prioritize your work, your relationship, and your time for yourself! New social activity and business associations show up in August.
Fall. You are finally ready to make some clear decisions about your career and your relationships. This is an excellent time to sign contracts (or a marriage license!) as you let go of the past and move on. Economic news may not be very good, so stay clear about your direction even as others may feel nervous about their finances. There is continued growth for you that will help well into 2020.

LEO
JULY 23–AUGUST 22

Winter. Organizing your life, health, work space, and time is a focus this year. This is a particularly important year for you to improve your health through changes in eating and exercise habits. Changes and improvements in your work environment are likely. You have to deal with the chaos as it occurs. A second strong force affecting you is the need to reinvent yourself at work or to find a new project that sparks your interest; otherwise you will be bored. Some of you will want to start your own business; others consider retirement. The January eclipse will be a big stimulant!



Spring. This is a very high-energy time that helps you think outside the box to solve problems, explore new ways to express yourself, and be more creative! You look for new employment opportunities if your current job isn't allowing you to grow. In March you are not very patient. Time to step back and gain some perspective about what you are trying to accomplish. Keep a close eye on your finances, especially debt. Make safe investments and avoid risk. Your relationships need renewal, as well as your career. Make sure you and your partner are on the same page; otherwise it may be time to let go and move on.
Summer. You are in an introspective mood. Personal freedom and expression are important to you. Your views may conflict with your company's policies or with co-workers. Make sure you are in a supportive environment, as restriction affects your health. You may change your job situation sooner than planned. Let July be the time you step back and reassess. August is a better time for you to act on your plans. Your relationship will need attention. Make plans for you and your partner to renew important bonds. Getting away from work can be very good for your soul.
Fall. You work to create a stable path that really interests you. The current economic environment may slow your pace. Nevertheless, you move forward by the end of September. Relationships improve as you and your partner feel more in sync. This is also a good time for business partnerships! Spending time with family is especially important this year, particularly in October. Home and roots take on a deeper meaning.

VIRGO
AUGUST 23–SEPTEMBER 22

Winter. The majority of planets are in a very favorable relationship with Virgo, making this an interesting year for you Virgins. Creative efforts should come to fruition. You may teach or go back to school, and/or expand your social media presence. You have an eye on writing and publishing this year that is enhanced with current planetary alignments. Another planetary impulse has put you in touch with your spiritual and psychically sensitive side, making you more careful about who you converse with. You will feel the need to pull away from those who are too needy. It's not unusual for this aspect to keep you at home or in a peaceful supportive environment.



Spring. Despite your growing psychic receptivity, you are busy at work, as people are seeking out your services. This is a good time for self-promotion, expanding your education, and considering jobs more supportive of your work. Travel is an interest and you are ready to take a break from routine. Your relationships need attention in the spring. Your health appreciates you taking time for relaxation. Working with a budget or getting debt resolved will also be one of the demands in spring.
Summer. Work and home demands are greater throughout the summer. You are more visible than usual and can draw more attention to yourself for self-promotion, entertaining your followers, or taking a leadership position in your company. You will need time to reassess in July. Don't start new projects until August. Get involved in business groups or community organizations. That can really help with work!
Fall. Current economic conditions will have your attention as fall begins. You should be able to tap into alternative resources by expanding what you do or looking for more fertile fields. The need to find something that resonates with you continues to be important. This is very strong in November, and you may need some time to yourself. Pace yourself in the latter part of the year. Do what you like, and your energy will be strong. If you let obligations and duties rule, they will take the life out of you. Surround yourself with loving and supportive people, even if that is only you!

More Astrocast on page 46

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LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23–OCTOBER 23

Winter. You are focused on more stability by clearing out the outmoded and decaying aspects of your old life. Decisions that you make this year are significant and will shift your path. You consider moving or remodeling to make your nest more comfortable. Family responsibilities shift as people in your family are aging. This may create power plays and possibly some divisions. Career and family responsibilities are rethought. January eclipses are triggers for this. You have always been the responsible one in the family, and now you have a choice about that role.

Spring. Relationships take the spotlight! Even here, you are reevaluating to determine if your partnership has a future. Your boundaries are tested and strengthened. You want more participation from your partner. Business relationships are especially vulnerable. You are more physically sensitive this year, especially in the spring. Don't overexert yourself, especially at work. You are more sensitive to negative energy and may pick up on things that you normally ignore. Eat good fresh food and avoid contrarians.

Summer. The beginning of summer activates your career and social sectors. There will be demands on your time, some by choice. Boundary issues resurface as you decide your priorities. There is a slowdown in July. Take time to assess where you are and how well your plan is working. You want some vacation time. You may not think you have the time, but your psyche will thank you. You are still in a physically sensitive time, and stress will take its toll. Start your new project in August!

Fall. You work to create a clear agenda. This has been part of this year's theme. You should see situations around you coming to a head, so you can be comfortable with your decisions. Your energy levels are strong, and you feel more confident in September, October, and November. Old financial issues resurface in November, but you are ready to address them. Resolution of ongoing family issues reaches a conclusion, whether all parties agree or not. You may not feel done until after January 2020, but you are done after that.

SCORPIO

OCTOBER 24–NOVEMBER 21

Winter. Keeping a balance between your work and home life is certainly important this year. Last year was busy, and you are trying to manage your time much better this year. You will want to make sure you have time to just relax and reduce your have-to's. Your creative side is much more active. You are interested in projects that really capture your imagination! The more mundane aspects of your life could feel very tedious. You will be changing that this year. You are essentially reviewing all your habit patterns, from driving to work to how you arrange your schedule.



Spring. Another important theme this year is relationships. On a personal level, you are moving away from demanding and restrictive relationships and commitment. You will want more attention and passion from your partner. This is a good time to plan a short vacation, so you get to know your partner better! Relationships that control your freedom will end. Your writing and publishing skills are very active. This is a good time for continuing education, especially in the arts or a creative field.

Summer. You are more socially active this time of the year. Balancing personal responsibilities with vacation and fun time will be very strong throughout the summer. Watch your spending this summer. It will be easy to justify what you want! You take a step back in July and reexamine your career and long-term goals. You need more personal choice and freedom in this area of your life. Your patience could be wearing thin, especially in the latter part of July. You are ready to act on your decisions in August.

Fall. You are continuing to develop better time-management skills. You are weighing each decision carefully. At the end of October and throughout November, Mercury is retrograde in your sign! This will make your birthday time a very self-reflective one. You are ready to move forward by December. Relationships are improving as you become increasingly clear about your own needs and desires. Economic news may keep your expectations realistic, but you are still looking to make your life more exciting!



SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22–DECEMBER 21

Winter. This is an active and busy year for you, as Jupiter, your ruling planet, is in your sign at the start of 2019 and continues there through November. This helps you feel more positive about your goals and aspirations. It also gives you more energy to achieve objectives. This is a great year to travel, promote your business or services, or to meet someone special! You are being driven by a strong spiritual intention to make yourself happy! Family activity is very strong in February and March. You may need to visit family to offer your support and healing energy.

Spring. Finances and capitalizing on resources is very important this year. The current economic situation may have you anxious, but you are very good at making the best of your talents and skills. You are still in an upbeat mode and are willing to push yourself forward. Relationships are more positive this year. It may be easier to meet someone, but you are still guarding your personal time. Your home is your retreat from the demands of the outside world, and you may not want anyone cluttering up the place. Long-distance relationships work more easily.

Summer. You change your work patterns and habits. You want your work schedule to reflect your actual busy times and not just wasted time. Relationship activity picks up. If you are involved, this is a great time for re-bonding. If you are single, this is a good time to meet someone new. July is a time to rethink where you are headed. Focus on what you have on your plate and don't add to it! There are new opportunities, but wait until August to commit to them.

Fall. Your positive mood remains strong. You are beginning to get even more focused on making money, creating long-term security, and working on your brand. You do not need as much time for yourself, and you are more available for deeper commitments in relationships. You are in a rethink mode in November. You need time to yourself to get centered. You have been pushing yourself this year and will need a break. But no worries; you come roaring back in December!

More Astrocast on page 50

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CAPRICORN
DECEMBER 22–JANUARY 19

Winter. This is an extremely important year for Capricorns. We are having an unusually strong planetary alignment in your sign. On an international level, this affects world politics and economics. On a personal level, you are manipulated and motivated by forces larger than yourself. For resourceful Capricorns, necessity is the mother of invention. Career, relationships, and family are all affected. You will reevaluate your position and responsibility in all these areas. This theme will be strong through February 2020. This can be a time of starting your own business or considering retirement.



Spring. You will need some down time when spring arrives. There is a lot on your plate, and it can be taxing to keep it together. You could easily overthink, which leads to being stuck. Step back and consider what you can do, and act on that. Keep your goals realistic and reachable. Family matters take the lead in late spring. You may be doing some remodeling or possibly moving. You are still working on making your life more manageable and pleasurable.

Summer. Health and work are very connected this time of the year. You have been pushing, and you may feel depleted. Paying more attention to healthy eating habits can help, but this is a time for retreat. July is another very active and stimulating time, as the eclipses occur in your sign. Eclipses are often markers for shifting times in our lives. It is best to wait until August before you act on some obvious opportunities. Relationships can be stressful if they are too demanding. Reinforce your boundaries.

Fall. The strong pressure that you experienced in January returns. The necessity to clear out the old to make way for the new should be obvious. The time for you to make decisions has come. This will build through January of 2020. This is the process of death and rebirth! Your emotions run the gamut. You are more reflective in November and ready to get back on track in December. There are positive energies coming that will open doors and make you feel more secure about your security, both personal and emotional.

AQUARIUS
JANUARY 20–FEBRUARY 18

Winter. You are entering a time of updating core values, personal goals, and views about commitments. There are fundamental shifts occurring with your family. You are wanting more freedom from the role you took on as a child. This may make you question where you belong and what your role is now. Parents and family are making significant changes in their lives. This gives you the freedom to satisfy a more personal urge, rather than doing what has been expected. Mundane aspects in life can be very boring with this new updating going on. Where's the fun?



Spring. Your social outlets are improving. This is an excellent time to get involved with your community or a spiritual group. You can meet new friends who are also questioning their moral responsibilities and spiritual views. You go much deeper than you have in the past. Although this may be occurring in the background, you are emotionally invested in this search. Old ways are being released, so you can enjoy the bigger picture. On the surface, you are looking for new projects at work, questioning other people's motivations, and enjoying family activities.

Summer. You take a laid-back approach to the summer. This is a great time for creative expression or just enjoying your kids. You will want to travel this year. If you travel in July, make sure you revisit familiar places and not new ones. You will need some time to retreat, especially in July. Relationships need time and attention in July and August. If you aren't getting enough affection, you could be very testy. Don't let that happen.

Fall. You continue to break free from past expectations. You want to feel the passion through your work and social commitments. Your work duties can make you feel limited, especially in November. You are reexamining your choices, letting go of what's not interesting, and focusing on those things that stimulate you intellectually. Your spiritual questioning continues into January 2020, and you continue to examine your spirituality in detail through the end of September 2020.

PISCES
FEBRUARY 19–MARCH 20

Winter. Your ruling planet, Neptune, has been traveling through Pisces since 2011. Neptune is halfway through, but still has another seven years to travel through Pisces. Neptune has activated your inner artist, a closer connection to your spiritual center, and a deeper desire to do what satisfies you personally. Neptune also increases your psychic sensitivity and may make you retreat from loud and crowded places. But since the end of 2018, you have been feeling more social. This is also a better time for your career, with more opportunities that actually fit you.



Spring. You stay fairly social through the early spring, but your need for retreat gets stronger. You will want to spend more time with your partner. You will feel safe enough to drop your guard and be yourself. Friends and community organizations in your life are in a state of flux. You are interested in making a difference, but you don't want your time and energy wasted. You could take on a leadership position in your community that would satisfy your need for purpose.

Summer. Family, home, and emotional stability are very active. You want to make your nest a more comfortable place. You may be visiting with your family and even reconnecting with long-lost family members. Your level of activity in community or business associations increases through the summer. You may take on a leadership role during this time, both in community groups and in your career. If you are single, this is a good time to meet new people—except for the month of July.

Fall. You reenter a more social time this fall, and it's also a good time to look for advancement in your field. Although there is some economic stress, you seem to be able to manage it. This is a good time to promote yourself or your services. Your relationship is your place of personal retreat. You will need time together as well as time apart, which is part of the natural flow of this energy. Economic stress may keep you more nervous than you like. You will be feeling more comfortable by February 2020. The goal is to make you happy! ■

A STAR IS BORN

Trans artist JanieWhateva's OutSmart Zodiac series promotes queer visibility.

By Kathryn Way



Truth be told, astrology is central to LGBTQ culture. But it wasn't until a conversation with JanieWhateva, the artist and creator of OutSmart's stunning new Zodiac series, that I understood the profound connection between LGBTQ culture and astrology. With little to no LGBTQ exposure growing up, Janie turned to astrology as a teenager to search for a better understanding of herself and her trans identity. "Using astrology as a stepping stone, we can learn about our emotions and dreams and have a path to self-discovery," she says. Not only does astrology provide people with answers to some hows and whys, but it's also inherently reflective of the self.

In essence, astrology serves as a vehicle of self-portraiture—which is not exclusively visual in nature, but rather an honest reflection of the self. And for people under the LGBTQ rainbow with multiple intersections of identity, self-portraiture is absolutely vital. Queer survival depends on queer visibility. Not only is your own image essential to self-love and acceptance, but queer representation also serves as an example to others to live and love openly and authentically.

As a perfect example of how crucial self-portraiture is to LGBTQ identity, JanieWhateva began her artistic career by affirming her identity as a woman via drawing. Combatting dysphoria, and before she was out as trans, Janie would draw a version of herself that the mirror did not yet reflect. There on paper, her true inner self revealed her outer self, and the wholeness of her existence finally clicked into place. Not only was she creating art, but she *was* a work of art.

I'd be remiss not to highlight the significance of a trans artist creating this Zodiac artwork, since representation behind the scenes matters just as much (if not more) than outward visibility. Trans people rightfully demand that trans characters be portrayed by real trans actors, and that trans writers should be the ones to write trans narratives (we're looking at you, Jill Soloway). Trans folks disproportionately experience workplace discrimination and are vastly more susceptible to poverty, so supporting and hiring trans artists is an economic imperative.

Janie has created an utterly flawless convergence of both inner and outer reflections in her 2019 Zodiac series. Superbly personifying Houston's rich diversity, all of Janie's star signs are specifically modeled on LGBTQ identities. Some familiar faces appear, with trans actress Hari Nef representing Libra while Aquarius is aptly depicted by drag darling Aquaria.

As a Virgo herself, Janie is methodical and cautious, taking great care to portray each sign by showcasing different body types, races, and gender identities. Also true to her Virgo nature, Janie admits to being a skeptic when it comes to astrology. Regardless, she enjoys and finds comfort in astrology, appreciating its place in our culture. Straight, cisgender men on Tinder can hate astrology all they want, but astrology ultimately harms no one and generally makes people feel better about the world and themselves.

Let's be real: 2018 has sucked for a lot of people. OutSmart's 2019 Zodiac series will give us LGBTQ folks something beautiful to look forward to each month with representations of people like us and a reminder that we're all connected. "Astrology is fun to explore," Janie says. "When you feel desperately alone, it helps to see the literal web of stars above that connects us all. It assures us that others have walked our path before, and we're never truly alone."

Kathryn Way is a frequent contributor to OutSmart magazine.

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On December 5, a Red Ribbon Toy Drive for Thomas Street Clinic was held at Riva's Italian Restaurant. Pictured are **Larry Crawford**, **Luis Martinez**, **Dena Page**, **Michael Siboye**, **Rocky Romero**, **George Trisch**, and **Marc Cohen**.



On December 6, Rice University and the Oral History (OH) Project held a holiday event celebrating the Montrose Center at Woodson Research Center. Pictured are board members and supporters.



On December 7, Smoke Break performed at Guava Lamp. Pictured are members of the cast.



On December 1, Gay Dodgeball open play was held at Q&B Sports Indoor Soccer & Futsal. Pictured are a number of the dodgeballers.

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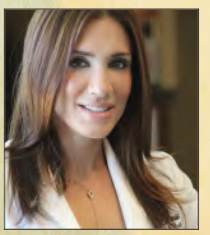
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On December 9, Jim Sikorski and Ed Finger held the annual "Share Your Blessings Holiday Bash" at Gloria's Latin Cuisine Restaurant. Pictured are **Timmy Martinez**, **Lauren Peterson**, **Katy Caldwell**, **Maria Cantu-Ondarza**, **Jim Sikorski**, **Chree Boydstun**, **Claudette Guerrero**, **Ed Finger**, and **Lindsay Gonzales**.



On December 9, The Houston Tennis Club held its Annual Awards Banquet at Harold's in The Heights. Pictured are members of the club.



On December 12, Texas Pride Impact Funds held its grant recipient reception at Sloan/Hall. Pictured are **Chree Boydstun**, **James Gonzalez**, **Jani Lopez**, **Joshua Davis**, **Jeanette Curtain**, **Bryan Hlavinka**, **Don'l Nicol**, and **Ron Guillard**.



On December 15, Montrose Softball League Association held its 8th Annual Holiday Social Toy Drive at Guava Lamp and presented checks to the Dalton DeHart Photographic Foundation and the Montrose Center. Pictured are: **Nick Alvarado**, **Dalton DeHart**, **Kennedy Loftin**, and **Henry Gonzales**.



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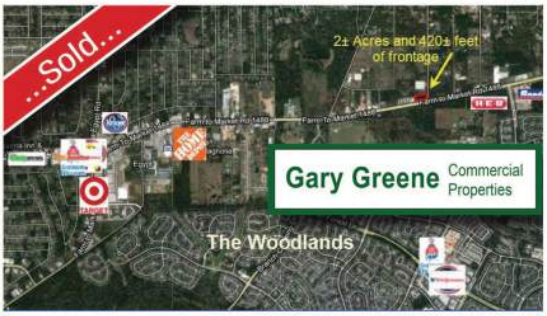
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Rainbow on Ice, DJ Joe Ross return to Discovery Green.

By Marene Gustin
Photos by Morris Malakoff

There aren't a lot of places for outdoor ice skating in Houston— we like our rinks in malls, so it's exciting each year when Discovery Green's Kinder Lake looks like it was kissed by *Frozen*'s Elsa.

"We are thrilled to bring back The Ice powered by Green Mountain Energy for its 10th year," says Discovery Green president and park director Barry Mandel. "This family-friendly attraction has become a mainstay of holiday traditions, and we invite the entire community to join us."

The annual event runs through January 21, but January 11 is the date for Rainbow on Ice, the biggest LGBTQ dance party on ice in the state. And, as usual, DJ Joe Ross will be spinning the tunes.

"I've done it for probably four years now," says Ross, who has been a popular DJ at LGBTQ nightclubs including F Bar, South Beach, and other venues throughout the country. And he's won Favorite Male DJ in OutSmart's Gayest & Greatest Awards several times.

"Rainbow on Ice is a gay event," he says, "but it's a family event, and that's why it's so special. Most of the clubs I DJ at, you have to be over 21 to get in. So I like seeing the kids out here. It's great to watch kids seeing a drag queen for the first time—kids are so nonjudgmental. Plus, I have a gay nephew who's too young for the clubs, so he can come to this event and watch his uncle at work."

Ross, 40, loves music and has no plans to give up working as a DJ, although he does sell real estate by day. He's currently single and living in Montrose, but his life hasn't always been a happy tune.

He grew up in a Mormon family in Deer Park. After his first teenage gay experience, he actually tried the church's counseling program until he realized it wasn't for him.

"But my family was great," he says. "It wasn't what they were expecting, but they wanted me to be my authentic self. They've supported me ever since."

So he moved to Montrose and started working at the clubs, eventually getting to DJ. But then, barely a decade later, he was diagnosed with lymphoma and underwent aggressive chemotherapy. With the help of friends and family around him, as well as his music, he carried on and beat the cancer. →



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Rocking the Rink

continued from previous page



MORRIS MALAKOFF

"Sometimes when I'm working, it feels like a gift—to do what you love to do and get paid for it," he told OutSmart in 2015.

And he's certainly looking forward to Rainbow on Ice again this year. His favorite musical genres are circuit and tech house. "At the clubs I like the higher-energy music, but for Ice, I have to make sure the songs don't have any bad words, because of the children.


Barry Mandel

DALTON DEHART


DJ Joe Ross

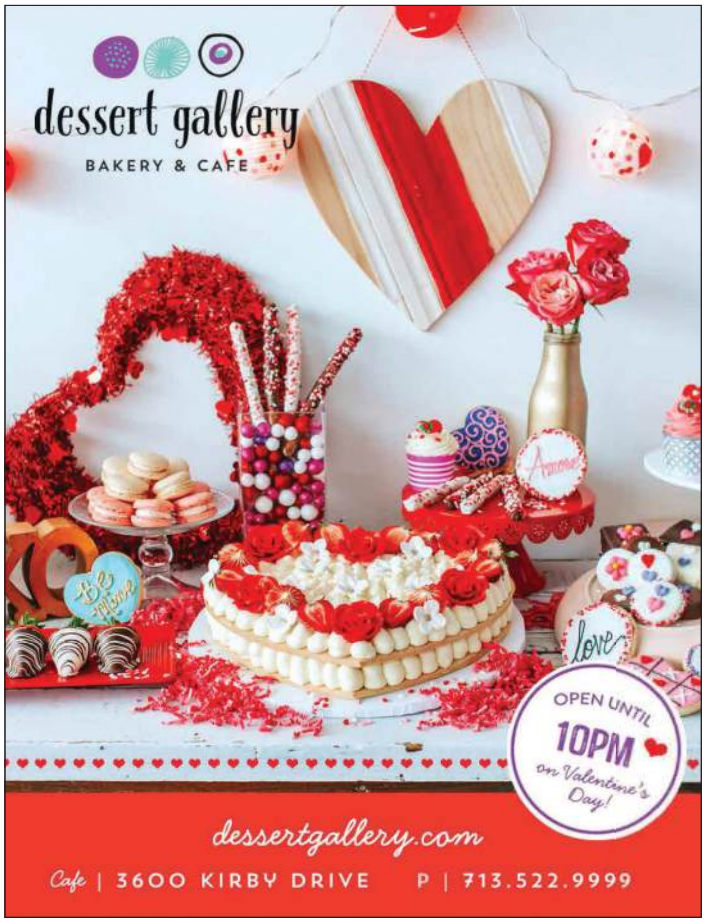
"I know it's a holiday event, but I don't dress up or do anything festive in particular," he adds. "I just wear gloves and a heavy coat because it's always cold at that event."

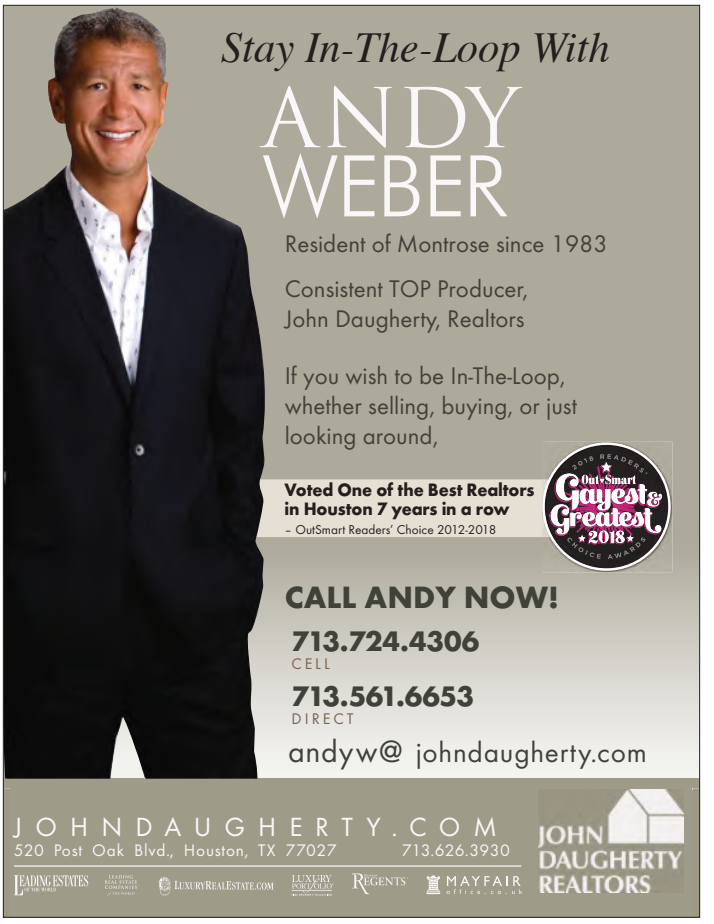
And you should probably do the same, although layers (maybe an ugly Christmas sweater or two?) might work better than a bulky coat if you are skating the rink. Although the event is free, if you don't have your own skates you will need to rent some at the park. There will also be food and drinks, musical acts, and drag-queen performances.

"It's always interesting to see drag queens on skates," Ross says. "That's so next-level!"

What: Rainbow on Ice
When: 7–10 p.m. on January 11
Where: Discovery Green, 1500 McKinney St.
More info: discoverygreen.com or 713.434.RINK

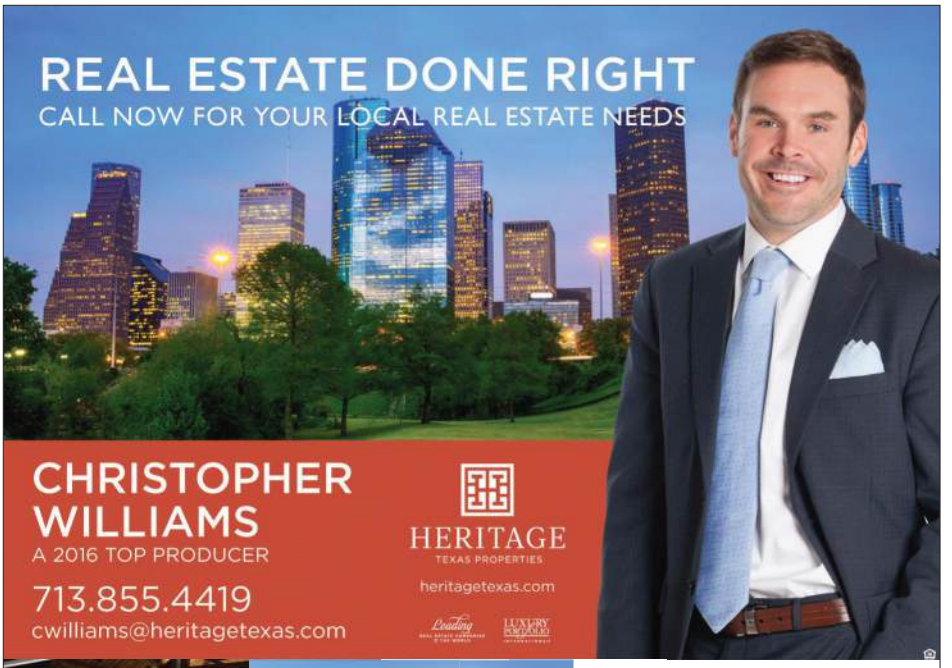
Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.


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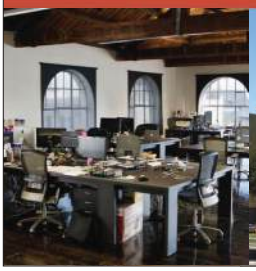

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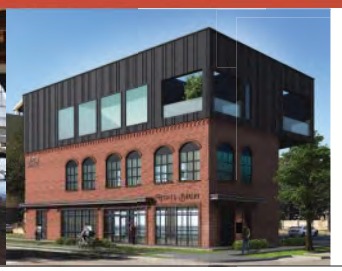

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Big Steps Forward

Big Brothers/Big Sisters expands outreach to LGBTQ community.

By Ryan M. Leach

After attending a Big Brothers/Big Sisters event in Houston, where he learned that more than 900 children were on the group's waiting list, 42-year-old Lennard Sims felt compelled to get involved.

But Sims was also nervous. After all, he was preparing to marry his partner of seven years, Shelton Davison, and he wondered whether his sexual orientation would have a negative impact on his application to serve as a mentor, or "Big," to a child in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BBBS) program.

As it turns out, BBBS staff also had some concerns, but not about Sims' sexual orientation. Rather, they feared wedding planning might impact his ability to spend time with a child. But in the end it worked out, and today Sims and his "Little," 8-year-old Bryant, have been matched for about six months.

The Big Picture

BBBS Lone Star, the local branch of BBBS of America, serves Greater Houston as well as parts of North Texas.

"Big Brothers/Big Sisters has a big mission that requires us to engage the good in all adults to help ignite the potential in every child," says BBBS Lone Star CEO Pierce Bush, the grandson of the late president George H.W. Bush.



Three's Company
Houston Police Department Commander Kristene Anthony, counterclockwise from top right, and her fiancée, Kristy Miller, serve as a Big Couple to 14-year-old Terrell.

"Big Brothers/Big Sisters Lone Star is proud to stand with the LGBTQ community and all other communities that want to join us in our good mission of ensuring that every child—from every background or circumstance—who reaches out for a mentor has a caring and compatible adult reaching back."

BBBS Lone Star is one of twenty LGBTQ pilot chapters funded by the Altria Group, Inc.

"This initiative is helping us improve our own LGBTQ cultural competencies and increase our outreach and services to the LGBTQ community," says Michael O'Teter, chief program officer for BBBS Lone Star.

Alexander Dailey, who serves as director of community engagement for BBBS Lone Star/Greater Houston, says finding LGBTQ mentors can sometimes be challenging. "While Big Brothers/Big Sisters has engaged individuals from the LGBTQ community for decades, too frequently LGBTQ adults and organizations don't realize that about our organization," says Dailey, who identifies as gay. "So our biggest challenge is getting the word out to the LGBTQ community that we do want to serve LGBTQ youth and we actively want to engage adults from the community as mentors, as well as in every other aspect of our organizational life."→

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BIG STEPS FORWARD

continued from previous page

January is Mentorship Awareness Month, an opportunity for BBBS to engage potential Bigs from the LGBTQ community. Dailey explains that while many Littles identify as LGBTQ, that does not necessarily mean they will be matched with LGBTQ Bigs.

"[Mentors] will be paired with a child based on needs, strengths, proximity, and compatibility," Dailey says. "The compatibility component will consider sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, as well as race, background, and other factors. All of these are considered in an attempt to maximize the potential bond between the adult volunteer and the child."

The Big Couple

Kristine Anthony, 51, and her fiancée, Kristy Miller, serve as a Big Couple—one of several options for couples or families that want to mentor a Little together.

Anthony, a commander with the Houston Police Department, says the application process takes into consideration the requests of both Bigs and Littles.

"I asked for an older teen," Anthony says. "I really wanted a girl who wouldn't just want to hang out in the mall, because that's not me. I indicated I wanted a Little who was outdoorsy. I also wanted an older Little because I know that they kind of age out and they quit matching. I could not imagine a girl that wanted a big sister that wasn't going to be able to get matched, and that broke my heart."

Anthony started the program as a single Big to Terriell, 14, in December 2017. Later, Terriell initiated the process of expanding their Big/Little "family" to include Miller.

"With Kristine being her Big as a single, I would be ancillary. Every once in a while, I would join in, but I would not be a main involvement," says the 36-year-old Miller, who serves as a clinic social-work manager at Legacy Community Health.

"As a couple, we can do everything together," Miller adds. "I went through the whole vetting process initially so that we could all spend time together as a couple or individually, before we officially became a Big couple."

The process of becoming a Big takes about two months.

First, volunteers complete applications, which can be found at bbbstx.org. Then, BBBS staff members contact applicants to set up interviews and conduct reference and criminal background checks.

The BBBS matching team works to find the child that best fits each volunteer, and then seeks approval of the proposed match from the parent or guardian.

If a Big identifies as LGBTQ, that information is shared with everyone as part of the consent process. Although BBBS does not

discriminate, the group recognizes that some Littles or their parents/guardians may not have the same point of view.

The Big Coming Out

Zach McKenzie, 28, has been volunteering as a Big since he was 24, but did not come out as gay until recently.

"I met Haven when he was 8, and he's 12 now. Me coming out is a relatively new thing, and [back when we were first matched] I wasn't really wrestling with [being gay]," McKenzie says. "Going into this organization, you're more concerned if the kid is going to like you, and what your relationship with the family is."

McKenzie's story is an example of how the bond between a Big and a Little can transcend a typical volunteer experience. Participants often see themselves as family. McKenzie came out to Haven's Nana before he broached the subject with his Little.

"This whole relationship has been very emotionally fulfilling," McKenzie says. "I initially reached out with a super-long text to his Nana, who I also refer to as Nana when we talk. She sent me the sweetest text message back and was very affirming. I had a feeling she would be gracious, and so to see that felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders."

Eventually, he had the opportunity to come out to Haven.

"I had to mentally and emotionally prepare," McKenzie says. "I just kind of went into it ready for the worst-case scenario. We hung out like we always did, and I knew that if it didn't go well I couldn't be defensive with him. I needed to reconcile with that beforehand."

"He first reacted by regurgitating stuff [about gay people that] he had heard, but he hadn't formed his own opinion yet, so we had a really great conversation," McKenzie recalls. "I told him I am the same person. Nothing has changed. After we got done we went right back to what we had before. The hardest part was bringing it up."

Although the coming-out process was a unique aspect of their long relationship, McKenzie's favorite story is about the day Haven asked if they could be known as "brothers."

"We got tickets to the Astros game, and as we sat down there was a lady with another little boy. We heard them talking and whispering. They were wondering if we were with BBBS too, and she introduced her Little as her 'brother," McKenzie says. "As we were driving away in my truck, Haven looked at me and asked, 'Did you notice how she introduced him?' And I said, 'Yeah, is that how you want me to introduce you?' And he said, 'Yeah.' And now that's how we refer to each other. We're brothers."

Ryan Leach is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



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Poetic Prodigy

Queer teen Jackson Neal named Houston's Youth Poet Laureate.

By Don Maines

Photo by Pin Lim

Queer teen poet Jackson Neal contemplates reports of violence against gay men and cries:

If we are some kind of gods,
and we are,
then you will trust we have not fallen.

The City of Houston's fourth Youth Poet Laureate, named last November by mayor Sylvester Turner, stands on the threshold of adulthood, asking:

Where can't I go, when I came
from so many strange miracles?

At age 19, all vim and vigor, the 2018 graduate of Stephen F. Austin High School in Sugar Land exhorts his younger sister, in his poem "For Selah," to fight off sex traffickers with her karate skills, warning:

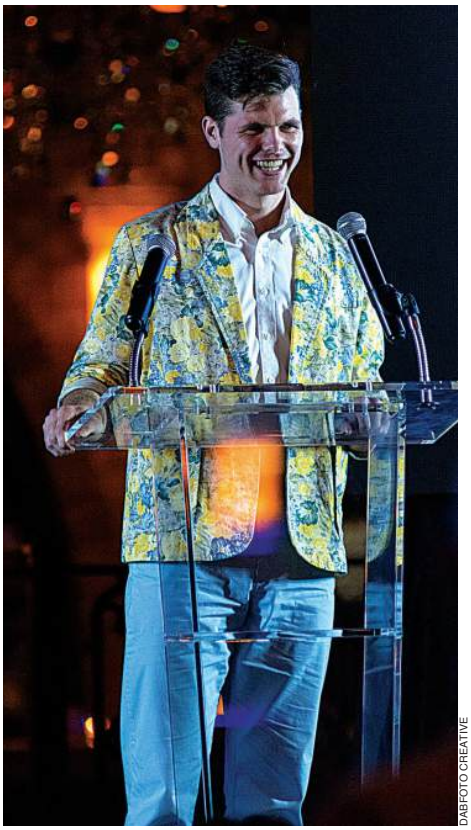
The Houston Ship Channel exports more daughters than it does oil.

As the city's Youth Poet Laureate, Neal wants to "encourage all Houstonians to find each other through their stories, to make art and spaces for art to exist radically, relentlessly. We are in a time with destruction all around us, but poetry is the opposite of that. Poetry is alive; it is the revolution; it is the hope we have left to carry."

Mayor Turner proclaims, "Jackson Neal's commitment to uplifting the voice of every Houstonian is powerful."

Currently a freshman studying creative writing at the University of Houston, Neal's one-year term includes a scholarship, →

continued from previous page



DABFOTO CREATIVE

publication in the *Houston Chronicle*, and mentorship from Houston's Poet Laureate, Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton.

"What most excites me about this position is the opportunity to expand the ways we tell stories in Houston," says Neal. "A poem is so much more than the words it's made of—it's a breath, a spirit, a song in the spine, and I want to make it irresistible. Our city is full of so many rich histories and legends that need to be celebrated. As the Houston Youth Poet Laureate, I want to find the stories we often overlook and splash them on every street in H-town."

Neal plans to reach Houstonians from all walks of life through a podcast he will create. "The podcast will examine the myths and traditions in celebration of Houston's rich and diverse cultures. It will use storytelling to lift the underrepresented voices at the heart of the city and ask, 'How do Houstonians find each other through stories?'"

Neal says that he grew up as "an avid literary child."

In high school, he says, "I got serious as a sophomore. Performing poetry was my introduction to poetry—what we call *slam* or *spoken-word*. It was a beautiful entrée, to be in a space with an audience and to get audience reaction. The only limitation is the poem's length, which is usually around three minutes."

Neal's emergence from the suburbs of Fort Bend County happened in 2016, when he placed second in the annual Space City Grand Slam Championship. The top six teens were invited by the arts-advocacy group Writers in the Schools (WITS) to spend up to four hours a day for six days a week in "poetry heaven"—a bungalow near the Menil Collection and Rothko Chapel in Montrose.

Neal returned to win both the 2017 and 2018 Space City Grand Slam Championships.

Later, he studied with award-winning queer poet Chen Chen, a Lambda Literary fellow who is pursuing his doctorate in English and creative writing at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

"He incorporates humor, wonder, and awe into his work," says Neal. "I also identify as queer, and poetry is a way to explore the celebration of all that is amazing and inspirational" about the LGBTQ community. "It is ongoing for me, and I don't think that will ever end."

For more, visit jacksonnealpoetry.tk

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.





‘Mormon’ Missionary

Out dance captain Kenny Francoeur previews ‘The Book of Mormon’ at the Hobby Center.

By Jenny Block


Kenny Francoeur

Even though gay character Elder McKinley is a “second banana” in *The Book of Mormon*, getting to see him celebrate himself is powerful, according to Kenny Francoeur.

“At the end of the show, with the final number and everyone dancing together, there is this thing about all of our differences making our tapestry more interesting,” Francoeur says. “How happy can you be when you’re just trying to conform to someone else’s idea of how things should be?”

Francoeur, who is gay, serves as dance captain for a touring production of *The Book of Mormon* that stops at Houston’s Hobby Center this month. He says a lot of LGBTQ youth who see the show connect with the characters, and it means more to them than the writers intended, “which is really beautiful.”

“They wait at the stage door [after the show to talk to us about it],” he says.

The Book of Mormon is known for walking the razor’s edge between funny and offensive. And Francoeur admits that some situations and language in the show can be challenging for him. But he adds, “It’s a very real story about humanity and getting through differences. The best way to live life is to accept one another for our differences.”

Francoeur was a vocal-performance major at New York University. These days, one might call him a quadruple threat: he sings, dances, acts, and teaches. But he says teaching is the key to being a successful dance captain.

“My work is to keep the dancing clean and true to the original choreographer, keeping it to the level our producers—and most importantly, our audiences—expect to see,” he says.

His role is not just about teaching dance, though. It’s also about integrating new members into the show, as well as introducing scene work and music.

“You have to be able to walk the walk when you’re dancing, and be a solid teacher and communicator,” he says. “Everyone comes with talent, but with varying levels of experience or training.”

Francoeur is a swing as well, which means he frequently appears in the show. But teaching is by far his favorite part of the job. “It’s really fun if it’s a new dancer’s first show, or they’re getting used to being on the road. It’s a pleasure to be a stern welcoming/education committee.”

Francoeur says the best training he received for the job was being raised by his mother, a middle-school history teacher. “I can steal my mother’s tips and tricks and how she would handle things. I was set up for success. If I wasn’t good, it was my own fault.”

Francoeur has been with *The Book of Mormon* for a little more than three and a half years, so his home address is “on the road.”

“I have a pile of my crap in my parent’s basement,” he says. “It can be difficult to not→



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'Mormon' Missionary

continued from previous page





JULIETA CERVANTES

have a bed of your own or a bookshelf. But this really is a gift. I've been able to see this country three times over. I'm very lucky. Not many people in their 20s get to do this."

Francoeur says he has even started doing some writing about traveling around the country as a young gay man, including challenges "like getting your PrEP [prescription filled] in the middle of the country."

This will be his third time in Houston. He was here with *Anything Goes* in 2014 and *The Book of Mormon* in 2017. Both times he was in rehearsals the entire week.

"It is a beautiful city," he says. "I hope to get to see some things and eat some things this time. Being from such a tiny state, it's shocking how different the cities are in Texas. Being in Austin versus Houston, or even Dallas versus Fort Worth—they are such large, individual cities. The Texan culture in each city is so different, each one could be an entirely different state."

The Book of Mormon is not for everyone, Francoeur admits. But art rarely is. Ultimately, he says, it is a story about two white boys getting lost—and found—in Uganda.

"There is something really great about seeing a piece of theater that you can talk about afterward, whether you 'got it' or not," he says.

What: *The Book of Mormon*
When: January 15–20
Where: The Hobby Center, 800 Bagby
Tickets and info: thehobbycenter.org

Jenny Block is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

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By Gregg Shapiro

Same-Sex Serenader

Gay artist Philip Chaffin unveils album of songs typically sung by women to men.



HOWARD ZUCKER

Hymns for Him
Philip Chaffin says he and his husband, Tommy Krasker, poured 25 years of their shared lives into his new album, *Will He Like Me?*

Will He Like Me? (PS Classics), the new album by gay singer Philip Chaffin, asks a musical question to which the answer is a resounding yes.

The songs on the album, usually sung by women to men, take on a new and profound meaning when sung by a man without changing the pronouns. After hearing Chaffin sing songs such as "Lovely, Lonely Man" (from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*), "Tom" (from *Hello Again*), "Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe" (from *Cabin in the Sky*), and the title tune (from *She Loves Me*), you will probably never listen to them in quite the same way again. I had the pleasure of talking to Chaffin about the album in mid-autumn 2018.

Gregg Shapiro: Philip, your new album *Will He Like Me?* is described as "a reimagining of the Great American Songbook for the post-marriage-equality era." Why was now the right time to release it?

Philip Chaffin: I can't imagine releasing this album even 10 years ago; so much has changed. We started planning this album in 2013. At that time, marriage equality was still two years away. But New York State, where we lived, was allowing same-sex marriage, and Tommy and I had gotten married in 2012. The whole idea of the album was a celebration of equality, and marriage equality in particular. It's always been a convention that when you sing the Great American Songbook, women sing about men and men sing about women, and you adjust the pronouns accordingly. But the impulse for this album was, What if we took these songs designed for women, and didn't change the pronouns? What if we simply sang them from a gay man's point of view—from our point of view? It was very exciting to imagine singing songs in a way that I honestly wouldn't have imagined singing them just a decade ago—and in fact, because so many of the songs we chose mention "my husband," it's something I couldn't have done a decade ago. It felt incredibly liberating.

The album is subtitled "A love story." How much of the album is a reflection of your own love story with your husband, Tommy Krasker?

Tommy and I had our first date in 1993, and we've been together ever since. We definitely poured 25 years of our shared lives into this album. As we developed the album, we knew we wanted it to be more than just a collection of songs. We wanted it to be a journey—a gay man's journey. We knew we wanted to start with a first date and a first relationship and a first breakup, and then move through new experiences and new relationships. We wanted to hit some key moments that Tommy and I both related to and hoped that others might also relate to. The time in your life when you think, "I'm never going to find the right guy. I'm just going to have fun." The time when you try to settle down, and your libido trips you up, and you mess it all up. And although the album wasn't really autobiographical, we definitely knew that near the end, the singer was going to find true love when he least expected it. That was definitely true for the two of us. That part—finding true love after a whole lot of trying—is absolutely about us.

With so much music from which to choose, what can you tell me about the song selection process when it came to including familiar songs such as "Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe," "I Got Lost in His Arms," and "Mister Snow"?

It's so nice to hear you say that there's a lot of familiar tunes on the album—I always gravitate toward the really obscure, and Tommy has to remind me that familiar is good, too! [*Laughs*] But here, I think I was more willing to include familiar material because I knew I wasn't presenting it in a familiar way, or in a familiar setting. Those three songs you mention aren't typically

sung and recorded by men—I don't know if they've ever been [recorded that way]. So even the familiar songs felt so fresh to me. I think the moment we first thought of and sang through "Mister Snow" was one of my favorite moments in this whole five-year journey. We always knew the first song on the album (about the first date) was going to be "Will He Like Me?" But then we wanted a song where the singer on that date [started] reflecting and imagining a shared future—a moment where he really jumped in with his heart. And of course, it had to be a moment—as with all the songs on the album—that was designed for a woman to sing. So it was a tall order, but then Tommy came up with the idea of "Mister Snow." He ran to our music library and pulled out his piano-vocal score of *Carousel*, and we sat at the piano and he played and I sang. It was so exhilarating to sing one of those sweeping long-lined ballads I love so much. Again, it was everything we wanted to do with this album. Before marriage equality, no guy was singing "when I marry Mister Snow." Honestly, the first time I sang those lines, I burst into tears. It was incredibly moving to me.

A majority of the songs on the album are from the 1960s. What do you think that says about the love songs written during that period?

You know, I had never noticed that! [*Laughs*] But Tommy and I both grew up in the '60s—I can't imagine that didn't influence our song choices. You bring yourself to every album you do. If you don't, what's the point? I confess, in the five years between our getting the idea for the album and our actually releasing it, there were a lot of times that we thought, "Aw, shoot, someone is going to beat us to it" because it seemed like such a timely and sort of inevitable idea. But the truth is, if some other singer had made this album, he wouldn't have made this album. This album is about me and Tommy, and our likes and dislikes, and our sensibilities, and no one else was going to make this album. And I suspect we gravitated toward a lot of songs from the '60s because that's when we developed a love for American popular song and Broadway. That's when that music became a part of our lives. And let's face it, there were so many amazing writers at that time. I guess I include more mainstream ones on the album like Bock & Harnick, and Cy Coleman and the Sherman Brothers, plus lesser-known ones like Erwin Drake and John Clifton. It was a pretty heady time for love songs!

Food comes into play on "Cooking Breakfast for the One I Love" and "But I Could Cook." Is the quickest way to a man's heart through his stomach?

It has been for me! [*Laughs*] There is indeed an awful lot about cooking on the album—that's

continued on page 88

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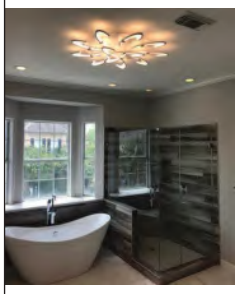

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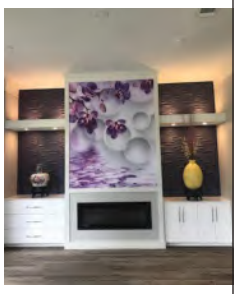

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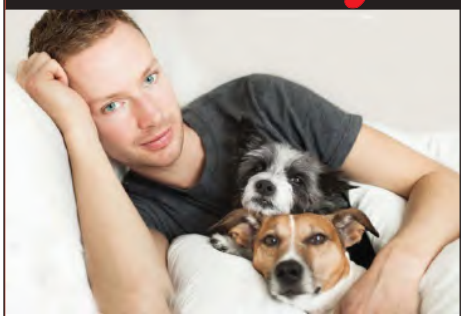
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On December 15, A Jolly Bollywood Christmas Party was held at the home of David Sisler and Ryan Balbas. Pictured are **Dale Labang**, **Kim**, **Valerie**, **Zara**, **Jasmine**, and **Bobby Banay**.



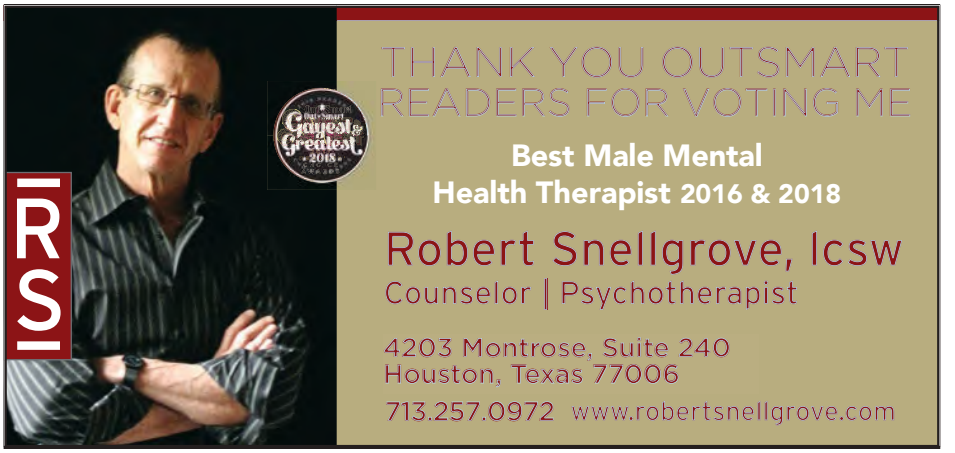
On December 16, Donna Junker and friends held the "Not Quite Social Security-Medicare Age" brunch fundraiser for BARC. Pictured are **David Revils**, **Amy Morales**, **Rochelle Jackson**, **Jenny Layton**, and **Donna Junker**.



On December 15, the Diana Foundation held a holiday party at the home of Richard Holt and Mark McMasters. Pictured are (back row) **Ciro Flores**, **Dan Maxwell**, **Daniel Waller**, **Brian Waddle**, (front row) **Eric Salins**, **Nicolas Arroliga**, and **Kevin Hamby.**



On November 11, the T.R.U.T.H. Project presents *I Am Life* at the University of Houston South Center Theater. Pictured are (front row) **Lauren Burke**, **A'mya Millian**, **Cristina Martinez**, **Danielle Quinn**, (back row) **Devan Pool**, **Nick Muckleroy**, **Rayla Crawford**, **Peace**, **Rechatter Brady**, **Duchess Whitt**, and **Kevin Anderson**.



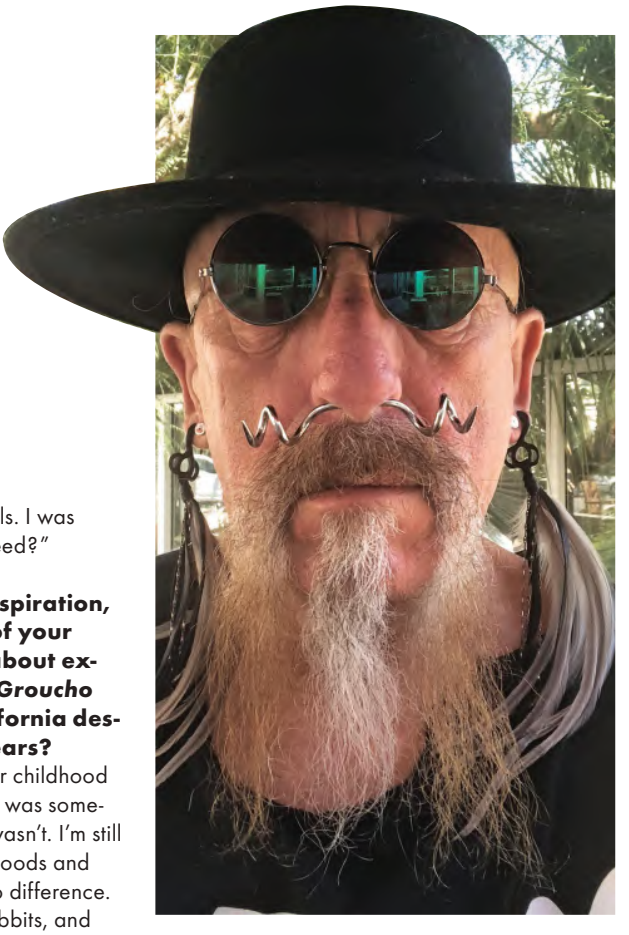






By Gregg Shapiro

St. Sukie 'Marx' the Spot



Gay author discusses his latest book, 'The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist.'

The odds are in your favor that you've never read a memoir quite like St. Sukie de la Croix's *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist* (Rattling Good Yarns, 2018). With a precision eye, de la Croix takes aim at post-World War II England, his family, the education system, religion, bullies, and far more things than you might imagine could be included in a 118-page book. Known for his cutting wit and unique observations, de la Croix does not disappoint here, providing the reader with countless opportunities to laugh out loud. The best part is that he's in on the joke, painting as bleak a picture as you've seen while never failing to find the humor in practically every unbelievable situation. I spoke with de la Croix about the book at the time of its publication in autumn 2018.

Gregg Shapiro: You relocated to California in 2014. How has your writing evolved since you moved from Chicago to Palm Springs?
St. Sukie de la Croix: I love Chicago, but the city is all about noise. Great when you're young, but when you're old—not so much. I find the desert and mountains very calming, perfect for what I'm writing at this point in my life. I'm certainly writing more. I'm happier, too. More relaxed. Chicago can eat you up and spit you out if you let it. Captain Beefheart lived in the desert, and if it was good enough for him, it's good enough for me.

How does this latest move compare with your move from Bath, England, to the United States?
I moved to the States in 1991, and it was a culture shock. I came from a town built by the Romans, so I knew hypocausts and the goddess Minerva. No skyscrapers or Mexican restaurants in Bath—not when I was living there. America always fascinated me. I jumped in at Chicago's deep end and swam as hard as I could. Soon after I arrived, I overheard my husband talking to a friend about Donna Reed and how she always vacuumed the carpet wearing pearls. I was thinking, "Who the hell is Donna Reed?"

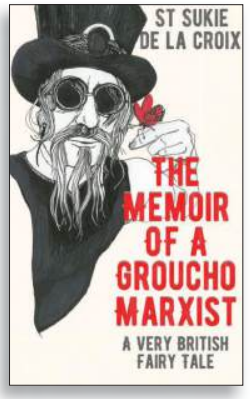
In terms of your sources of inspiration, how do the Midford Woods of your childhood (which you write about extensively in *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist*) compare to the California desert of your current mature years?
Writing this book, I realized that our childhood never really goes away. We think it was something that happened years ago. It wasn't. I'm still that little boy running through the woods and talking to fairies. Location makes no difference. Now I talk to hummingbirds, jackrabbits, and ravens. At night I float in my pool and watch the bats flying over like Spitfire airplanes during and after World War II. Here, the fairies live in the palm trees. Anyone who doesn't believe in fairies is a fool.

At the time of this interview, you have three books to your name. *Chicago Whispers* is a gay history book, *The Blue Spong and the Flight from Mediocrity* is a novel, and *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist* is a memoir. Which of these three genres would be your favorite, and why?
I can't say that writing comes easily to me. *Chicago Whispers* was just a hard slog, and appealed to that stubborn part of me that refuses to give up. Chicago welcomed me, and I wanted to give something back. *The Blue Spong and the Flight from Mediocrity* was just me relaxing and letting the story flow out of me. Fiction comes easier to me. *The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist* was an old man trying to make sense of the past. Of course, nothing makes sense. Not really. Nor should it.

As someone who spent a lot of time escaping into books as a child (as you write about in this book), do you think you write because you want to provide a similar outlet for others who need to escape?
No. I don't really analyze why I do anything. I think there's a tendency in this country to overthink everything. I'm just sharing what interests me and might interest other people, too. I'm not good at determining how other people view my writing, although I'd like to think my writing inspires people to create something of their own. *Chicago Whispers* inspired other people to write about the LGBT history of Chicago. I'm proud of that. My writing was once described by a reviewer as "the work of a well-read literary thug." I'll take it.

Lewis Carroll is referenced in *Groucho Marxist*, and his influence can be felt throughout. Carroll was known for his young readership. What would it mean to you for this book to find a place among younger readers?
It would be an honor. Childhood is a wonderful and a terrible time. It's something we all spend the rest of our lives getting over. If young adults read this book and recognize themselves, that would be a positive thing. I've already been getting mail about this. The book seems to have rung a bell.

Karl Marx and Groucho Marx are quoted at the opening of each chapter. Was this something that you always planned on doing, or was it something that occurred during the writing process?
It was planned. They were both thinking men—both intellectuals. Karl Marx is just Groucho Marx with the jokes taken out. I don't think Karl Marx ever performed in a comedy club—"Three men walk into a bar: a member of the proletariat, a Tsar, and a rabbi . . ." And I don't think Groucho Marx ever inspired a revolution. [But] it would be fun to make a movie of circus clowns storming the Winter Palace with pitchforks in 1917.



Out Sider
St. Sukie De La Croix says his latest book, "The Memoir of a Groucho Marxist," is "about LGBT children, and other kids, who don't fit in."

From my perspective, *Groucho Marxist* is a book about an outsider, written for other outsiders. What do you hope that insiders who read the book might learn from it?
When we're born, our parents attempt to shape us into something acceptable to the society around them. They do this with religion, politics, etc. Some people are square pegs that can't fit into a round hole. As for the "insiders," this book isn't about them. This book is about LGBT children, and other kids, who don't fit in. It's about how I, as an isolated sissy boy, ran away and joined the circus. I don't know what "insiders" would get from this book. I don't know any.

You write about your mother's mental illness with gob-smacking descriptions, such as calling it the "festering boil of schizophrenia," and an "on-again, off-again mercurial relationship with reality," and saying she "knelt before the Altar of Lunacy." Can you say something about the challenges of writing about the subject of mental illness?
I was more understanding and forgiving of her at the end of the book than I was at the beginning. I've dedicated the book to "My MOTHER, the woman who drove me insane." If she had been a stranger I met in a bar, we would have had a gay old time. However, her job was to bring up a young child. She was not qualified for that job. Having said that, this book is not about casting blame. This book is a thank-you to her for bringing me up to think outside the box. Any creative gifts I have are because of my mother. No, it wasn't a challenge dealing with these sensitive issues, because the woman was f--king nuts.

What do you think your parents, Doreen and Stanley, would think of the way that they are depicted in *Groucho Marxist*?
No idea. They've both passed away, so there's no point thinking about it. In my writing, I've never been influenced by other people's opinions. My mother was alive when I started writing this book. What would they think? Let me speculate. My mother would have a meltdown [and] whip up some mega-drama—nobody did it like she did it. My father would have beaten the crap out of me.

As a parent yourself, do you know if your daughter has read the book, and if so, what she thinks of it?
I don't think Lucy has read the book yet, but she will. When my mother died, I flew back to England to sort everything out. My daughter and I were at the funeral parlor and the woman said, "Your mother has arranged the funeral so you don't need to worry about anything, although one thing she didn't do was pick the music." My daughter chimed up with, "We were thinking of Meatloaf's 'Bat Out of Hell.'" So that will tell you something about the relationship between my daughter and my mother.

***Groucho Marxist* ends on the morning of your "sweet sixteenth birthday," although, as you say, "I vowed never to become a teenager, and I didn't; I became a Groucho Marxist instead." Have you begun working on the next installment of your memoir, picking up where this book left off?**
No I haven't, but it could happen. I once lived in an anarchist DaDa arts commune for 18 months—that's got to be worth a book. I'm currently putting the finishing touches on a history book, *Out of the Underground: Homosexuals, the Radical Press, and the Rise and Fall of the Gay Liberation Front*. Also, artist Roy Alton Wald and I are working on a book called *St. Sukie's Strange Garden of Woodland Creatures*. I've also completed a novel called *The Orange Spong at the Vamp-Art Café*, to be published soon.

Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



Queen of the Beyhive



Proud Houston native Michael Arceneaux talks Beyoncé and his new book, 'I Can't Date Jesus.'

By Jenny Block

Michael Arceneaux says he was all about Beyoncé for years before that was cool.

"Long before you other folks banded together to launch the BeyHive, I was setting the stones for the building that housed our meetings with the other true believers," Arceneaux writes in his new book, *I Can't Date Jesus: Love, Sex, Family, Race, and Other Reasons I've Put My Faith in Beyoncé*.

Arceneaux, a 34-year-old Houston native, attended the same middle school as Beyoncé. But he says it's their intense, shared beliefs about being true to themselves that makes him such a BeyLiever.

"Choosing to stand firm in who you are and the culture that shaped you is a testament to caring about Blackness, Black culture, and Black people," Arceneaux writes in the book. "Beyoncé's stance on remaining exactly as she's always been, no matter what is happening around her, has instilled in me the strength to remain the Gulf Coast ratchet bird I am."

In addition to Beyoncé, Arceneaux has written about culture, sexuality, religion, race, and other topics for outlets including the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *New York Magazine*, *Complex*, *The Root*, and *Essence*. And he has appeared on MSNBC, VH1, NPR, Viceland, and SiriusXM, among other media outlets. He champions young people "who feel both marginalized and denied the chance to pursue their dreams."

Arceneaux, who identifies as gay, tells OUTSMART that *I Can't Date Jesus* is the book he wishes he had growing up. He hopes it will make people laugh and think. He also hopes it will resonate with readers who have struggled with their identity, as that is unquestionably his story.

These days, Arceneaux lives in Harlem and visits Houston occasionally. As a child, he attended Windsor Village Elementary, Welch Middle School, and Madison High School. He graduated from Howard University in Washington DC before returning to Houston for a year. Then he headed to Los Angeles before returning to Houston for over a year. Finally, he made the move to New York City.

"Houston prepared me for other cities more than I thought it did. It's very diverse," Arceneaux says, explaining that while other cities are more segregated, "in Houston we're all

lumped together.

"Houston is the first city to elect an openly gay mayor, not New York or L.A.," he adds proudly.

In some ways, Arceneaux's devotion to Houston is surprising. He endured a difficult childhood thanks to an alcoholic, abusive father and a zealously religious mother. When Arceneaux came out to his mother, he says she responded by saying, "Well, that explains why you and your brother's lives have gone the way they have." Nevertheless, he says Houston remains home to not only his family, but also his oldest friends. "No matter what happened in the past, where you grow up is home. Houston is always home."

As a child, Arceneaux carved "DIE DAD AND MOM" into the wall of his bedroom. While those words remain there to this day, Arceneaux says the feelings do not.

"Select members" of Arceneaux's family have read *I Can't Date Jesus*, including his mother, but he says it has not changed her views. "My mom is in the same place. I was hopeful, but this is not unexpected. It comes from a place of concern. I understand that. People are who they are, and you have to take people where they are."

I Can't Date Jesus is a personal story, but because Arceneaux is a proud gay black man, it is also very political.

"If I experience prejudice, it will be about race first," he says. "It's always there, but because it's so pronounced now, it feels overbearing. People feel more permission to be direct."

Arceneaux says President Trump is certainly to blame for this, but so are those who voted for him and continue to support him.

"There is a reason an incompetent bigot scammed his way into the presidency. [Fear of minorities] propelled him into office," Arceneaux says, adding that people were worried about the country becoming "blacker and darker."

"It should not have taken a loudmouth showboat to show us," Arceneaux says. "People don't want to acknowledge white privilege, but they vote to preserve it. We like to pretend we are more evolved than we are. But 52 percent of women voted for a man accused of sexual assault."

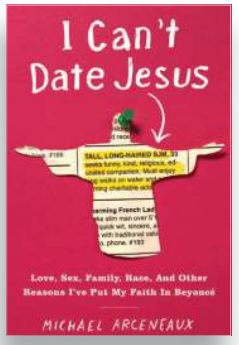
There is hope, though, and that is something we simply cannot afford to lose, according to Arceneaux.

"Problems seem longer than they actually are. This is temporary. We have to be proactive so this doesn't happen again. Be hopeful and productive."

Above all, *I Can't Date Jesus* is a call to the disenfranchised, the unrecognized, the forgotten, and the maligned. The book has a simple message, and it is a rallying cry.

"You don't have to dilute who you are to appeal to the masses," Arceneaux says. "Beyoncé makes the masses come to her. I was told I had to write my story in a different way, [but] I don't have to dilute who I am. What's new about me is my perspective. [My book] is about universal things. I'm here for everybody."

Jenny Block is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



True Bey-Liever
Although Michael Arceneaux and Beyoncé both attended Houston's Welch Middle School, he says it is their shared belief about being true to themselves that makes him such a diehard fan.

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Second Time's the Charm
Jovon Tyler (r) and Justin Carter initially dated 10 years ago, but broke up after three months. Through the magic of Facebook, they kept in touch and were reunited in 2015.

Hearts Reconnected

Jovon Tyler marries Justin Carter following a six-year separation.

By Henry V. Thiel

Photo by Dalton DeHart

Native Houstonians Jovon Alfon B. Tyler and Justin Carter met 10 years ago outside Blur Bar. Tyler was working the door, and Carter was waiting in line.

"Justin was so darn cute that I told him I would let him in for free if he would give me his phone number," Tyler recalls.

"May my friend get in, too?" Carter replied.

Tyler let them both in after getting Carter's phone number.

Tyler, 42, is a funeral director at Bradshaw-Carter Funeral Services. Carter, 31, is a student at the University of Houston and a service manager at HEB Montrose Market.

For their first date, they went to the Art House Café where they chatted over coffee. Then they visited the Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral where they indulged their shared passion for architecture.

"I was immediately attracted to Jovon's dynamic personality and his impressive physical presence," Carter says. "He is passionate and eloquent in his speech—something that 21-year-olds would want to model themselves after. I wanted, and needed, to know more about him. I was really attracted to his dashing good looks."

"What intrigued me about Justin was his innocent nature—his kind and sweet spirit. He is quite simply the best person I've ever known," Tyler says. "He has a great sense of character, values, and ethics. I'm positive he's never told a lie a day in his life. He is among the purest souls I've ever had the privilege to encounter. Plus, I'm a sucker for redheads."

Tyler says their greatest challenge as a couple was that Carter was still finding his voice in the community.

"I am charismatic and constantly in the public eye," Tyler says. "I always encouraged Justin to find his own voice, to be his own person, separate from me. Freedom is very, very important in a relationship, and I believe a person needs to experience that freedom daily."

Conflict arose when Tyler's friends and family were slow to embrace Carter as his boyfriend. "I am sure it was because I had always been a serial bachelor," Tyler says. "And that Carter was not in our same social circles and just came out of nowhere. I also think that they were convinced Justin would flame out like the rest of my relationships."

After three months of dating they did break up, but through the miracle of Facebook they stayed in touch. Six years later, Tyler reached out to Carter with an invitation to meet and catch up. By the following summer of 2015, Tyler and Carter were a couple living together in Montrose.

"Our time apart taught me that you cannot go into a relationship trying to change someone," Tyler says. "You must love them completely—warts and all."

"What I learned from our relationship the first time around is that every struggle you go through in a relationship will help form you into the best husband you can be," Carter says. "And to make a relationship work, it takes complete honesty and mutual respect."

What they also learned was that they have to keep their romance alive by taking time out of their schedules for each other—whether →





Wedding Guide

continued from previous page

it's a weekend trip to Puerto Vallarta or a dinner and a show at the Alley Theatre.

"Once we reconnected, I knew immediately that I had to marry Justin because he was the same kind, gentle kid I'd met so many years earlier—just older," Tyler says.

When Tyler was sent to Memphis for work, he invited Carter to join him so they could visit Graceland, Tyler's favorite place on earth. But once they were on the road, Tyler realized that he really wanted to make a marriage proposal. Even though he didn't have a ring, he popped the question at Elvis Presley's grave the next day.

Even though they had planned to marry last year in the Graceland chapel, the election of Donald Trump was so disappointing that Tyler wanted to move their wedding up exactly one year so they would have something to look forward to.

Tyler sought the blessing of his boss before calling his mother, former Houston mayor Annise Parker. He then asked his friends Richard Holt and Mark McMasters if he could use their home for a small wedding of no more than 40 people. It was only then that he informed Carter of his plan, telling him they had only 12 weeks to plan their wedding.

On January 20, 2017, Rev. John Tucker (an Episcopal priest), Rev. Cindy Goza (a Baptist chaplain), and judge Steve Kirkland officiated for their wedding at Holt and McMasters' home.

The procession included eight groomsmen, eight groomsmaids, Tyler's sisters and cousins, three flower girls, nieces, goddaughters, and godchildren. It was so long that it took three songs—"The Lord's Prayer," "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You," and "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling"—to get everyone down the aisle. Carter was escorted by his father, who is also gay.

For their vows, Carter told Tyler, "You can be free with me or without me, but I'd rather you be free with me." To which Tyler replied, "Red, I love you with my whole heart, body, and soul from this day until eternity."

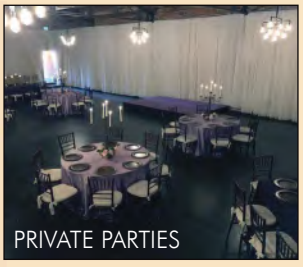
More than 200 guests attended the wedding, where every smile and laugh was captured by photographer Dalton DeHart.

The newlyweds decided to forgo a traditional honeymoon in favor of traveling throughout the year and celebrating their vows every day.

They reside in Montrose.

Henry V. Thiel is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine. He cries at weddings.

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First-Class Love

Allison Zaragoza and Stephanie Herrera met as brand-new students at the University of Houston.



Sky-High Romance
Allison Zaragoza (l) and Stephanie Herrera married at the Houston Club because the skyline view reminded them of the many times they went downtown together as college students to see the lights.

Allison Zaragoza and Stephanie Herrera met in 2005, when they sat next to each other in a Spanish class on their first day at the University of Houston. Herrera vividly recalls the details of that fateful encounter. As she walked in to class, she spotted Zaragoza sitting near the back of the room.

"She was wearing Converse shoes, jeans, a T-shirt, and she had a really cool haircut," Herrera says. "I thought Allison was super quiet, and I liked her sense of style. I also assumed that since she was quiet, she was probably eally smart and could help me pass the class."

When the professor asked students to →

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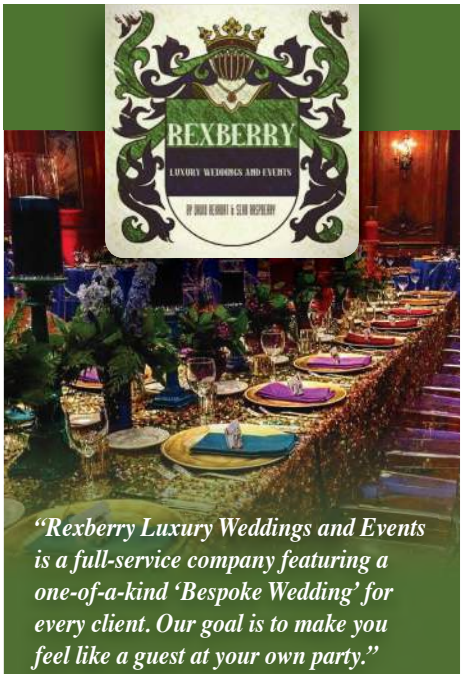
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continued from previous page

introduce themselves to their neighbors and exchange phone numbers in case they missed class, Herrera says Zaragoza looked at her like she was crazy.

"I wasn't really interested in making friends," Zaragoza recalls. "I thought Stephanie was very outgoing and talkative—my complete opposite. She would practically carry the entire conversation, and I would just sit back and listen to her talk."

Zaragoza reluctantly gave Herrera her number. "Before the end of that semester, we were more than friends," Herrera says.

Zaragoza, a 36-year-old CAD drafter, grew up in Sugar Land. Herrera, a 35-year-old retail manager, grew up in Needville, Texas.

Neither can remember their first date.

"We started hanging out and studying together," Zaragoza says, "and then it kind of transformed into this relationship.

"Stephanie was fun and always wanted to try new things, and I enjoyed showing her stuff that she had never seen before," Zaragoza adds.

They visited museums, tried restaurants, and attended concerts.

"Allison was super cultured, and that fascinated me," Herrera says. "I grew up in a small town and didn't really come into Houston very often. When I moved here for school I was introduced to so many things, and Allison continued that trend, feeding my passion for art, culture, and music."

Despite their blossoming romance, Zaragoza says they both "still had a lot of growing up to do.

"I think for us, we had to be comfortable with ourselves, and be happy with who we were before we could have a healthy relationship," she says.

That moment didn't arrive until they had been together for about a year and a half.

"I hadn't come out to my family," Herrera recalls, "and our relationship was beginning to get serious. It was at that point that I realized I needed to accept myself before we could be happy together.

"I had to learn how to share my thoughts, and to be honest about my feelings, and Allison had to learn how to listen," Herrera adds. "And we both had to learn not to assume that the other person knew what they were thinking, or how what the other person said, or did, made them feel."

"It was very hard for me to listen—to really hear what Stephanie was telling me and not get defensive," Zaragoza says. "I also had to be patient with what she was going through. I was already out to my family, and I had to keep reminding myself that coming out is a scary process."

Herrera recalls that she had been working

long hours when Zaragoza surprised her with a weekend getaway to the Texas Hill Country.

"She scheduled a wonderful massage for me, and rented us this beautiful cottage," Herrera says. "After dinner and a wonderful wine tasting, we went back to the cottage where she had lit candles throughout the room. It was just breathtaking. She then gave me a book she had made listing all the things she loved about me. On the last page, she wrote, 'Will you marry me?'"

Herrera recalls that she had never thought too much about marriage as she was growing up.

"I didn't dream about my wedding day or anything like that," she says. "I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with Allison because she loved me just the way I was. It wasn't until recently that marriage became something that I really wanted. Allison hates change with a passion, so I had to drop massive hints or our wedding would have never happened."

They were married on September 29, 2018, at the Houston Club. Their officiant was family friend Angi Boudreaux. They chose the Houston Club because the skyline view reminded them of the many times they went downtown after dinner to see the lights.

Their favorite moment during the wedding was when they first saw each other—Zaragoza in her suit, and Herrera in her gown and custom-made bolero. They had kept the details of their ensembles secret, despite teasing each other with small details.

Herrera says it wasn't until their wedding that she was fully open about their relationship.

"It isn't like my extended family didn't know, but we had never addressed it," she says. "Family is very important to me, and I feared not being accepted. There were the usual bumps in the road that really tested our strength and love for each other, so to be in that room and see the love and support of those closest to us was invaluable."

The brides used LGBTQ-friendly vendors to help them plan their dream wedding, including Balani Custom Clothiers for Zaragoza's suit, Olivia's Bridal House for Herrera's gown, Jeana Auger at the Houston Club, and photographer Steve Lee.

They chose a Greek honeymoon and visited Athens, Santorini, and Mykonos, which allowed them to go sightseeing and lounge by the water while reading great books.

Their advice for other couples planning to marry is to hire a wedding planner. "They not only have great insight into the many vendors that you will need to hire, they will also keep you sane," Herrera says.

The brides currently reside near downtown in EaDo.

Henry V. Thiel is a frequent contributor to OutSmart magazine. He loves weddings.



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Nik Dodani

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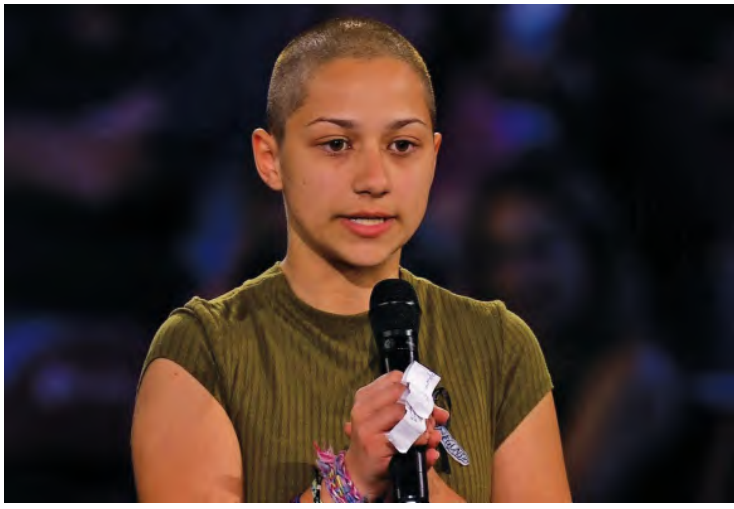
Nik Dodani (seen here at a press tour for CBS's *Murphy Brown*): why didn't he step forward?

(*The Advocate*, Dec2018/Jan2019, Daniel Reynolds)

During freshman orientation at Occidental College in 2011, Nik Dodani joined his classmates on a football field in an exercise illustrating the benefits of privilege. Statements were read aloud, such as, "I can marry the person I love in any state." If a statement applied to a student, he or she took one step forward.

When this particular statement was announced, a 17-year-old Dodani prepared to take a step forward. But before he did, he looked around and saw that several of his peers were unmoved. He reconsidered. He decided to stay put with the other queer kids.

"And then from there, I was just out," said the 24-year-old actor who was cast this year as Pat, a series regular on CBS's *Murphy Brown* revival.



Different and Beautiful

Emma González (seen here pressing an NRA spokeswoman at a CNN town-hall meeting after the Parkland school shooting): she identifies as bisexual.

Emma González

(*Out*, Dec2018/Jan2019, Monica Costillo)

"There are so many people who are coming forward and being like, 'Yep. I am not straight. I am not cis. And I am here to stay.' Our society doesn't need to be cis, heteroromantic, heteronormative, and heterosexual all the time. We have these different people, and they're beautiful, and I'm just so glad to know that there are so many people who are out. And even if they're in the closet, they still know who they are."



MONÁE - TERENCE PATRICK/CBS; KNIGHTLEY - BLEECKER STREET; DODANI - FRANCIS SPECKER/CBS; GONZÁLEZ - CNN

Queer Quotes

Compiled by Blase DiStefano

▲ Janelle Monáe

(Advocate.com, 11/16/18, Tracy E. Gilchrist)

Janelle Monáe, whose *Dirty Computer* was nominated for the Grammy Awards album of the year, said her acclaimed record aims to elevate people who have been "pushed to the margins of society."

The artist joined *CBS This Morning* as nominations for the Grammys were announced. Shortly after she learned *Dirty Computer* was in the running for album of the year, she delivered a tearful statement about community and representation.

"This album is so much bigger than me," Monáe said. "It's not about me, it's about a community of dirty computers, of marginalized voices. Being a young black queer woman in America, there was something I had to say."

Grammy Nominee
Janelle Monáe (seen here on *The Late Late Show with James Corden*): is she "dirty"?



◄ Keira Knightley

(The Advocate, Dec2018/Jan2019, Tracy E. Gilchrist)

Re: her title role in out director Wash Westmoreland's biopic Colette. *Colette was a French writer, journalist, and actress.*
Colette was exploring her sexuality "without shame, and she was doing it unapologetically. That it was a very positive part of her life was a great message," Knightley says of her attraction to the role of Colette.

"I want my [LGBTQ] friends to have positive stories about their community," she says. "And I want for my kid—if she identifies with that community—[to know] there are positive stories out there that she can tap into and she can feel a part of."

Femelle Bisexuelles?
Keira Knightley (left, as Colette) and Denise Gough as Missy in the recent film *Colette*.

Photos by Dalton DeHart & Edgardo Aguilar

OutSmart Holiday Party at the Alley Theater - December 11

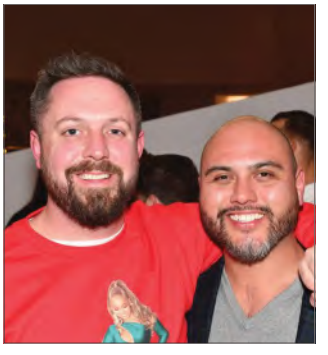
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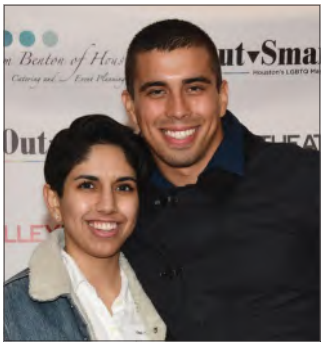






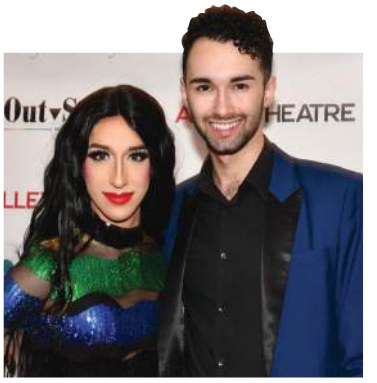




For more event photos, please visit TINYURL.COM/OSMPHOTOS



























GrooveOut

continued from page 71

one of my passions. My love of cooking actually goes back to my early days of dating. When I was in college, there was a guy named Jesse whom everyone wanted to go out with. He was handsome, smart, funny, and talented. He was also always hungry. I figured that if I wanted to date him, my best shot was to cook for him. Except all I knew how to cook at that time was steak and potatoes—and cinnamon rolls. But I taught myself to cook, and grew to really love it. So all the cooking songs and references on the album—that's who I am. Those are the songs I related to, that I could infuse with my own spirit. And with "Cooking Breakfast," which is an old Fanny Brice song, that's exactly the kind of thing never designed for a man to sing. And with "But I Could Cook," which talks about acquiring husbands for the money [you could inherit from them as a spouse], that's the kind of song a man never could sing, until very recently.

Who is a better cook, you or Tommy?
Tommy can't even boil water. [*Laughs*] There are lots of things he's way better at than me—many, many things—but when it comes to cooking, that's my domain! And I love it. Nothing makes me happier than cooking something new for Tommy, and having no idea how it came out, and hearing him say—as he often does—"that's the best thing you've ever made."

You made a point of including forgotten gems such as "Who Gave You Permission?" from *Queen of the Stardust Ballroom*, and the title tune from the 1966 off-Broadway musical *Man with a Load of Mischief*. As someone who comes from the cabaret world, can you say something about that genre's tradition of educating your audience?
I wish I could take credit for those two numbers, but those two were Tommy's suggestions. Tommy has this amazing memory for show tunes. I swear, he remembers every show tune he's ever heard on cast albums, in revues, and from playing auditions early in his career. A lot of the song suggestions, especially the obscure ones, came from him. In terms of "Who Gave You Permission?" we knew that we didn't want to end the album with a traditional happy ending. This album was about celebrating equality. It was about exploring a gay relationship by using songs that had always been used to explore straight relationships. And I think in any life, there's a certain amount of heartbreak. Tommy and I are in our 50s now—we have gay friends who've passed away, leaving spouses behind. It's awful and heartbreaking, and it's part of our collective story. We can get married now, and that's amazing. That also means that at some point, one spouse is left alone. Tommy and I

wanted to reflect that, and we struggled for a while to find the right song. Then he remembered seeing on TV, maybe 40 years earlier, Maureen Stapleton singing about her husband who'd just died in *Queen of the Stardust Ballroom*. I don't know how Tommy remembers this stuff. He didn't remember a lot of the details, but he just remembered the mood of the song and a few phrases, and Maureen Stapleton wandering through her empty house. But he managed to track the song down, and it was perfect. Honestly, Gregg, I don't think we ever think about "educating" the audience. We just don't really make a distinction between known and unknown songs. We just try to do what feels right for each particular moment on the album. I think, for us, that's always been a big part of our mission statement at our PS Classics label—that there's no distinction between known and unknown music, just as there's no distinction between old and new music. It's part of one long, beautiful tapestry.

I'm glad you mentioned PS Classics, the label you co-founded with Tommy. Please say a few words about being a record-label mogul.

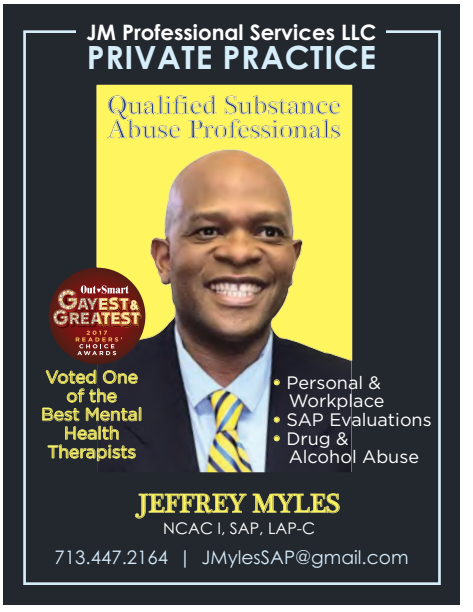
Jessica Molaskey, one of the first artists we recorded, always used to call us "the reluctant moguls" because Tommy and I were the farthest things from businessmen. We didn't start the label to make money—and thank God, because we didn't make a penny for years—but simply because Tommy had been freelance record-producing for a decade, and all the big labels were downsizing their music-theater divisions. He knew if he wanted to continue making the kind of music he cared about, the music of Broadway and the Great American Songbook, he'd have to start his own label. And we knew he couldn't do it alone, so I came aboard as his partner. Right from the start, though, I said, "Let's only work with nice people." We'd both been in the business for a collective 25 years at that point, and we'd both worked with a lot of jerks. We thought, If we're going to start our own label, we only want to work with nice people—people who are warm and generous and kind. And we've stuck to that, and that's what's made running this record label a wonderful experience for 18 years now.

Are there plans for you to perform concerts to promote *Will He Like Me?*

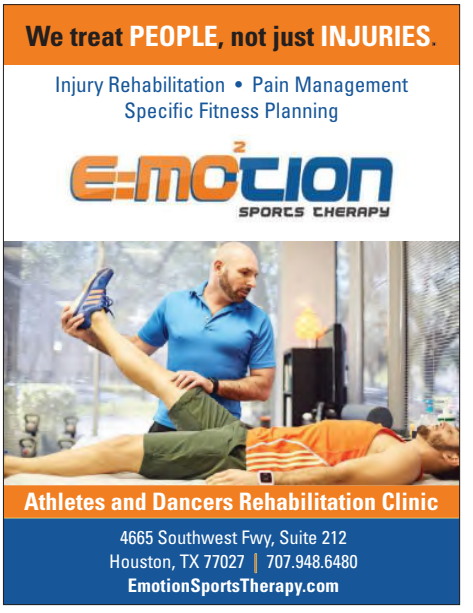
Absolutely. It was always designed to function not only as an album, but as a one-man show. Even as we were choosing and refining songs, we knew what the staging was, and imagined things I would do onstage to complement the material. I'm very much hoping to start touring with *Will He Like Me?* in the spring.

Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to OutSmart *magazine.*























Bar & Club Guide

HOUSTON

ALIBI
Located right next to Hamburger Mary's, this dance club was voted "Favorite Club for Dancing," "Best Club after 2AM," and "Best Martini" by our readers. It's party central for Montrose with late-night dancing until 4am Friday and Saturday weekly. Mary always goes to Alibi to party after her shows! 2409 Grant St., 713.522.2867, alibihouston.com

BARCODE
Houston's newest bar with happy hours from 11am to 8pm daily, this new neighborhood watering hole is a great place to see drag shows and strippers Tuesdays–Saturdays and Karaoke Sundays & Mondays. 817 Fairview St. 713.526.2625 • barcodehouston.net

BLUR
Multi-level dance club featuring an upstairs lounge and balconies. Ladies enjoy Wet and Wild Wed., 18-year-olds welcome Thurs., Latin night on Sun. Happy hour 8–10pm; free cover before 11pm. 710 Pacific St. • blurbar.com.

CLUB CRYSTAL
Find many of Inergy's former staff and décor at this two-room Latin/hip-hop club. Sunday evening drag shows rule the roost. 6680 Southwest Frwy, next to Colorado 713.278.2582 • crystaltheclub.com.

CROCKER BAR
This comfortably remodeled Montrose nightspot also offers karaoke on Tuesdays and Thursdays and extended happy-hour prices throughout the week. 2312 Crocker • 713.529.3355.

GEORGE
Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar. Sports Saturdays and Sundays start at 3pm with dart and pool tournaments. 617 Fairview • 713.528.8102.

GUAVA LAMP
This trendy and friendly video and cruise bar gets busy during happy hour and stays busy 'til closing. Karaoke on Wed. and Sun. 570 Waugh Dr. • 713.524.3359 guavalamphouston.com.

HAMBURGER MARY'S
Since 1972, Mary has served up amazing food and stellar shows*! With the best drag talent in the city, it's been voted "Best Drag Show Bar," "Most Supportive of the LGBTQ Community," "Best Hamburger," "Best Brunch," "Friendliest Staff," and "Best Place to Celebrate" by our readers. Be sure to try the famous Mac & Cheese Balls, or grab a leg glass (as seen on RuPaul's Drag Race)! *Reservations recommended for shows. 2409 Grant St., 713.677.0674, hamburgermarys.com

EAGLE
Part of the Eagle worldwide family, it's the definitive home to the man's man. Leather, Bear or Jock, you'll find them here. Voted "Best Community Bar," "Best Men's Bar," "Best Place to Show Your Leather," "Best Happy Hour," and "Best Place to Buy Erotic Playthings" by our readers. Eagle has multiple levels and patios, along with DJs and male dancers—and it's the place to watch sports. Noon–2am every day, 611 Hyde Park Blvd., 713.523.BIRD houstoneagle.com

JR'S BAR & GRILL
This Montrose standard offers drag and strip shows throughout the week, karaoke Thurs. and Sun., plus pool tables and male dancers. 808 Pacific St. • 713.521.2519 jrsbarandgrill.com.

MICHAEL'S OUTPOST
Jerry Atwood, Clay Howell, Neil Massey, Steve Wheaton, and Roger Woest take turns at the keys at this comfortable neighborhood piano bar. 1419 Richmond Ave. • 713.520.8446.

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON
Houston's only LGBTQ country dancehall opens Wednesday–Sunday. Wednesday features Steak Night and Bingo. Free dance classes on Thursdays and Karaoke. 11410 Hempstead Hwy 713.677.0828 • neonbootsclub.com.

PEARL BAR
This LGBT-friendly lounge in the Washington corridor features daily highlights like open mic night, steak night, and drink specials. 4216 Washington • pearlhouston.com.



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What is your favorite shot to make? To drink?
The Pillow Princess: pineapple vodka, pineapple juice and pomegranate syrup

What is the best and worst holiday to work? Why?
Best holiday: Halloween. Worst holiday to work: Christmas

Biggest tip from one customer?
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If you weren't a bartender, what career would you choose?
I would be an interior designer

Do you have any pets?
One pit bull named Kya.

RICH'S HOUSTON
Houston's most iconic and largest LGBT dance club, with multiple levels featuring a video/show bar and a private VIP lounge. No cover before 10:30 p.m. 2401 San Jacinto • 281.846.6685 richsnightclub.com.

THE RIPCORD
This multi-roomed leather bar boasts a busy patio, especially on the weekends. The Forge shop located inside the club. Saturday nights with DJ Tad Dvorak
715 Fairview Ave • 713.521.2792.

RUDYARD'S
The eclectic British pub is known for its craft beers as well as for the burgers. Most weekends you'll find up-and-coming local bands rocking the house. 2010 Waugh Dr. • 713.521.0521 • rudyardspub.com.

TONY'S CORNER POCKET
This comfortable club has one of the friendliest bar staffs in town. Amateur dance contest each Thurs., Fri., & Sat. at 11pm. Opens daily at noon. 817 W. Dallas • 713.571.7870 tonyscornerpocketbar.com.

VIVIANA'S
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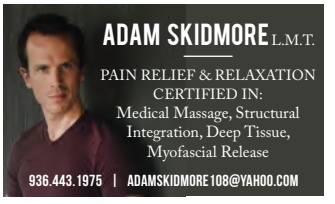
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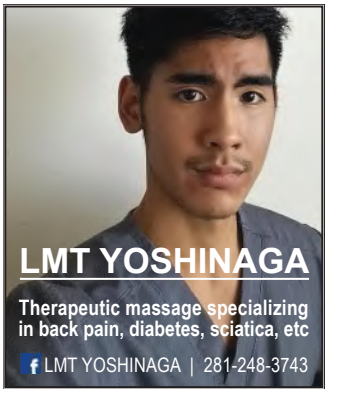
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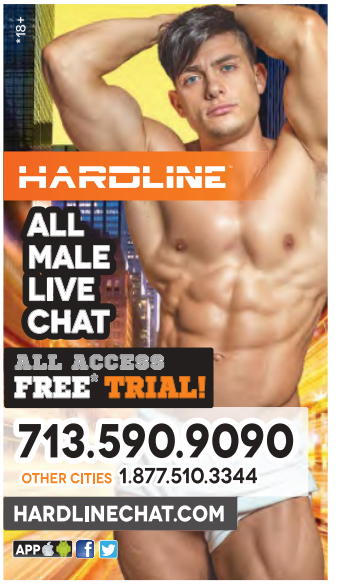




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By Lilly Roddy

January Is Very Active

. . . and filled with the need for decision-making.

This is going to be an active and eventful month with the solar eclipse on the 5th and the lunar eclipse on the 21st. The solar eclipse has the strongest impact on Aries, Libra, Cancer, and Capricorn, while the lunar eclipse affects Leo, Taurus, Scorpio, and Aquarius. Eclipses are openings for stimulation and a change of direction. The pace of life quickens after the 6th as we look for innovation and change.

ARIES (March 21–April 19). You start the new year off with lots of energy and a strong desire to focus on your career, family, and social responsibilities. You may want to start something on your own, particularly with the eclipse stimulating your career sector on the 5th. You are letting go of your fears and are better at making a commitment to yourself. With Mars in your sign for the next 40 days, you will not be very patient. You are feeling more comfortable with risk. Business associations can be very helpful to your career at this time. You are needing more attention and affection in your relationship. Plan for a fun weekend away! If you aren't being appreciated, you will certainly let your partner know!

TAURUS (April 20–May 20). This is the beginning of an innovative and mentally stimulating time for you as you redefine who you are. With your career, you need something that draws out your passion. In relationships, you are wanting more equality and an active partner. Currently, you are in a good place to make some decisions about your career direction. You are open to new ideas and different ways to approach your goals. You will feel clearer about your choices after midmonth. Relationships are positive this month, so if you are single, this is a good time to be actively looking. This is a good time to purchase property, as it is easier for you to get a loan. Investments should remain good, even with the uneasy economic conditions.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21). You continue to work on clearing up debt, making safer investments, and creating more intimacy in your relationships. With romance, you are tearing down the walls and barriers that keep your intimate partners at a distance. This is a good time for therapy if you are having relationship problems. Business relationships will need some fine-tuning as well. This is a great month to connect with friends—they can be very inspiring and help lift your spirits. Your career needs to be really fulfilling, or you will be looking to go in some other direction that is more satisfying. By the end of the month, you are taking a breather.

CANCER (June 22–July 22). Relationships and partnerships are on the menu this month. This is a time to review and renew your long-term goals and directions. This can make you feel more secure in your partnership for the next several years. If you are having problems, they need to be solved or you will not move forward. You are entering an active time in your career sector. You should be ready to take a leadership role, or even start your own business. By midmonth you should be taking care of debt, managing your retirement plans, and connecting with your partner on a deeper level. Your office space needs a redo, so spruce the place up!

LEO (July 23–August 22). This is a dynamic month for you. As we begin the month, you are getting your work space in order. You are updating your cell phones and tablets, and also getting your health in order by changing your whole approach to healthy eating and regular exercise. You will also be looking for a new project or interest that really inspires you. Your children are growing fast this month. There could be some new family members on the way! Toward the end of the month, you are making time for your relationship. It can be easy for you to overcommit yourself and put your relationship on the back burner.

VIRGO (August 23–September 22). You are in a creative and playful mood as the new year begins. You are not taking life so seriously, because you know you are not in control. However, your communications are heartfelt, and that comes through loud and clear. Spending time with your children can be very satisfying this month. They help keep you young. By midmonth, you are back to your routines that make the best use of your time. The last half of the month is a great time for you to get on a healthy eating and exercise program. You are feeling positive about your relationship. In fact, spending time with your partner is your spiritual boost, so don't miss that!

LIBRA (September 23–October 23). Home, family, and roots are in the spotlight as the month begins. You are working to make your nest a more comfortable place. You may be considering moving, remodeling, or massively downsizing! There could also be some drama within your family, especially as things change with older relatives. That may create some divisions if power struggles show up. Your relationship needs some attention, or your partner could be very testy. Make some time to get away and renew those emotional and sexual bonds. Career directions are being reviewed to make sure you are still on the right path. By the end of the month, you are looking to have more fun and less tension. You are very open to classes, continuing education, or traveling throughout the month.

SCORPIO (October 24–November 21). You are getting your life organized this month as you set up several goals to create more opportunities for long-term security. This is a good period for any type of writing, publishing, or expanding your resource base. Your magnetism is strong this month. This can draw people to you who want to support your work or even get to know you much better! You are more open in your viewpoint, and you won't be silenced. Restrictive relationships won't last, while individuals who are secure with themselves can be very attractive. This is a great month to start a new health and nutrition program. At the end of the month, you will want to make your home a more comfortable place to retreat.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22–December 21). This is going to be a busy year for you with Jupiter, your ruling planet, traveling through your sign for the whole year. This is a good time to travel, go to school, expand your business, and even get married. As the month begins, you are focused on making money and creating long-term security. You may be feeling a financial pinch, but that only serves as a motivation to do more. If you are single, this is a good month to be putting yourself out there. If you are involved, you are enjoying your partner's company even more. Your home serves as your place of retreat. Creating an altar at home can help you add a more peaceful, Zen-like experience.

CAPRICORN (December 22–January 19). Happy Birthday to the Capricorns. This is an especially powerful birthday month with the

eclipses on the 5th and the 21st. This can be a huge trigger to start your own business, enter into a business or romantic partnership, or (if you are older) step back and consider retiring. Normally, this is your yearly cycle of review when you set new long-term goals. But this year has you releasing your fears and limitations from the past and making investments in yourself. Your ability to use your resources to create more stability becomes stronger by the end of the month. You are stepping into your own power this year!

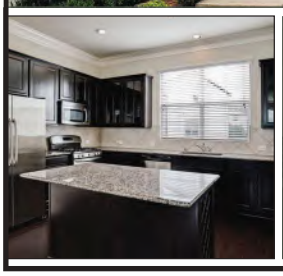
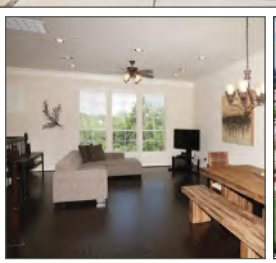

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AQUARIUS (January 20–February 18). You start the month off wanting to take some time to retreat from all the holiday activity. You have been fairly social by connecting with friends during the holidays, but now you are ready to recharge. You are also breaking free from old habits and are no longer running on autopilot. You will want and demand more choices and options about what you are willing to do and not do. Your relationship may need some updating to keep it fresh and interesting. By the end of the month, you are back from your retreat. The eclipse on the 21st could be a strong trigger to get you started for the new year!

PISCES (February 19–March 20). Despite the intervention of the holidays, you are in a very good period for your career. There are promotions and other opportunities to make you more visible this year. You have been more in the background over the last few years, but this month you are more socially interactive. Groups and community associations can be good for you, but they need to have a purpose and achieve their goals. If they don't, you will not want to waste your time with them. Watch your impulse-spending this month—it will be easier than usual to justify spending what you want! By the end of the month, you are ready for some rest and retreat. It can be easy to overdo things. Be careful about making commitments, even for the fun things!

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Photos by Dalton DeHart and Edgardo Aguilar



On December 14, the Victory Fund held a holiday party at the home of Annise Parker and Kathy Hubbard. Pictured are **Brian Cotton**, **Jani Lopez**, **Seth Schermer**, **Annise Parker**, **Alan Dettlaff**, **Vince Pryor**, **Mayor Sylvester Turner**, **Bryan Hlavinka**, and **Heather Jones-Taylor**.



On December 12, Out@TUTS night at *Beauty and the Beast* was sponsored by Theatre Under The Stars and OutSmart magazine at the Hobby Center. Pictured are members of the cast with hostess **Regina Blake-Dubois**.



On December 9, the HIV and Aging Coalition held a holiday party at the Montrose Center. Pictured are **Tana Pradia**, **Bruce Turner**, and **Denis Kelly**.



Lambda Nextgen held a holiday party at Aria Stone Gallery at the Decorative Center on Dec 6. Pictured are **Shawn Kuehn**, **Luis Lopez**, **Ryan MacMillan**, and **Alan Prewitt**.



On December 2, friends gathered for a celebration of life memorial service for Ray Hill at Houston City Hall. Pictured are justice-elect **Charles Spain**, former mayor **Annise Parker**, and judge-elect **Jerry Simoneaux**.



The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber held its holiday party at Amegy Bank on December 5. Pictured are **Gary Wood**, **George Marshall**, **Deborah Lawson**, **Laif Afseth**, **Tammi Wallace**, **Corey Allen**, **Dave Stevenson**, **Catherine Duyka-Morse**, **A.J. Mistretta**, and **Tony Martinez**.



On December 1, Legacy Community Health sponsored the World AIDS Day 2018 Vigil at Legacy Community Health in Montrose. Pictured are **Ahmier Gibson**, **Venita Ray**, **Dena Gray Hughes**, and **Amy Leonard**.



On December 1, Kinship Care presented "The Untalked About Realities" on World AIDS Day. Pictured are **Denise Sherman**, **Mayra Luna**, **Dee Dee Watters**, and **Nine Lam**.



On November 30, the T.R.U.T.H. Project presented *I Am Life* at the University of Houston South Center Theater. Pictured are **Niki Lessig**, **Justin Turner**, **Abiola Wabara**, **Kevin Anderson**, **Jacques Davis**, and **Robert Ross**.



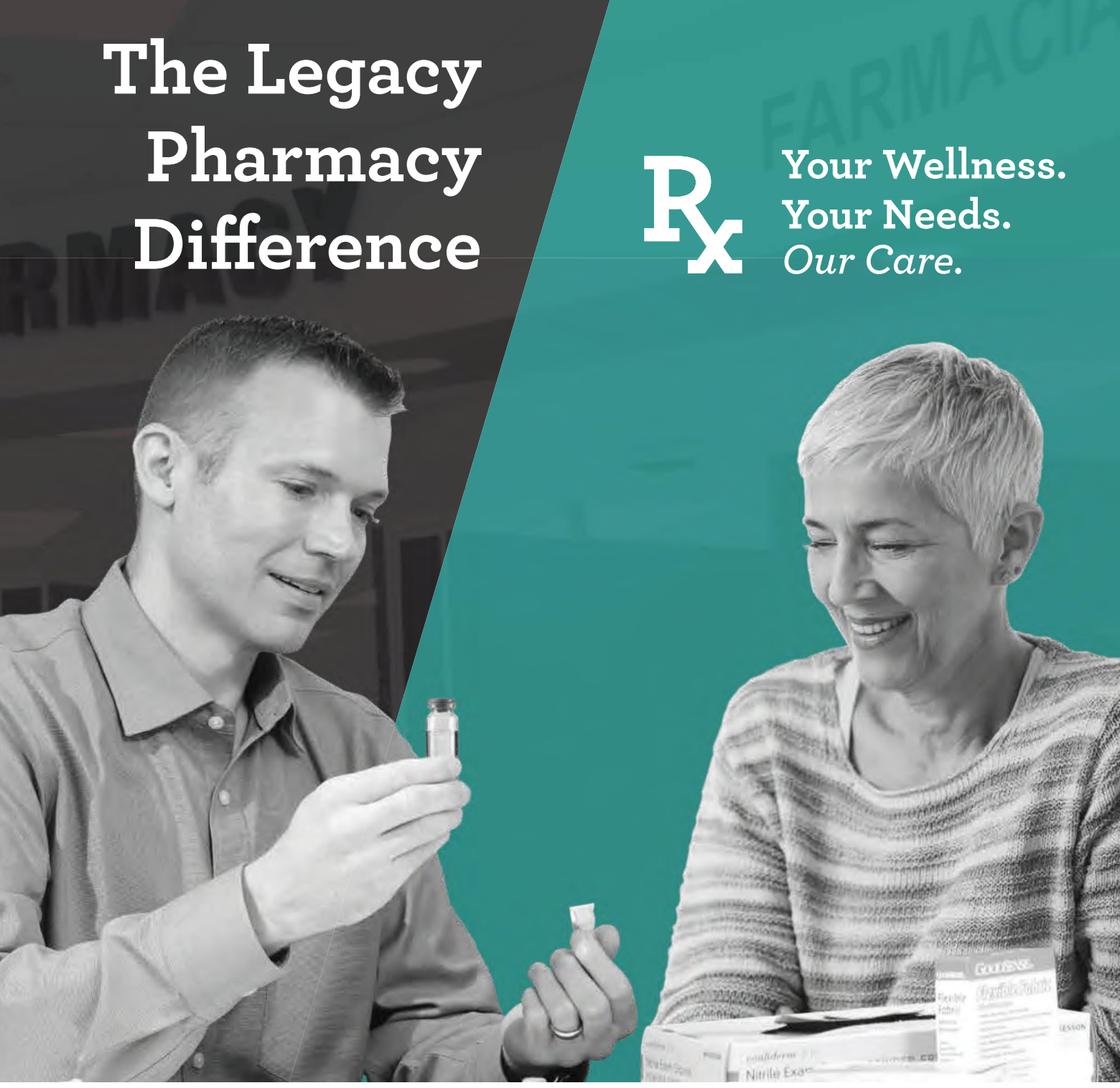
On November 30, AIDS Foundation Houston sponsored the World AIDS Day Luncheon with guest speaker Tituss Burgess at the Ballroom at Bayou Place. Pictured are **Jerry Hooker**, **Joe Fuentes**, **Kelly Young**, and **Jacob Sudhoff**.



On December 12, Bayou City Performing Arts presented its *Joy to the World* concert at Resurrection MCC. Pictured are members of the Gay Men's Chorus of Houston and the Bayou City Women's Chorus.

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