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Outward JAN. '21 mart

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

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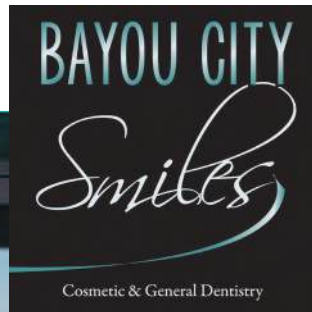
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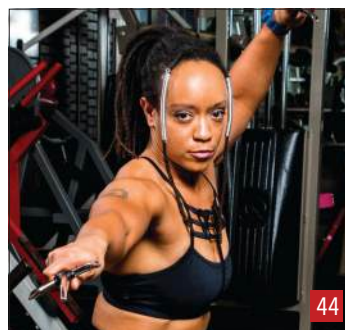
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Houston's LGBTQ Magazine

JANUARY 2021

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In November, many celebrated Joe Biden for embracing transgender Americans in his victory address—the first president-elect to do so.

“And to all those who supported us: I am proud of the campaign we built and ran. I am proud of the coalition we put together—the broadest and most diverse in history,” Biden said. “Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Progressives, moderates and conservatives. Young and old. Urban, suburban, and rural. Gay, straight, transgender.”

In just a few short sentences, Biden signaled his readiness to usher in an era of renewed LGBTQ protection after four years of the exact opposite.

Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris ran on what Alphonso David, the president of the Human Rights Campaign, billed in August as “our nation’s most pro-equality ticket in history.”

Among other things, he was referring to Harris’ pro-LGBTQ track record, which goes back to when she entered politics in 2004, and to the former vice president’s radical shift on LGBTQ rights. Biden went from voting for the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act in 1996 to getting out ahead of former President Barack Obama in publicly backing marriage equality in 2012.

Biden and Harris’ win in the 2020 election couldn’t have arrived at a better time for LGBTQ Americans and those who care about equality. It’s no secret that under President Donald Trump, anti-LGBTQ ugliness has become a newly visible norm.

An extensive 2019 report from ProPublica cataloged the Trump administration’s anti-LGBTQ maneuvering and found “dozens of changes that represent a profound reshaping of the ways the federal government treats the more than 11 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans.”

These changes include reversed, dropped, removed, and withdrawn LGBTQ protections in areas such as employment, health care, criminal justice, and public life.

In particular, the administration has made a target of transgender Americans, who some LGBTQ advocates say the Trump White House has attempted to use as a wedge against the broader coalition.

During Pride Month this past June, the administration rolled back an Obama-era regulation prohibiting discrimination in health care against transgender patients. (In August, a federal judge blocked the rollback one day before it would have gone into effect.)

There’s also Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett, Trump’s third pick for the high court.



A Fierce Ally in the White House

The promise of LGBTQ equality under the Biden administration.

By BRANDON TENSLEY, CNN

During the Senate hearings in October, Republicans and the Christian Right sought to brand Barrett as a sort of conservative feminist icon, an approach that hinged on their apparent obsession with her family size.

For many LGBTQ Americans, though, the new justice is more like a specter, waiting to strike at their rights.

Barrett has limited experience as a federal judge, but she has nevertheless participated in important cultural and political conversations that offer insight into her convictions.

For instance, in a lecture at Jacksonville University in the run-up to the 2016 election, Barrett supported the dissenters in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that cleared the way for marriage equality nationwide. She also signaled that the Title IX rights protecting transgender Americans should be subject to congressional review.

“Maybe things have changed so that we should change Title IX,” Barrett said in 2016. “Maybe those arguing in favor of this kind of transgender bathroom access are right. But it does seem to strain the text of the statute to say that Title IX demands it, so is that the kind of thing that the Court should interpret the statute to update it to pick sides on this policy

debate? Or should we go to our Congress?”

In a similar vein, an October report from the Associated Press detailed Barrett’s previous multi-year term on the board of a private Christian school system, one that the AP said has anti-LGBTQ policies.

The system “effectively barred admission to children of same-sex parents and made it plain that openly gay and lesbian teachers weren’t welcome in the classroom,” the AP found.

While it remains to be seen whether Barrett’s opinions on the 6-3 conservative-majority high court will track with her prior stances and affiliations, the anxiety hovering over LGBTQ Americans is real.

“Lawyers are sharing advice on how same-sex families can ensure legal protections if marriage equality goes away—secure second-parent adoption papers, living wills, health-care proxies,” as Allison Hope wrote for CNN Opinion. “We don’t and can’t know for sure how Barrett will rule on cases relating to LGBTQ rights, but the overall signs, given past comments and statements from other conservative justices on the Court, are not promising.”

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito has also reiterated, in an inflammatory speech, his

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



A new year is a time for new beginnings, and 2021 already seems to be on the up-and-up.

The COVID-19 vaccine promises an end to the pandemic and a return to normalcy, while the incoming Biden administration has the potential to enact positive systemic change.

Get excited about this good news, but don't let your guard down just yet. It will still take a community effort to push both our nation's health and a pro-equality political climate forward. So remember to keep following COVID-19 safety precautions while we continue fighting for the freedoms of marginalized Americans.

In Texas, LGBTQ rights are again on the line in this year's legislative session, which begins January 12. In OUTSMART's inaugural 2021 issue, writer Lillian Hoang chats with Equality Texas' Angela Hale, who gives us the run-down on what is at stake and how community members can get involved.

Another group kicking off the new year by motivating activists is the National LGBTQ Task Force with its annual Creating Change Conference. Writer Andrew Edmonson previews the virtual confab, which will bring together thousands of queer leaders and mark an historic change of leadership in the organization.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is also making an effort to mobilize LGBTQ youth. Houston's Alise Maxie, a 20-year-old

nonbinary lesbian, recently teamed up with the organization to empower local young queer people. Writer Zach McKenzie introduces us to Maxie, who discusses their role as a new HRC Youth Ambassador.

Because January is typically a great time to reprioritize your life and set some goals, this issue of OUTSMART spotlights six out health experts who aren't letting COVID-19 stop them from helping us achieve our wellness dreams. Writer Sam Byrd chats with our cover star, Dr. Wade Maggert, a Zen Buddhist and mental-health therapist who shares his advice for a more mindful year.

Houston is the hottest place to be if you're an art lover. If you need further proof of that, check out my interview with Tommy

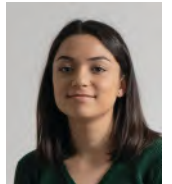
Ralph Pace, the new director of The Orange Show Center for Visionary Art. Pace is coming to Space City from Miami to help the organization expand its programmatic footprint.

Finally, astrologer Lilly Roddy gives us her annual look at what's in store for this promising new year. Roddy's 2021 horoscopes are complemented by the Zodiac artwork of John-Paul Arreaga, a Capricorn whose illustrations are inspired by cartoon images and queer entertainment icons.

Happy New Year!

Lourdes Zavaleta

MANAGING EDITOR



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The Fight for Equal Rights Continues

The 87th Texas Legislative Session could greatly impact the LGBTQ community.

By LILLIAN HOANG



A lot is at stake for the LGBTQ community in the 87th Texas Legislative Session that begins on January 12. Lawmakers will convene in the State Capitol for 140 days to discuss dozens of bills that could impact the LGBTQ community, for better or worse.

The session runs through May 31, and the deadline for lawmakers to file a bill is March 12. Republicans still hold the Texas House and Senate majorities following the November election, and officials have already started filing anti-LGBTQ bills. However, pro-equality legislators are ready to play offense in 2021 by proposing their own LGBTQ-affirming policies.

“Every legislative session, the rights of LGBTQ Texans are on the line,” says Angela Hale, a senior advisor at Equality Texas. “It is our responsibility to ensure that LGBTQ Texans are treated fairly and that we defeat discriminatory legislation.”

To prepare for this year’s legislative session, Equality Texas has been monitoring other state legislative sessions to spot the trends in various political attacks against the LGBTQ community. The organization discovered that opponents of equality are using various tactics—from deceptive religious exemptions to fear-mongering bathroom bills—to deny basic civil rights. This time around, Equality Texas anticipates having to fight legislation targeting transgender youth.

These attacks have already begun. Rep. Steve Toth (R-The Woodlands) has filed a bill that would subject medical and mental-health professionals to charges of child abuse if they assist a trans youth in medically transitioning.

Trans people, including trans children, rely on informative healthcare as part of their transition, Equality Texas reports. Every major medical association considers transition care for trans people to be safe, medically necessary, and life-saving. These findings are backed by a recent study published in the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Hale says Toth’s bill places trans children



Rep. Jessica Gonzalez (I) has filed a statewide nondiscrimination bill to protect LGBTQ Texans, while Rep. Steve Toth has filed a bill targeting trans children.

in danger. Anti-trans attacks during the 2017 Texas Legislative Session led to The Trevor Project’s suicide hotline receiving an increased number of calls by young LGBTQ Texans. She fears the same, or even worse, will happen should Toth’s bill move forward.

“Parents [and] children should not have to [debate] their personal health care on the [Texas House and Senate] floor,” Hale says. “This is people’s private lives, and trans children just want to be treated like everybody else, without government interference. That’s why we fight.”

Toth’s bill is not the only anti-LGBTQ legislation that will be reviewed in Austin this year. Equality Texas suspects it will also be fighting bills that bar trans athletes from joining teams that reflect their gender identity. In 2020, lawmakers in 18 states introduced 25 similar bills. The nonprofit also anticipates a fight over bills that would give people a license to discriminate based on their religious beliefs.

Due to Texas’ conservative majority, many anti-LGBTQ bills could become law this year. Fortunately, the new Texas House LGBTQ Caucus, which was founded in 2019 and has 23 committed members, has vowed to take a stand for LGBTQ equality in Texas.

Caucus Vice Chair Rep. Jessica Gonzalez (D-Dallas) partnered with Equality Texas to file a statewide nondiscrimination bill that would protect LGBTQ Texans in employment, housing, and public accommodations. She re-

cently discussed her plan during a Pride Across Texas event, hosted by the Texas LGBTQ Chambers of Commerce.

“Most people don’t know that LGBTQ people can legally be fired from their jobs [simply because of their sexual or gender identity]. They can be denied housing because of who they love, and be denied services for the same reason,” Gonzalez told the Chambers of Commerce. “That’s just unfair, and most Texans don’t believe in that.”

More than 60 percent of Texans don’t believe in discrimination against LGBTQ people, according to a 2019 analysis by the Public Religion Research Institute. “It’s time that our laws reflect what Texans actually believe,” Gonzalez says. “That’s why I’ve decided to make it my top priority to pass a [statewide nondiscrimination bill] for the first time in Texas history.”

Gonzalez’s bill already has bipartisan support. Rep. Todd Hunter (R-Corpus Christi), who helped kill a bathroom bill in 2017, has agreed to co-author the proposal.

“A comprehensive nondiscrimination bill will protect trans children and the LGBTQ community [and ensure that they will] be treated equally, like everybody else,” Hale says. “We don’t want special rights; we want equal rights under the law.”

Despite widespread support for LGBTQ people across the state, Texas has had a rocky relationship with comprehensive →



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nondiscrimination legislation.

In 2014, the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), which prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (in addition to more than a dozen other characteristics), was approved by City Council. Then anti-LGBTQ organizations used misleading anti-trans attacks to convince voters to repeal the ordinance in 2015. Following this repeal, Texas began to see anti-trans bathroom bills filed in the 2015 and 2017 legislative sessions.

Even so, amid great adversity, advocates, activists, and organizations like Equality Texas are continuing their fight for LGBTQ rights. They are supported at the federal level by the incoming Biden administration, which vowed to pass the Equality Act—with its nationwide LGBTQ protections covering virtually every area of daily life—within its first 100 days.

Texans can stay up to date with the 87th Texas Legislative Session by signing up for Equality Texas' email alerts. The nonprofit will notify people when it needs individuals who have faced discrimination and are willing to share their story to testify at critical stages in this year's legislative session.

"We're always looking for Texans to tell their story," Hale adds. "It takes people from all over the state standing up, providing

testimony, and participating in the process to educate [both] the legislators and the public about the issues we face in our lives that they may not be aware of."

Below is a list of several LGBTQ-specific bills that have been filed so far:

Bad Bills:

HB 68 would expand the definition of child abuse, prohibiting medical and mental-health professionals from helping transgender youth medically transition. This bill was proposed by Steve Toth (R-The Woodlands).

• **HB 369** would classify the transmission and exposure to communicable diseases, such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), as an aggravated assault. This bill was proposed by Tom Craddick (R-Midland).

• While **HB 338** would establish a procedure for correcting names and gender markers on legal documents, it would prohibit trans people with felony convictions from updating their records. This clause would disproportionately impact trans women of color, who are regularly profiled and targeted by law enforcement. The bill was proposed by John Rosenthal (D-Houston).

• **HB 610** could scrap nondiscrimination ordinances if an individual with an occupational license goes to court and claims that a

local nondiscrimination ordinance infringes on their ability to run their business. The bill was proposed by Valoree Swanson (R-Spring).

Good Bills:

HB 73 would ban the "gay/trans panic defense" by prohibiting the use of a victim's sexual orientation or gender identity as the reason for the defendant's violent behavior. This bill was proposed by Gina Hinojosa (D-Austin).

• **HB 407** and **HB 560** would ban anti-LGBTQ conversion therapy by prohibiting mental-health providers from attempting to change a child's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. These bills were proposed by Ana Hernandez (D-Houston) and Celia Israel (D-Austin), respectively.

• **HB 493** would allow opt-in HIV testing in certain routine medical screenings, regardless of whether an HIV test was part of a primary diagnosis. A healthcare provider would provide each person who receives a positive test result with information on available HIV health services, as well as referrals to community support programs. This bill was proposed by Gene Wu (D-Houston).



For more information, check out equalitytexas.org/.

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Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

The pros and cons of ESG investing.



While most investors have various objectives in mind when making financial decisions—such as long-term growth and/or future retirement income—there are some cases where

an underlying company or fund goes against an individual's beliefs. In these instances, even if the investment vehicle has performed well over time, the investor may decide not to include such items in their portfolio. That is where ESG investing could provide a viable solution.

What Is ESG Investing?

ESG stands for Environmental, Social, and Governance. Investors who employ an ESG strategy are using these factors to analyze stocks, mutual funds, and other avenues of investment.

This type of “socially responsible investing” (as it is often called) has gained a great deal of traction over the past couple of decades as investors strive to not only grow and protect their money, but also to help shape (or reshape) the world.

Including these non-monetary criteria in a portfolio mix was once considered somewhat radical. However, this type of investing is not only more attainable today, but it could also be more profitable. One reason for this is because consideration for environmental, social, and governance issues have evolved a great deal from its original concept of screening out equities on the basis of moral values.

There are currently a number of different methods that investors and financial profes-

sionals use to select investments that are based on a wide variety of different values. While ESG issues are not typically addressed by publicly held companies, there is a growing number of businesses and other entities that are starting to do so by providing disclosures in their annual reports, or as a part of their stand-alone sustainability reporting.

In addition, there are various financial entities—including the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)—that are starting to form standards and define materiality in order to incorporate these and other factors into the overall investment process.

According to a 2019 survey by a large asset-management firm, approximately 85 percent of individual investors are interested in sustainable investing—a figure that is up from 75 percent in 2017.

There are also more financial options available now for investors in the area of ESG and socially responsible investing. For instance, based on Morningstar research, there

were only 111 sustainable open-ended mutual funds and exchange traded funds (ETFs) in 2014, but as of 2019, this figure has nearly tripled to over 300.

What Makes ESG Investing Different?

ESG and socially responsible investing is different because it not only strives to generate financial returns for an investor, but also to generate ethical, social, environmental, and governmental changes.

Therefore, investors who take on an ESG type of strategy select financial vehicles for their portfolio based on performance and expenses, as well as on whether or not the revenue from a company aligns with their values.

As the demand for ESG investing is accelerating, there are some key issues that are starting to emerge, such as:

- Climate change
- Social unrest
- Interconnectedness of sustainability and the overall financial system
- Scarcity of a natural resource (such as fresh, natural water)
- Changing demographics →

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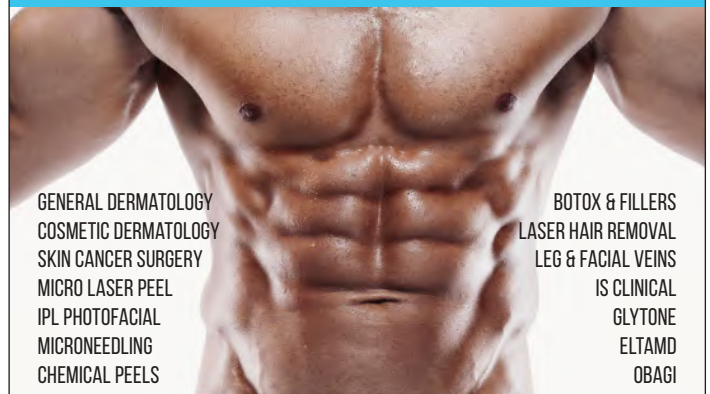
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It is important to keep in mind, though, that there isn't one single, exhaustive list of ESG issues. Rather, they can typically be inter-linked—and because of this, it can be somewhat challenging to sort out which investment options are “only” environmental, social, or governmental.

Investors and financial advisors will often use six methods for taking ESG factors into consideration. These can include one or more of the following criteria (which are not necessarily mutually exclusive):

- Exclusionary screening
- Best-in-class selection
- Thematic investing
- Active ownership
- Impact investing
- ESG integration

What About ESG Investment Returns?

In the past, environmentally and socially conscious investments were considered more risky than other more traditional options. But that assumption has since changed. A recent analysis by a global asset-management firm found that 80 percent of the reviewed studies showed that sustainability practices actually have a positive influence on the performance of investments. And further research determined that not only can the performance of mutual funds with an ESG bent match that of more traditional funds, but in some cases these investments can perform even better.

Is ESG Investing Right for You?

With so many different ESG investment opportunities available today, it can be difficult to sort them all out. Outlining what is most important to you can be helpful, though. For instance, are you against companies that manufacture firearms, or are you more interested in businesses that are run by female CEOs?

It is also important to determine how much of your portfolio you want to have allocated toward this type of investing. So before you move forward with any ESG investment strategy, it is recommended that you discuss your short- and long-term objectives with a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™, practitioner who is well-versed in this type of investing. That way, you will be better able to narrow down which ESG investments, if any, are right for you.

Grace S. Yung, CFP®, is a Certified Financial Planner practitioner with experience in helping LGBT individuals, domestic partners, and families plan and manage their finances since 1994. She is the managing director at Midtown Financial Group, LLC, in Houston. Yung can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com.

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Dare to Embrace Hope in 2021

Houston's queer mental-health providers share some strategies.

By DARYL SHORTER, MD

Perhaps unlike any other new year in recent memory, 2021 brings substantial hope, anticipation, and expectation. Even as COVID-related deaths in the U.S. near 4,000 per day and many Americans refuse to change their behavior to reduce viral spread, the rollout of the COVID vaccine represents a light in the pandemic's dark tunnel. Although many will question its long-term safety, the vaccine is clearly our best hope for a return to safe public gatherings.

2021 also brings a significant turning point in Washington as the Biden/Harris administration promises a return to civility and common sense in government. And on the LGBTQ front, the Victory Fund's support of queer candidates nationwide helped 334 out of 782 known LGBTQ general-election candidates win their races in November. Equitable queer representation at all levels of government may indeed be on the horizon.

But despite the excitement of the new year, many of us are still feeling depleted after getting through 2020. Turmoil and transitions challenge us in powerful ways. They put our coping strategies to the ultimate test, require

us to develop new skills for managing stress, and strain our relationships and our mental health.

In honor of the new year, four local LGBTQ mental-health providers shared their reflections on 2020 and their hopes for LGBTQ Houstonians in 2021.

Combat Isolation with Connection

According to Elizabeth Steen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and LGBT Veterans Care Coordinator at Houston's VA Medical Center, it's important to acknowledge how challenging 2020 was for many of us, and the impact it had on our emotional state. "One of the things that stuck out to me about 2020 was the isolation—the painful, divisive events of the year that would lead someone to feel like isolating. It is a natural human instinct to protect ourselves by isolating when we experience pain."

Dr. Michael Kauth, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Baylor College of Medicine, stresses the critical importance of social and family relationships. "We're social beings, and we like to be around people. We need our friendships, our work relationships, our chosen families, and our families of origin. It's very important that we continue to foster those relationships and stay connected [either

in person, online, or through] letters and the telephone. We've got to stay connected, because that loss of connection just contributes to further isolation and depression."

Steen agrees that we should guard against our tendency toward isolation. "Notice your urge to back away, and combat it with meaningful connections with people [you trust]."

Set Realistic Goals

Dr. Mauro Garcia-Altieri, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine, reflects on the importance of setting goals to create a sense of optimism and renewal. "Keep on moving toward whatever goals you set for yourself. The new year is an opportunity to re-evaluate what those goals should be. Try to find what it is that has meaning and value to you."

In times like these, allowing ourselves to feel optimistic can feel dangerous. Kauth encourages hope with a dose of reality. "I think of the new year as a fresh start, and a way to kind of reset the game. It's not going to be a complete reset this year, but I think 2021 is going to be better. [The promise of the COVID vaccine and the changes in government] are still months away—it will probably be late next year before the vast majority of us see significant changes." Kauth believes the next few months will be about "staying vigilant, continuing to do what we're doing, and not losing hope."

Live Out Loud

By capitalizing on the energy and empowerment generated by the social-justice movements of 2020, we can find even greater encouragement to live boldly and speak out. As psychotherapist Dr. Wade Maggert, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a psychologist in a private practice, encourages, "Be bold. Be yourself. It's time to stop hiding in the shadows. It's time that people just get used to us being out and queer and whoever we want to be. There are definitely times when you have to think about safety and where you are, so you might have to [sometimes be less visible] in the moment." However, he believes one of the most important lessons from 2020 is that we must be ourselves. "People just need to get used to it."

So as 2021 begins to unfold, that unfamiliar feeling you might be experiencing is called hope. Embrace it. We haven't felt it in a while. How will you attack this new year? If you were to define *success*, what would it look like?

Daryl Shorter, MD, is a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and is board certified in both general and addiction psychiatry. His clinical practice focuses on veteran care, and he lectures widely on LGBTQ mental health.

regressive belief that marriage is only between a man and a woman.

“Until very recently, that’s what the vast majority of Americans thought. Now, it’s considered bigotry,” he said.

More broadly, the abiding fear is that Trump—who’s successfully appointed more than 200 federal judges, including his three Supreme Court picks—has reshaped the federal judiciary in a manner that could embody his administration’s anti-LGBTQ animus long after he’s left office.

One example is Steven Menashi, Trump’s appointee to the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals. Menashi has a “history of denouncing women’s marches against sexual assault, dismissing education about multicultural awareness, and accusing a major LGBTQ group of exploiting the brutal murder of a gay student for political ends,” CNN’s KFile found in 2019.

To an extent, the concern over such appointments isn’t even about Trump—it’s about the kinds of people the president has sought to empower. According to a 2019 report from Lambda Legal, more than a third of the president’s circuit-court nominees have “records of working to undermine LGBT rights and protections.”

No one knows the continued attempts to erode equality that a second Trump term might have brought, but it’s no small thing to be able to look ahead toward progress instead of injury.

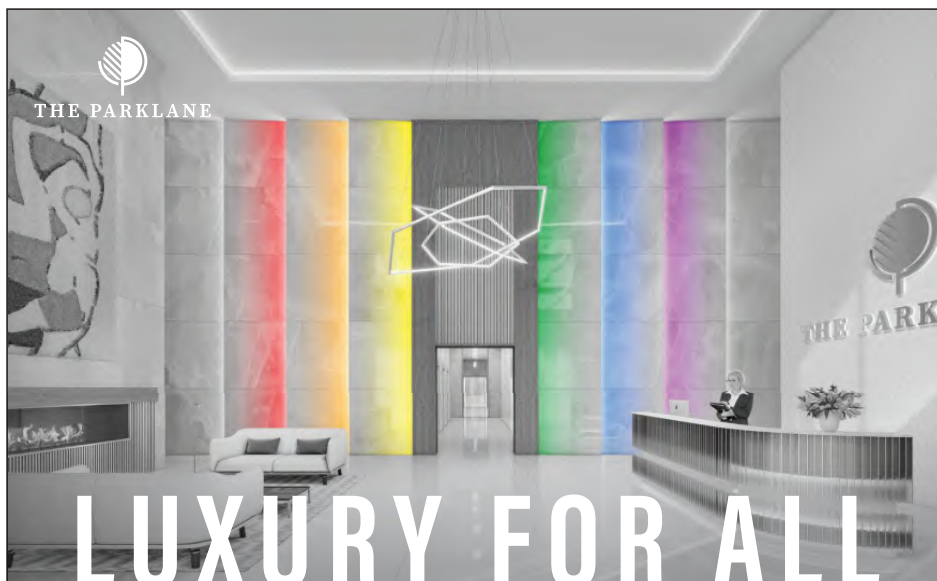
The Biden administration won’t be able to fix everything that has been damaged over the past four years, and there will be no easy triumphalism, especially if Republicans hold the Senate majority. But Biden and his team can take meaningful actions to undo much of the harm.

In fact, in March the Biden campaign previewed how it would protect and expand LGBTQ rights via the wide-ranging “Biden Plan to Advance LGBTQ+ Equality in America and Around the World.”

For one thing, the plan commits to passing the Equality Act, a bill that would protect against anti-LGBTQ discrimination in commercial and public life, with no exemptions for religious beliefs. In addition, the plan pledges to combat the violence afflicting transgender women of color, get rid of the transgender military ban, and restore safeguards for homeless LGBTQ Americans.

Gay. Transgender. To many, those two words in Biden’s speech might have seemed unremarkable. But given their centrality in the president-elect’s victory speech, these words registered as a promise that come January, LGBTQ Americans would have a champion in the White House.

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Kierra Johnson

Creating Change

This year's conference marks a changing of the guard in National LGBTQ Task Force leadership.

By ANDREW EDMONSON

For the first time in its venerable 33-year history, the Creating Change Conference will go virtual when the four-day online event kicks off on January 28.

The conference is sponsored by the National LGBTQ Task Force, and is billed as “the foremost political, leadership, and skills-building conference for the LGBTQ social-justice movement.” Each year, Creating Change draws thousands of activists, advocates, and leaders from across the nation. The theme of the 2021 conference is “The Power of You,” and it will include four plenary sessions, 16 day-long institutes, and 48 workshop and caucus sessions. Taking place one week after the inauguration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, the event promises a rich dialogue about the new possibilities for the queer community under a more liberal White House administration.

Outgoing executive director Rhea Carey (l) will step down at the end of January. She will be succeeded by Kierra Johnson, who will become the first Black woman to lead the National LGBTQ Task Force.



The Conference will also benefit from a dollop of star power. The opening keynote address will be delivered by actress and activist Dominique Jackson, perhaps best known for her leading role as Elektra Abundance on the FX television series *Pose*. The closing keynote speaker is adrienne maree brown, an American women's rights activist, Black feminist, doula, and author of the book *Emergent Strategies: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*.

Ample entertainment at the conference will be provided by Big Freedia, a New Orleans rapper hailed as "The Queen of Bounce," and Latina comic Sandra Valls, best known for her performances in Showtime's *The Latin Divas of Comedy* and *PRIDE: LGBT Comedy Slam*.

"The air is electric with hope"

"I think the best thing about the conference is the assembly of the various rainbow segments of our community," says Houston gay activist Bryan Hlavinka, who served as co-chair of the host committee when Houston hosted the Creating Change conference in 2014. "The air is electric with hope. We tend to work in silos in our community, so it's great to see different segments of the community come together for the conference and celebrate who we are, without judgement."

While the Task Force ventures into new territory with its first online conference, it promises to have financial benefits for attendees and extend the reach of the event. With no travel or hotel expenses this year, attendees will only need to pay to register for the conference, which begins at \$50 for students and \$150 for the general public.

A Leadership Transition

This conference will mark a changing of the guard at the oldest advocacy organization fighting for queer equality nationwide. Executive director Rhea Carey, who has led the Task Force during a tumultuous period for the last twelve years, will step down at the end of January. She is the longest-serving executive director in the group's history, and will be succeeded by Kierra Johnson, who has been

the Task's Force's deputy director since 2018. Johnson will be the first Black woman to lead the organization in its 48-year history.

Carey and Johnson will share the stage together for the State of the Movement address, a signature conference event in which the leaders articulate the challenges and opportunities, as they perceive them, for the LGBTQ movement in the year ahead.

Achieving Greater Ethnic Diversity

During her tenure, Carey helped increase the Task Force's financial sustainability and the diversity of its staff, among other achievements. "From the beginning, I wanted to move

**"FROM THE BEGINNING,
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COMPLETELY."**

—Rhea Carey

the organization into one that would not only be majority people of color staff, but led by a more diverse set of leaders, representing our LGBTQ+ community more completely," Carey observed. "It hasn't only been about who we hire. It has been about moving the Task Force more fully toward being a racial, economic, gender, and social-justice organization and having the diverse perspectives of our staff help to shape and fulfill that mission."

Before joining the Task Force as deputy director, Johnson served on its board of directors and its National Action Council. Previously, she was the executive director of URGE, which

mobilizes young leaders to advocate for reproductive and gender equity. She is recognized as a national expert on queer and reproductive-rights issues, and has testified in front of the U.S. House of Representatives. She has also appeared in *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, Fox News, and National Public Radio.

In its announcement of Johnson as the organization's new leader, the Task Force board noted that "her background in reproductive justice speaks to the breadth and intersectionality of the Task Force's mission, and her experiences as a BIPOC will resonate with so many in our economically, racially, sexually, and otherwise diverse community."

Spotlighting Veteran Movement Activists

As is its tradition, the Task Force will honor four veteran activists at this year's conference:

Gloria Allen, who is widely known as "Mama Gloria," is the 74-year-old transgender advocate, activist, and community leader who will be awarded the SAGE Advocacy Award for Excellence in Leadership on Aging Issues. Having grown up in Chicago and being immersed in the drag ball scene of the city's South Side, Allen went on to found and run a charm school for homeless transgender youth at Chicago's LGBTQ community center on Halsted Street. Now retired from a career as a licensed practical nurse, Allen continues to speak to youth and others about the transgender community. She is the subject of the recently released award-winning film *Mama Gloria*.

Lisbeth Melendez Rivera, a grassroots organizer and self-described "Puerto Rican butch dyke," will be awarded The Susan J. Hyde Award for Longevity in the Movement. Rivera is a 30-plus-year veteran of the LGBTQ and labor movements.

Javier Hernandez, an immigrant and queer leader fighting for immigrant rights in the Inland Empire, will receive the Award for Outstanding LGBT Leadership on behalf of Immigrant Rights, given by the Haas, Jr. Fund. Since 2015, Javier has been the director of the Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice (IC4U), a coalition of over 40 organizations, unions, legal service providers, and congregations that advocate for immigrant justice in the Southern California region.

Anthropologist, theorist, and writer Gayle Rubin will be honored with The Leather Leadership Award for her work and studies within the leather community.

 For more information and to register, visit creatingchange.org



LGBTQ Liaison

Officer **Jo Jones** works to build bridges between HPD and the queer community.

By **BRANDON WOLF**



The Houston Police Department (HPD) has had a dedicated liaison to the local LGBTQ community since 2014. That position, which was created to streamline communication between activists and police, is now held by HPD senior officer Josephine “Jo” Jones, a member of the LGBTQ community who has held the position for the past year.

“It’s my job to make sure my community is heard by the HPD, and likewise to make sure the community understands the concerns of the HPD,” Jones says, noting that it is up to her to build trust through consistency. She wants to be sure that the community understands that the police are there to help them, through

good times and bad.

The U.S. has had a significant history of LGBTQ people being mistreated by law enforcement, including profiling, entrapment, discrimination, and harassment by officers, according to the most recent survey by UCLA’s Williams Institute. This has undermined effective policing by weakening the community’s trust in local police officers.

“There is a history of police not respecting the LGBTQ community. Finally, the Stonewall riots in New York City gave rise to a movement,” HPD Chief of Police Art Acevedo says. “We want to send a message to our workforce that we will ensure an interest in the priorities and concerns of the LGBTQ community. And that is why I think it’s important to have [Jo Jones serve as] a liaison who can be the eyes and ears for the department.”

A Gifted Athlete

Jones was born in Sealy, Texas, in 1976, and spent her early years in Belleville. She was living in Giddings during her high school years, and was an all-around athlete who excelled in basketball, volleyball, and track. Her father was a minister, and her mother worked in state facilities for the mentally challenged. She was the “middle” child with two brothers and two sisters.

In high school, Jones dreamed of military service and becoming a member of the military police. “I’m a rule follower,” she says, “and police are there to enforce rules.” She looked up to members of law enforcement, and felt they were there to help people.

Jones enrolled in Blinn Junior College to complete her basic undergraduate coursework and play basketball. She then moved to Hous-



Jones was eventually assigned to HPD's Midwest station, which was added in 2008 to provide better coverage in the Sharpstown Mall area. In 2012, she began to work as an HPD recruiter.

Last year, HPD's LGBTQ liaison position came open, and Jones applied. She was already aware of the job because her sister EJ, who is an LGBTQ ally, had been the first person to hold that position. Jones was chosen for the job.

She is also a member of the HPD LGTBQ employee group LEAP (Law Enforcement Alliance of Pride), where she plans social events for members and organizes a contingent of officers to march in Houston's Pride parades.

Opening Lines of Communication

One of the most difficult parts of Jones' job is dealing with the crisis of violence against trans women of color. She is currently working with the family of Asia Foster, who was murdered in December. One of Foster's best friends was 22-year-old Tracy Single, another Black trans woman, who was killed in July 2019. Through tips from the community, a suspect was apprehended during the Single investigation.

Jones says it is vital for HPD to work with community activists like Dee Dee Watters and the late Monica Roberts in murder investigations. "We are doing all we can to bring justice. We need a police presence that tears down the barriers that people think are there. We need to change the narrative and spread the word. Education is needed to repair those broken

lines of communication. I love my trans community and the activists I work with."

Jones says her job entails "being available, and being out there." She often participates in networking events and accepts speaking engagements at neighborhood meetings. She is available at any time to speak with anyone in Houston's LGBTQ community who has an issue to discuss. Her HPD office number is 713-308-3257.

Cadet Training Classes

Another part of her job is to coordinate training sessions for every HPD cadet class. She puts together panel discussions with various local LGBTQ activists, and Lou Weaver teaches sessions on the trans community that include a full explanation of the LGBTQIA+ acronym. Cadets learn to avoid misgendering trans citizens by using only their preferred names and pronouns.

Additionally, cadets visit the Montrose Center to learn about the many activities and programs provided there. That field trip even includes a stop at the Houston Eagle Phoenix Room, where cadets view the wall murals that feature decades of LGBTQ community history.

These cadet classes are produced by the HPD Public Affairs office, and include overviews of all the communities that Houston police protect—Indian, Asian, Muslim, Hispanic, LGBTQ, and others. The multicultural classes include speakers such as the ambassador from the South Korean Consulate on Post Oak Boulevard.

Jones says one of the most common ways that HPD officers interact with citizens is through traffic stops. The HPD officers are taught how to treat each person they deal with respectfully, and to realize that using correct names and pronouns can make interactions less confrontational.

Weaver is quite pleased with Jones' work with Houston's LGBTQ community. "I think it's fabulous that we have a dedicated officer. She has introduced herself to our community leaders and reaches out to us. We have an open line of communication. She works with all the other departments, so HPD cadets and officers are meeting queer people every step of the way." Weaver recently worked with Jones in an HPD class on domestic violence that included same-sex domestic violence scenarios.

HPD Sergeant Alexa Magnan, an out lesbian who was the second officer to hold the HPD LGBTQ liaison position, notes that even if LGBTQ citizens have no idea who the community's HPD liaison is, they will probably benefit from the liaison's work if they ever interact with an HPD office and find that it is a positive and respectful encounter.



"IT IS MY JOB TO MAKE SURE MY COMMUNITY IS HEARD BY THE HPD, AND LIKEWISE TO MAKE SURE THE COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDS THE CONCERNS OF HPD."

—Jo Jones

ton to enroll in the criminal-justice program at the University of Houston's downtown campus. She joined the Houston YMCA and began working with their family programs. After graduation, she was appointed director of the YMCA's local family programs. "It molded me into who I am today," Jones says. "I learned to work with people—understanding them and being tolerant."

Joining HPD

In 2006, Jones applied to the HPD and was accepted into their 189th cadet class. After that six-month training program, she began working a regular beat. She asked for an assignment in Southwest Houston because that is where her older sister, EJ Johnson, already worked as an officer. "I learned how to read a Key Map really quick," she recalls.



For more information on the HPD, visit houston.tx.gov/police.



Empowering Queer Youth

Houston native **Alise Maxie** teams up with HRC to uplift their generation

By ZACH MCKENZIE
Photo by MIKAH DANAÉ

With LGBTQ visibility in the media at an all-time high, it's easy to forget that coming out and becoming comfortable with a queer identity isn't always a seamless process. Alise Maxie, a 20-year-old

nonbinary lesbian who uses they/them and she/her pronouns, is using their new position as a 2021 Human Rights Campaign Foundation Youth Ambassador to inspire queer people of all ages to embrace their coming-out journey, talk openly about their sexual health, and continue to make noise in the form of protest.

Maxie will join nine other LGBTQ advocates from across the country who are all serving two-year terms as Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Youth Ambassadors. Dr. Vincent Pompe, the HRC Foundation's director of the Youth Well-Being Program and the Time to THRIVE Conference, explains that the ambassador program "is designed to amplify the important voices of teens and young adults and engage them in helping the HRC Foundation improve the lives of LGBTQ youth at home, at school, at work, and beyond."

Maxie, a student at Prairie View A&M University, was surprised that the other HRC youth ambassadors are so young. "When I saw who else was involved, I was amazed," they explain. "I am one of the older people in the cohort. I'm about to graduate college, and some of these people are in high school."

As an ambassador, Maxie looks forward to reaching into the communities they grew up in. "My main goal is to help out [other] queer youth of color. Growing up, I didn't have anybody to help me out or to look up to. Being queer was seen as shameful," Maxie recalls.

LGBTQ youth of color face more discrimination, police targeting, family rejection, and homelessness than their white counterparts, according to a recent study by UCLA's Williams Institute.

"A lot of minority communities [resist change because of their religious beliefs]. It's hard to discover who you are when you have [no positive role models]. I'm a big proponent of helping queer youth of color. I want to create programs for them, reach out to them, talk to them, and educate them."

One way that Maxie is reaching out is through their sexual health video blog series on Twitter. Using the hashtag #ThursdaysAreForSex, Maxie empowers followers to take sexual health into their own hands. "I noticed that a lot of people who I went to school with weren't as knowledgeable in sexual health," the native Houstonian says. "There was this negative connotation that being tested, having an STI, and using protection [somehow makes you] 'dirty.'" Maxie's goal is to break through the stigma by normalizing sex talk. "I feel that talking about what you like and what you dislike should be a very normal and open conversation. I don't want people to feel scared to talk about sex or getting tested or revealing their status. I go to an HBCU, and I'm LGBTQ. I felt like it was my duty to do something about it."

Maxie is no stranger to answering the call to act. This summer, in response to the murder

**"I'M A BIG PROPONENT
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I WANT TO CREATE
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REACH OUT TO THEM,
TALK TO THEM, AND
EDUCATE THEM."**

—Alise Maxie

of Breonna Taylor, they led their very first protest with a friend. "It took place near Memorial Park. It was really amazing. At first it was 30 people, but once we started marching through the park, the crowd got to about 150 people. For two students who had no idea how to put a march together, I think we did pretty great for a two-week turnaround."

Looking ahead to their time as a Youth Ambassador, Maxie's eyes are set on fostering safe spaces for queer people of all ages. "My

main goal is to reach out to people who are like me—the people in their 20s who are still trying to figure out their identity and their sexuality, or who haven't come out to their families and they're 21 years old. People tell me they love how open and free I am, and then they'll tell me their stories. That means a lot to me. I'm not just a role model for the youth, I'm a role model for people who haven't come out yet, who don't feel comfortable enough to come out. That's so often overlooked. We are so pressured to come out before we're ready. I never want people to come out before they're ready.

"[As one of the older HRC ambassadors], I'll be the voice for people who are older as well. I felt discouraged at first, because the other ambassadors are so much younger than me, but I realized this is where I'm supposed to be right now, and this is my path. I'm an older youth, and they need representation as well."

 For more information on the HRC Foundation's Youth Ambassador program, visit hrc.org/resources/youth-ambassadors. Keep up with Alise Maxie on Instagram @lbb.maxie.

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Tommy Ralph Pace

The Orange Show Center for Visionary Art welcomes a new director with big plans for Houston's creative scene.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

Photo by XAVIER LUJAN

You're moving to Houston from Miami. Who are you bringing with you, and where do you plan to live?

I'm coming to Houston with my partner, Dick, and our cat, Bruce. We found a great duplex for rent in the Montrose neighborhood, an area everyone said was a good place for someone coming from out of state. We're very excited.

Once you settle in, which parts of the city do you plan on exploring first?

Probably the Project Row Houses in Third Ward. I also plan on checking out the Rothko Chapel, the Menil Collection, and all of the historic fine-art museums. Houston is a real leader in the art world. It also has amazing architecture.

What do you like to do for fun?

My father ran one of Miami's recording studios, and even recorded Gloria Estefan's first album, so music has always been a huge part of my life. (Unfortunately, COVID has put a big dent in my social calendar, in terms of my ability to see live music.) I also love bike riding, traveling, and watching bad TV. [Laughs] And food. As a larger guy, I'm very excited to be moving somewhere where there are plenty of opportunities to walk and plenty of opportunities to eat great food.

You previously served as the deputy director for the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami. How do you think that experience will influence your decision-making at the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art?

My role at the Institute was to create the framework for the organization's mission [to become] the center for the exchange of art and ideas in Miami. I plan to help the Orange Show expand its own programmatic footprint in Houston, along with the scope of its mission, which is to promote artistic expression and create communities where that expression is valued. This is something I think local audiences are really going to be engaged in.



"HOUSTONIANS SHOULD START GETTING EXCITED ABOUT WHAT'S COMING NEXT FROM THE ORANGE SHOW, INCLUDING A REINVESTMENT IN SOME BROADER CULTURAL PROGRAMMING."

Houstonians should start getting excited about what's coming next from the Orange Show, including a reinvestment in some broader cultural programming. And of course, when it's safe, the Houston Art Car Parade will be coming back in full force.

How does being an openly gay man impact your artistic vision?

Not so much aesthetically, but the gay community is such a creative community, and it has always made me feel like I'm part of a larger network. That's an openness that many don't get to experience in their professional fields. So maybe it affects my practice in the sense that it gives me a perspective of gratitude.

The arts have suffered tremendously due to COVID-19 restrictions. What are your predictions for how the art world will look in 2021?

The pandemic has changed our appetite for the way we consume culture. I don't know that we'll be able to return to that same [pre-pandemic] rate of art consumption. Let's hope that with the vaccine on its way, we'll be able to go back to concerts and other in-person events really soon. I do think there is going to be a reserved approach to that, though.

How do you plan to help Houston restore its thriving creative community?

Creative expression is important to leading a healthy and balanced life. One of the things we plan to do post-COVID is invest in our digital footprint for the types of digital experiences people have around self-taught art. We'll also be looking toward more green spaces, like Smither Park. Houston is already known for its public art, so I think there's a great future for more public program spaces that think "culture first."



For more information about the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, visit orangeshow.org.

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Nathan Montgomery (l) and Andrew Pachan
pictured with their dog, Blanche.

Trial by Vaccination

Houston couple **Nathan Montgomery** and **Andrew Pachan** share their experience with two COVID-19 trials.

By RYAN M. LEACH | Photos by ALEX ROSA

Prior to New York critical-care nurse Sandra Lindsay becoming the first person in the U.S. to receive an FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine, thousands of Americans volunteered themselves as guinea pigs for dozens of vaccine trials being administered by the pharmaceutical companies. Pfizer and Moderna were the first highly effective vaccines approved by the FDA for use in the U.S., and Houston couple Nathan Montgomery, 35, and Andrew Pachan, 34, were two of the men who stepped up to the plate when their country needed them.

Montgomery, who is a human-resources manager for an oil and gas company, and Pachan, who does administration work for skilled-nursing facilities, were selected for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine studies, respectively. Although the two men have approached the pandemic with a great deal of caution, they were chosen due to their higher level of risk for becoming infected with the virus.

“[The pharmaceutical companies conducting the vaccine trials] want to make sure you’re not just sitting in your house. In order to test the vaccine, you need to be exposed. They were happy that I was traveling for work and going into the office. Before the pandemic, I was flying between Alaska and Texas for work, and I would have to go through Seattle. This was right before Seattle became a hot spot. I was sent to work from home in March, and then was back in the Houston office in April. Most people came back in May,” Montgomery explains.

Pachan, on the other hand, has been working from home since March, and has yet to return to the office. “Once it showed up in the skilled-nursing facilities in Washington, that’s when it hit home hard that this was serious. That’s what I do. I work in nursing homes. I knew early on that we had to take this seriously because it can spread so quickly,” says Pachan.

The couple was taking the same calculated risks that many Houstonians took as the virus moved from spring to summer, and then to fall and winter. “We would eat outside at restaurants. We would go to the store to get groceries,” says Montgomery.

It was during a summer trip to visit Pachan’s family in Ohio that the two had their first real COVID-19 scare. Just as they arrived in Ohio, some Houston friends they had recently spent time with in their “bubble” called the couple to inform them that they had recently tested positive for the virus. Although Montgomery and Pachan were not experiencing any symptoms, they spent the rest of their visit keeping 20 to 30 feet away from Pachan’s family.

Shortly after that, Montgomery learned about the trials on the news and social media, and decided to go online and fill out the questionnaire in hopes of participating in a study. Three weeks later, they called him for a second screening and eventually accepted him into a trial.

“IN ORDER TO TEST THE VACCINE, YOU NEED TO BE EXPOSED. THEY WERE HAPPY THAT I WAS TRAVELING FOR WORK AND GOING INTO THE OFFICE.”

—Nathan Montgomery

“The first in-person appointment was also when I got my first injection. I had been hearing so much from Moderna that I was hoping to be in that trial, but I ended up in the Pfizer trial. I was happy about that. I figured Pfizer is a big name, so they are probably not going to kill me,” jokes Montgomery, who is still alive and well months later.

Pachan, on the other hand, was called almost immediately after filling out the online questionnaire, and two days later he was scheduled for his first appointment and injection as a participant in the Moderna trial. Although both of the approved vaccines are now being administered around the world,

Montgomery and Pachan will be observed for up to two years as part of the Pfizer and Moderna studies.

“It’s your job to track and report any side effects you may have,” says Montgomery. Depending on the study, these diary reports are made daily or weekly, and become less frequent as time moves on. Montgomery’s trial involved the use of an app to track symptoms. Both were sent home with thermometers to monitor their temperature and also report back on how they were feeling. Both men had sore arms shortly after injection and ran very mild fevers. But after a short period, those side effects subsided.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are administered as two shots given three weeks apart. After both shots, Montgomery felt tired but otherwise fine. Pachan, however, experienced more significant side effects after the second one.

“The day after the second shot, I felt run down and tired. I went to bed early and woke up every hour with a sore arm and achiness. I would get the chills. I tossed and turned—all that stuff. I put off taking medication as long as I could, but around 2 or 3 a.m. I took some Tylenol. After that, I felt a little better. That whole next day I was just tired and achy. By that evening, I was a little better. I took the dog for a walk and then went to bed. I woke up the next morning and felt fantastic. I’ve never had that extreme of a swing,” says Pachan.

Both studies were conducted under “double blind” protocols, meaning that neither the healthcare workers who gave the shots nor the recipients know if, in fact, they received a placebo or the vaccine. However, Montgomery has become a bit of a medical detective since receiving the shot. After getting his second dose they went to get a COVID-19 antibody test. Both of them were positive for COVID-19 antibodies so they were fairly confident that they both got the real thing.

It will be several months before the couple will be officially told whether or not they got the real vaccine, so in the meantime they plan to continue following COVID-19 safety protocols by wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and encouraging others to do the same.

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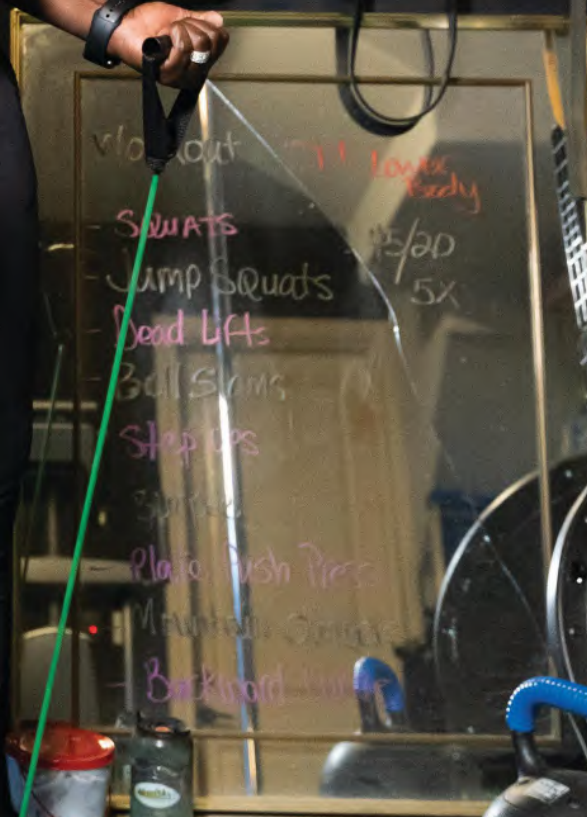
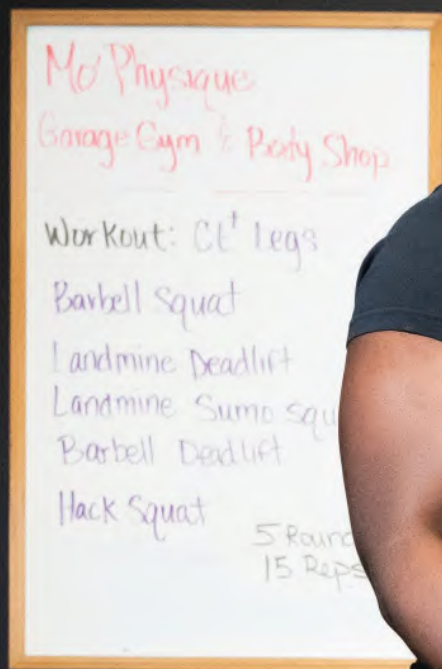
HOUSTON strong

The beginning of a new year is typically a great time to reprioritize your life and set some goals. But with the pandemic affecting every aspect of our lives, following through on those goals might require even more effort in 2021.

This issue of OUTSMART spotlights six out health experts who aren't letting COVID-19 stop them from helping us achieve our wellness goals.

First, metabolic specialist and fitness instructor **Monique Freeman** uses data to create personalized workouts for her clients. Then **Dr. Wade Maggert**, a Zen Buddhist and mental-health therapist, offers advice for a more mindful new year.

Next, registered nurse **Nat Rodriguez** launches a new mobile IV therapy business. Activist **Nate Herrington** discusses his "I Like to Move It Movement," an online fitness challenge that raised funds for local LGBTQ youth organizations, while personal trainer and entertainer **Melanie Jackson** keeps clients engaged with her performance-oriented training sessions. Finally, yoga instructor **Adonis Directo** shares his enthusiasm for yoga as both a physical and spiritual practice.



Monique Freeman
photographed in
her Houston home gym.



Data-Driven Workouts

Monique Freeman uses metabolic testing to create personalized training plans.

By ZACH MCKENZIE

During normal school hours, Monique Freeman can be found in the classroom teaching special-education classes for HISD. And during her evenings in the gym, the out lesbian fitness expert finds herself passionately spreading the gospel of working out smarter, not harder. This metabolic specialist has become one of Houston's most popular trainers by blending her technical expertise with a deep desire to help her clients reach their individual goals.

For Freeman, fitness is a family affair. "My dad, Johnny McCoy Sr., played professional football when I was a kid, and moved to Canada to play in the '80s," Freeman explains. "When he retired, he took his money and invested in a gym called Fitness Unlimited in Garland, Texas."

McCoy Sr. was a graduate of Rice University, where he ran track and played football. His Garland gym welcomed familiar faces including Dallas Cowboy legends Tony Dorsett and Tony Hill.

"I just kind of grew up a gym rat," Freeman recalls. "My dad made me into the athlete I became. I ran track in college and went to the 2004 Olympic trials. I was a fairly celebrated long jumper in the state of Texas. Still, I was always excited to be in the gym environment and watch my dad train and compete. I didn't know any other way of life besides that."

It was the former long jumper's mother who encouraged her to figure out her career goals. "My mom asked what I wanted to do when I was going to LSU. I told her I wanted to own a gym," Freeman says. "I figured out [that I needed to study] kinesiology." The athlete began learning about anatomy, nutrition, and physiology in the LSU Bachelor of Science program. "I became my own [research] subject

in college, applying all that information to see what worked for me.

"I always tell my clients that I wouldn't put them through it if I won't do it myself. I'm able to break things down and tell them the reasoning behind it. I over-communicate with my clients to give them what they need from a professional standpoint and integrate [the particular goals they want to achieve]," she says. "If they want to get fit for their wedding or reunion, we work on meeting those goals and learning how to maintain that. The first word in personal training is 'personal,' so I build a trusting foundation with them. I want to give them something they can walk away with and replicate in case they get back into a rut and need to apply this on their own."

After a job pivot, Freeman was given the opportunity to pursue work as a metabolic specialist. "Metabolic testing demonstrates that not everyone is built the same. Some may need a minute more or less than the person next to them, so you have to focus on each client as an individual. I take clients through a stress test that involves measuring their oxygen exchange to find out what their threshold is," she explains. Once a client finds their threshold, Freeman uses that data to create a personalized interval workout.

Freeman touts the impact of applying this type of data to workouts. "It results in less time in the gym. We do 15- to 16-minute workouts, max. Clients are burning calories more effectively, their lean muscle mass improves, and their metabolism improves."

Once her clients meet their goals, she administers the stress test again to find her clients' new threshold, and they continue to expand on their goals. "Clients have seen faster results. I learned that efficiency and effectiveness is way better than longevity. That's really appealing to clients, because it's not about working out longer, but working out based on your threshold. I apply that to myself. You won't see me out for an hour-long run unless I need some time to think. I do what is best for me, based on my current fitness level."

As an all-around bad-ass trainer, Freeman reflects fondly on her dual career path that has struck a balance between teaching in a classroom and training in a gym. She is proud that both her students in special education and her gym clients receive the attention they deserve as they strive to reach their full potential.



For personal training inquiries, contact Monique Freeman by email at mophysique1@gmail.com.





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A Path to Peace

Mental-health therapist **Dr. Wade Maggert** discusses his journey to becoming a Zen Buddhist.

By **SAM BYRD**

Photo by **ALEX ROSA**



As 2020 fades in the rearview mirror, we can start to appreciate the lessons it taught us about the need to safeguard our mental health. We can also appreciate people like Dr.

Wade Maggert, a practicing Zen Buddhist, who is here to offer Houston's LGBTQ community some advice for a more mindful 2021.

Maggert brings years of experience in Zen Buddhism to the table, as well as a unique perspective gained from his days as a DJ who played the hottest clubs in the United States and abroad.

"In the '90s and early 2000s, I was a circuit DJ for 11 years. I went to eight countries and I worked a lot in the U.S. at parties and clubs under the name DJ Ra. It was an amazing experience. I loved it, but it came with a lot of nightlife and drug use," he recalls. "When you're the DJ, you're the star, and people supply drugs to you. I was not one to deny gifts at the time, so I just did a lot of them. That's really what got me into therapy."

While he didn't recognize it at the time, the party lifestyle was leading him on a path of discovery that would eventually inspire him to help others face and overcome similar challenges.

"Through therapy, I learned that I got immersed in drugs because I didn't love myself. I also learned that I couldn't stay clean as a DJ. For my sobriety, I had to make the choice to find another career. The process of therapy made sense to me, and I thought I could help others [as a therapist]. So, I quit DJing in 2005 and enrolled in school."

He earned a master's degree from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and a PhD from Pacifica Graduate Institute in California, where he studied and wrote about toxic masculinity—a subject inspired by his own experiences.

"I had a difficult relationship with my fa-

ther, and that's why I did the research I did. In my DJ career, I played to thousands of gay men who adored me. That's what I'd been searching for from my father all my life. My career was [a substitute for] my father's acceptance. I loved DJing, and I like to think I was good at it, but the "shadow" or unconscious side of it was that I was trying to heal something from my past that couldn't be healed."

Maggert eventually relocated to Houston to be closer to his husband's family, and to work at Houston's VA Hospital. Throughout this period

"ZEN BUDDHISM IS ABOUT 'ZA ZEN,' WHICH IS JUST MEDITATION—WHETHER THAT'S TAKING PLACE WHILE SITTING ON A CUSHION OR IN EVERYDAY ACTIVITY. YOU CAN DO WALKING MEDITATION, WORKING MEDITATION, EATING MEDITATION—THE IMPORTANT THING IS BEING IN THE MOMENT COMPLETELY."

—Dr. Wade Maggert

of self-discovery, Zen Buddhism became an increasingly important practice that he used both in his own life and with his clients.

"Zen Buddhism is about 'Za Zen,' which is just meditation—whether that's taking place while sitting on a cushion or in everyday activ-

ity. You can do walking meditation, working meditation, eating meditation—[the important thing is] being in the moment completely," he explains.

That became an enlightenment point for Maggert, who then connected the dots between psychology and Buddhism.

"Buddhism and psychology go hand in hand. What's been really big in mainstream culture is the idea of 'mindfulness,' which is actually just meditation. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to do many wonderful things. It can reduce anxiety, help with addiction, improve immune function, and improve attention," he says. "When I first started this, I was working at a VA addiction clinic, and we wanted to add mindfulness into the curriculum for the veterans. It just took off. The veterans loved it, and it evolved into a Buddhist form of the 12 Step recovery process."

Maggert says the thing he appreciates most about Buddhism is that it taught him to exist in the moment.

"Buddhism showed me just how much my mind has to say about things—why are we doing what we do, or why are things this way? I saw how much judgment my mind had, and it allowed me to soften it," he says. "Meditation teaches you to be kind to yourself. As humans, we beat ourselves up. We think, 'I can't do this,' or 'This is too hard.' But all your mind does is think. It's designed to do that, but sometimes it doesn't do that very well. Meditation helps you understand that these are all just thoughts. They only have the meaning you provide them with. That doesn't mean you're doing things incorrectly, and that you're a bad person. You're just human, and you just need practice. Then you can start to love yourself, because you're not judging yourself as much."



Dr. Maggert can be reached online at psychologytoday.com or via email at DrMaggert@gmail.com. To explore Zen Buddhism, Dr. Maggert suggests houstonzen.org.



Hydration Station

Nat Rodriguez's new IV therapy business offers at-home healing services.

By KIM HOGSTROM

Intravenous (IV) therapy offers individuals hydration relief and nutrients by delivering fluids directly into their veins. The practice has been around for centuries, but it has reached prominence over the last few years. Now the medical technique and wellness trend is making its way into our homes, thanks to Natividad “Nat” Rodriguez, the openly gay founder of LIVE Hydration that’s heading to Montrose.

Launched in December 2020, the business is entirely mobile. “At LIVE Hydration, our clients stay home in their pajamas, and we come to them. We do a health profile, ask some questions, get to know them, and help them feel comfortable. Then we determine a good path for treatment with IV therapy to provide relief,” he explains.

And with two decades of healing experience as a registered nurse, Rodriguez knows what he is talking about. He started his career in San Antonio at Southwest General Hospital in the intensive care unit (ICU) and the neonatal ICU. He then worked at Christus Santa Rosa Health System as part of its pediatric ICU.

After he moved to Houston in 2010, he joined the professionals at Spring Branch Medical Center, and later worked in the trauma and pediatric emergency rooms at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital and Texas Children's Hospital's west campus. Until recently, he was working his magic during full-time night shifts in Ben Taub Hospital's emergency room.

Over the years, Rodriguez has witnessed the value of IV therapy in healing. Today, his business offers treatment for flu symptoms, headaches, hangovers, vitamin deficiencies, immune deficiencies, and even aging issues. These services are normally provided in medical settings, but forward-thinking professionals are beginning to offer at-home help, as well. IV therapy services are booming in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, but are relatively unknown in Texas.

As Rodriguez describes it, the therapy process is simple. Clients choose from a menu of infusions, or "cocktails." For example, the Myers' Cocktail includes magnesium, calcium, B vitamins, Vitamin C, and antioxidants. The fluids are delivered through an intravenous

needle. It takes an hour or less, and some patients say the experience is preferable to an impersonal clinic or hospital visit, especially during a pandemic.

Results vary by individual. While some clients feel relief during the treatment, others may experience the benefits either a few hours later or the following day. While diseases such as cancer or Alzheimer's are not candidates for IV treatment, many day-to-day ailments qualify.

"Why let the partying on a Saturday or Sunday wreck your work week?" Rodriguez asks. "We offer a fast and effective way to help relieve hangovers by re-hydrating your body with vitamins and antioxidants. It is always so rewarding to watch someone spring back to life afterward."

A healer and humanitarian, Rodriguez says one of the reasons he and his partners launched LIVE Hydration was to meet the needs of the LGBTQ community. "We need to take care of one another, as family. The LIVE team has seen, firsthand, the second-class care that LGBTQ patients sometimes receive.

Here in Houston, we are fortunate. Discrimination is not as rampant, but it *is* out there. We make sure [we're providing] the best care available," explains Rodriguez, who has been married to his husband, Alex Treviño-Rodriguez, since 2018.

The LIVE Hydration team consists of two registered nurses, one nurse practitioner, and a medical director. They offer a monthly membership program that provides multiple home visits over a predetermined. This allows the team to efficiently treat specific conditions at a reduced hourly rate.

Other plan options include the LIVE Hydration "Drip Party," which has proved to be popular with couples making wedding plans. "We are sometimes booked to treat groups of people after a bachelor or bachelorette party the night before," Rodriguez says with a smile. "Watching a group of people feel better so they can make it to a wedding is a joy to behold."

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A New Movement

Nate Herrington inspires folks to get physical for a good cause.

By KRYSTLE DIAZ

Last fall, at the height of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Houston yoga instructor's "I Like to Move It Movement" virtual fitness challenge got over 126 people from around the globe committed to some serious moves. The 21-day exercise "fun-draiser" generated nearly \$12,000 in donations for Houston LG-BTQ youth organizations Tony's Place and Out for Education.

Nate Herrington, the man behind the campaign, used the power of social media to inspire folks from Texas to New York to Nairobi, Kenya, to work out for a good cause.

"As a gay man who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, I really wanted to do something that promoted self care, mental health and wellness, and was connecting in a meaningful way," Herrington says. After attending a leadership course sponsored by the personal-development company Landmark Worldwide, he decided to launch the I Like to Move It Movement. His friends were thrilled to find an online challenge like this in the community.

Herrington, who works as the head of team development for BIG Power Yoga, believes wellness should be radically inclusive and all people should have access to a variety of resources to improve their health. As someone who has struggled with mental-health issues, Herrington admits that yoga and other physical activities have changed his life.

Herrington was first introduced to yoga when he was 18. After finding BIG Power Yoga in 2012, he fell in love with that community during a 40-day fitness challenge. "This was revolutionary for me. I [wanted to share] this with other people."

Eight years later, Herrington is still at BIG Power Yoga as the head of team development. Despite the pandemic restrictions on fitness facilities, he says he is more enthusiastic than ever about promoting body-positive mindful-

ness and self love through movement and perseverance.

While the I Like to Move It Movement ended up raising thousands of dollars, Herrington was worried shortly before the launch date because only three people had signed up. That didn't stop him, though, as he began to contact everyone who shared his interest in fitness to support the cause. "I asked them to sign up and get five people to sign up with them," he says. "It just snowballed, and that was really cool. As a result, there were a ton of people in this thing that I had never met before. I gained friends in the process."

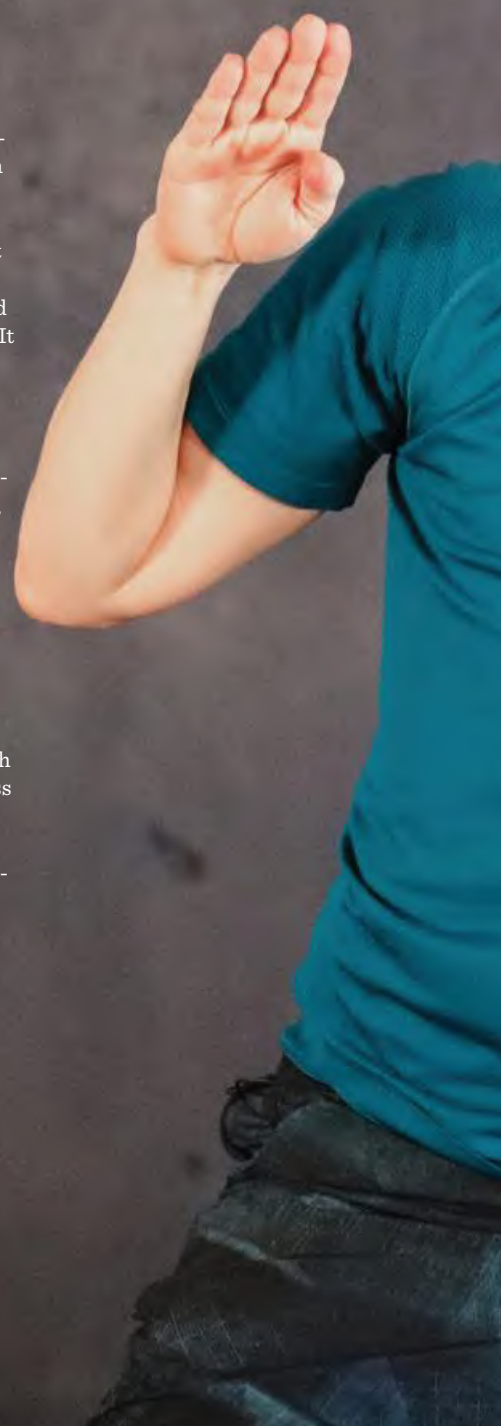
By partnering with Reason2Race, who graciously offered to promote Herrington's cause, he gained a reputable platform to promote his fitness challenge. "We couldn't have done it without them—it really created something magical." He hopes to host another I Like to Move It Movement challenge in 2021.

Following in Herrington's charitable footsteps, three local organizations—BIG Power Yoga, The Atrium Yoga Studio, and The Melanin Yoga Project—have teamed up to birth an exciting new concept: the Houston Wellness & Diversity Collective, which focuses on increasing awareness of issues important to the BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and body-positive communities. Houston Wellness & Diversity Collective will invite local spin studios, health coaches, and anyone working in the wellness field to collaborate on quarterly wellness events and educational pieces. Their goal is to prioritize mental health and wellness through a variety of fitness activities.

"This movement wound up being a community effort," Herrington emphasizes, "and it expanded beyond what I could have ever imagined or hoped for."



Follow Nate Herrington and the I Like To Move It Movement at [instagram.com/iliketomoveitmovement](https://www.instagram.com/iliketomoveitmovement).





**"I REALLY WANTED TO
DO SOMETHING THAT
PROMOTED SELF CARE,
MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLNESS, AND WAS
CONNECTING IN A
MEANINGFUL WAY."**

—Nate Herrington



HEALTH & WELLNESS

Heavy Lifter

Personal trainer **Melanie Jackson** helps her clients transform their bodies and their mindsets.

By JENNY BLOCK

Photos by SUI GENESIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Personal trainer Melanie Jackson, 34, has only been on the fitness train for five years. Now wild horses couldn't tear her away from it.

Jackson was born and raised in South Houston, but she now lives a short distance away in Manvel. She studied biochemistry at Texas A&M for a while, and then earned her associate's degree in paralegal studies followed by a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. "I also have my personal trainer certification with the National Council for Certified Personal Trainers," Jackson adds.

Jackson, who identifies as bisexual, first became interested in fitness when she discovered that the law firm where she worked offered a free fitness boot camp twice a week for employees. "I thought, 'Why not?' and started attending." →

That was five years ago. After experiencing a positive weight-loss journey, she got her personal-trainer certification while continuing to work as a paralegal and attending law school. “Unfortunately, the firm fell on hard times financially, discontinued the boot camp, and eventually laid me off. I decided to go work for a gym until another law firm hired me.”

But by then it was too late. Jackson had already fallen in love with personal training. She knew it was the right thing for her when she started prepping for her first bodybuilding competition after losing 75 pounds in one year. “Once I saw the transformation in my body and mindset, I wanted to share that with the rest of the world,” Jackson says.

Watching her clients start to see and feel results from the training process is what inspires Jackson these days. “[I know] they’re genuinely happy to be there when they start showing up to work out and no longer have a frown, or they’re not rolling their eyes. It takes time to see the progress, but that inspires me to keep spreading the message about health and fitness.”

Finding her way in the fitness world has been a bit of a roller coaster for Jackson. She worked at a small local gym for a year before setting off to go into business for herself. “That’s where I really started working on myself and looking [inward to discover] how I want to be as a trainer,” Jackson explains.

As a self-described “Japan-ophile,” Jackson created Geisha Fitness in 2019. Since she also dabbles in the arts of drag, burlesque, and singing, she decided to try an entertaining approach to leading her personal-training classes.

“When I train, it’s no different than me being on stage,” she says. “As an entertaining trainer, I will keep you engaged. And by the time our session is over, you won’t feel like you were just training, because it’s fun.”

She eventually merged her business with Camp Gladiator and opened a location in Manvel, which exposed her to a larger number of people who were familiar with that brand. “I also train people on a one-on-one basis, but not as often as I used to due to my growing Camp Gladiator location. There have been many challenges where I’ve questioned myself as a trainer and as a person, but I’ve come out stronger and more confident about what I bring to this world as a fitness professional,” she says.

Many of Jackson’s clients are members of the LGBTQ community, and she has a number of transgender clients through her partnership with Camp Gladiator. “Outside of training, I do perform in drag or I sing for charities—most recently at a benefit for Tony’s Place,” she explains. “I have participated in the Slay and Game of Kings drag competitions, and

I made it all the way to the finals in both. Every once in a while, you will catch me performing drag, singing, or even doing burlesque at either Barcode or JR’s.”

Jackson says it’s vital to remember that fitness is like a marriage commitment. “You stay with it through the ups and downs, through the bad times and the good. The only difference is, you’re making this commitment to yourself and no one else.”

If you’re nervous about starting your fitness journey, Jackson says the best thing you can do for yourself is get an “accountability buddy.” There’s strength in numbers. So find someone that will hold you accountable and influence you to be more mindful and diligent about eating healthier and being more active,” she suggests.

Jackson says that now is a great time to

focus on getting fit. “It’s no mystery that the pandemic has hit minorities and the LGBTQ community the hardest. The best thing to do at this point is to focus more on self care, and give your body a fighting chance to combat this virus by getting in shape. This not only helps you physically, but mentally as well by fighting off anxiety, depression, and negative moods—things that [our LGBTQ] community knows all too well.”

When it comes to getting in the shape you want to be in, Jackson says there is one vital thing you must never forget: “As long as you consistently show up to put in the work, you will start to see the results you want.”



For more information on
Melanie Jackson and Camp Gladiator,
visit geishafitness.com.



The Art of Yoga

Instructor **Adonis Directo** shares the benefits of the spiritual and physical practice.

By JENNY BLOCK

For Houstonian Adonis Directo, 41, yoga was a calling he never saw coming. Directo grew up in Houston, but was born in Quezon City, Philippines. “Oh great, now everyone knows the answer to my website security question!” Directo jokes.

A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, Directo holds a B.A. in history and a B.S. in kinesiology and exercise science. “Though it’s much more fun to say I majored in story time and gym. I was heavily involved in marching and concert bands, too. I was the first Asian American Pacific Islander president of my college band.”

When he was growing up, Directo only wanted to be one thing: a Care Bear. “Oh, how the universe ironically granted me that wish,” Directo muses. “I’m certainly more of a bear now than I was when I was a little kid, that’s for sure. I just knew I wanted to help others and make people happy.”

Directo first came to yoga in the early 2000s when an older fraternity brother (who he idolized) advised him to take classes other than weight training to complete his kinesiology degree. “In other words, I was a young twink hanging on every word of a hotter, older, muscular guy. We all know that story,” Directo, an openly gay man, admits. “I also took a separate non-movement yoga class [that emphasized its] history and philosophy to fulfill a cultural requirement for my history degree.”

So how did Directo discover that yoga was his thing? Well, he actually discovered that it was his *everything*. “It was athletic. I stretched and strengthened muscles I didn’t know I had.

It was contemplative. I enjoyed the meditation. It was captivating. I liked hearing about the mythology and history. It was fantasy. One minute I’m a dog, another minute I’m a warrior, another minute I’m a bird in flight. It was unifying. I loved being in a group moving as one. Really, it was everything to me—being powerful, being graceful, acknowledging that you’re alive by moving and breathing.”

The only thing that inspires Directo more than watching his yoga students fall in love with yoga is being a student himself. “I like to

**“YOGA GIVES YOU AN
OPPORTUNITY TO UNPLUG
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THIRTY MINUTES, AN HOUR.
MEDITATE, FLOW, AND BE
PRESENT. BREATHE. THEN
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OTHER THINGS.”**

—Adonis Directo

learn from others. To be an effective teacher, you also have to be a student and continue to learn. Adapt, grow, and do it again!”

Although his day job in medical sales limits the time he can spend teaching yoga, he actually prefers it that way. “If I was doing and teaching yoga all the time, it would lessen the joy that I get from it,” he says.

Directo’s boyfriend of four years, Alexan-

der, is an educator and content specialist at a charter school.

For several years, Directo was involved with Bunnies on the Bayou, thanks to the insistence of his best friend, David Goldberg. “I wanted to support him while he was in that group’s leadership, and do something for the local community, so I did.” Directo is still active in a few LGBTQ exercise groups, as well as a group for gay yoga instructors.

The one thing Directo wishes people knew about yoga is its deep roots in the ancient history of India. “You have to honor and respect the source material, so as to not culturally appropriate it. Yes, yoga has evolved more into [a style of] exercise, but there’s a rich history, philosophy, and mythology behind it,” Directo emphasizes.

And if you’re nervous about trying yoga for the first time, not to worry, “There is a plethora of varying styles and types of yoga. Yoga is for everybody!” he says. “Yoga gives you an opportunity to unplug for fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, an hour. Meditate, flow, and be present. Breathe. Then go tackle all the other things. If you’re in “go” mode all the time, you’re gonna burn out and run out of fuel.”

When it comes to Directo’s hopes for a better world in the New Year, the passionate teacher offers a lesson worth remembering: “Honor the ones who paved the way for you. Support each other. Help each other grow. Learn from others. Say Please, I’m sorry, and Thank you. Tell the ones who you love that you love them—and do it often.”



For more information on Adonis Directo, email [@adonisphd@yahoo.com](mailto:adonisphd@yahoo.com).





"HOUSTON IS A VERY GIVING CITY. WHEN WE DO A STORY ABOUT SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST EVERYTHING IN A FIRE, WE GET CALLS FROM VIEWERS WANTING TO KNOW HOW TO HELP WITH A DONATION. THAT MAKES ME PROUD WHEN I CAN HELP SOMEONE LIKE THAT THROUGH MY WORK."

—Daniel Brown

Award-Winning Producer

KPRC-TV's **Daniel Brown** receives three regional Emmys for his strong news coverage.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Even if 2020 was not exactly a positive news year, it was certainly a busy one for the local stations covering the pandemic and the election. But last year was especially memorable for Daniel Brown, a 43-year-old openly gay executive producer at KPRC-TV (Channel 2). “I won three regional Emmys,” Brown says with a hint of awe in his voice. “I’ve only ever gotten one before, and that was at WTTG-TV in Washington, DC, for coverage of Hurricane Irene.”

Brown, who’s been at KPRC-TV for nine years now, won two team awards in 2020—one in the special-programming category for hurricane and flooding coverage, and one for the documentary *Apollo 11: Houston’s Mission to the Moon*. He also won an individual award recognizing his talents as a producer for news and specials.

The National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS) created the Lone Star Chapter in Texas in 2002, which covers all 19 television markets in Texas. Before that, Houston had to join Miami’s Suncoast Chapter to compete for an Emmy.

But Brown admits he wasn’t always interested in television news.

“I remember watching the news as a kid, but I didn’t gravitate toward it,” he recalls. He watched television stations from Lubbock because his tiny hometown of Crosbyton, Texas, didn’t have a station. “There were only 45 kids in my sophomore high school class,” Brown laughs. “It was a good time, and I didn’t know

any different until I moved away.”

Brown was attending McMurray University in Abilene as an undeclared major when his best friend suggested pursuing a degree in communications.

“They didn’t even have a television department,” Brown says. “So I got a part-time production job at an Abilene station, running teleprompters and floor cameras. I’d spend my breaks hanging out in the newsroom to learn what they did, and eventually the producers would let me write news stories.”

That led to the station’s news director offering Brown a full-time job producing a morning show. After graduation, he worked at several television stations around the country, most recently in Washington, DC, where he won his first regional Emmy. In 2011, he decided to come home to Texas to be closer to his family.

It took some adjustment when he came out at 24, but he feels that he was fortunate to have had a supportive family.

“And television has been remarkable,” Brown says. “Being gay has never been an issue, and there were a lot of gays at the station in DC. KPRC-TV is just a great group of people. They push diversity and inclusiveness, both as a newsroom and in our news coverage.” The station’s popular longtime meteorologist, Frank Billingsley, is openly gay and married his husband in 2012. The *Houston Chronicle* covered their wedding.

Brown and his partner, David, an accountant (“Yeah, I tried dating in the business, but it never works out.”), have a house in Northwest Houston. Brown says it was interesting

during the lockdown. “He was working from home, and I was working from home two or three days a week to keep the newsroom staffing [to a minimum]. So here we were at this table with all of our computers and printers spread out.”

In the “before” days, the couple loved to travel and had vacation plans that had to be cancelled. And they used to love to entertain friends. “I love to cook and bake,” Brown says. “Unfortunately, I have to eat it all myself now.”

They’ve also spent time redoing their backyard and finishing other home-improvement chores that they otherwise wouldn’t have gotten around to. They also miss eating out with friends, although they do some take-out now—any sushi place, as well as Urban Eats, a gay-owned and -operated bistro and market in the Heights. And morning runs to La Mexicana for breakfast tacos are also part of their new routine.

While Brown won his team regional Emmy awards for a documentary and a weather special, his favorite stories are the ones that have an impact on people’s lives. “Houston is a very giving city,” Brown notes. “When we do a story about someone who has lost everything in a fire, or they were moving here and someone stole their truck and all their belongings, we get calls from viewers wanting to know how to help with a donation. That makes me proud when I can help someone like that through my work.”



For more information on KPRC-TV, visit click2houston.com. Keep up with producer Daniel Brown on Twitter @EPdanielb.

ASTROCAST 2021

by **LILLY RODDY**
Illustrations by
JOHN-PAUL ARREAGA

This year promises to be a very different one from 2020. The grouping of planets responsible for COVID-19 and the struggles with the economy will be breaking apart and allowing us to begin the recovery process. As the recovery process begins, I'm sure we will find out a lot more about what was broken, and this can be very revealing!

From a larger perspective, the nation's chart is going through a cycle that harkens back historically to 1775 and 1776—the time we broke away from our past to push forward globally. This can be a time of purging and exposing the darker side of our nation so that it can be addressed.

The fixed signs—Taurus, Scorpio, Leo, and Aquarius—are being activated this year because three outer planets will be influencing those signs. This should be a time of growth, reinvention, and gaining a better sense of our priorities.

The eclipses this year are in Gemini and Sagittarius. This will impact the mutable signs of Gemini, Sagittarius, Virgo, and Pisces. Eclipses open doors and allow us to see new opportunities. This year, eclipses will occur on May 26, June 10, November 19, and December 4. These will be very energizing times for the mutable signs.

2021 will only have the usual three retrograde cycles of Mercury, our communicator and organizer. These will occur January 25 through February 28, May 22 through June 29, and finally, September 21 through October 23. During these periods, it's better to deal with what we have in front of us, rather than add more to our plate. We do have a Venus retrograde, but that shows up late in December. That will be a time of counting our blessings.



Lilly Roddy has been an astrologer for over 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 lillicath@aol.com.





Leigh Bowery

ARIES

MARCH 21–APRIL 19

This year you should find more support, more opportunities, and less drama. You are still searching for a better career to produce a more secure future.

Friends and business associations will be especially beneficial in offering support and advice regarding career opportunities. This can be a very good time to get involved in community activities as you prepare to take on a leadership role. This will open doors for you, and put you in touch with other powerful individuals who can direct you on a new path that allows you to live up to your potential. If you have children, this will be the year when you see them grow up and take on more of an adult attitude.

Socially, you are more open to new friends, particularly after last year's coronavirus restrictions. You are more open to new technology and are getting more comfortable with our "virtual" world.

You are also reworking your resource base, expanding your education, and exploring new ideas to invest in—or possibly shifting your career to be more involved in high tech. For some, this can be a time of wanting more freedom to live off the grid. You will be more protective of your finances, passwords, and other personal information, even from the government. You may be letting go of some older friendships as you make way for the new folks you are meeting.

Career activity is still undergoing change, and you will certainly need to roll with the punches. This period may actually last through 2023. Being flexible will be a real asset. Relationships are under a lot of scrutiny from September 21 through October 23. Difficult relationships may not last during this period, but stable ones will gain strength.

Times are better this year, and the crises are not so arduous.



My Brother Christopher

TAURUS

APRIL 20–MAY 20

Taurus is one of the more activated signs this year. You are going to make some long-term choices this year around your career, your relationships, and the continued pursuit of your passion.

Your career sector is going to be extra-active for the entire year. You will be open to new opportunities that allow you to do more of what you like. This may include moving to a new location or traveling more for your job. This will also be a great year for you to promote your services, go back to school, or expand and get busier in your current business.

You may also plan to start your own business, get a promotion, and/or take on more responsibility. The next two years will provide a positive time for you to be a mentor, to lead and help others along the path. For some of you, this may be a time of retirement as you seek alternatives for totally reinventing yourself.

This same energy will also be affecting your relationship sector. You will be looking to upgrade your current situation. If you are in a good relationship, this will be a time of renewal or taking the partnership to the next level. This applies to business relationships as well. You are planning to make sure that everyone is working toward the same goal.

Personally, you will be opening yourself up to be freer and more expressive. Restrictive people, rules, or situations will really gnaw at you. It is very likely that you will be getting them out of your life over the course of the year.

The upcoming Mercury retrograde from January 25 through February 28 will definitely impact your career sector. You will be looking at the reasons you feel unappreciated. This may serve as a stimulus for you to make other choices. You will have a lot more stability this year!



Violet Chackki

GEMINI

MAY 21–JUNE 21

An eclipse occurring in your sign this year (in late May and early June) means that you are going to be open to new opportunities and will see the world from a different point of view. Another eclipse will occur in mid-November and early December. Eclipses have an 18- to 19-year cycle, so this is a repeat of 2002 for you. This eclipse cycle will have a strong impact on your relationship sector. If things aren't going well, an eclipse can force the issue to be resolved or ended. It can just as easily bring a new person into your life.

This same energy will have an impact on your career. For the last couple of years, you have been rethinking and examining alternative career paths in order to find something that really resonates with your inner self. It has to have a creative side, as well as a side that improves or helps people and the planet. This has certainly activated your need for more creative expression and less drudgery. In a sense, you are looking for a calling and not a career.

For some, this may also be a time to retire or pull away from the noise and find a more peaceful place to live. You are more apt to travel this year to help with your spiritual searching. This will also be a very good year for continuing education, being the teacher, working on your novel or your blog, and opening up to some spiritual practices that can help you release old beliefs.

Mercury retrogrades are always important to you, since Mercury is your ruler. The most impactful retrograde for you this year will occur from the end of May through June 29, as Mercury is retrograde in Gemini at the same time the eclipse occurs. This will be a very strong time of self-examination. You are more grounded this year than you were in 2020!→



Solange Knowles

CANCER JUNE 22–JULY 22

You have been feeling the effects of the difficult alignment that has been propagating COVID-19 and making the economy falter. This made the past year a very challenging and taxing time that forced many of you Cancerians to review major parts of your life. This alignment begins to break apart as we get into the new year, so you will not be feeling so much stress. You will also be in a better position to make decisions about what you want to accomplish to improve your environment, despite the ongoing problems with the coronavirus.

You will want to get a handle on your debts and improve the way you manage money. You may even put yourself on a budget or cut back on needless expenses. And yet, strangely, this year can also be a better time to borrow money to consolidate debts, or even to remodel or relocate. This can also be a much better time for you to invest, as long as you take a cautious approach.

You are more open to the quickly growing world of high tech and virtual reality. You will be replacing some of your old systems and moving into the modern era! This will also improve communication between you and your loved ones, as well as your clients or your customer base.

Business associations and community gatherings will be particularly beneficial for you this year. And the more “virtual” it is, the better it will seem to work for you! This is a great year to renew friendships that were put on hold during the pandemic lockdowns. Relationships will still be going through a cleanout, but that pace will slow.

The eclipse cycle this year affects your health and work-habits sector. This is the year to develop a health program and make it a part of your daily routine.



Mitch Grassi

LEO JULY 23–AUGUST 22

This year is very much a growth-oriented time as you make decisions about your career, your long-term security, and your partnerships.

Relationships are a big topic for you this year. You will be more open to relationships, and people will notice. If you are single, this is a good time to meet new people for fun and possible relationships. If you are involved, this is a time when your relationship should flow along much better. Of course, you may also feel that you have outgrown your partner, and this may cause you to look for someone more suitable. Any partnerships created during this year, either business or personal, will depend on logic and shared goals to create success. Business relationships can be especially fruitful this year!

You will be reviewing your career direction and long-term security goals. You are ready to take on a leadership role, and you will be wanting a promotion at work. For some of you, this may be the signal to start your own business or to gain more control over what you do. For you older Leos, this may be a time of semi-retirement or adjusting your schedule to fit your drive and needs at this time of life. Your boundaries are becoming clearer as you notice where the holes are. You will find that you are using the word No a lot more!

This will be a year of looking for something that really excites your passion for life and living. Besides looking for new paths, you will want those choices to be more fun and more in sync with the real you. You may feel totally bored by the past—including some people from the past.

The first Mercury retrograde is January 24 through February 28, and it will have a direct impact on you. Take the time to be self-reflective. You are just making sure you are on the right path.



Billy Porter

VIRGO AUGUST 23–SEPTEMBER 22

You have been exploring how your choices in life reflect your view of inner happiness—or not! Your inner child is more outspoken and doesn't want to be controlled by other people's demands. This will change your relationship with your own children as you start to see them as individuals and not carbon copies of yourself. This year, you will take the lessons you have learned and apply them to your routines.

One of the first things you will work on is your daily health habits and routines. This is an excellent year to improve your eating patterns and start some sort of daily exercise program. You will be more aware of your physical limitations and your sense of aging. You will feel motivated to improve your daily work habits by putting some routines back into your life. Managing your time better will mean more enjoyment of your free time.

You will want to improve your working conditions by updating your office setting and business equipment. You are wanting a more efficient place to work, and this includes getting your co-workers to improve their attitudes.

With regard to your career, you are looking for something marketable that aligns with your inner sense of purpose. You have been exploring this since 2011. This year's eclipse cycle will stimulate that again, and open new prospects for you around May 26, June 10, November 19, and December 4. There could be some new business partnerships and other opportunities for your career. All of this ties in with your desire to make your life more interesting as you align your career goals with your inner aspirations.

Career activity will be under review with Mercury retrograde May 22 through June 29. Take your time. You'll get the chance to review, correct errors, and ensure efficiency. The time to act is now!

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LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23–OCTOBER 23

Over the past year, the focus has been on your family, your home life, and remodeling or moving to a new home. The pace of that process will be slowing down as the focus shifts, but you will still be dealing with major shifts in your family hierarchy. Family traditions are shifting as the younger folk take over some of the responsibilities. Those traditions may not resemble what you are used to, but it's time for you to let go of the past and allow yourself to move forward!

You are in a much more lighthearted mood as you move into 2021. You will be looking to express yourself and your creativity. For some, this can be a very good time to start a family or expand your existing one. This can also be a time when your inner child expresses your creativity by finding something that combines your interests and also makes money!

You are more willing to step outside of your comfort zone and commit to your ideas. This can be a good time for investing in electronics or other innovative technologies. You will also be wanting more independence and to have your say. This includes wanting to have more intimacy in your relationships as you open up and become more willing to share.

The eclipse cycle is stimulating your teaching, learning, and writing sector at the end of May and into early June, as well as mid-November to early December. You will want to take your communication skills to the next level. You may have a stronger voice through social media or your own platform.

Mercury will be retrograde in your sign between September 21 and October 23. This will be the time for personal review and making sure you are doing what's best for you!



SCORPIO

OCTOBER 24–NOVEMBER 21

2021 is a very dynamic and significant year for you. Three outer planets will be affecting you at the same time. When that occurs, you are likely to find that the growth process is accelerated and you will make more consequential decisions.

In the area of relationships, you will be refreshing your views on what a partnership means to you. For some of you, this is a time of reinventing your alliances and making daily interactions more significant. Others will feel the restrictions of old ways of interacting. This could bring problems to the forefront so you can either confront them or bring some alliances to an end. You are looking for a greater sense of equality and shared responsibility in all of your collaborations.

Your career sector is highly stimulated this year—something you may have noticed beginning in late September of 2020. You will be looking to take on a leadership role or get a promotion in your field. For some, this can be a time to start your own business and make a commitment to yourself. For older Scorpios, this will be a time to rethink your current career path. You may cut back on your work schedule, or look toward retirement.

You will also be reexamining your personal and professional boundaries as you prioritize the way you spend your precious hours and minutes during these crazy times! You will want to reduce the time you spend on projects and mundane activities that don't make your life more secure. You will expect more from the projects and the people that you focus your attention on.

This is going to be an extremely busy year. You may move, relocate, expand your business, take on more responsibility, and upgrade your commitments. This is the time to prioritize your options, as there will be many! Enjoy!



SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22–DECEMBER 21

The big news is that the 2021 eclipse cycles are occurring in your sign this year! That influence began with a late-December eclipse, and it continues with the eclipses on May 26, June 10, November 19, and December 4. This eclipse cycle repeats approximately every 19 years, so it may help to look back and recall what activity was being stirred up in your life at that time.

Eclipses prompt us to grow beyond who we have been. You can expect some doors to open and others to close. Also expect a direct impact on your relationships, both business and personal. This will shine a light on the ones that work, but especially on the ones that don't work. You will have more options in this area of your life.

Another big theme this year is improving your boundaries, speaking your truth, and using your time to improve work routines. You will want to have more control over daily activities. You will do that by prioritizing your career and security goals, and then focusing your time on projects that address those goals. This is also a great year for expanding your presence on social media via writing, blogging, or podcasting. You will want to teach and further your education in your area of specialty.

You will also bring your office into the new virtual world, improving it with new electronics and changing how you work.

The Mercury retrograde is the time to review past decisions. That 2021 retrograde will have the biggest impact on you from May 22 to June 29, combining with the eclipses that are taking place in May and June. This period will highlight partnerships, so that would be an excellent time to fix problems, renew your commitment, or possibly end a relationship. Focus on what you can do, and let that be your agenda! →

John-Paul,
the artist



CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

For the last few years, all of the heavy-duty planets have been in your sign. For many of you, this process actually started in 2008 and got stronger until it reached its peak in 2019 and 2020. As we move into the new year, two of those big planets are moving out of your sign and giving you time to breathe! Although remnants of this energy will remain through the end of 2024, you will move out of this stagnant time as you begin to put some plans and projects into motion.

You will be reassessing your skills and talents this year. You could reinforce and expand on those skills, or you might consider a whole new track. You will be more concerned about your finances, and may feel that you have to put yourself on a budget. This is a good time to rely on skills that you may have thought you were never going to use again. This is true on a personal level as you decide who and what you want to give your time to. For Capricorns, time is money and you don't want to waste any on people or things that don't enhance your sense of security.

This is also a good year to expand your education, as that will give you an edge in an ever-changing job market. You may even consider a whole new field of study so you can change your career direction completely. You are more comfortable with making commitments to yourself, rather than feeling stuck and doubting your choices like you did last year.

The eclipse cycles of May/June and November/December will impact your health and work habits. You may already be feeling some of this from the late-December eclipse. You will not tolerate the same level of stress from your work commitments. Your world must fit you better, rather than the other way around.

Shea
Coulee



AQUARIUS

JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

This is a very important year because you are looking at future plans to improve your life. This is a big year for career! You may take on a leadership position, start your own business, or if you are older, look to start cutting back and only do what interests you. This is also a year of improving personal boundaries. You will find yourself saying No a lot more often, because you are valuing your time more.

You will be more aware of your vitality and health. You will want to improve your diet, your environment, and rid your life of negativity. You will be more protective of the people you care the most about. The same will be true for those you choose to work with or have as friends. You are wanting people to grow up and act more mature and responsible!

This is also a time when you will want to expand your social outreach through community groups, social media, or your circle of friends. You are feeling more positive about the future, but you're still keeping the past in mind.

Your family is going through some changes this year. If you have older relatives, they may be looking for the final freedom. You are needing to live in the present more and more. This will bring reality into greater clarity and allow you to prioritize your objectives. If you choose to, you can have a voice in the changes occurring in your family structure.

Mercury, our communicator and organizer, is retrograde in your sign from January 25 through February 28. This is a super time to review the past, enjoy friends you haven't spoken with in a while, listen to songs from your childhood, and review your personal plans for the future! Work on current projects, and avoid starting anything new until after February 28.

Nina
Flowers



PISCES

FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

This is a very active year for you, with career and home being strongly influenced by the eclipse cycles in May/June and November/December. Eclipses have an approximately 19-year cycle, so you may want to look back 19 years to see how those areas of your life were affected then. With both career and home energized, you may be looking at a promotion, more responsibility, possible relocation, and/or furnishing your new home or office.

Family will have a strong pull on you this year. This may be the time for a changing of the guard. Older matriarchs and patriarchs will be replaced by the younger family members coming up. You will find your own role shifting in the family. You can have more input and a stronger voice if you choose to. Some of this will be more apparent with Mercury retrograde from May 22 through June 29. That may be a time when you feel compelled to act.

This same Mercury retrograde period will shine a light on your relationships. That will be a good time to address the problems that even good relationships have. Problematic partnerships will have to improve, or you will leave them behind.

Pisceans always need some time alone to process their emotions without having another person around to psychically interrupt them. You will need more time to yourself for personal renewal this year. In fact, this is a great year for any type of retreat, vacation, spiritual pilgrimage, and/or just spending more time at the beach!

Career takes a back seat as you focus on improving your health and your environment, finding a sense of inner peace, and doing something that feeds your soul and also makes money. This is a great year to focus on you! ■

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A Rising Star

Illustrator **John-Paul Arreaga's** **OUTSMART** Zodiac series is inspired by the lives of queer performers.

By **MARENE GUSTIN**

Capricorns are supposed to be generally pragmatic, ambitious, and disciplined, although they can also be somewhat stoic and pessimistic. “I don’t follow horoscopes daily,” says artist John-Paul Arreaga, “but I think that description fits me.”

Born on January 18, 1999, this 21-year-old cis gay man is the illustrator for **OUTSMART's** 2021 horoscopes—an opportunity that came out of the blue last year. “It was a shock,” he says. “The magazine reached out to me; I’ve never done magazine work before.”

Born and raised in Houston, Arreaga lives with his mother, stepfather, and younger brother near Garden Oaks. He was the fifth child in a family of six kids, and when he came out at age 14, he says his oldest brother, who is also gay, was a big help to him. In fact, his entire family was very supportive.

“They were like, ‘We already knew!’” he says.

Attracted to art at an early age, Arreaga attended Houston’s High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA), where he studied drawing, painting, and costuming. After graduating in 2018, Arreaga applied to a couple of art schools but wasn’t selected. He found a day job in 2019 that lasted until 2020 happened.

For the past year, Arreaga has been able to live off of commissions from illustrations, which he primarily displays on social media. The work reveals his love for pop culture and its celebrities through the use of bold colors and erratic and jarring details. His unique style stems from his fascination with childhood cartoons and the lives of queer artists and performers.

Arreaga’s illustrations of notable drag queens were featured on *The Art of Being*



Queer blog in February 2020. In fact, after doing some drag himself at HSPVA, he looks forward to doing more when the pandemic is over and the drag clubs reopen. “I really miss the drag scene. The clubs are very exciting,” Arreaga says.

He also misses going out with his family for dinner, like they did last year for his 21st birthday at Teotihuacan Mexican Cafe in the Heights. (He calls that popular eatery “the pink place” because he says the actual name is too hard to pronounce.)

“We had a big party there, and I wore my stilettos!” he recalls. “I have a lot of good family memories from there, and I can’t wait until we can all go back again.”

Otherwise, Arreaga has been handling the

COVID-19 pandemic well by working on his art at home. He’s particularly happy about the **OUTSMART** commission, which he admits has pushed him to create more.

“My horoscope illustrations are hand-drawn with color pencils and Sharpies, with bold colors [to accent the] black-and-white images,” he explains.

As a young bachelor, Arreaga mainly hangs out with his dog, Dudley—who he says is kind of dumb. “But that’s okay, I love him anyway.” The budding artist is looking forward to receiving more commissions in 2021, in addition to diving back into Houston’s thriving drag scene.



Follow John-Paul Arreaga on Instagram
@johnnyxpolly.

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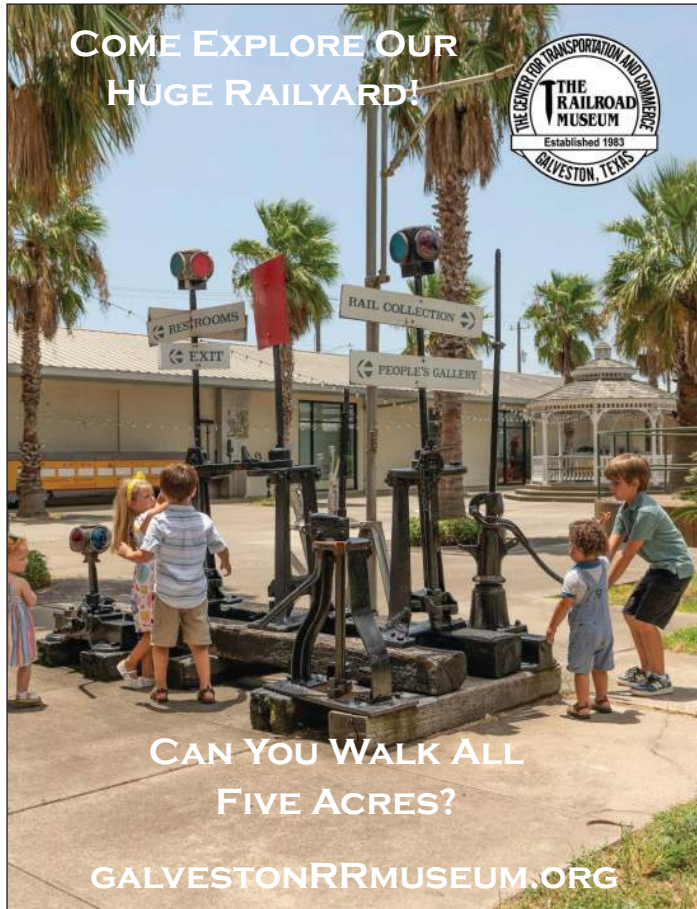
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Rainbow Dream Machine

Brooklyn-based lesbian artist **Julia Kunin** debuts her evocative ceramic sculptures in Houston.

By **KRYSTLE DIAZ**

Continuing her mission to increase queer visibility through art, out sculpter Julia Kunin brings her queer-coded *Rainbow Dream Machine* installation to Houston's McClain Gallery, 2242 Richmond Avenue. The exhibit is open to the public Tuesdays through Saturdays until February 13.

The installation will include six totemic, sentinel-like figures in addition to *Rainbow Dream Machine*, her first horizontal piece (and the exhibit's namesake). Kunin's distinctive style of abstract imagery and figuration is rooted in ancient utopian forms that seem almost robotic or warrior-like. Her gender-bending abstracts of the human body develop a surreal dialogue with her audience. The utopian forms that inspire Kunin's work include caryatids (stone carvings of draped female figures in Greek architecture), 20th-century Arts and Crafts motifs from socialist Hungary, the Bauhaus movement (specifically Oskar Schlemmer's futuristic costumes), and illustrator Aubrey Beardsley's Art Nouveau-era drawings that incorporate subtle patterns based on organic forms.

In the 1980s, Kunin began sculpting

small objects and "archaeological" pieces that dealt with sexuality and gender issues. In 2007, she began using commercial luster glazes during her time at the John Michael Kohler Arts Industry Residency in Wisconsin. Following her first visit to Hungary in 2009, Kunin began experimenting with more complex glazes that allowed her to transform ordinary or grotesque forms into something spectacular. The pieces in this exhibit were all created during her time in Hungary, and took over four years to complete.

The iridescent glazes, rooted in ancient Persia, gained popularity during the Art Nouveau era. As a Fulbright Scholar in 2013, Kunin attributed the style of these pieces to the inspiration she found during her time in Hungary. "I've been visiting Hungary every summer since 2009, I'm thankful for all my friends there, and I couldn't have done it without their help," she explains.

After growing tired of being closeted, and seeing the homophobia and sexism that is common in Hungary, Kunin began to create abstract pieces with homoerotic imagery that was intentionally eroticized. "It's almost like a game when I am creating these pieces," she says, describing her ar-



Julia Kunin,
Rainbow Dream Machine
(2019, ceramic)

tistic process. "I set the rules of the game, then I break the rules. I'm controlling the game."

No stranger to Texas, Kunin was showcased by the McClain Gallery at the Dallas Art Fair in 2019. She has shown her work at the Inman Gallery in Houston, the Barry Whistler Gallery in Dallas, and she also completed a Core Residency Program fellowship at the Glassell School of Art in Houston. Kunin

attributes much of her inspiration to notable queer artists such as Harmony Hammond and Barbara Zucker. "I can't forget to pay homage to all the 1970s feminist artists who have paved the way for my generation. You can still see so much of that in my work today."

Strategically showcased in the McClain Gallery, *Rainbow Dream Machine* comes alive when viewed in person, with its colorful luster

glazes and raw, organic details. "Working with clay is very physical, and I work very intuitively," Kunin says. She deliberately reworks and manipulates the clay in order to leave finger imprints on the forms. "I've begun to leave some areas raw and unfinished [to highlight] the nature of the art. I love the contrast of the glitzy rainbow glaze and the raw, rough surface of the clay."

Kunin earned a bachelor's degree in art from Wellesley College and a master of fine arts degree from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. She currently resides in Brooklyn, and her work is represented by Sandra Gering, who featured Kunin in a solo show entitled *Les Guerilleres* in 2015. Kunin was also a member of the Women's Action Coalition, and is a founding member of the activist group We Make America.

"I hope that people will have a physical response to seeing the pieces," Kunin says. "I'm sad that I can't be in Houston for the show due to COVID-19, but I'm excited [that my work] is back in Houston for this exhibit."



For more information on Julia Kunin's *Rainbow Dream Machine* show, visit mcclaingallery.com/exhibitions/julia-kunin.

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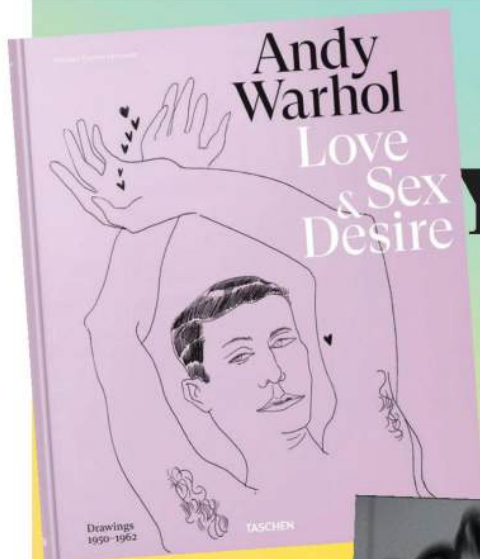
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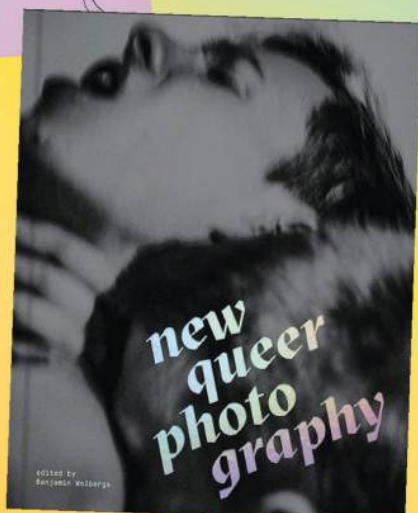
Queer Books for Your Coffee Table

Spark a conversation with these new LGBTQ-themed pictorials.

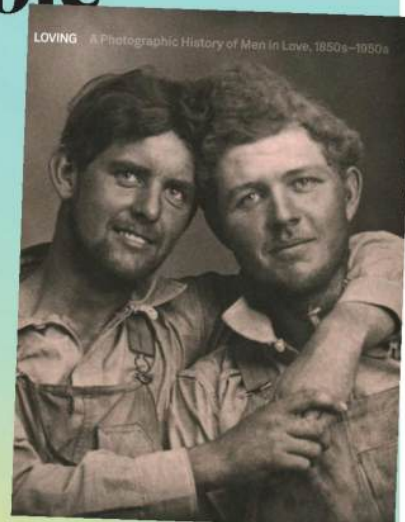
By STAFF REPORTERS



Well before Andy Warhol became a 1960s Pop Art icon, he often created seductive drawings celebrating male beauty. Drew Zeiba's new book **Andy Warhol. Love, Sex, and Desire: Drawings 1950-1962** features over 300 of Warhol's provocative drawings portraying men. \$100



The rise in queer representation in the media has led many to believe that society has finally embraced the LGBTQ community, but community members know this is only partially true. **New Queer Photography** by Benjamin Wolberg's features over 50 contemporary photographers whose work reveals sexuality beyond the limits imposed by taboos, and shines a critical light on society's understanding of gender issues. \$63



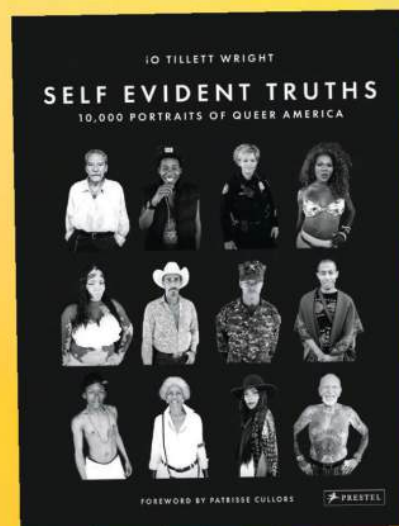
Hugh Nini's Loving: A Photographic History of Men in Love, 1850-1950 examines the history of romantic love between men in hundreds of touching images from distant eras. This visual narrative brings to light an until-now unpublished collection of images taken in various contexts, both public and private. \$58



Being queer means having an eye for unique style, from the items we fill our homes with to our wardrobes and the gifts we give our friends. But what makes something "queer"? Chris Breckle's **Queer Objects** sets out to answer this question by examining the LGBTQ community across time and cultural boundaries. \$40



No, RuPaul didn't invent drag. In fact, the cultural phenomenon has actually been around for thousands of years. **The Art of Drag** by Jake Hall, with illustrations by Sofie Berkin, Hellen Li, and Jasjyot Singh Hans, shares the rich history of drag in a beautifully created guide, brimming with dazzling colors and fabulous facts. \$17



LGBTQ people come in all shapes, sizes, races, and social strata. Author and artist iO Tillet Wright showcases this in his new book **Self Evident Truths: 10,000 Portraits of Queer America**, which contains thousands of striking and diverse images. \$28

‘Tom of Finland’

Author F. Valentine Hooven III’s new book recounts the life of a closeted European artist.

By TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

Born in the spring of 1920 in Kaarina, Finland, young Touko Laaksonen was raised in a community of lumberjacks and farmers. He was fascinated by those “well-muscled laborers,” but he didn’t quite know why until he was an adolescent.

By the time Touko understood that he was gay, he’d become talented at sketching the laborers he saw, although he had to hide his work because he depicted those men naked for his own enjoyment and sexual relief. He hid who he was, too: as a young man, he had a girlfriend, worked in the male-dominated world of advertising, and even served in the Finnish army during World War II, where his sketches of his uniformed “buddies” became gifts for their wives and girlfriends.

Indeed, Touko couldn’t resist a man in uniform, and they were prominently featured in what he called “my dirty drawings.” Those drawings included uniformed Nazi officers—artwork which got Touko into trouble. (Had he gotten caught having exceedingly risky anonymous sex with men during the war, it could have been far worse.)

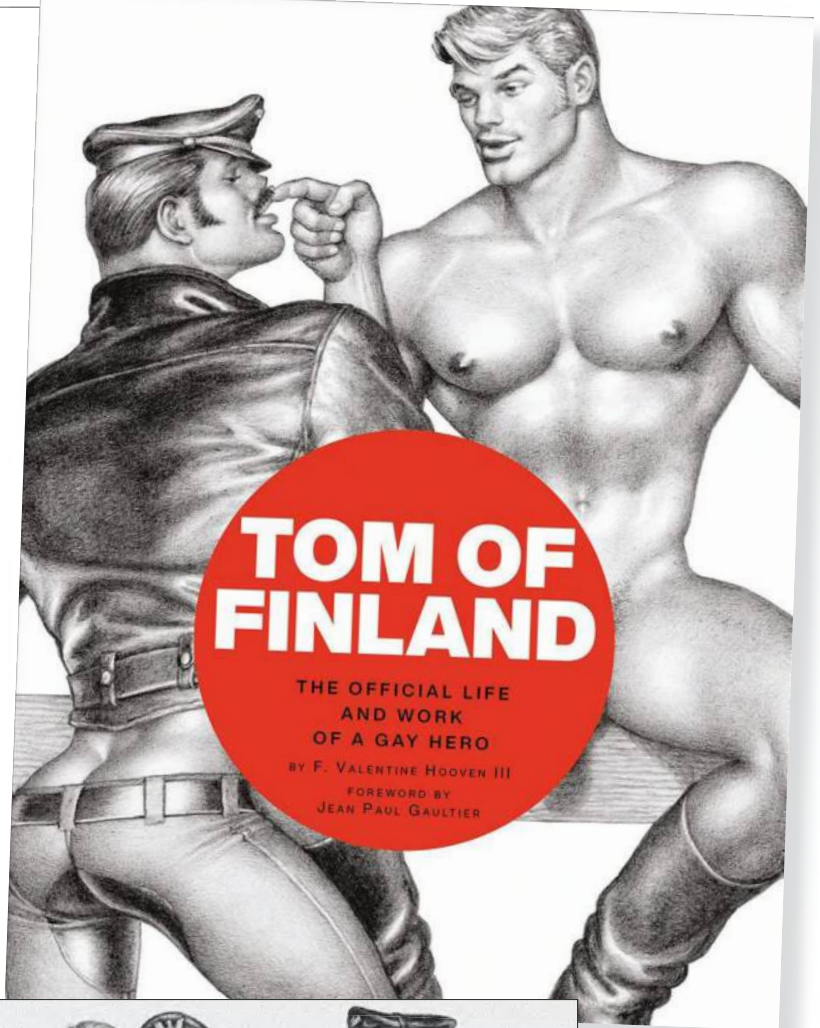
Although he had a lover after the war, art was again more of a release than any other physical act. This desire for erotica grew his portfolio throughout the 1950s, and he carefully shared it with “anyone who he thought



would appreciate it,” including the publisher of a new kind of international magazine who immediately accepted it for publication.

A year later, that magazine’s cover featured “a new, exciting, never-before-published artist” who now called himself Tom of Finland.

Yes, biographer F. Valentine Hooven III has filled *Tom of Finland* with reproductions of Tom’s artwork from the 1940s through 1991, when he died. Nearly every bit of it is explicit in nature, drawn in typical over-the-top Tom of Finland style. But readers will find Hooven’s narrative to be just as interesting. He explains quite often in this biography (which



Tom of Finland
© 2020, Cernunnos,
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\$50.00, 295 pages

was finished just before Tom’s death but never before published) that the mere creation of this art could have gotten Tom jailed or killed. This gives modern readers a sense for the amount of secrecy gay men had to endure in the days before Stonewall.

Hooven’s voice can be annoyingly sunny at times, but the courageous turn this story takes is irresistibly appealing. So savor this book both for the artwork and for a story that will fascinate you.



Tom of Finland by F. Valentine Hooven III is now available on Amazon.

French-Inspired Fare

Houston's hottest new culinary couple opens **Bludorn** in Montrose.

By MARENE GUSTIN
Photos by JULIE SOEFER

How do you get one of the Big Apple's rising new chefs to move to Houston and open one of the hottest restaurants of 2020? Have him marry a Texan, of course.

Chef Aaron Bludorn, 36, was the executive chef at Daniel Boulud's Café Boulud in Manhattan when he met Victoria Pappas Bludorn, 32. The Houston native (and local restaurant royalty) was working in operations for Boulud when they fell in love. After they were married in 2018, Bludorn decided to open his own restaurant, and she convinced him to do it in Houston.

"I played the long game," laughs Pappas Bludorn. "We would come here for holidays and sneak away from family events to explore the city."

"We would check out all the new restaurants," adds Bludorn. "There was such a great culinary climate here, and Houston diners are so committed."

Early last year, the couple was renovating the old Pass and Provisions space on Taft Street, preparing for both their first Houston restaurant and their first child, when the pandemic hit and everything shut down.

"It was terrifying," admits Bludorn. "We were past the point of no return on the space. We didn't know what was going to happen next."

When the lockdown lifted, Bludorn studied restaurants worldwide to learn how they were adapting to the new restrictions. He made changes to his space by enlarging the patio and spacing the dining room out. It seemed to work, and Bludorn has been running at 50 percent capacity ever since it opened in August.

"I think it's because of the changes we made for safety," says Pappas Bludorn, who is the operations manager of the restaurant.

"We are blessed," adds Bludorn. "The turnout has been better than we expected."



Maitake Mushrooms



Tuna



The couple was blessed again when Pappas Bludorn gave birth to baby Gregory in November. Through it all, the chef has been working on refining his menu.

"I'd call it New American, and seasonal," Bludorn explains. "All of our seafood is from the Gulf, and produce is from local farms." He hits up farmers markets every week and is building relations with area farmers and ranchers. Though the menu will change with the season, look for some incredible signature dishes like beef Wellington, foie gras, lobster pot pie, and Gulf cioppino made with red snapper, crab, and shrimp. There are several Italian dishes featuring risotto and ravioli, and of course the requisite chicken, lamb, and New York strip steak with a twice-baked potato.

There's also a "raw bar" in the dining room. "It's like 'The World's Your Oyster Bar,'" says Bludorn. You can order oysters by the half-dozen or dozen and eat them raw, fried with capers, or roasted with watercress and parme-

san. There's also a seafood tower stacked with oysters, lobster tail, uni, tuna, and a half-dozen shrimp for real seafood lovers.

If all of this sounds like "special occasion" food, don't worry—there's also a burger on the menu. It's dry aged beef adorned with "redneck cheddar," a cheese made with Texas beer.

Bludorn serves up specialty cocktails and wines curated by wine director Molly Austad, featuring everything from French Chablis to a Napa Valley Cab.

About the only food you can't get here is Tex-Mex, but that's only because the chef has so much local competition. "Oh yeah," says Bludorn. "I love the Tex-Mex in Houston, and also the crawfish boils in season."

Or as Pappas Bludorn adds, "Tex-Mex—I don't know how we ever survived in New York City without that!"



For more information on Bludorn, visit bludornrestaurant.com

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Recounting the Life of Selena Quintanilla

Raymond Arturo Perez, a gay Texas native, writes for Netflix's *Selena: The Series*.

By CONNOR BEHRENS

Netflix's new *Selena: The Series* features all-inclusive Latinx representation both on and off the screen. For openly gay Season 2 writer Raymond Arturo Perez, being part of the show is the culmination of a journey that started early in his childhood.

"I have always been fascinated by film and television, but particularly film," he says. "Since my parents were usually working around the clock, I was often by myself with either my toys or the television. Like many other writers in the industry, I feel like television was a third parent for me."

Watching more mature, diverse TV shows as a teenager made Perez's passion for the art really blossom. Those shows sparked deep family conversations on topics such as homophobia and racism to occur naturally, Perez recalls. It was then that he realized the influence that TV and film can have in households across the world.

"That is the power of television," he says. "These are the kinds of conversations that we're having in our household, so imagine

the kinds of conversations that are happening elsewhere. I wanted to be part of that."

But Perez never imagined that his love for TV and film would take him down the path of recounting the life of Selena Quintanilla-Pérez.

The new Netflix drama, which debuted in December, tells the story of Tejano singer (and queer icon) Selena Quintanilla from her childhood through her rise to fame. Mexican director Hiromi Kamata's talented cast includes Mexican actress Christian Serranos as Selena along with Latinx actors Ricardo Chivara, Seidy Lopez, Gabriel Chavarria, and

Noemi Gonzalez.

Perez, a University of Texas graduate, didn't set out to get involved in the new Netflix series. As he says, it all was due to the power of networking.

"It is so important," he says. "I would often go once a week to a networking event. One particular week, a colleague (through another colleague) invited me to this open house event. It was two LGBTQ organizations—Black Gay Brunch, and The Clubhouse. I walked in and was so pleasantly surprised that this many queer professionals were out and working.

They didn't just exist, they were in community and aware of each other and supporting each other."

It was there he met Moisés Zamora, the showrunner of *Selena*.

"At the time, I don't think the Netflix deal had happened yet, and he was a working writer on another show," Perez says. "He became a mentor to me, and was tracking me. A few months later, he reached out to me and asked if I had any interest in joining *The Clubhouse*. Fast-forward to Zamora making the deal with Netflix and Season 1 about to wrap up. I was about to finish my second year of graduate school, and he reached out to ask me if I had any interest in being a part of Season 2. I said Of course!"

The experience of helping to shape this new adaptation of Selena's story has been immensely satisfying for Perez, particularly because of the representation in the writer's room.

"It was really refreshing to know that the room was completely Latinx," he says. "Having a whole Latinx room meant that there were a whole myriad of voices, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. When I was in the classroom or in a workshop, I was oftentimes the one Latinx person or the one person of color or the one minority in the room. It's



kind of awesome, in some regard, to not have to worry about identity and just focus on the show and the relationships these characters have. We got really deep into that, and it was really fulfilling."

Perez is excited for fans to see what they have in store for the series' second season, which will continue Selena's story and cover

more of her classic discography.

"I think the hits that people are most familiar with get their moment to shine in the next season," he says. "So exploring how some of those songs came to life, and the story behind them, is going to be really fun. The luxury of television is being able to sit with characters for a much longer period of time and see how they are formed by the relationships that they have. I think that will be a pretty awesome and compelling treat for viewers."

Perez notes that Selena has been such a great model for the LGBTQ community, and that he feels honored to be a part of telling her story for a new generation.

"She was a trailblazer, but there was no path set for her to truly follow," he says. "It's the boldness, it's the courageousness that she carried. I think there's something about it that's very radical. I oftentimes feel that as a queer brown kid, our lives are radical. I feel very empowered seeing Selena [getting] her footing. She was very much sure of herself. That's a goal of mine: to have as much confidence [as she had] in going after what I want, and to be able to speak on my own behalf and keep my head up."

 Season 1 of *Selena: The Series* is now available on Netflix.





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WEDDING GUIDE

By JENNY BLOCK | Courtesy photos



Rok Ware (l)
and Tank Campbell

For the Love of Leather

The Montrose Forge owners Rok Ware and Tank Campbell hosted a small pandemic wedding ceremony.



When New Orleans native Chip “Rok” Ware and Cincinnati native Robert “Tank” Campbell first met, it was supposed to be a simple hookup. But the universe had something

much bigger in store for Rok and Tank.

The pair met on March 24, 2014, on the Scruff app while Rok, 42, was working for a

contracting company in Washington, DC, and Tank, 32, was studying culinary management at the Art Institute of Washington in Arlington, Virginia. “We thought it would just be a normal hookup,” Rok recalls, “but we immediately hit it off.” Since Rok was in DC for the full week, they went on a date every night that he was in town.

Rok, who now works in IT product development at cPanel in Houston, says he knew

Tank was “the one” on their very first date at Matchbox, a restaurant on Capitol Hill. “When we were leaving the restaurant and bundling up to face the cold, something just felt right as I helped him with his coat,” Rok recalls. For Tank, it was when his close friend Jen met Rok at the Leather Leadership Conference in Philadelphia in April 2014.

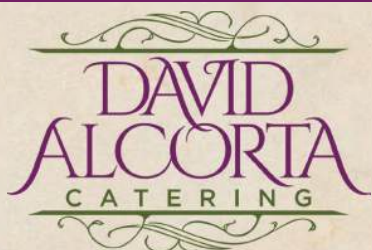
In March of 2015, Rok asked Tank to marry him during a trip home to New Orleans—with the help of a friend who happens to be a tarot reader in Jackson Square. “After his reading, she asked Tank if he had any questions for her, and he said No. Then I interjected and said, ‘But I have one for you. Will you marry me?’ He was surprised, but did not hesitate to say Yes!”

The pair was engaged for five years, during which time they kept making (and changing) their wedding plans. “The logistics of a wedding are so much to ponder, especially with all the community work we do, and owning a store,” Rok says. In 2016, the couple opened The Montrose Forge, a Houston leather/fetish store located at 711 Fairview Street. “We are a small business that is committed to the community, so our personal plans took a back seat.”

With all of the challenges they were facing last year with COVID-19, they decided to just have a small wedding ceremony in July. “Once things are a bit more conducive to having gatherings, we want to have a celebration with friends and family. That will prove to have its own set of challenges, I’m sure!” Rok says.

Before finalizing their July plans, they each contacted their mothers to make sure they would be comfortable just watching the wedding via livestream. “Tank’s mother is a healthcare worker, and my mother has lymphoma. So we made the decision to get married in a small ceremony surrounded by eleven close friends in the backyard of the home of our friends Brandy and Dusty, with our friend Robert Raney officiating.

They streamed the wedding and the signing of the marriage license and Ketubah, and encouraged donations to PWA Holiday Charities in lieu of gifts. “We are blessed in our lives, and we always encourage people to do more for their community when they are able,” Rok says. →



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Finding Love on Capitol Hill

Five years after meeting in Washington DC, Rok Ware and Chip Tank hosted a tradition-filled wedding ceremony.



The couple's vows were very special to both of them. "It was five years of feeling coming out all at once. But the time with just the two of us streaming live and talking with the people who could not attend in person—that was very special. We were smiling ear-to-ear, and [even though] I protested, Tank smashed a slice of cake into my face with no hesitation!"

Since Rok is Jewish and Tank is agnostic, they did their best to incorporate aspects from both of their lives into the ceremony. "From my Jewish faith, we signed the Ketubah, wore yarmulkes, and we each smashed a glass. I also wore a tallit, or prayer shawl. For Tank, we included wearing kilts to honor his Scottish heritage. And the officiant happens to be pagan, so we were able to incorporate the point of view of some of our dear friends into our ceremony as well," Rok says.

The honeymoon they had in mind was not really an option during a pandemic. "We originally wanted to visit Europe, and specifically Berlin and Munich. Instead, we just dove right back into our store and our community work with Bayou City Pups and the Space City Sisters," Rok says.

Though they started out with short-term plans, the pair ended up with lifelong love. "Tank is one of the most giving people you will ever meet, and is a fierce defender of his friends and family," Rok says. And as Tank is quick to point out, "Rok has the ability to find a positive in just about any situation. It can be frustrating, but it's also inspiring." ▼

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OUT THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR



December 19, 2020

The 2020 **Diana Foundation Holiday Party** was an outdoor event held at the Houston Zoo. Socially distanced attendees were masked up to tour the venue's nighttime Zoo Lights display, and longtime OUTSMART photographer Dalton DeHart was inducted into the Diana Foundation as a lifetime member by the organization's past presidents.



November 24, 2020

In order to provide a safe Thanksgiving celebration for transgender folks, the Montrose Center hosted a drive-thru style dinner event for trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals. Organizers are hopeful that the traditional **TGiving** potluck dinner at the Center will return in 2021.



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By LILLY RODDY

Illustrations by JOHN-PAUL ARREAGA

Thinking in New Directions

It's time to move beyond last year's agenda.

The activities that are driving the economy and the pandemic are still very active as the month begins, but we should start seeing a break in that activity around mid-month. Mercury is retrograde in Aquarius from January 25 through February 28. Get your projects and New Year's resolutions started, or you'll want to wait until the end of February to move beyond last year's agenda. This is an especially busy time for the fixed signs of Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, and Aquarius, since both Jupiter and Saturn are visiting Aquarius this year. Jupiter is about growth and expansion, while Saturn is about control and safety—not always an easy pair to dance with at the same time. Days to go with the flow this month are January 1 and the 11. Days to keep your guard up are January 4, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 28 and 30—a lot of days! The sun moves from Capricorn to Aquarius on the 19th, while Venus enters Capricorn and Mercury enters Aquarius on the 8th. Keep your dancing shoes on this month!

ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

The focus on your career will continue through the end of the month. However, you are looking to reconnect with friends and others for emotional and financial security. This continues to be a time when outside forces have pushed you into making decisions about your career. Your options—anything from starting your own business to retiring—are all there! By midmonth, you are getting more organized and ready to decide on which paths you are going to explore. You are still working on adjusting to your family and a new awareness that the pandemic has brought on.

TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

This new year is a significant time for the Bulls and Cows! Career activity is going to be very active for at least the next two years. As the month begins, you are in an organizing and planning mode, but you'll be ready to move forward after January 6. This month is a good time to improve your skill set, continue your education, and explore other career options in new settings. And by midmonth, you will want

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)

Happy Birthday to all of the Capricorns. This is your personal yearly cycle of review and setting new goals for the coming year. The last two years have been quite rough for Capricorns in general, as difficult planetary alignments took root in your sign. Those conditions began to change in mid-December, and you are now moving into a time of rebuilding and stability. You are especially focused on finances and economic stability this month. Mercury, our organizer and communicator, is retrograde in your money sector from January 25 through February 28—a time to review your finances, investments, and how well you are serving other people's needs. Family issues calm down after the 6th. It's best to wait until after February 28 to put your new plans into motion!

to be acting on those possibilities. You may be considering doing something on your own, or looking to take on a leadership position at your company. Mercury will be retrograde in your career sector toward the end of the month, so you'll be thinking a lot about this area of your life. You will want to wait until the end of February to make final decisions. This is going to be a busy month!

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

As the month opens, you are improving your financial situation by clearing out old debts and being more responsible with your money. You are entering a time of expansion that could include going back to school, starting your autobiography, or relocating to a new country. New opportunities appear that you may not have seen coming. You are seeking a direction that really satisfies you from the inside out.

With your ruler, Mercury, going retrograde on the 25th, you can thoroughly explore your options without having to make a commitment until the end of February, when you will get a big boost of energy and confidence.

CANCER (June 22–July 22)

Relationships continue to take center stage as the month begins. Your partnerships have been so primary over the last year. This has taken your partnership to the next level or brought it an end. This month is a great time to renew those bonds, or for singles to figure out a way to date in the new virtual world! The other big topic this month is your finances, investments, and debts. This is an excellent month to review this part of your life. Mercury will be retrograde in this area of finances, so you can review previous decisions and errors as you release yourself from the past. This is

also a good time for therapy, couples counseling, and exploring the mental blocks that prevent real connections with those closest to you. Letting go of secrets will set you free! Friends and business associates are becoming more important to you.

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

You are continuing to improve your health and develop better habits to make your life more efficient. This is a great time to get your work space in top shape by upgrading your electronics and creating a comfortable work space. There are new projects coming this month that can relieve the boredom and spark some passion for your work and your partnerships. Demanding partners who are restrictive will rub you the wrong way this month and cause you to make some different choices. Partnerships take the spotlight by midmonth.



If you are happy, this is a time of renewal. If you are unhappy, this is the time to figure out what is wrong, fix it, or look for more promising relationships. This period of reexamination will last until the end of February.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

As the month begins, you continue to be in a creative time of connecting with your inner child, or perhaps your own children. This is a time when a hobby could become more than just a hobby. You are looking for comfort and peace at home, and to indulge in your favorite personal activities with people you really enjoy! This is also a good time to look at home furnishings and accessories. In mid-January you are looking at how things are flowing in your daily routines. This is an excellent month to improve your work environment and replace old, inefficient equipment. You are resetting some habits that have been disrupted by the pandemic. You are paying more attention to your health and avoiding negative people. January will be a safer and saner month!

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

Home and family are still your priority as the month begins. For some, the holidays were a time of reckoning as you were confronted with

other people's core values. This is a time of improving your home, or possibly relocating. After the 6th, you will feel freer and ready to take steps to improve your life. You are shifting your focus to self-improvement, self-care, and improving the relationship between you and your children. This is a great month for working on your hobby. Your children are getting more mature and looking to prove themselves, so this is a good month to give them added responsibilities. You will focus on activities that are fun and give your life a more satisfying sense of completion. Relationships are easier as the arguments fade and peace enters the picture! Put some fun back into your life.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

Communications and organization lead the way as the month begins. You have been in a cleaning-out mode in preparation for a time of major decisions that will take place throughout 2021. You are reexamining your career, where you live, your long-term plans, and ways to have more fun in your relationship. This is a time in your career when you are looking at taking on more responsibility, moving up the ladder, starting something on your own, or possibly retiring. As you set your own rules, boundaries, and goals, you want to make better use of your time, no matter your

choices. Family demands will increase this month, and it may be your time to step into a family leadership role with Mercury retrograde in that area of your chart from January 25 through February 28. Set your boundaries!

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Relationships play a strong role in your life this month. This is a good time to strengthen those bonds and remember the reason you got involved in the first place. Your need for financial security continues to be strong, and you are having to make some changes there. This can be the time to reassess your skills and perhaps use them elsewhere on new projects. You are more protective of your time this month.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

With Jupiter (planet of growth and opportunity) and Saturn (the decider and builder) both entering your sign for an extended visit, you are already in an action and planning mode. This follows your usual time of self-reflection during the holidays. Some of that reflection is still going on, but with Mercury retrograde in your sign from January 25 through February 28, you are focusing on plans to move forward. Improving your boundaries will be very important, especially as it relates to your family's

expectations of you—and the expectations you have of yourself! You are setting new career goals as well as reviewing how your relationship is going. Home and family will need some attention this month, particularly around the 20th! You are clearer by the end of the month, but it's best to wait until after Mercury is direct on February 28 to move forward.

PISCES (Feb. 19-Mar. 20)

Despite the pandemic, you are reaching out to friends and family and also feeling more connected to your community. You could be taking a much more active role in this area. Business associations are also good for you, but only if you can participate and not just be an onlooker. Toward midmonth, you are moving into a place of rest and retreat. You will want to limit your social contacts because your psychic sensitivities are pushing you to avoid negative people. This can be a great time for planning, self care, meditation, and improving health routines. Your goal of looking for something to connect with that gives your life greater purpose will be more active this year! Your ability to get your message heard improves this month as well.



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All Hail the Queen

Hu'Nee B is a ruler of Texas' pageant scene.

By **SAM BYRD**

Photo by
ANGELO S. ORTIZ VELA



What better way to ring in the new year than by getting to know Hous-

ton's *other* queen bee: Hu'Nee B. She's got poise and panache, but don't get in her path or you might get stung. This dynamic diva has enough sass to fill a room, and she'll let you know it when she gets ahold of a hot microphone. However, she's a softie with friends in her inner circle, and she'll always treat her royal subjects like her own family.

Preferred pronouns?

She/Her/They in drag.

Hometown?

Born and raised in Houston.

Inner avatar?

A lion. They are confident, majestic, and natural leaders.

Drag birthdate?

Although I started as a Halloween drag queen, Hu'Nee's drag birthday is in mid-April—a true Taurus woman.

Describe your drag persona.

Hu'Nee is a young queen with an effervescent take on old-school drag. Standing at 6' 7" in heels, I love rhinestones, glitter, and feathers. I can be fun and wild while twerking to Megan Thee Stallion, or elegant and sexy while serenading you with Beyoncé. When not on stage, Hu'Nee is your good girlfriend that you meet for happy-hour drinks and to talk the tea.

Inspiration behind the name?

My name came about after the 2010 Lady Gaga music video for "Telephone," featuring Beyoncé.

Favorite illusions that you're known for?

I love doing my Patti LaBelle illusion. Other illusions that I perform regularly are Aretha Franklin, Chaka Khan, Jennifer Hudson, and my most requested, Madea.

Any New Year's resolutions?

To shed this excess "quarantine fifteen." I have evening gowns and a 30th birthday to prepare for!

Where can we catch Hu'Nee B when she's not performing?

When I'm not performing, I'm usually at home catching up on TV or on the phone catching

up with my friends and family. Every now and then, you may catch me out in my rare boy-form supporting the gayborhood and local drag entertainers.

Any titles or awards?

I love pageants. I started in 2015 when I entered Miss Gay Gulf States America, a preliminary contest to Miss Gay Texas America. I am a former Miss Tony's Corner Pocket, a former Miss Gay Heart of Texas America, the current Miss Galveston County America, and have placed in the Top 10 at Miss Gay Texas America for the last three years.

Hobbies?

I love to cook and sing. I'm not the best at either, but it's fun and it helps me de-stress.

Advice for your younger self?

Just do it. Take the risk and step outside of your comfort zone.

What would you say to the world about the LGBTQ community?

We are not a monolith. The community is made up of all types of people—all sizes, colors, and gender identities. Accept us as we are, because we are forever growing and evolving.

What is something about you that people can't find out through social media?

I'm a Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 2013! I actually started my drag career in college.

Any hidden talents?

Tengo una subespecialización en español, pues puedo hablar, leer, y entender español. Estoy buscando amigos para practicar (o un novio).

Advice for up-and-coming drag performers?

To know where your future is in this industry, you have to look to the past and study the history. A lot of new entertainers enter with hopes of only being on TV, but if you micro-wave your success, you may find that the center of your brand isn't fully cooked.

Where can people see Hu'Nee B perform?

Catch me every Thursday night for Bites & Bingo at ReBar, where we play four rounds of bingo with some fun, sexy prizes. Outside of that, you can catch me entertaining across the city and the state. ▼

Follow Hu'Nee B
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