

▶ **LATINX LEADERS: FIVE LOCAL PIONEERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT** Pg.28

SEPT. '21

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

OutSmart

ARTS &
ENTERTAINMENT
ISSUE

EVOCATIVE CREATIONS

Martine Gutierrez explores identity, fashion, and culture at Blaffer Art Museum

Pg.38



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EVOCATIVE CREATIONS

Martine Gutierrez'
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structs social norms.

Photo credit: Martine
Gutierrez, *Demons*,
Tlazoteotl 'Eater
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OutSmart Media Company

Publishers of OutSmart Magazine
3406 Audubon Place • Houston, TX 77006
713.520.7237 • 713.522.3275 Fax

Subscriptions: \$30/12 Issues, \$58/24 Issues

E-mail: letters@outsmartmagazine.com

Website: OutSmartMagazine.com

OUTSMART is published monthly. Estimated readership in Houston and surrounding areas is 60,000. OutSmart Media Company is not responsible for claims and practices of advertisers. The opinions and views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the staff or management of OutSMART. Inclusion in OutSMART does not imply sexual orientation. ©2021 by OutSmart Media Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited. Unsolicited material is accepted. No manuscript returned without SASE.



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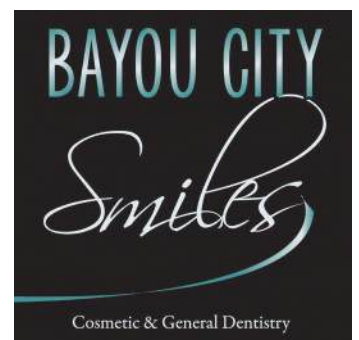
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The pandemic has had major impacts on every part of society, but one sector hit the hardest was the arts and entertainment community.

COVID-19 safety restrictions forced theaters and galleries to close, resulting in devastating job and revenue losses. And while artists, musicians, and actors are using the internet and socially-distant in-person platforms to keep us engaged, we've all missed the energy that being in a large, enthusiastic audience can provide.

Fortunately, with the rollout of vaccines and months of planning for ongoing COVID protocols, Houston's arts and entertainment venues are now preparing to welcome back their audiences. This

September Arts & Entertainment issue of *OUTSMART* is your guide to everything you should know about the return of our city's thriving cultural scene. Writer D.L. Groover fills you in on the impressive lineup of performances that kick off in Houston this month.

Musical-theater lovers will also be elated to know that one of Houston's favorite theater traditions, *Out@TUTS*, is back this season. Writer Sam Byrd sits down with party host and local drag artist Regina Thorne-DuBois to chat about these lively Theatre Under The Stars LGBTQ after-party events.

Out art aficionado and Blaffer Art Museum curator Tyler Blackwell has worked throughout the pandemic to preserve the artistic footprint of local artists. I speak with Blackwell about his survey

of Houston's dynamic visual-art scene and the exhibits at the University of Houston-based museum. Currently on display is Martine Gutierrez: *Radiant Cut*, a micro-survey of provocative works by New York artist Martine Gutierrez. As this month's cover feature, writer Jenny Block talks to Gutierrez about her explorations of identity, fashion, and cultural norms.

We also feature eight local LGBTQ creatives who are prospering in Houston and beyond—gallery owner Magen Pastor, painter Edgar Medina, comedian Bob Morrissey, burlesque performer Tifa Tittlywinks, photographer and rapper Emilio Coochie, and actors Adam Zapata, Scott Luptin, and Greg Dean.

Elsewhere in this edition, we kick off Hispanic Heritage Month

by celebrating five local Latinx leaders from Houston's queer community—artist and activist Fabian Echavarri, attorney Jessica Rodriguez-Wahlquist, HIV-care advocate Steven Vargas, media consultant Austin Davis Ruiz, and rapper Morena Roas.

Finally, don't forget to check out the winners of our annual Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards in our upcoming October issue that will highlight your local LGBTQ and ally favorites.

See you then!

Lourdes Zavaleta
Managing Editor



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Combating Gender Inequalities

City Council Member Abbie Kamin's new commission includes two LGBTQ pioneers.

By STAFF REPORTERS

One day before Women's Equality Day was celebrated in the United States last month, the City of Houston launched a new effort to improve the quality of life for its female residents.

During a meeting on August 25, City Council members voted unanimously to create a permanent women's commission that will examine local gender disparities and devise policies to address them. The volunteer board—which is made up of 25 female leaders—includes pioneering LGBTQ activists Phyllis Frye and Tammi Wallace.

Council Member Abbie Kamin, a longtime ally who represents District C, spearheaded the women's commission and worked with Mayor Sylvester Turner to get Council approval.

"After over a year of planning, to see this effort come to fruition is very special," Kamin said in a statement. "This is the first time we will have a board specifically looking at women's equity in our city; something we must have if we want to address the substantial disparities women continue to face day-to-day."

Full-time working women in Harris County only earn 80 cents for every dollar earned by men, according to a study by the University of Houston's Institute for Research on Women, Gender & Sexuality. Women are also more likely to experience poverty than men—a gender gap that is more pronounced in Harris County than at the national level. These disparities are even larger among Hispanic and Black women.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these existing inequities in the United States. From March 2020 to the present, over 2.6 million women have left the workforce (compared to 1.7 million men), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The virus has also disproportionately impacted women's health.

"Many women have unfairly fallen even farther behind," Kamin said. "It is critical to bring industry to the table to come up with creative solutions. The Women's Commission will help ensure this stays at the forefront, and I am grateful to Mayor Turner for championing this."



City Council Member Abbie Kamin (l) spearheaded Houston's new women's commission, which features LGBTQ advocates Tammi Wallace and judge Phyllis Frye.

Turner congratulated Kamin for proposing the commission.

"As an attorney, wife, and mother, she brings a unique voice to public service," he said. "Women play a vital role in my administration, and are leaders who are making a significant contribution in all aspects of our diverse community. I look forward to seeing the Commission's recommendations and working to enhance the quality of life for all women."

Members of the inaugural board, who volunteer for staggered four-year terms, are Beth Matusoff Merfish, Carmen Peña Abrego, Elsa Caballero, Carvana Cloud, Elizabeth Gregory, Chau Nguyen, Angie Wiens-Talbert, Elizabeth Gonzalez Brock, Codi Wiener, Eureka Gilkey, Alison Young, Haley Crain Carter, Juliana Garaizar, Barbara Burger, Lori Choi, Tammi C. Wallace, Phyllis Frye, Rogene Calvert, Glenda Joe, Kristy Bridges, Christine S. Willie, Jana-lia Moreno, Nancy Macgregor, Tanuke Smith, and Sima Ladjevardian.

"The 25 women serving on the Houston Women's Commission represent a diverse cross-section of Houston," the City announced in a statement.

The two out women appointed to the commission have both made major impacts on the LGBTQ community, both locally and nationally.

As the first openly transgender judge in the nation, Phyllis Frye made headlines for her pioneering activism in the trans community. Tammi Wallace, the co-founder, president, and CEO of the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce, works to strengthen a network of queer-owned businesses in Houston.

"The Houston Women's Commission is a voice that is needed in our city to ensure that there is a dedicated focus to advance equality and equity for women," Wallace said. "Thank you to Mayor Turner and Council Member Abbie Kamin for this nomination, and for your vision and leadership in establishing this important commission to address situations in supporting women across our great city."

"The City's Commission on Women will focus on many items of interest for both trans women and trans men," Frye added. "Health, employment, and racial discrimination are chief among them. I hope that with my history of advocacy and as an out role model, I can help bring discussion of these issues to the table."

Commission members will spend their first year addressing the issues Houston women have faced during the pandemic, including job loss, health care, family-leave coverage, childcare needs, and wage disparities.



For more info on the Houston Women's Commission, visit houstontx.gov.



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A Well-Deserved Retirement

Legacy Community Health
CEO Katy Caldwell
retires after 25 years.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

Legacy Community Health CEO Katy Caldwell is retiring after 25 years of leading the organization. Caldwell will retire from her position on December 31, Legacy said in a statement. After a nationwide search, Dr. Robert “Bobby” Hilliard Jr. has been appointed to the role.

In the late 1980s, Caldwell began her journey as a volunteer at the Montrose Clinic, where she assisted people impacted by HIV and AIDS. In 1996, she became executive director of that organization (which later became Legacy). At the time of her appointment, the clinic provided care out of a converted motel building on lower Westheimer Road.

Under Caldwell’s leadership, Legacy grew exponentially. It is the largest federally qualified health center in the entire Southwest, with more than 40 full-service clinics and 1,300 employees across Houston, Baytown, Deer Park, and Beaumont.

Hilliard’s appointment to CEO marks the first time that Legacy has been led by a physician.

Hilliard holds an MBA from Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, and a doctor of medicine degree from the UT Health Science Center. He is a former board member of Legacy Community Health, chairman of the board of trustees for AIDS United, and a diplomate with the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

For the past decade, Dr. Hilliard has worked with medical insurance companies in a variety of positions, including president of WellCare Health Plans of Illinois and chief operating officer of UnitedHealthcare Community & State Plan of Texas.



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By Adriana Salazar

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Brothers Osborne



Space Kiddettes



PROUD Tina

QUEER THINGS to DO

MUSIC

September 23

Brothers Osborne Tour

Brothers Osborne—the hit country music band made up of brothers T.J. and John Osborne—will debut their new sounds at Houston's White Oak Music Hall this month. The duo's *We're Not for Everyone* tour features songs from the band's third studio album, *Skeletons*, which explores rock-inspired tunes such as the group's new single "It Ain't My Fault."

The band's appearance will be especially important for Houston's LGBTQ community, as its lead vocalist recently made queer history. After coming out publicly in early 2021, T.J. became the first out country musician signed to a major record label.

"I want to get to the height of my career being completely who I am," he told *TIME* magazine in February. His coming-out story soon made international headlines.

Feeling lonely and isolated while he was still closeted, the only way T.J. knew how to express his emotions was through writing music. Brothers Osborne's 2017 song "21 Summer" tells the story of T.J.'s first heartbreak, and how

alone he felt going through it.

As Brothers Osborne's following grew, the band's music videos also became more inclusive by featuring interracial and same-sex couples. This provoked some backlash from country-music fans, and T.J. admitted that the reaction discouraged him from coming out.

With no regrets now about coming out, T.J. admits that it's the best thing he could have done for himself. Still, he wants to be more than just a gay country singer.

"Don't get me wrong," T.J. explains, "when I say I want to put it behind me, I want to put the coming-out part behind me. Because ultimately, it's a very small detail about me."

However, he's still proud of his journey. "At this point, my happiness is more valuable than anything else I'd ever be able to achieve."

Tickets to Brothers Osborne can be purchased at whiteoakmusic-hall.com. The show will be held on the White Oak lawn, and the show begins at 5:30 p.m. tinyurl.com/sytc6p8k

STAGE

September 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

KINGS OF HOUSTON

Pearl Bar hosts Kings of Houston, a Wednesday drag-king event with a rotating cast and themes. This event is 21+ and has a \$5 admission fee. tinyurl.com/nfk9sjr4



NIGHTLIFE

September 2

LE FREAK LIVE

OUT & PROUD LIVE, Houston's only LGBTQ-owned and -operated online music station, presents Le Freak Live at Numbers nightclub. Special guest singer Wendy Taylor opens the night for the disco band, and guest DJs will be on the turntables all night long. Proceeds from the event benefit the Virgin Mae Youth Music Foundation. tinyurl.com/57rn7vmz

NIGHTLIFE**September 4****FREDDIE FOR A DAY!**

Hard Rock Cafe International and the Mercury Phoenix Trust present Freddie for a Day, an event to honor the late openly gay musician Freddie Mercury. This is an all-ages event.

tinyurl.com/aksp2zbn

COMMUNITY**September 10****RUMBA WITH PRIDE**

Pride Houston presents Rumba with Pride at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon. The Latin night features meringue, salsa, mambo, and more. Admission is \$5 and tickets are on Pride Houston's Eventbrite page.

tinyurl.com/3nkd5rcb

STAGE**September 10****PROUD TINA**

Miller Outdoor Theatre presents PROUD Tina, a musical tribute to Tina Turner. Hits from the '60s through the '90s will be staged with a full band, dancers, and backup vocalists.

Tickets at milleroutdoortheatre.com.

NIGHTLIFE**September 11****SCOTTY'S PUB FIRST-EVER DRAG SHOW**

Head to Scotty's Pub for their first-ever drag brunch with local performers Kiki Dion Van Wales and Reign LaRue. Admission is \$5, and proceeds benefit Caitie's Foster Fam.

tinyurl.com/63h3wmvb

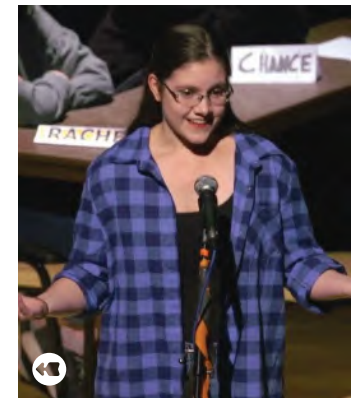
COMMUNITY**September 12****MISS AND MISTER TRANS OLTT 2021**

Organización Latina de Trans en Texas presents its Miss and Mister OLTT 2021 pageant at Club Crystal. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at the door.

tinyurl.com/5yd6vd2c

**COMMUNITY****September 15****COMING OUT MONOLOGUES WRITING & INFO SESSION**

UH's LGBTQ Resource Center hosts a writing and info session for its annual Coming Out Monologues. LGBTQ students will share their coming-out experiences and stories this November at the university's Student Center North. tinyurl.com/rwpz9ckjw

**MUSIC****September 15****SPACE KIDDETTES WITH TRANSVIOLET**

The Space Kiddettes, Houston's queer music duo, open for the pop-rock band Transviolet at The Secret Group performance venue. \$15 tickets are on Transviolet's Eventbrite page.

tinyurl.com/3mfy4vra

COMMUNITY**September 16****RECRUITMENT NIGHT AT BUDDY'S**

Space City Rugby's recruitment night allows participants to talk with current team members and learn more about the world of LGBTQ rugby while enjoying rugby-style carnival games and BUDDY'S happy-hour drink specials. tinyurl.com/33ma84mw

**COMMUNITY****September 18****PRIDE IN THE COUNTRY**

Pride Houston hosts Pride in the Country at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, an LGBTQ western night complete with line dancing and two stepping. Discount \$5 advance tickets are on Pride Houston's Eventbrite page. \$10 at the door. tinyurl.com/n85tp5e4

COMMUNITY**September 24****BEAR TUBING 2021**

The Houston Bears present Bear Tubing, a three-day event in New Braunfels for socializing and relaxing while tubing down the Comal River. Lodges and cabins are available, as well as tent camping. Tickets on the Houston Bears Eventbrite page.

tinyurl.com/umm2tnf9

**COMMUNITY****September 25****EDEN PARTY**

Pride Houston hosts the Eden Party at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, an event dedicated to the strong womxn of Houston's LGBTQ community. Early-bird tickets are \$15 on the Pride Houston Eventbrite page, or \$20 at the door. tinyurl.com/ammcxty7

STAGE**September 26****MR. AND MISS TONY'S CORNER POCKET CONTEST**

Tony's Corner Pocket holds its Mr. and Miss Tony's Corner Pocket pageant, with proceeds benefiting the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. tinyurl.com/2ds9wp9x

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FESTIVAL

October 2

MONTROSE BLOCK PARTY

Pride Houston is scaling down this year's LGBTQ Pride celebration due to COVID-19 concerns. Instead of the annual festival and parade, the Montrose Block Party will be a night filled with concerts, entertainment, vendors, and more. Open to the public, no admission charge. tinyurl.com/h6zmv855



COMMUNITY

October 9

PRIDE RIDE TO GALVESTON

Pride Bike Ride Houston hosts a long-distance bike ride from Eagle Houston to Rumor's Beach Bar in Galveston. Unlike other Pride Ride events, this is not a social bike ride, and all riders need to be prepared for the marathon. tinyurl.com/2xcjzdc3



FESTIVAL

October 30

THE WOODLANDS PRIDE

The Woodlands Pride organization is asking community members to help make this year's celebration possible by volunteering, donating, or signing up to be a vendor. To get involved, contact media@thewoodlandstxpride.org. tinyurl.com/yydkdnhu

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QAnon Quackery

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I've gotten my COVID vaccine, and I hope you did, too.

If, on the other hand, you're an anti-vaxxer, I hope you end up in a Deer Park

parking lot with your Chuck Taylors melting in the tar so you'll stay put until Thanksgiving—when it will finally be cool enough to unlace your Chucks and walk home barefoot.

If you're an anti-vaxxer, you need to wash off your damn war paint. Look at it this way: you gotta get the vaccine because this is Texas, and our fragile electricity grid can't be trusted to keep your ventilator going.

Last I looked, the vaccination rate in Houston was only 66 percent. That means if you're on the bus with two other people, one of you is playing Russian Roulette with a contagious bug that eats your lungs.

Let's make this simple: you don't have a clue what the dickens is in Tylenol, Pepto-Bismol, or Tums, but holy cow, you put all that stuff in your body. Hell, you don't even know what's in those Peeps things you eat at Easter, and you still eat them. But because Trump has messed with your brain, suddenly you're an expert on messenger ribonucleic acid and spike-protein shedding.

Next up: those loons who think there's a tiny wiretap embedded in the vaccine shot so the government can track them. Yes sireee, they believe Big Government wants to know every time they go bowling at the Lucky Dixie-Boobs Lanes.

These are the same loons who already carry phones in their pockets (precariously close to their privates) that they often hold right up to their ears. Some of them even wear wristwatches that track their heartbeat, oxygen levels, and whether or not they've fallen down.

So when they say the government is trying to track them with some kind of James-Fricking-Bond-Meets-Rand-Paul stuff, we start wondering if there's loco behind their eyeballs.

This brings me to those QAnon loonies. Sweetie, those people make me roll my eyes so far back in my head that I'm checking out my own butt.



QAnon folks earnestly implore you to “do your own research” on the vaccine. Do my own research? Back in about the ninth grade, when I was trying to learn physics (with a spectacular lack of success), I made a deal with the science people. I would not mess with science, and they would not critique Shakespeare or correct people's grammar. I was so bad at physics that even the Home Economics teacher asked me to put down my spatula and walk away from the mixing bowl. I can barely operate a shower curtain, but my critiques of Shakespearean sonnets will make you weep the tears of the typewriterless.

But if you're gonna insist that I do my own research, I will. For starters, I do not have an autoclave, but I do own a barbecue pit (which is basically the same thing, or maybe better).

I also do not own a test tube or a Petri dish, but I do have a Ball jar. It has pickles in it right now, but give me a couple of days and ...okay, okay, I'll eat the pickles right now.

No electron microscope here, but I have a handy magnifying glass that does a decent job with the fine print on my over-the-counter medicine bottles.

Okay, I'm doing my research now! (Also no centrifuge here, but hitting the puree button on the blender should work.) And my heat

source? The carburetor on my Mitsubishi Mirage while it's driving uphill.

I still need something to test how those COVID cooties will react to antibiotics. In the science world, that's known as a reagent. In my world, that's known as Aunt Thelma's potato salad at the Fourth of July picnic. As far as an antibiotic that I can test, I've got rubbing alcohol, Neosporin, hydrogen peroxide, and plenty of Tito's vodka. There ain't no slack in my rope.

Now I just need to get hold of some COVID 19 bugs to grow them and figure out what kills them the fastest. My best guess at the moment? A hammer.

Anyway, what I ended up learning is that you can fry an egg on Idris Elba's butt during a day at the beach more quickly than you can do your own research on a coronavirus.

That's all until next month, when I'll reveal how I broke into Area 51 to do my own UFO research with just a baseball bat, a compass, and Idris Elba.

Susan Bankston lives in Richmond, Texas, where she writes about her hairdresser at The World's Most Dangerous Beauty Salon, Inc., at juanitajeane.com.

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By DARYL SHORTER, MD

Working with Imperfect Systems

Interacting with institutions that have historically caused harm.

Despite the efforts in the fields of medicine and law enforcement to repair past harms against LGBTQ communities, it can still be hard—particularly for queer and trans BIPOC folks—to trust these systems.

Quite frankly, the mistrust is justified.

The Trust Factor

There are countless examples of queer patients seeking medical or mental-health care, only to have their experiences judged or their health needs misunderstood or disregarded.

From the moment a queer person arrives at a clinic, the risk for harm is present. It can begin with having only “M” or “F” gender options to check on intake paperwork. A lack of gender-inclusive restrooms or clear signage regarding provisions for LGBTQ-affirming care can also suggest an environment that may not be welcoming. Misgendering trans and nonbinary patients, or using deadnames or improper pronouns, can be tremendously invalidating and create anxiety and feelings of dread.

During the history-taking part of the physical examination, queer patients are sometimes subject to questions that feel gratuitous or voyeuristic. Assumptions about sexual orientation or the gender of one’s partner(s) can force queer patients to “come out” to their providers.

Alternatively, aspects of health that are specific to queer people may be completely ignored. For example, it has been widely found that lesbian and bisexual women have a greater risk for developing breast cancer, and may also be less likely to receive mammograms. These types of health disparities in queer communities are not solely based on lifestyle choices. They are the result of a system that was built around cisgender and heterosexist identities.

Altogether, these types of interactions with healthcare systems can cause people to feel dismissed or invalidated. The presence of implicit bias (or outright prejudice) can impact health encounters, leading to delayed diagnoses and improper care.



Policing the Police?

While the queer community’s relationship with the medical field is certainly fraught, the lack of trust in law enforcement is exponentially worse by comparison. In fact, we are not that far removed from the time when queer identity was criminalized and could result in arrest or public shaming.

Harassment and judgment by some police officers has done significant damage to the queer community. Derogatory language, as well as the expression of homo- and trans-phobic attitudes, has further widened the divide between LGBTQ people and law enforcement.

In some areas, queer spaces have been disproportionately policed in regard to drug- and sex-related crimes. LGBTQ people have higher rates of incarceration and victimization while in custody, compared to cisgender and

heterosexual people. And there is a fear that when LGBTQ people become crime victims, law enforcement may not take those cases seriously.

A Path Forward

So what do we do with all of this? Well, we can begin by acknowledging these systems’ faults. It is reasonable to retain a healthy skepticism of systems that have historically disregarded or done harm to your community. However, it doesn’t serve you or your community when you react by refusing to interact with those systems.

For your next medical appointment, consider taking a partner or trusted friend with you. Sometimes just having a supportive friend in the waiting room can make all the difference. If you’re comfortable, that person can

accompany you to the exam room and help to make sure all of your questions and concerns are addressed. Remember, there is strength in numbers. And as a general rule, it's not a bad idea for at least one person to know a bit of your health information in case of an emergency.

And as for your interactions with law enforcement, remember that it's critical to inform the police when something has happened in the community. Failing to report crimes, including those based on hate, means that crime victims may never receive justice. It is also important to collect crime statistics within queer communities so that appropriate police training and resources can be allocated to those communities. Additionally, incidents where police officers do not behave appropriately should be reported through the proper channels in order to address bias and prejudice within the system.

**"IN THE SAME WAY THAT
WE CAN EXTEND GRACE TO
OURSELVES AND OTHERS BY
SAYING 'NOBODY'S PERFECT,'
WE CAN AGREE TO ACCEPT
IMPERFECT SYSTEMS AND
CONTINUE WORKING TO
IMPROVE THEM."**

Maybe what we need is to become even *more* involved with law-enforcement systems so that we are in a position to challenge and change them from within. We could certainly use more queer police officers to work directly with our community. Consider how you could become an advocate within the justice system and help to improve relations and promote reform. Is there some way to channel anger and mistrust into action?

Perhaps the bottom line is that we must make peace with imperfection. This is a practice that we should employ with ourselves, and then extend it to our friends and family. In the same way that we can extend grace to ourselves and others by saying "nobody's perfect," we can agree to accept imperfect systems and continue working to improve them.

Daryl Shorter, MD, is a Diplomat 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.

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Financial Planning for Singles

Creating a plan is essential for those without life partners.



While being single can mean more freedom and fewer compromises when it comes to making decisions, it can also require a great deal of responsibility—particularly

as it pertains to saving and retirement planning (or “life planning,” as I call it). In some cases, being single is a choice, while in other instances it can result from a sudden tragedy such as an unexpected death or divorce.

Without a spouse or partner to rely on, it is up to you as an individual to ensure that you can generate enough income to cover living expenses and debt payments. Also, it is all on you to build a “rainy day” emergency fund.

So if you are currently single, it is crucial that you plan ahead. The good news is that there are strategies available for creating a more secure financial future, and working with a financial-planning professional who is experienced in this area can help you sort out the options.

Financial Planning for Singles

Disability Insurance – As the sole income earner, the first thing you need to do is make sure you have disability insurance (DI). Should something happen to you, whether it's because of an accident or a medical condition, disability insurance will kick in after a waiting period if your doctor diagnoses you as being unable to work. Typically, DI will pay approximately 60 percent of your current income (until your normal retirement age) so that you can meet some of your living expenses. Obviously, as a single person without a partner's earned income to fall back on, disability insurance is critical. If you work for a corporation that offers DI, you can usually sign up for it during open enrollment. If you are self-employed or work for a small company, you can still get coverage, but it can be less cost-efficient so you should explore other avenues such as the group-rate coverage offered through professional trade groups.

Long-Term Care Insurance – Because disability insurance only covers you until age 65 (and in some cases age 70), if one needs care beyond age 65 it could present a huge risk to



your retirement nest egg. That is why it is important to look at long-term care (LTC) insurance. Like any insurance that requires underwriting, it is imperative to start looking into this while you are still “young and healthy.” I have had clients in their 30s who have suffered with strokes and accidents. It used to be a rule of thumb that planners don't talk to clients about LTC planning until their late 50s or early 60s, but that is now an obsolete concept. The sooner you get coverage, the better—mainly due to the preferred rates you will receive as a healthy young person. With LTC insurance, should your doctor confirm you are unable to perform two out of the six “daily living activities”—bathing, dressing, transferring, continence, eating, and toileting (with cognitive impairment also considered)—this coverage helps you pay for care and equipment such as wheelchairs and ramps. There are complexities with LTC insurance, so finding the proper policy type for you is important. For example, there are huge differences between “reimbursement” policies and “cash indemnity” policies, and a traditional LTC policy is different than a hybrid policy. Those who have a spouse or partner can usually get a couples discount.

Unfortunately, singles and those who are HIV-positive will not receive the best rates, but there are ways to structure a policy to still receive some kind of benefit. Your financial-planning professional can help you find the right policy to fit your situation and cash-flow needs.

Legal Documents – It is essential that singles have their legal documents in place. I know a lot of people who joke and say “Who cares? I'll be dead.” Well, I'm here to tell you that you should care. Do you want the State of Texas to dictate what happens to you, or how your assets will be divided up? Wills and trusts help direct things like a traffic cop does, so you can decide what happens and how you want things to go. Also, as a single person, if you become incapacitated or develop a cognitive impairment, you will need someone you trust—whether a close family member or a trusted friend—to have “power of attorney” and help manage your affairs on your behalf. It would be prudent to put this plan in place while you are healthy and of sound mind. Even though we all tend to think that we'll deal with this later, the time to think about it and plan is now. You never know what can happen, and we should all want to “hope for the best, but plan for the worst.”

Life Insurance – Many times, people think that life insurance is unnecessary for a single person who is not married and doesn't have children or other dependents such as an elderly family member. Life insurance, if designed properly, can still function for your benefit. There are different types of life insurance, and if structured properly, policies can act as a tax-free source of retirement income. Additionally, there are riders that can be added to the base policies that may be beneficial. For example, one could obtain long-term care

coverage through a life-insurance policy. It all comes down to the design, and what makes sense for you. A qualified financial planner can be a big help in this area.

Creating a Customized Plan

There are many different kinds of financial tools and strategies available for single individuals, because everyone's short- and long-term objectives are unique. And since not all planning techniques will be right for everyone across the board, it is essential to discuss your current situation, as well as your future financial goals, with a professional who can create the right plan for you. Working with an advisor who is also well-versed in financial planning issues for the LGBTQ community can help to ensure that your plan is up-to-date, based on your personal circumstances, and can respond to changing legislation in the future.

Grace S. Yung, CFP®, is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER practitioner with experience in helping LGBTQ 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. Visit letsmakeaplan.org or midtownfng.com/lgbtqplus.10.htm.



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Tyler Blackwell

The out Blaffer Art Museum curator surveys Houston's thriving art scene.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

Tell me about your journey to becoming an art curator.

As a teenager and during my first few college years, I really thought I wanted to be a photographer. While I was studying photography in Chicago and trying to understand what it meant to create and sustain a creative professional practice as an artist, I had the opportunity to intern at a small alternative art space. There I learned what it meant to organize and administer exhibitions and to support artists' ideas at a very fundamental level. This type of cultural production really appealed to me, and it quickly led me to seek out credit-based internships at a few of Chicago's museums. I came to realize that curatorial work was an analogous, meaningful sort of creative practice—one that combined my interest in collaborating with and learning from artists with my other loves of writing, art and cultural history, interpretation, and talking about contemporary art to different audiences.

How does your previous experience in Chicago influence your current work in Houston?

My experience working at museums like the Art Institute of Chicago provided a truly substantial education for cultural work more broadly. At such a large place, you are able to watch, learn, and collaborate with colleagues working in various departments like visitor services, registration, interpretation and school programs, collections management, conservation, design, development, marketing, and more. This background has been useful to help inform how I approach and prioritize projects at a much smaller but equally hardworking museum like the Blaffer.

Describe the footprint that Blaffer Art Museum has in Houston.

I believe the Blaffer has a unique place in this city's really dynamic contemporary-art community. We present large and small exhibitions by historically significant and emerging contemporary artists from Houston and around the world, as well as UH's art majors and graduate students. Our primary audience is the UH student and faculty community, and over the last three years, the museum has re-



COURTESY PHOTO

"THE BLAFFER IS MEANT TO BE AN EXPERIMENTAL SPACE FOR SHARING CONTEMPORARY ART AND EXCHANGING DIVERSE IDEAS, AND WE WANT THE MUSEUM TO FEEL LIKE A PLACE THAT IS MOST WELCOMING FOR ALL."

—Tyler Blackwell

ally redoubled its efforts to expand and rethink its program of exhibitions, performances, and other public programs. The Blaffer is meant to be an experimental space for sharing contemporary art and exchanging diverse ideas, and we deeply want the museum to feel like a place that is both welcoming for all and socially relevant, responsive, and meaningful to students and visitors of all ages from across the city.

How do you compare our Houston art scene to those in other cities?

Houston is very unique! There is an active, creative scene at all levels, with many opportuni-

ties for local artists to have studio space, make exhibitions, show in galleries and nonprofit spaces, and be in conversation with scholars, teachers, patrons, gallerists, community organizers, curators, and other artists. Special, longstanding programs like the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Core Residency at the Glassell School have also regularly brought in dozens of innovative artists and writers from around the world to take part in the dialogue. All of these elements make for a thriving community.

What do you like to do for fun?

Well, as you can probably tell, I really enjoy going to places where you can look at art—even in my spare time. I also like to travel to new places, read biographies and melodramatic thriller/mystery novels, and watch a lot of TV and movies. I also enjoy a good gin martini, and I recently got into amateur floral arranging after watching HBO's new-ish *Full Bloom* series!

Fill us in on some of your favorite local spots to take in art.

There are so many great places in Houston that offer different experiences for viewers. I really enjoy visiting exhibitions and programs at Lawndale Art Center, Project Row Houses, the Houston Museum of African American Culture, DiverseWorks, the Cistern at Buffalo Bayou Park, Art League Houston, the Moody Center at Rice University, the Cy Twombly galleries at The Menil, CAMH, and the Houston Center for Photography—to name a few.

Finally, is there anything exciting happening at Blaffer Art Museum that our readers should know about?

Right now, we have three great exhibitions of artists Jamal Cyrus (a Houston-based artist and professor), Jagdeep Raina, and Martine Gutierrez. This fall, on Halloween, we will open a major exhibition of the queer American artist, writer, and former Riot Grrrl Molly Zuckerman-Hartung. The show will survey Molly's punk-influenced career, and will feature over 100 paintings, drawings, writings, photographs, and sculptures. Please join us!



For more info: blafferartmuseum.org.



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First, meet artist **Fabian Echavarri**, who draws to raise awareness of trans issues. Then get to know attorney **Jessica Rodriguez-Wahlquist**, who handles some of Houston's toughest personal-injury cases. Next, we introduce you to **Steven Vargas**, a longtime activist for people living with HIV/AIDS. Finally, media mogul **Austin David Ruiz** empowers major LGBTQ organizations, and musician **Morena Roas** fills us in on her unapologetic songs.

Fabian Echavarri

Artist and Activist

By LILLIAN HOANG

Fabian Echavarri knew he wanted to be an artist since he was 4 years old. As a child, he would draw for hours on the large blank art canvases his mother bought him, rather than playing outside or watching cartoons.

“Art is important for me because it helps me to relax and get my feelings and thoughts out of my brain,” says Echavarri, a Latino autistic trans man.

His most recent artwork is inspired by his experiences and identities, and he uses it to bring awareness to issues that the trans community faces.

In 2019, he created a piece titled *Deadgendering*, which features a young trans man with blue skin surrounded by pink speech bubbles that misgender and disrespect him. The artwork was based on his experiences while coming out in high school. Although he asked his teachers to call him Fabian and refer to him with he/him pronouns, many of them failed to do so—leading students to do the same.

“When people accidentally misgender and deadname me, I feel like I’m getting stabbed by a knife,” he says.

Echavarri supports the trans community not only through his art, but also by volunteering at local trans organizations such as Organización Latina de Trans en Texas (OLTT). The nonprofit educates and provides health services, legal advice, community, and resources to trans folks—everything from food to emergency funding. Echavarri became aware of OLTT after the group’s founder, Ana Andrea Molina, helped him correct his gender and name marker on government ID documents.

“She saved my life,” he says.

OLTT’s founder also helped create the Chi-



cos Trans Masculinos Oltt Houston support group for Latino trans men like Echavarri. The group has given him the space to talk about issues that matter to him, such as immigration, sex work, sexual health, gender dysphoria, mental illness caused by transphobia, and more. Sometimes, he creates artwork based on their group-meeting discussions.

Echavarri plans to feature more body

diversity in his upcoming artwork, as well as create more black-and-white pieces inspired by his dreams. He also encourages other artists to express themselves based on their own experiences. “Don’t copy the drawings from other people,” he says. “Just be yourself!”



Keep up with Fabian Echavarri on Instagram @fabian.artist.

Jessica Rodríguez-Wahlquist

Personal-Injury Attorney

By ZACH MCKENZIE



Attorney Jessica Rodríguez-Wahlquist handles some of Houston's toughest cases at Sorrels Law, a personal-injury law firm. The Mexican-born powerhouse was raised in Space City, where she ascended to her role as a top injury attorney. She cites her humble beginnings and a desire to be a champion for her community as her motivation to handle the emotionally taxing moments of her profession.

"I think I had the same upbringing as most gay little girls, playing with science kits and robotics," Rodríguez-Wahlquist recalls. "I didn't think I was going to be a lawyer." However, the summers she spent alongside her mother, who cleaned houses and had a successful lawyer as a client, sparked her interest. "I saw his awards and all the charities he worked for, and I wanted to learn more about what he did."

A serious car accident in 2010 showed Rodríguez-Wahlquist the real power that the American justice system carried. "I was T-boned by a car at Deerbrook Mall, and my mother's boss represented me in my case," she says. "I realized I liked what he was doing, and I knew I wanted to help the millions of people like me out there."

The proud immigrant obtained a business degree before graduating from Chicago's DePaul University College of Law on a scholarship in 2018. "I interned for senators. I also worked for Mayor Annise Parker in 2013 as a Fellow. She is still an inspiration to me as a powerful example of another gay woman doing amazing things. I quickly realized I would be really good at law, and it was what I was passionate about."

Rodríguez-Wahlquist works day and night for her clients, including victims of the recent Downtown Aquarium shooting. The families she represents have often experienced unfathomable loss, and have children in need of financial support.

Her work-life balance is supported by her partner of three years. "I work with my amazing colleagues, and at home I have my wife who is incredibly supportive. I try to leave everything from the office at the door. I work a lot and get home very late, but the few hours I spend at home with my wife eating dinner, I make sure it's meaningful."



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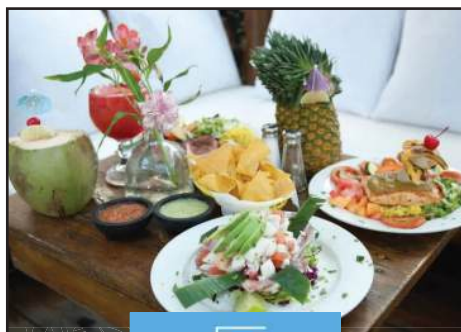


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Steven Vargas

HIV-Care Advocate

By ANDREW EDMONSON



The 12 months from September 1994 to August 1995 were devastating for Steven Vargas. In the fall of 1994, he lost his stepfather to AIDS. On April 19, 1995, Vargas himself tested HIV-positive.

And then in August, his beloved mother succumbed to AIDS.

As painful as that period was, it set in motion a chain of events that would lead Vargas, a self-described “reluctant activist,” to become one of Houston’s leading advocates for people living with HIV, both at the state and national levels.

During the past 26 years, he has served as co-chair of Houston’s Latino HIV Task Force, co-chair of the City of Houston’s Hepatitis C Task Force, and as chairman of Houston’s Ryan White Planning Council, which oversees the disbursement of millions of federal dollars earmarked for low-income individuals living with HIV. In 2015, he was named to the influential POZ 100 list of U.S. AIDS activists who have made an impact in their communities. The publication praised him as “a dedicated agent of change.” He was recently elected co-chair of the newly formed National HIV Aging and Advocacy Network, focusing on the needs of individuals over the age of 50 who are living with HIV.

Born in Houston in 1968, Vargas attended the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, where he excelled at playing the French horn. In 2004, he accepted a job with AIDS Foundation Houston and eventually rose to the position of case manager. In 2008, he joined the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans, where he focused on developing the Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS program.

A turning point in his personal development came in 2005, when he enrolled in Project LEAP (Learning Empowerment, Advocacy and Participation), a months-long course offering advocacy training for HIV-positive individuals. “It lit a fire to do something with all that information I had just gained,” he remembers.

And despite the devastating impact that AIDS has had on his own life, Vargas remains optimistic.

“I am hopeful that we’ll see a cure,” he says. “And I wouldn’t be surprised anymore if I saw one in my lifetime. I’d probably cry tears of joy if and when it ever happens, but I don’t think I’d be surprised anymore.”

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Professional

By ZACH MCKENZIE



Feeling like he never fit in while growing up, queer Latino leader Austin Davis Ruiz is claiming his cultural identity and paving the way for other LGBTQ Latinx folks to thrive. The 26-year-old marketing and communications professional, who grew up in Space City, works tirelessly to spread the message of two local advocacy organizations—the Montrose Center, and the Houston GLBT Political Caucus.

“A big part of my job [at the Center] is to meet donors, volunteers, and potential clients, and to share our story,” Ruiz says. “We do social-support programs for youth, seniors, and the trans community, case management for people coming out of incarceration, condom distribution to people in the streets, and more. My favorite part is sharing our story with the community. I get to do all the media interviews, and I post on social media to share what our employees who have boots on the ground are doing. I love knowing I’ve made a positive impact on people’s lives.”

Ruiz also represents the Houston GLBT Political Caucus. “My titles with the Caucus

are Board Trustee Position 1, and Communications Director,” he explains. “I was approached initially because they needed help with social media. That grew into me managing newsletters and press statements, and it continued to evolve. I [ended up] taking on a larger workload, but I’ve been so happy to do that. My work is driving membership growth and donations for the PAC so we can push our slate of pro-equality candidates.”

Ruiz explains that his current work embodies the representation he sought as a child. “I see myself as something I never really saw when I was growing up. I’ve struggled with my identity as a Latinx person. My family didn’t teach me Spanish, but we lived in a very Latino

community. I was going to a private school with a lot of Latinos that spoke Spanish, and they saw me as a white kid. It was this weird dichotomy where I was too white for the Latino kids, but at that school in River Oaks I was too Latino for the white kids. I never fit into either world perfectly, so I consider myself a representation of the Latinx people who don’t see themselves fitting into either realm, based on a host of factors,” he notes. “I’m happy to be a symbol of diversity within the Latinx spectrum. It makes me appreciate my culture even more.”



For more info, visit montrosecenter.org and thecaucus.org.

Morena Roas

**Musician
and Producer**

By MARENE GUSTIN

Morena Roas is a multi-cultural, multi-talented artist. The native Houstonian identifies as queer, Black, and Puerto Rican, and her perspectives all shine through in her music. The tunes she grew up listening to were bilingual. “It wasn’t just hip hop, but Spanish and Black,” Roas notes. “I’m a combination of it all. Latin, jazz, hip hop. I sing, I rap, and I might just go out and do the Cumbia!”

Roas has been performing live, hosting events and weekly shows, and competing in local singing competitions for years. But she also has a presence in Brazil that includes performances in clubs and LGBTQ festivals.

“I love Brazil,” Roas says. “I’d be there right now if I wasn’t afraid to travel. When I’m rich, I’ll have a home in Brazil, Puerto Rico, and in Houston.”

Other than curtailing her travel plans, the pandemic hasn’t done much to slow Roas down. She’s performed streaming sets featuring earlier songs such as “Molly Where You At?” and last November dropped the new single “Next To Ya” on streaming platforms. “That was my feel-good song,” she says. “An easygoing one.” She followed that with the grittier hip-hop song “Gangsta Vampire” in January.

“[Keeping ‘vampire’ hours] is just my life—late nights [and] bartenders. You’ll get bit if you wake me up in the morning,” she laughs. “But it’s also just a cool name.”

The music video for “Gangsta Vampire” was choreographed by the talented Mike Baerga, and is the first single being released

under Roas’ new record label, Mollynation Records, where she plans to bring together Houston-based artists as a thank-you for their support.

“I’m an independent artist,” Roas says. “And I support all artists. We all have to support each other.”

Right now, she’s finishing a live album and putting on some shows around town. But she misses the synergy of working with other artists.

“I was really looking forward to my Discov-

ery Green debut with Las Fenix [this month],” she says. “But it’s been postponed again because of COVID.”

One of the women in the group contracted COVID-19, and although all are well and recovering, one of the women is pregnant, so the band decided to take time off from public events. The downtown park concert has been rescheduled for May 5, 2022.



Follow Roas’ work at morenaroas.com.



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Evocative Imagery

Artist **Martine Gutierrez** uses her latest exhibit to deconstruct social norms.

By JENNY BLOCK

A

rtist Martine Gutierrez has what some might call Peter Pan syndrome. “I wanted to stay a kid forever,” she admits. “I never planned on growing up.”

But grow up she did, and the art world became a better place because of her work.

Gutierrez, 32, is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design who currently lives and works in Brooklyn. As an influential and controversial performance artist who works in a variety of experimental media, she often serves as her own subject and muse—all in the name of “documenting her personal metamorphosis into various imagined roles.”

Houstonians can take in Gutierrez’ latest exhibit *Martine Gutierrez: Radiant Cut* at the UH Blaffer Art Museum through October 24. The exhibit is somewhat of a micro-survey of the artist’s work, in which she explores both personal and collective identities. As a nonbinary transgender woman, she is very interested in the fluidity of relationships and the role that gender plays within them.

Utilizing mannequins as her counterparts, she seeks to explore “the diverse narratives of intimacy.” There is an interchange between her life-sized backdrops and props that inspires a dialogue about reality. The tension and conflict all come from the interplay between the art and the viewer. This exchange invites a discourse “that requires the viewer to question his/her/their own perceptions of sex, gender, and social groups,”

she explains.

Gutierrez’ career began with a series in which mannequins and sex dolls were positioned as idealized partners and surrogates, “circulating in an uncanny space of mimicry, desire, and plastic intimacy.” That series informed her subsequent work and infused it with a sense of curiosity and depth that goes beyond what the viewer sees at first glance.

Viewers who take the time to absorb her work will leave changed. The art is enthralling,

dangerously evocative, and revealing in important and powerful ways. Gutierrez poses both the questions and the answers, but neither can be revealed without viewer engagement. She is an artist who simply serves as a conduit for the art, and she tries not to define it. “Defining anything seems to put an end to its possibility,” she says.

Her work does indeed defy easy definitions. It is powerful, raw, and unflinching—denying viewers any opportunity for excuses. “But

what about?...” “But not all...” “But isn’t it possible?...” Such doubts are batted away before there is even a chance for baseless criticism. What she sees and what she believes cannot be ignored.

Gutierrez’ other recent exhibitions include *Disturbing Innocence* at the FLAG Art Foundation, *About Face: Self-Portraiture in Contemporary Art* at Dartmouth College’s Hood Museum of Art (where her work also resides in the permanent collection), and *hummannequin*, a solo exhibition at the Anna Marra Contemporanea gallery in Rome.

In 2016, Gutierrez showed in two solo exhibitions: *True Story* at Boston University, and *WE&THEM&ME* at the Contemporary Art Museum in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her work was also featured on a public billboard campaign throughout New York City while she was in residence at the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in Brooklyn.

A project entitled *Martine Jeans* was created in collaboration with the New York Community Trust, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and the New York State Council on the Arts. →



Martine Gutierrez, 2021



Martine Gutierrez, *Body En Thrall*, page 113 of *Indigenous Woman*, 2018.
© Martine Gutierrez; courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.



Martine Gutierrez, *Line Up 6*, 2014. © Martine Gutierrez; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.

Gutierrez is also a published musician and producer. Her first unreleased single, “Hands Up,” was selected by Saint Laurent Paris for their Cruise Collection 2012 video editorial. Her music has been featured by other fashion houses as well, including Christian Dior and Acne Studios.

Her photos, performances, and videos all serve to deconstruct “glittery conventions of fashion, beauty, advertising, and glamour.” She also explores how “sexuality and style are constructed and propagated in popular media—from clothing lines and cosmetics to perfume, haute couture, and music videos.”

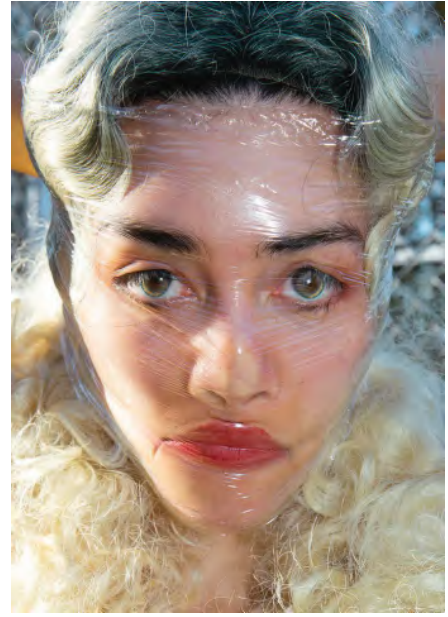
Gutierrez also wants to compel a re-invention of gender, race, and identity “by translating her Mayan heritage and Guatemalan-American ethnicity into an evocative platform to (re)discover, embellish, and amplify bodies ‘outside of the binary.’” She finds inspiration in ancient Aztec deities that embody historical models of duality and gender fluidity.

Her most ambitious project to date is the 128-page glossy magazine called *Indigenous*

“ARTISTS HAVE BEEN CULTURAL INFLUENCERS SINCE THE BEGINNING. TECHNIQUE AND AESTHETIC ARE OPINIONS OF THE VENUE—A VENUE WHERE NOTHING IS TRULY FORBIDDEN—A CRADLE OF SPECTACLE, SCANDAL, AND INTROSPECTION.”

—Martine Gutierrez

Woman, in which a kaleidoscopic inventory of fashion-model personas blooms not like flowers, but like weeds that are too pretty to poison. For that project, she assumed the roles of model, stylist, photographer, art director, advertiser, writer, and editor-in-chief. In a manner reminiscent of Andy Warhol’s *Inter-*



Martine Gutierrez, *Plastics, Dahlia*, 2020. © Martine Gutierrez; courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.

view magazine, Gutierrez’ *Indigenous Woman* combines a fictional high-fashion marketing campaign with transgressive satire and swelling post-colonial confrontation.

Her *Radiant Cut* exhibit at the Blaffer Art Museum looks unflinchingly at self-identity and the social constructs that bind us. The show is equal parts stark, revelatory, and revolutionary. It’s a powerful thing to have your preconceived notions shattered by an artist’s truth-telling. Gutierrez tells the truth.

In a world that seems to be on fire and gathering speed at every turn, art may be the one thing that can save us. “Artists have been cultural influencers since the beginning,” she emphasizes. “Technique and aesthetic are opinions of the venue—a venue where nothing is truly forbidden—a cradle of spectacle, scandal, and introspection. Fashion magazines, the music industry, and Hollywood all take from art, because ‘the mainstream’ is pre-chewed. It’s the constant update of what was previously taboo.”

Gutierrez concludes with a specific piece of advice that couldn’t be any simpler—and more revolutionary. “Try everything once. Everything.”

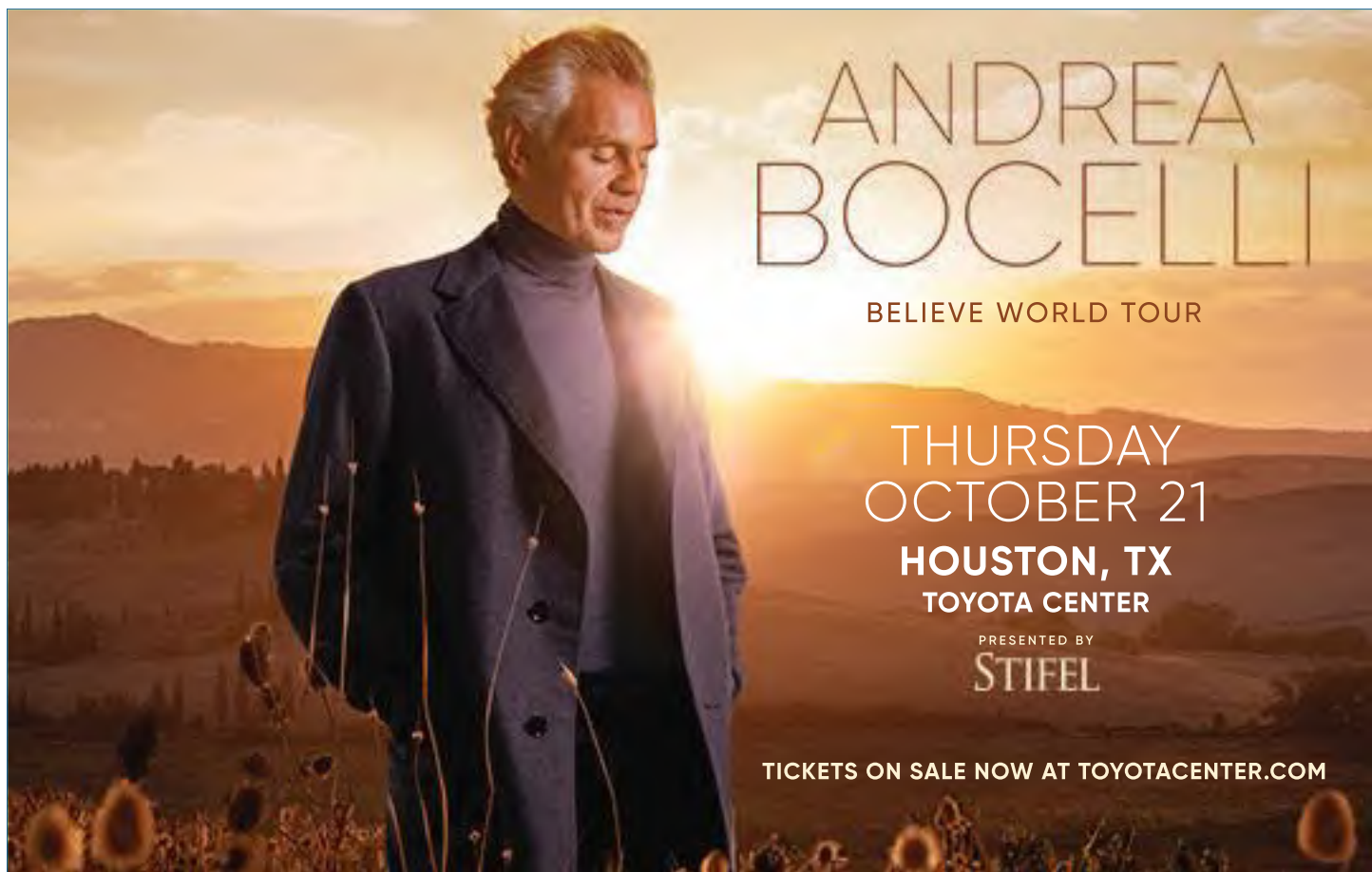
What: Martine Gutierrez: *Radiant Cut*

When: Through October 24

Where: Blaffer Art Museum at the

University of Houston, 4173 Elgin Street

Info: blafferartmuseum.org/martine-gutierrez



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FALL 2021 STAGE & THEATER PREVIEW



It has been a year and a half since we've been to the theater. With few exceptions, we've had to endure Theater-in-the-Zoom, which isn't theater (nor even very good television). But the directors got to put on a show, the actors got to act, and everyone made the best of a horrible situation.

That's about to change. While the

pandemic still rages, theater companies have planned a fall season and were rehearsing in mid-August. Safety precautions are unsettled, and nobody knows if audiences will be masked, distanced, or otherwise restricted. We've sorely missed theater, and we pray to the theater gods that this fall season is a renaissance for Houston theater. Glad to have you back where you belong.

By D.L. GROOVER

MY FAIR LADY

September 14–19

Broadway at the Hobby
thehobbycener.org



Forget *Hamilton* and *Wicked*—the greatest Broadway musical comedy is Frederick Loewe and Alan J. Lerner's Edwardian-era-encrusted *My Fair Lady*. Overstuffed with sparkling songs and the best lyrics this side of Sondheim, *Lady* has it all. Add to it luscious costumes, elegant sets, and iconic characters, and it's all there to be devoured like the high tea it is. This new production is the distinguished Lincoln Center revival directed by Bartlett Sher that won rapturous reviews. She's only here for six days, so go and be entranced. You'll feel like you could have danced all night.



MARGARET ALKEE JUBILEE OF DANCE

September 30–October 3

Houston Ballet
houstonballet.org

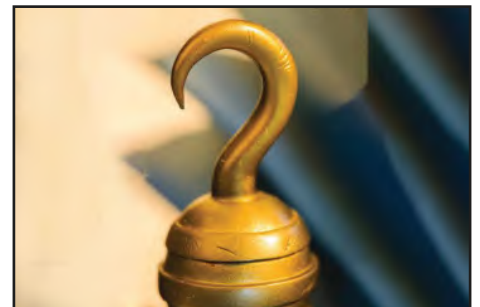
For Houston balletomanes, there's nothing more anticipated than the company's annual *Jubilee of Dance*. It's a grand smorgasbord, utilizing the entire company performing excerpts of future works in the coming season while showcasing the incredible depth of their dancers. The company, never less than exceptional, shines in this exemplary overview which will include artistic director Stanton Welch's live-action adaptation of his buoyant video production of *In Good Company*, and samples from his phenomenal *Divergence*. The program also

celebrates principal dancer/choreographer Melody Minetti's 20th year with the company. Among her numerous starring roles, her indelible interpretation of France's doomed queen in Welch's *Marie* defines her passionate, all-out dancing. The *Jubilee of Dance* is always an unforgettable night at the ballet.

HOOK'S TALE

October 1–17

Stages Houston
stageshouston.com



As a kid, I used to run around the house in a long bathrobe with a coat hanger for an arm, playing my favorite Disney character, Captain Hook. Playwright John Leonard Pielmeier (*Agnes of God*) has unearthed the pirate's lost

journal, where he writes about that egotistic whippersnapper Pan and his motley Neverland crew. In this one-man show, Donald Corren (who played Bobby Riggs in *Balls*) gets to strut and slow-burn as Barrie's immortal buccaneer.

SWEAT

October 1–24

Alley Theatre
alleytheatre.org



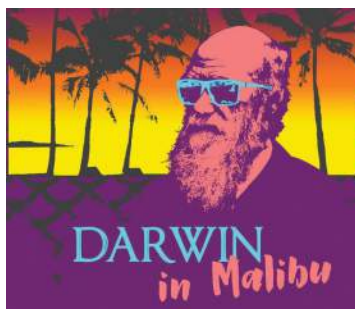
LYNN LANE

Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer prize-winner about steel workers in hardscrabble Reading, Pennsylvania, is hard-boiled, gritty, photo-realistic, and lyrical. These nine lives gather at the local bar and grouse about their fate, their country, each other, and their dead-end jobs. They all have stories to tell, fights to pick, and unburied jealousies. There are narratives and flights of remembrance about their young lives that held so much hope. This is contemporary kitchen-sink drama—earthy, and packing a relatable gut punch.

DARWIN IN MALIBU

October 2–24

Main Street Theater
mainstreettheater.com



What if evolutionist Charles Darwin lived in a beach house on Malibu and “met cute” agnostic anthropologist Thomas Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce, an ardent critic of Darwinism? The conundrum of science versus heart weaves through this witty and incisive play, a riff of sorts on the famous 1860 Huxley and Wilberforce debate over Darwin's newly published *On*

the Origin of Species. London critics hailed it as “a hoot and a half” and “exceptionally spry,” but we'll have to judge for ourselves.

ROCK OF AGES

October 5–17

Theatre Under The Stars' Hobby Center
tuts.com



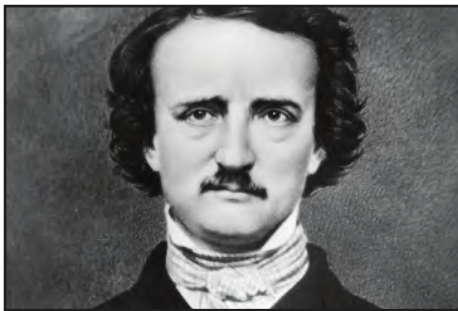
LAURA HAGEN

1980s Sunset Strip rock venue The Bourbon Room is slated for demolition. Sweet, horny rock mavens sit around and do nothing while sweet, young ingénues fall in love, fall out of love, fall back in love and, miraculously, save the club. If ever a jukebox show that started off-Broadway was meant to glitter its way into the big time, this MTV glam-rock knockoff is the one. Big-hair '80s glam rock screams into Houston, and if you wanna scream, too, here's the show where you're encouraged to do it.

NEVERMORE: THE TALES OF EDGAR ALLEN POE

October 6–17

Classical Theatre Company
classicaltheatre.org



What better way to celebrate Halloween than with the classic stories of Edgar Allan Poe? No copyright issues, no diva writers breathing down your neck, no distant relatives defending their dearly beloved's work as if it were set in concrete. The scares include *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *William Wilson*, and *The Raven*. With artistic director John Johnston's affinity for classic texts, Poe will be in nifty hands.

DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE

October 6–24

A.D. Players
adplayers.org



Here's Ken Ludwig's latest: a two-actor love story about his parents, set around the letters they wrote to each other while medic dad was fighting in World War II and mom was battling Broadway as an aspiring actress. The epistolary play—somewhat like A.R. Gurney's *Love Letters*—details the couple's trials, tribulations, and deepening love. We know it's going to end well, but the final clinch will no doubt trigger copious tears. Ludwig will probably win another Tony.

A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2

October 14–November 6

4th Wall Theatre Company
4thwalltheatreco.com



Belittled but beloved, wife Nora Helmer walks out on her husband and family at the end of Ibsen's classic and slams the door on 19th-century theater. It's the most significant sound effect ever. Lucas Hnath reimagines what would happen if she returned home 15 years later. Has she found herself? Is she liberated? Is she free? Does she still love Torvald? The turn-of-the-last-century has never seemed so contemporary. →

72 MILES TO GO

October 15–November 14

Alley Theatre
alleytheatre.org



When you think about it, 72 miles isn't all that far. For Billy and Anita, it's a world away. Anita is in Mexico waiting for the word that she can rejoin her family. Son Christian, brought here when he was a baby, doesn't speak Spanish, and his teen sister Eva and brother Aaron are finding it hard to keep their American dream alive. Billy holds the family together as best he can, holding romantic dinners for Anita over the phone. With the threat of deportation swirling constantly, this is hot-button relevance at its best.

THE REVOLUTIONISTS

October 22–November 6

Dirt Dogs Theatre Company at MATCH
dirtdogstheatre.org



Playwright Lauren Gunderson (*Miss Bennet*, *Silent Sky*) shakes up the male-dominated French Revolution with equal parts humor and tragedy in this distaff dissection during the bloody Reign of Terror. Olympe de Gouges pens her feminist pamphlets, Charlotte Corday plots the death of Marat, and doomed, whiny Marie Antoinette can't quite comprehend why anyone would want to chop off her head. "I need better press," she demands from Olympe in this wondrously skewed view of women and power.

CARMEN

October 22–November 7

Houston Grand Opera
Wortham Theater Center
HGO.org



If you've never been to the opera, Georges Bizet's insanely sexy *Carmen* is the one to see. It shocked even the unshockable French at its premiere. No matter how many times we have seen Carmen destroy her lover, get another, and die at the hand of her ex, she is the epitome of modern. The opera is ever-fresh, sparkling with the heat of Seville, gypsy encampments, bullfights, and a will to love unfettered by convention. You wouldn't bring Carmen home to meet your mother, but she wouldn't care.



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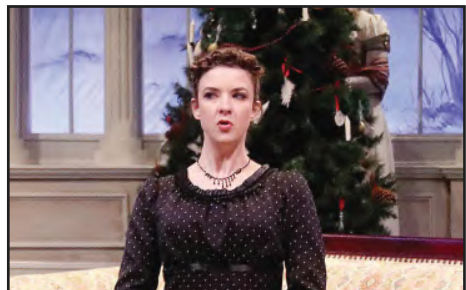
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MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLY

November 20–December 19

Main Street Theater
mainstreettheater.com



PINLIM / FOREST PHOTOGRAPHY

Main Street has found a pleasant niche in the holiday trade with its *Pride and Prejudice* sequels *Miss Bennet* and *The Wickhams*. In only a few years, Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon's *Miss Bennet* has become one of the most produced plays in the United States. It's full of grace, woman-power, and Regency attitude. This is middle daughter Mary's story, really—the unwed, bookish Bennet who finds her soulmate in the unimpressive (at first glance) Arthur. A match made in Old Hollywood heaven.

THE NUTCRACKER

November 26–December 24

Houston Ballet
Wortham Theater Center
houstonballet.org



ANITAVA SARKAR

Put Tchaikovsky's gloriously shimmering score under the dazzle of Broadway and the spectacle of Cecil B. DeMille, and you have Stanton Welch's mind-blowing adaptation of this classic Christmas ballet. It's an eye-popper, with intricate choreography that's as crisp and sharp as an icicle. Kids of all ages will be mesmerized.

THE SNOWY DAY

December 9–19

Houston Grand Opera
Wortham Theater Center
HGO.org



In its perennial quest to find the perfect Christmas opera to rival Alley Theatre's *A Christmas Carol* and Houston Ballet's *Nutcracker*, Houston Grand Opera has had a hard time of it. Except for Menotti's radiant fable *Amahl and the Night Visitors*—a sublime yuletide work for all ages, there hasn't yet been an original, family-friendly holiday opera. This season's entrant is a world premiere by composer Joel Thompson and librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney, adapted from the Caldecott-winning children's book *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats. Thompson and Pinkney have labored to keep our interest by adding characters to pad out the slim book. HGO studio artist Raven McMillon sings the pivotal role of Peter, the opera's innocent snow catcher. ▼

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Broadway Returns to Houston

Out@TUTS is a musical-theater lover's dream.

By SAM BYRD

Photo by GAVIN CALAIS

All the world is a stage, as they say, but Houstonians don't need to travel the globe to see great musical theater. Houston is home to Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS), one of the most fabulous musical-theater gems in the region. And the company has saved a spot for LGBTQ friends and family, so dust off the spectacles and don the tux (or business casual, if that's more your vibe), because Out@TUTS is the place to see and "be scene" on this fall's theater circuit.

After the curtain goes down on each second Thursday of a TUTS mainstage show, the party continues with free bites, drink specials, and live music—all hosted by the Broadway Beauty of Texas, Regina Thorne-DuBois. Patrons who attend that Thursday show are invited to the Diana American Grill (located inside Hobby Center) to mingle with the cast and crew members, sing a few show tunes, and celebrate the show.

Thorne-DuBois says there is no better place for theater lovers to find their tribe.

"Out@TUTS brings together members of the community who have a love for musical theater. These are people who want to sit and talk about the show with others who have just experienced the show," she says. "Plus, cast members join the event and will mingle. Sometimes they'll get up and sing. It's an after-party, it's an unofficial meet-and-greet with the cast, and it's an all-around good time."

TUTS, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, has made history by introducing some of Broadway's most memorable moments, including the original staging of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. TUTS also developed *Jekyll & Hyde* in partnership with the Alley Theatre.

This coming season promises even more conversation-starters and show-stopping moments. Audience-development manager Elizabeth England describes the season as "a rollercoaster of experiences. You've got rock and roll, gospel, shows that are perfect for the family, old-school classics that will please ev-



Out@TUTS host Regina Thorne-DuBois

everyone, shows that will fill your heart, and we end with a rowdy time for the generation who grew up on Oldies music. This is the season that has something for everyone."

Here's the full breakdown:

Rock of Ages (Oct. 5–17)

Featuring the music of hit '80s bands including REO Speedwagon, Pat Benatar, Twisted Sister, Bon Jovi, Styx, and Journey, this musical comedy was nominated for five Tony Awards,

including Best Musical. Set at the end of the 1980s in one of the Sunset Strip's last legendary venues, this show packs action, comedy, drama, and romance into one "hair band"-filled night of unforgettable fun.

Sister Act (Nov. 2–14)

When disco diva Deloris Van Cartier witnesses a murder, she is placed in protective custody in the one place the cops are sure she won't be found: a convent. Disguised as a nun, she finds →



herself at odds with both the rigid lifestyle and the uptight Mother Superior as she breathes new life into the church and the community. But in doing so, Deloris blows her cover. Can she find saving grace, or is it curtains for her career and her life?

Disney's The Little Mermaid (Dec. 7–24)

Take a trip under the sea with Ariel and her collection of animal friends. As King Triton's youngest daughter, Ariel wishes to pursue the human Prince Eric in the world above, bargaining with the evil sea witch, Ursula, to trade her tail for legs. But the bargain is not what it seems, and Ariel needs the help of her colorful friends to find true love.

**"THIS IS THE SEASON
THAT HAS SOMETHING
FOR EVERYONE."**

—Elizabeth England

South Pacific (Feb. 8–20)

More timely than ever, this Rodgers and Hammerstein landmark musical proves that even the backdrop of a tropical paradise cannot shelter its residents from the prejudices of World War II. *South Pacific* is the winner of the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and 10 Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

Come from Away (March 22–April 3)

This show takes audiences into the heart of the remarkable true story of 7,000 stranded passengers and the small town in Newfoundland that welcomed them during the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Cultures clashed and nerves ran high, but uneasiness turned into



Elizabeth England,
TUTS audience-development manager

trust, music soared into the night, and gratitude grew into enduring friendships.

Jersey Boys (May 10–22)

They were just four guys from Jersey—until they sang their very first note. They had a sound nobody had ever heard and radio audiences just couldn't get enough of. But while their harmonies were perfect onstage, offstage it was a very different story—a story that has made them an international sensation all over again.

Out@TUTS is a musical after-party for LGBTQ theater fans. The event is hosted by local drag entertainer Regina Thorne-DuBois.

"I would say that at its core, the next season (and the next round at Out@TUTS) is almost a 'welcome back' season and experience," Thorne-DuBois says. "There are so many people who have come out of this year-and-a-half drought of tangible art, and how better to celebrate than in the post-show glow in a room full of theater lovers? That's what I'm most excited about, and what I hope people bring to this season and to Out@TUTS. If you haven't attended before, this is the year to start doing it because the joy and levity you feel is something you won't be able to get again for a long time. If 2020 was good for anything, it was to kickstart an artistic renaissance for all of us."



Out@TUTS takes place after the second Thursday performance of each show at Diana American Grill, located inside the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bagby Street. Individual show tickets start at \$40, packages of three or more shows start at \$99, and packages of six shows start at \$198. Information: tuts.com or 713-558-8887.



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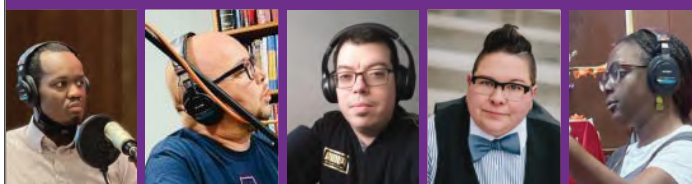
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OUTSMART introduces you to eight **QUEER CREATIVES** who enliven the local arts scene. First, meet **MAGEN PASTOR**, a gallery owner who uses her platform to uplift femxle artists. Then get to know painter **EDGAR MEDINA**, whose work is a synthesis of his Mexican and American cultures. Comedian **BOB MORRISSEY** and burlesque performer **TIFA TITTLYWINKS** use their humor and performance skills to entertain us, while photographer and rapper **EMILIO COOCHIE** uses his images and sounds to make waves nationally.

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Committed Curator

Gallery owner **Magen Pastor** empowers femxle artists.

By JENNY BLOCK

Photo by AMA BY AISHA



The pandemic has canceled, postponed, and crushed so many things—from events to businesses to relationships. But one thing it simply can't destroy is art.

In fact, in some ways, art has flourished as artists find new ways to connect that don't involve live audiences. Ballerinas pirouetting in their apartments, musicians turning their closets into sound studios, actors taking their talents to TikTok, and painters creating beauty out of despair wherever they can.

Then there are the organizers, promoters, and curators who transport us virtually to the artists, assuring that we don't miss even a drop of the magic being crafted. Magen Pastor, 34, is one of those pied pipers.

Originally from Tomball, Pastor claims H-Town as her own. "Houston is my home state, and where I started my first all-femxle art gallery pop-up," she says. The word 'femxle' and 'womxn' appear frequently in Pastor's writing, as they avoid the suffix "man" and help "recognize womanhood in a more gender-inclusive way."

Growing up, Pastor wanted to be a fashion designer. So she attended the Fashion Institute

of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles for product development, and worked for *Project Runway* winner Chloe Dao in Houston after she graduated.

But instead of fashion, it was the art world that ended up capturing Pastor's heart.

"I grew up around chickens and clay," Pastor says, noting that her mother is an artist and ceramicist. "When I was a kid, she would tell me there are no mistakes in art—a theme I took with me throughout my life. [After] growing up around femxl artists, I realized I could use my marketing background to really elevate their work. So I took a year to really figure out how I could be of service to them. Then I got an opportunity to host a pop-up during one of the craziest times in the world—the pandemic."

Pastor's first pop-up art gallery in Rice Village, which she named Inside Her Studio, was dedicated to showcasing the work of female-identifying individuals. The late-2020 endeavor was so successful that she decided to take the concept on the road. Her latest pop-up is in Denver, where she now lives with her fiancée, artist Laura Goodson.

Goodson was raised in Southwest Texas, not far from the Mexico border. "I started painting to capture the heart of my part-

ner, and I continue to paint to liberate my soul. My work is a modern representation of Americana/Western figures of the past, and occasionally their unforgiving landscapes," she explains.

Bold hat-wearing cowboys, bandits, and outlaws dominate her monochromatic work, with its single brush strokes and hard shadowing to emphasize physical pain and grit. Goodson's artwork is now available on Pastor's Inside Her Studio website.

Pastor proposed to Goodson last year (before the pandemic lockdown) at an art show. "We had this group piece that was in a show. It was based off of our love story, so I thought it was the perfect time to surprise Laura and ask her to marry me! She was so stunned—we had been so busy with art shows and holiday travel that she had no idea," Pastor recalls.

Helping womxn create self-sustaining careers with digital galleries for online sales is the primary focus of Pastor's work. "I help businesses create and support their community by producing in-person pop-ups and curated art walks. You can define my niche as 'a business marketing consultant for femxle artists and brands looking to create community.'"

Pastor is also the mother of twin girls and serves as the brand manager for Vivian Pastor Art and Laura Goodson Art. And she owns and manages an Airbnb rental property in Uvalde County, Texas, called Hat Hill Hideaway.

With pandemic restrictions still in flux, Pastor believes that art continues to be more critical than ever. "In a world that has become so fast, art creates a space where you can pause for a few minutes a day to just take in a big, deep breath and stare. Art really makes a home feel warm—and in a time where everyone is working from home, that's become so crucial."

If Pastor had one wish when it comes to art, it would be for people to stop buying art from craft stores. "Either pick up a brush or buy from a local artist in your community! You can find local art in all different price ranges. I'll always have a digital gallery, so you can go to insideherstudio.com to find a femxle artist to support."



Laura Goodson's *I Will be Damned* is one of her latest pieces. The artist's work is available at Inside Her Studio.



For more info, visit insideherstudio.com.



**"AFTER GROWING UP
AROUND FEMXLE ARTISTS,
I REALIZED I COULD USE
MY MARKETING
BACKGROUND TO REALLY
ELEVATE THEIR WORK."**

—Magen Pastor

Inside the Artist's Studio

Gay painter **Edgar Medina** folds color and culture into his works.

By **SAM BYRD**
Photo by **EDGAR MEDINA**

Ever since childhood, Edgar Medina was always a creative person. Like most children, he loved coloring books and watercolors—a passion that eventually prompted him to take art classes in high school. But upon graduation, he didn't see art as something that he could do for a living.

"I took trade classes to become a dental assistant, and did that for about seven years," he says. But he couldn't deny the pull toward his creative side. "I wanted to do something with art. It's always been my passion, but I didn't know where to start or what to do. I didn't know I could make it a successful career until [I left my dental job]."

He enrolled in classes at the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as well as at Houston Community College, and began the trek toward fulfilling his dream.

"I reduced my work hours to part time because I was showing my art in different places. It became overwhelming to create art, sell the art, and make a living while also taking classes. So I left school to pursue what became my full-time passion, which is painting," he explains.

And he's never looked back. Thirteen years into this endeavor, he is busy running an art studio and building up a dedicated client base.

Medina's paintings are considered "contemporary abstracts"—expressive, full of bold color and energy, and inspirational. He has created multiple series of paintings, each with a different vision and infused with positive messages that encourage a belief in oneself. Collectors are especially drawn to his abstracts after he explains his inspiration and message behind each piece.

"I like to think of my work as a fusion of my two cultures. I grew up in Mexico, and I get inspired by my culture for the colors in my works. When you think of Mexico, everything is very bright. The abstract part of my work comes from the United States—very bold, hopeful,

and inspiring," he notes.

Medina finds the creative spark for his art everywhere, with sunsets, oceans, and landscapes being particularly helpful in getting his creative juices flowing. "Every time I travel somewhere new, I take pictures as inspiration for future works. Or when I'm out and about, I take a photo of something random like a graffiti wall or the Houston skyline."

Medina reviews those photos and mental images whenever he starts a new painting. He reviews the colors from the images to start building the palette, and then takes an organic approach by letting the paintbrush and the hues direct his next moves.

"I LIKE TO THINK OF MY WORK AS A FUSION OF MY TWO CULTURES. I GREW UP IN MEXICO, AND I GET INSPIRED BY MY CULTURE FOR THE COLORS IN MY WORKS. THE ABSTRACT PART OF MY WORK COMES FROM THE UNITED STATES."

—Edgar Medina

That successful method can be seen in three series of paintings he's currently working on, as well as in his artwork on display around town at the JW Marriott Houston Downtown, the Westin Houston Medical Center, Texas Children's Hospital, and the Susan and Faye Sarofim Pavilion at Memorial Hermann in the Texas Medical Center. He's also shown works at art festivals in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, and Santa Fe. He recently held a show at the Mexican consulate in Houston.

In addition to painting commissioned

pieces, Medina does live-painting sessions at charity events, where he typically completes a painting in under three hours so it can be auctioned. "Live paintings are a lot of fun. I don't know how I do it—I wish I painted that fast in the studio! It's fun to create art in front of people. It gives me more energy, and I'm there for a purpose. I tell myself I have to finish because the painting is going to raise money for an organization."

In spite of the deadline pressure at those charity events, he enjoys mingling with gala attendees during the process because those people sometimes become his clients.

Giving back to the community is indeed one of Medina's core values, and the reason he is so excited about a current project with the Make-A-Wish Foundation of America. "I'm granting a wish for a little girl who is in remission from cancer. Her only wish was to take art classes from a successful artist so that she can learn and hopefully have a show in the future. I'm teaching her art and the basics, and we'll probably have a show involving her work very soon," he says.

He's also working on a new art show that he has titled Resilience. "It's something I've been thinking about this last year, with what we've all been through. I'm inspired for the show because I feel like all our feelings are out there right now. We're going through so many emotions. This will be mostly about the feelings we go through in life and in our journey—and just because you're having a bad moment doesn't mean that it will ruin your next day. Sometimes you must struggle in order to realize how strong you really are. That's the inspiration for the show."

Medina also wants to show his works in other parts of the world. "Maybe my first goal should be to bring my work to my home country. Hopefully my recent partnership with the Mexican consulate will open those doors," he concludes.



For more info, visit medinaedgar.com and nativecitizen.com



Charismatic Comedian

Bob Morrissey pushes boundaries with his sardonic sense of humor.

By CONNOR BEHRENS



No matter what comes his way, comedian Bob Morrissey has always tried to find the humor in life.

"I have always loved laughing," he says. "It draws me out of my shell. I

think my favorite quality in someone is a sense of humor."

Morrissey, who moved to Houston from Chicago in 2004 after being discharged from the Army, has had a knack for comedy for as long as he can remember.

"Comedy is something I have always had a passion for. I always wanted to be a comedian, but I did not start until I was 32. For the last nine years, I have been trying to make up for lost time by putting myself out there as much as possible."

Currently, Morrissey fills The Secret Group comedy club with laughter during the biweekly Comedy Bath House shows he co-hosts.



"I believe the funniest jokes come from the darkest places," he says regarding his Comedy Bath House appearances. "The things you cry about or are afraid of make you laugh the most. I regularly make jokes about being deployed in the Army, my sexual experiences—stuff like that."

While Morrissey frequently mentions his sexuality, he does not classify his humor as gay-centric.

"Yes, being gay is very central to my act. It is something I always talk about. However, I do not think I [target] gay audiences or just do gay comedy. I try to create comedy that anyone can laugh at."

Morrissey has also started producing a regular podcast titled *The Healing Club*, where listeners can get to know a different side of the comic.

"On the podcast, it is not always comedy-related," he explains. "I talk about my real-life experiences. The podcast is sort of a way to bring attention to the entertainment and art community in Houston—all of my friends that I have met."

The podcast is also a way for Morrissey to share his writings, diary entries, and life experiences. "I think that is one thing that

separates it from other podcasts. Some episodes are improv-based comedy. But it is a lot of things. I talk about books that I am reading, and just life overall.

"I try to just have as much fun as possible talking to friends. [That is how] I can give cool insights into the Houston comedy scene. I try to include as many voices from the Houston comedy and art scene as possible."

When asked about his career ambitions, Morrissey is quick to point out that he is not trying to get famous with his comedy performances or his podcast.

"The goal is just to have fun, whether I am doing standup or podcasting," he says. "I am not too focused on getting famous. That ambition is important to me, but if I was too focused on that, I would not have any fun on a day-to-day basis."

In Morrissey's eyes, the Houston comedy scene is special. Several comedians from the area have made it big—most notably *SNL*'s Andrew Dismukes, Comedy Central's Matthew Broussard and *The Daily Show*'s Ashton Womack, all of whom Morrissey used to hang out and perform with.

As Morrissey describes it, Houstonians have a sardonic sense of humor, full of roasting

and edginess.

"Houston is a great place to start your comedy career, but you have to have tough skin to make it. There is a brutal honesty to the comic scene here that separates Houston from other cities across the country."

Morrissey truly appreciates performing in Houston, mostly due to the distinct melting-pot nature of the population.

"There are no barriers between Latino comics, lady comics, gay comics," he notes. "We all work together, and that is what makes Houston unique."

Now, more than ever, people need comedy in their lives. Because of the pandemic, people want to be engaged and get out of the house to be entertained.

"People have always enjoyed comedy. It is available in such vast quantities these days. I think comedy is exploding right now because it is so easy to put together and produce. I cannot imagine a world without comedy and people having fun together."

 Listen to Bob Morrissey's *The Healing Club* podcast on Spotify and Apple Music, and get tickets to his Comedy Bath House shows at <https://tinyurl.com/5s4x2csw>



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Sensational Showgirl

Tifa Tittlywinks shares the art of burlesque in Houston and beyond.

By JENNY BLOCK

Photo by PENLAND PICKUPS

Burlesque performer and instructor Tifa Tittlywinks, 37, is a true force to be reckoned with. The Montrose resident is as talented and driven as they come, and she's doing her part to make burlesque a household word in Texas.

Tittlywinks is a multiple-award-winning performer, producer, and artist, as well as the owner of Dem Damn Dames Burlesque, which is Houston's longest-running and largest monthly burlesque show. She's also the owner and lead instructor of Houston's biggest burlesque studio, Madame Fantastick's Burlesque School, and she recently became the executive producer of Texas Star Burlesque in Dallas.

She identifies as "100 percent queer and pansexual, if I have to define my outward preferences."

Penland
Pickups

A native of Indianapolis, Tittlywinks has been dancing since the age of three. She has performed with the Indianapolis Dance Company, the Greg Hancock Dance Theater, and has choreographed for the Carmel Community Players in Indianapolis, where she won two awards for outstanding choreography.

She performed at the Burlesque Hall of Fame in Las Vegas in 2016 and 2018. She headlined both the Edmonton Burlesque Festival in 2017 and the Southwest Burlesque Showcase in 2018. She has hosted and been a featured performer at the Asheville, North Carolina ABSFest, and her performances and full-length productions have been featured in a number of conventions. Her performance styles range from vaudevillian to erotic and comic. Her highly artistic work incorporates elements of tap, jazz, bump-and-grind, and a plethora of other dance styles.

Her list of awards also includes the 2015 Future Legend of Burlesque at the San Antonio Burlesque Festival, the 2017 Most Original at the San Antonio Burlesque Festival, and the 2018 Most Comedic at the Oklahoma City Burlesque Festival.

Tittlywinks says she got into burlesque because of her love for musical theater. "I stayed in burlesque because I was tired of hearing

"BURLESQUE IS THE ONE PLACE I KNOW OF WHERE PERFORMANCE ARTISTS CAN EXPRESS THEMSELVES UNABASHEDLY."

—Tifa Tittlywinks

'No' from theater producers [who would tell me] I'm too tall, my voice is too low, I'm this, I'm that. In burlesque, I realized that harnessing the element of 'the tease' was all I had to do to liberate my creativity.

"The first show [that I choreographed] was super-cute, but horribly tragic in terms of costumes. We had no idea what we were doing. I could still wear my junior prom dress, so I took it and made it into my costume and started learning."

During the pandemic, Tittlywinks created "Cabin Fever," an opportunity for performers to perform and earn money at a time when shows were being cancelled left and right. "I am super extra-proud of that. We easily taught

over 200 people to livestream. There was no other way to make money, and we showed them how. That gave me a lot of perspective about what is next. After 11 years of being the worker and breaking down walls, it was time to build and make it bigger," she explains.

Tittlywinks is now enjoying her status as the "granddaddy," as her burlesque colleagues call her. In addition to that mentoring position, she still livestreams and also travels to perform in small towns outside of Houston. "Like a super-successful weekly show in Bryan. It's one of the first times a burlesque show has really paid the bills."

She has supported Houston's LGBTQ community however she can, "in countless ways for over a decade—Montrose Center, Hatch Youth, The Gender Book. The Houston Gendermyn have influenced me greatly."

Burlesque may seem like it's all fun and games, but Tittlywinks believes it can actually play a vital role in the arts community. "Burlesque is the one place I know of where performance artists can express themselves unabashedly. It can be political, religious, expressive, or just plain sexy. It can be anything, [but it] must be entertaining."

➡ For more info, visit damndames.com.



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An Altruistic Artist

Photographer and rapper **Emilio Coochie** uses his platform to make a difference.

By ZACH MCKENZIE



If a picture is worth a thousand words, Emilio Coochie is writing the epic novel of a lifetime. The photographer and rapper, born and raised in Houston, knows what it means to

fail and how to persevere to ultimately achieve your dreams. Today, the artist is working for Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion while also making plans to release his own collection of rap songs.

And he's just getting started with his promising career. Phoning in from a hotel room, the 28-year-old, fresh off the plane from a work trip, is energetic as he recalls how his work as a photographer began.

"My journey with photography began in the Myspace era of social media. I loved looking at the blogs and at-home photo shoots that these early social-media influencers posted," he recalls. Equipped with a Motorola Razr cell-phone camera, Coochie eventually leveled up to a digital camera suitable for photo shoots with friends in his neighborhood. "In high school I took a photojournalism class, and that was the first time I used a professional DSLR camera. I was able to check it out and take it home," the artist notes. "My senior year, my mom bought me my own camera and I started taking more pictures."



"IT TOOK A LONG TIME TO FULLY ACCEPT MYSELF AND REALLY LOVE MYSELF. I WANT TO HELP THE YOUNGER GENERATION TACKLE THAT EARLY ON—INSTILLING SELF-LOVE."

—Emilio Coochie

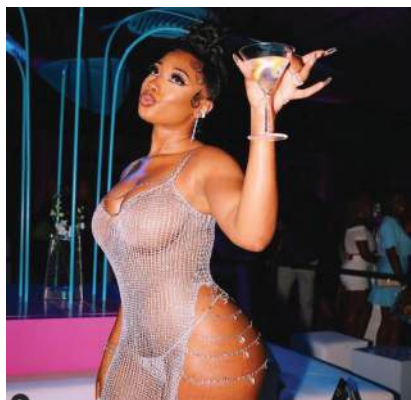
Realizing he had a knack for photography, Coochie briefly enrolled in the Art Institute of Houston. "I lasted one quarter," he says with a tone of nostalgia. "I took a photography class and completely bombed it. They wanted us to learn how to use [the camera's manual settings]. I was stubborn and only wanted to do things with the automatic settings. I thought it was so hard and confusing. That was when I decided to drop out, and I thought maybe photography wasn't for me."

But his undeniable talent with a camera kept him in the game. "Friends still reached out and asked me to shoot engagement parties

and small events. It kept me going,” he says. “Eventually I realized this is what I wanted to do. My sister bought me a photography book that was like having a friend teaching me these different techniques. I took it with me on shoots and, ironically, it taught me how to use the camera’s manual settings.”

With a catalog of hilarious TikTok videos under his belt, the creator explains how his next move was pivotal for his career. “In early 2018, I reached out to Megan Thee Stallion via Snapchat. I was a total fan of this super-fire female rapper from Houston. I got into her music immediately. I was like, ‘Hey, would you be interested in doing some behind-the-scenes content—photos, videos, blogs?’ She gave me her manager’s contact info, and within two weeks I was shooting her first blog.”

What happened next was the most lucrative use of a sick day ever. “I was working for the City of Houston municipal courthouse, and I was supposed to work the same day I was scheduled to shoot something for Megan. So I called in sick.” He soon began working for the rapper full-time. “My boss was super-understanding and supportive of my part-time gig, but I couldn’t always go with Megan because of my full-time job. She was going on tour with Meek Mill in 2019, and she told me she needed



Emilio Coochie, a self-proclaimed “stan turned camera man,” works as a photographer for Megan Thee Stallion.

me full-time. She said I needed to quit my job and we needed to go do some hot boy shit and hot girl shit.”

He credits his Houston roots for making rap a part of his life from the beginning. “In Houston, people have parties and kickbacks with their friends. Everyone is hanging out, and at the end of the night everyone just starts freestyling,” he explains. “Growing up, that’s what I did with my friends.”

Commuting downtown from Conroe also helped Coochie hone his craft. “I would listen to 97.9 FM, and they would play a lot of old rap

songs. I’d be on Snapchat and start freestyling, and people would hype me up. That was such a confirmation for me.

He describes his unique style as “playful pop-rap,” and he’s hard at work on a collection of songs that he hopes to release by his December 7 birthday. “I like to incorporate comedic shit in my music. I don’t take life too seriously, and I like to just say how I feel in the moment.”

Recent soul-searching has led the artist to examine his sexuality, and today he identifies as pansexual. “I love people for who they are, and I’m more interested in their soul and who they are as a person,” he explains.

It’s Coochie’s love for people that drives him to be a positive example for young queer kids. “I really want to be the voice and face for young gay boys. I grew up as the chubby, funny kid. It took a long time to fully accept myself and really love myself. I want to help the younger generation tackle that early on—in stilling self-love.”

He pauses briefly before summarizing his biggest ambition in life: “I want people to look at me and see that I love myself so much and they need to love themselves, too.”

 Keep up with Emilio Coochie on Instagram @emiliocoochie

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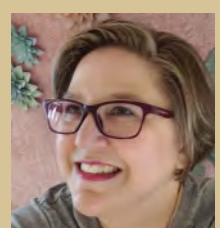




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Performers Greg Dean (l),
Abraham Zapata, and Scott Lupton

The Drama Squad Is Back

Performers **Abraham Zapata**,
Scott Lupton, and
Greg Dean prepare for another
round of pop-up theater.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Performing during a pandemic means pivoting to nontraditional platforms for most arts organizations. Ballet, opera, and symphony events have gone digital, bringing art streaming directly into people's homes. Catastrophic Theatre did them one better by bringing actual performers to folks' driveways and backyards—socially distanced, of course.

Catastrophic's Drama Squad, an intimate group of traveling performers, brought original content—dancing, puppet shows, and comedy—to backyards throughout the city. It was so popular that Catastrophic will deploy the Squad with all-new material (including a twisted clown) from September 24 through October 17. →

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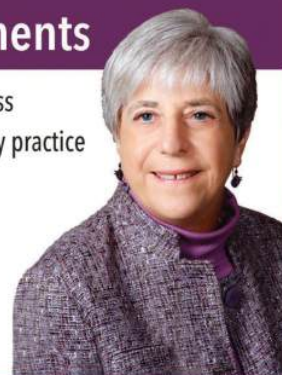
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“We are determined to make the shows accessible to more people,” says theater co-founder Tamarie Cooper, “while allowing for social distancing along with other safety protocols such as mask wearing. The shows will still be performed in outdoor spaces, but this time we are focusing on outdoor venues for up to 50 people. That will open up viewing opportunities to more people, while still maintaining the intimate nature of the show. We are currently considering some very unique outside-of-the box performance venues.”

Abraham Zapata, content creator for Drama Squad and one of the show’s three LGBTQ performers, found the experience very different than anything he’d done before. “It’s been such a rewarding and completely unique experience. As an artist, it’s been such an honor to have your work be immediately produced and performed, especially on such an intimate scale where audiences are so invested and eager to attend a performance. And it’s been challenging in that you have to so immediately adapt to the conditions of the space—someone’s yard, garden, on the curb with onlookers, in direct sunlight—you never know what the moment holds, so that makes it all the more challenging and rewarding.”

Scott Lupton, another gay performer and the Squad’s stage manager, misses Catastrophic’s in-theater experience. “Everything—the audience, the energy, the collaboration, the craftsmanship of all the technical elements, the story-telling, the music—everything!” But he still believes the traveling Drama Squad has been a godsend. “The experience thus far has been incredible! Hot, but incredible. Getting the opportunity to bring live theater to audiences is such a beautiful gift—for us, and, I believe, for the audiences we perform for.”

Out performer Greg Dean recently joined the Drama Squad for its fall tour, but he saw all the previous performances, which he likened to finding “water in the desert” during a pandemic. “Throughout almost the entirety of the pandemic, I’ve been completely absorbed by directing two films—one for The Catastrophic Theatre, and the other for Mildred’s Umbrella. Now that things have slowed down

for me, I cannot wait for that feedback loop of energy connecting performer and audience. When things are going well, it’s one of the best feelings.”

The company’s ticketing policy for its Drama Squad events is as casual as its performance venues. “All tickets will be Pay-What-You-Can,” Cooper notes. “We never want someone to miss the opportunity to see our shows because of a financial barrier.”

**“THERE’S JUST
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—Abraham Zapata

And as far as in-person theater goes, she’s optimistic. “We are hopeful it will be safe to return to our intimate indoor theater space soon, but we’ll continue to respond to the state of the pandemic as we determine programming,” she says.

Zapata is also looking forward to a return to Catastrophic’s home base. “What I miss most is the sense of community. There’s just something beautiful and wonderful about individuals from different backgrounds coming together to participate in a live, shared experience. Even the most reclusive of us enjoys a good story, and craves participating in a communal experience. I look forward to a time when we can do so again safely.”

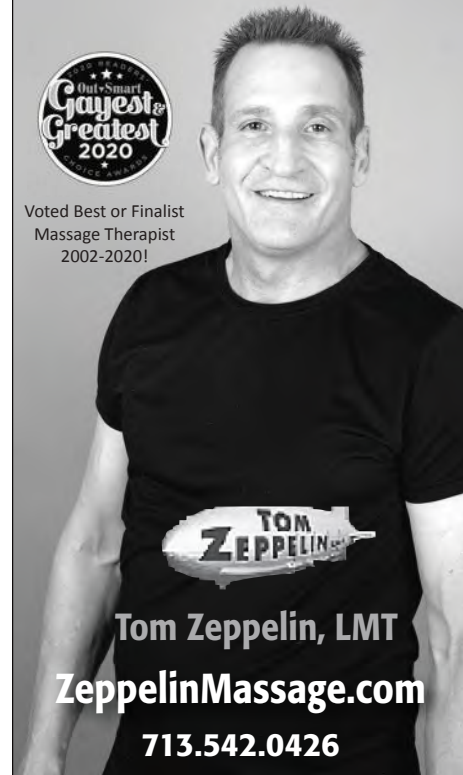


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COURTESY

‘New American’ Dining

Nobie’s offers a one-of-kind Montrose experience.

By KIM HOGSTROM | Photos by SHAWN CHIPPENDALE



Everyone enjoys impressing out-of-town guests with a visit to one of Houston’s wonderful homegrown restaurants.

The menus at these establishments usually boast of locally sourced this-or-that, and the chef/owner is typically following a lifelong dream after “working for the man” in a three-starred establishment elsewhere.

Houston has a plethora of these impressive eateries—places that have earned their “local classics” status through the test of time. A new addition to that list is Nobie’s, a five-year-old Montrose establishment that was recently named Restaurant of the Year by CultureMap Houston.

Located in an unassuming 1930s bungalow on Colquitt Street, Nobie’s offers seating for just 40 patrons. The charming windows, warm wood floors, and subtle architectural touches are original to the home and create a casually elegant impression. The U-shaped bar and banquettes complete the soft vibe.

Nobie’s is named after chef Martin Stayer’s



Nonno's Bolognese

grandmother, who is a lifelong Houstonian. “We wanted our place to be just like Nobie’s,” owner and manager Sara Stayer says. “She’s the warmest, kindest person, and an amazing host. No one is ever a stranger to Nobie.”

Sara met Martin while they were working together at a restaurant in Chicago. They soon discovered many mutual interests, including their dream to open a small, exceptional restaurant in a community that would appreciate it.

Martin trained at the Western Culinary Institute and had spent several years in the kitchens of Michelin-starred restaurants in Chicago. When he returned to his hometown of Houston in 2016, he and Sara decided it was time to pursue their dream.

Today, Sara acts as Nobie’s general manager and sommelier. She has assembled a brilliant wine list combining depth with unique varieties at affordable price points. The wines also complement Nobie’s unusual menu offerings.

And the menu is indeed uncommon; Nobie’s bills it as “New American” dining. What is that, you wonder?

“That’s the cool part,” Sara explains. “Like Americans themselves, New American dining could be anything. It can be from anywhere. We have so many wonderful influences and options to work with, particularly here in Houston.”

Martin’s menu is dedicated to the freshest, locally sourced produce, seafood, and meats available, so his 20 or 25 menu items—including the vegetarian and vegan options—are constantly changing.

A few standouts include the Octopus Garden, which the menu warns might “octopi your thoughts.” The chef marinates the octopus before it’s grilled, and serves it with Nonno’s Italian chili, crisp marinated olives, brown butter almonds, and a buttery leek soubise.

Another crowd-pleaser is a Nobie’s staple: Nonno’s Bolognese, made with “an absurd amount of love,” the menu boasts. Fresh ribbons of handmade pasta are served with Chef Stayer’s hearty, memorable, and meaty Bolognese sauce.

A favorite from day one has been the Beer Battered Sweet Tots, sweet-potato bites served over whipped goat cheese with harissa spice.

According to Sara, the average per-person tab, including a couple of drinks, runs about \$45. She adds that light dining is always an option, but Nobie’s can also accommodate more elaborate tastes.

Nobie’s wine list, bar service, and multiple dining options, available from 5 to 11 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, allows the eatery to meet a variety of needs. Special occasions and late-night imbibing are also welcomed.



Winner Winner Chicken Dinner

Another pleasing element at Nobie’s is the music drifting through the affable space. Martin has spent a lifetime collecting vinyl recordings, and he installed a special sound system that does justice to his audio treasures. No CDs or streaming here—the old-school LPs (anything from Edith Piaf to ZZ Top, Lady Gaga, and Queen) are played in their entirety.

A recent online review cleverly sums up the Nobie’s experience: “The vibe was chill, the music was remarkable, the staff was on point, and the food was phenomenal! The experience was so pleasing that I want to give it One Star—to keep it all to myself!”

So now *you* know. (Shhhh, don’t tell anyone.)



For more info: nobieshtx.com

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WEDDING GUIDE



Morton (l) and Preston Aubrey

MOMENTS TO REMEMBER

Morton and Preston Aubrey wanted every part of their wedding ceremony to be meaningful.

By JENNY BLOCK

Photos by JESSICA WILLIAMS



Preston and Morton Aubrey are the kind of match that just makes sense—like chocolate and peanut butter, Sunday and brunch, or a little black dress and pearls.

Morton calls Preston the yin to his yang. It doesn't get much better than that.

A Houston native, Preston, 33, is a real-estate agent for Compass Real Estate. Morton, 58, was born in Baytown, and is a procurement and supply-chain manager for INEOS Oxide. The couple now resides in League City, about 40 minutes south of Houston.

The two met on September 5, 2017, after

chatting for a few weeks on Grindr and talking by phone. "Preston lived in Houston at the time. I asked him to come down and meet me in League City," Morton recalls.

Preston proposed to Morton in July of 2019. Preston had planned to buy a ring and then wait for the "magical moment" to hit, but after returning home with the ring he was simply too excited to wait a minute longer. "As I walked into the house, Morton was sitting at the table reading a news article on his iPad. I interrupted him and asked him to marry me, and I presented him with the ring. He said yes!"

The proposal could not have been any more "Preston-like," Morton adds. "I am more inclined to plan elaborate things. Preston is

more spontaneous. In that sense, the proposal was perfect."

The couple wed on April 23, 2021, at Hotel ZaZa in Houston's Museum District. Several things figured into picking that date, the couple says. First, having gotten engaged during the pandemic, they wanted to be sure to wait until it was safe for family and friends to attend. And because of Houston's hot and muggy summers, they figured spring would be a better bet.

"Finally, it was the weekend date closest to my deceased mother's birthday. We thought it would be a nice remembrance, as she was quite a lady and we wished she could have been there," Morton says.



Having an LGBTQ wedding planner was very important to Morton. “We interviewed several, and very quickly knew Lauren Smith would be perfect for us. There was a very quick connection. She ‘got’ our wedding ideas and themes immediately, and was really enthusiastic and supportive. She killed it!”

Lauren’s wife, Jessica Williams, was their photographer. “We didn’t know she was Lauren’s wife,” Preston says. The couple was going over photographer portfolios in Lauren’s office, and they kept choosing photography that was from Jessica. “When we made the decision to choose a photographer based on her body of work and [shooting style], Lauren told us the photographer we were choosing was her wife. And then we got to meet Jessica, who was somewhere in the back working on photos. We were super-happy to have them working as a team,” Preston says.

Hotel ZaZa was also a perfect choice for the couple, with its quirky, upscale decor as well as its fabulous location and views. “We had both used the hotel in the past, and we knew the staff would do everything possible to help pull off an amazing wedding,” Preston notes. “They did not disappoint—we could not have picked a better location.”

Close friend Heather Feldman served as their officiant because she knew them well. “She could speak to and about us in a way that was deeply meaningful, and really resonated,” Morton says. After enthusiastically accepting the couple’s invitation, she researched how to become an officiant, registered with the Universal Life Church, and started preparing for the big day.

“She turned out to be the perfect pick,” Preston adds. “She made that a very special and memorable moment for us.”

Both agree that their “first look” was the most memorable moment of the wedding. “Preston can be a bit stoic. I had never seen him cry in happiness until that moment of the big reveal. It’s all on film, too, so he can’t deny it!” Morton says.

Because of the pandemic, the happy couple has not yet gone on their honeymoon, but they are hoping to travel together to the City of Light. Morton has been to Paris once, though only briefly, and Preston has never been there. “We think it would be a fun place to explore and experience together while creating first-time memories,” Morton says.

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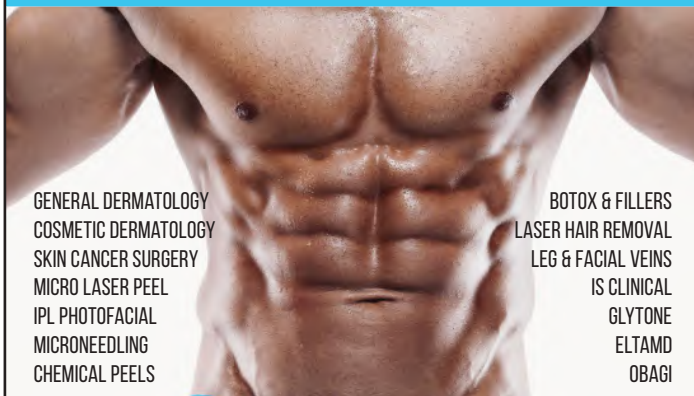
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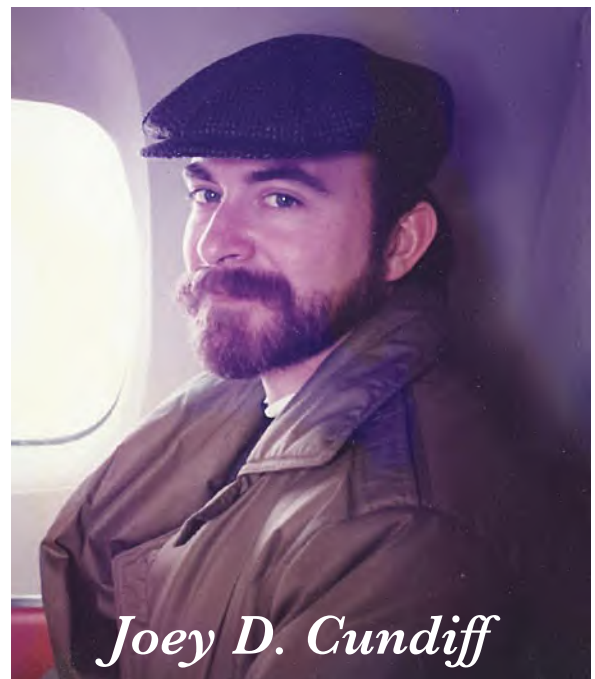


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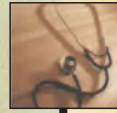
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Where is your favorite place to drink when not on duty?

I like to drink at Boheme, right across the street.

What is a current bar drink trend that you'd like to see end?

I would be happy if I never had to make another Cherry Sour!

What are you best known for?

I make a Moscow Mule with a kick, and a great Rum Punch.

What are the best and worst

holidays to work? Why?

Best holiday at our bar is Mother's Day, because you make great tips. But it's also the worst holiday to work because it's so busy!

Biggest tip from one customer?

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Who are the hardest customers to please?

Families, and especially ones with lots of kids.

If you weren't a bartender, what career would you choose?

Something in the media-production field, like an audio engineer.

Do you have any pets?

Yes, one small Chihuahua named Mambo.



JACK BERGER

Favorite food?

Spaghetti

Favorite restaurant?

Baba Yega (bring it back!)

Favorite place to travel?

Charleston, South Carolina

Dream vacation?

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Best advice to a wannabe bartender in an LGBTQ bar?

Don't stress, you'll get it.

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By LILLY RODDY

Plan Ahead

Relationships are in the spotlight.



September is the month to be planning ahead. We'll see a lot of tension (especially in the first 12 days), and the entire month could feel challenging.

Mercury, our communicator, organizer, and lover of routines, begins her retrograde path on September 22 and completes it on October 22. If you have plans or ideas you want to initiate, this is the time to do it. During Mercury retrograde, we have the opportunity to look back and correct or improve on our previous decisions. Relationships and partnerships will be the most impacted area during this time.

The sun begins the month in Virgo, but enters Libra on September 22 (the first day of fall). Mercury transits through Libra all month. Venus starts the month in Libra, but enters Scorpio on the 10th. Mars begins the month in Virgo, but enters Libra on the 14th. You can see that we'll have lots of Libra energy (relationships and balance) this month. Jupiter and Saturn remain in Aquarius, while Uranus is in Taurus, Neptune is in Pisces, and Pluto is in Capricorn.

ARIES (Mar. 21-Apr. 19)

This month you are juggling several activities. On the health front, it continues to be a good time to improve your approach to your overall well-being. You are improving your work environment as well, particularly with the shift to more home-based work. Relationships will become increasingly more important as you progress through the month. This will be a good time to connect with your partner and strengthen those bonds. As Mercury goes retrograde, it will focus more attention on how your partnerships function. Difficult relationships may be tested, forcing you to decide whether to stay or to go. This ties into your career energies, which are going through a downsizing. This month will be a time of decision-making for you.

TAURUS (Apr. 20-May 20)

Your sense of freedom and personal choices comes up against your career and responsibilities. You are exploring new ways to express yourself and your own method of doing things! Your workplace may seem more unorganized, and your patience in going with the flow will be tested. This may push you forward into taking a leadership role, becoming self-employed, or even retiring. Your professional relationships will need some attention as Mercury goes retrograde toward



the end of the month. This is a great time to connect with your existing customer base to make sure all is well. Personal relationships will need attention, and it's a good month to enjoy the company of your partner! Better boundaries make for more freedom.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

With your ruler, Mercury, going retrograde on the 22nd, you should get your new projects or plans into action before then, or wait until October 22. There is a strong focus on your home and family this month—a good time for home repairs and buying new accessories. Your family may need your leadership to resolve a nagging problem. By the middle of the month, you will want to look for more enjoyable activities. This is a more creative time, and you will be drawn to enjoyable adventures. This can be a great month to take a class, a vacation, or to just step away from your commitments and personal expectations.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

The Moon Kids are trying to get their lives more organized this month. You may feel something is always needing your attention. This is a very good time to improve your agenda and replace the activities that don't serve a purpose in your life. Your focus on money is strong as you continue to get rid of debt. In the latter part of the month, your home and family take the spotlight. The Mercury retrograde can be an especially good time to reconnect with a long-lost family member, or even to attend a family reunion. You may also be considering some home repairs to make your nest as safe as possible. You will not be as patient as usual, so an exercise program or some other healthy outlet may help you channel that energy.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Happy Birthday to all the Wheat Harvesters and Virgins! This is your yearly cycle when you take time to review the past year and set new goals for the future. You will get a longer time to review, as your ruler, Mercury, is retrograde from September 22 through October 22. You will be reviewing your commitments, how well you use your skills, and getting your finances in better shape. In the beginning of the month, you have plenty of energy to improve your health and diet, take on a leadership role, and take better care of yourself. Finances will be in the spotlight by the end of the month. You may look to refinance or pay off debt, and you could also consider asking for a raise or increasing your fees. Give this some thought, but you may want to wait to act on this until after October 22. With Mercury retrograde, it's a good time to slow down.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

Finances lead the way as the month begins. This is a good time to consider investments, ask for a raise, and get your life more organized. You are still focused on improving your career and your sense of security. In business, this continues to be a good time to seek out financial help or even take on a business partner. In all of your relationships, you are closely examining how you function. It may be time to make a new commitment or strengthen the one you already have. Your internet service may be a problem, especially in the latter part of the month. You continue to look for career options that make you want to go to work!

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

The beginning of the month is a great time for escaping for some rest and self care. Mercury, our communicator and organizer, goes retrograde in your sign from September 22 through October 22. This will be your time to review your choices and directions you have chosen. With this retrograde, you can go back and correct or improve the choices you made in the past. This is a great time for you to connect with old friends or relationships, attend a high-school reunion, or keep in touch with your existing client list! This is also a good month to start or restart your exercise and health program. You will not be as patient through September and October, and you will need an outlet for this competitive and quick-tempered energy. This is the time to focus on your needs. Enjoy the time you spend reviewing the past!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

This is a very good month for you to reach out to others via social media or through business groups.

You may also want to take a leadership role with business groups that you are involved with. Career and security issues remain strong well into next year. You are focusing on improving your career and creating a greater sense of inner security. Toward the middle of the month, you will want to slow down and find some time for creating inner peace. Family can be difficult, as there is a shift in the overall power structure of your family. You are also looking to find greater meaning in your life, and to focus on activities that satisfy your passions and help you live in the moment. Life slows down at the end of the month, so enjoy the gentler pace!

SAGITTARIUS (Nov.22-Dec.21)

Career responsibilities top your list as the month begins. There is a lot going on, and you are ready to take charge. This could be a time of promotion and more responsibility. And if things don't change fast enough, you may be looking for opportunities elsewhere. By the latter half of the month, you can expect help from your friends and business associates. The Mercury retrograde is an excellent time to renew those connections from the past. Communication problems can arise with your relationships if everyone is not on the same page. You continue to create more order in your everyday life, clearing out the things that no longer serve you. Some of this is also going on in your workplace, where there could be staff changes or

new electronics purchases. You are trying to be more efficient.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

As the month begins, you are in an open and curious frame of mind. This can be a great time for self-promotion, working on your social-media presence, or reaching out to new clients. As we move toward mid-month, your career sector becomes very active. This month and next, Mercury retrograde will be affecting your career sector. As with all Mercury retrogrades, it's better to stick with what's already on your plate rather than taking on new projects. The retrograde is great for reviewing your contracts, taking care of your clients, and going back to correct mistakes. You will be more short-tempered, so small things can make you angrier than usual. This may also affect your sleep, so exercise can really help release this energy in a productive way. Friends can be really supportive this month!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Your sign continues to be very active, with both Saturn (planet of career and boundaries) and Jupiter (planet of growth and expansion) moving through your sign! As the month begins, you are focused on increasing intimacy in your relationships and developing more trust. You are also more focused on your financial situation. The beginning of the month

is a better time for getting a loan or paying off debt. Toward the middle of the month, you move into a time of reflection. You can step back and view life without all the drama that you usually engage in. The latter half of the month is better for writing, taking classes, and reviewing past actions to determine if you should keep on that path. You are more aware of how others are treating you, and it's easier to take it all too personally. Be careful about who you choose to give you advice—you want a mentor, not a critic!

PISCES (Feb. 19-Mar. 20)

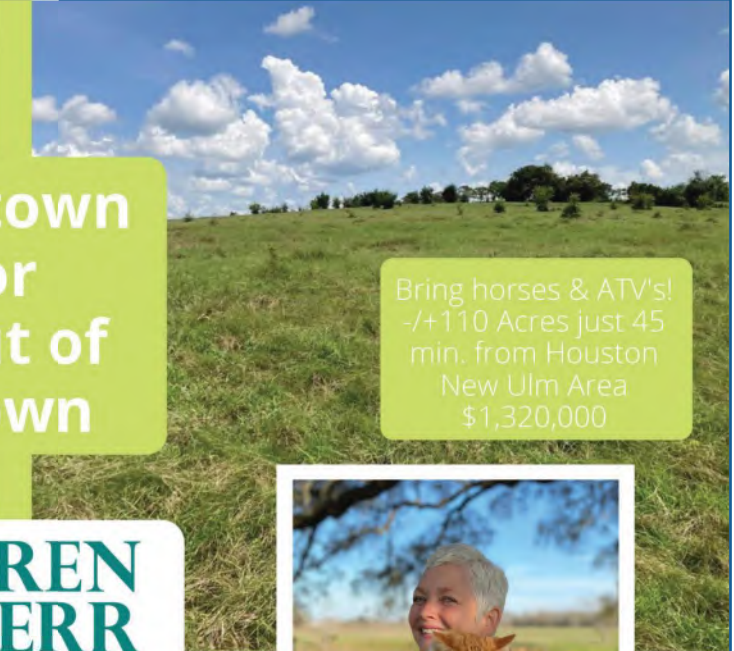
Relationships are the main topic as the month opens. This is a good time to renew those bonds and reconnect. If you are having problems, this can be a great time to confront those issues and get them resolved. You continue to be more open in your communications, and in your views about life in general. In the latter part of the month, you are sharing some intimate moments with your partner or those closest to you! You want to create a greater sense of trust with others, but you realize who is not telling you the whole truth. This is also a good time to review your investments and debt, since you are looking for something new to invest your time and money in. It will be best to wait until after October 22 to move forward with new strategies for your money. Make sure you create time for yourself!

For more astro-insight, log on to lillyroddy.com.



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SCENE OUT

Photos by
DALTON DEHART AND CREW



On July 25, 2021, Pride Houston held its Kickoff and Theme Reveal Party at BUDDY'S. Pictured are **Huong Truong, Kendra Walker, Reign LaRue, Jasmine Young, and Thasia Madison.**



The Montrose Remembrance Garden's 10th-anniversary observance was held at Avondale Promenade Park on July 27, 2021. Pictured are **Eden Torres, Dee Dee Watters, Katy Stewart, Council Member Abbie Kamin, Alan Everett, Ellen Cohen, Lane Lewis, and Lou Weaver.**



On July 31, 2021, a screening of *Friday I'm In Love* was held at Numbers nightclub. Pictured are **Abel Flores and Lane Lewis.**



The Diana Foundation held a Happy Hour and Check Presentation to its charity beneficiaries at JR's Bar & Grill on August 4, 2021. Pictured are **Brent Braveman, Howard Huffstutler, Cesar Villalta, Tom Seymour, Rae Sanchez, Jordan Mills, Jack Berger, and Kennedy Loftin.**



On August 7, 2021, Houston Haycocks Soccer Club held its 2021 Space City Soccer Tournament at Southwest Indoor Soccer. Pictured are (back row, l-r) Josh R., Tony A., Patrick C., Alberto G., Zachary S., (front row, l-r) Nan Z., Rob L., Farhan S., Sean R., and Brad R.



Montrose Softball League Association held its Miss MSLA Pageant "Rio Carnival" event on August 7, 2021, at Neon Boots. Pictured are **Naomi Gordon, Trixie (Miss MSLA 2021, center), and Lola Standards.**



On August 11, 2021, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber held its Brewing Up Business at the Law Harrington Senior Living Center, with catering provided by The Breakfast Klub. Pictured are **Dalton DeHart, John Smith, Tammi Wallace, Brooks Ballard, and Kennedy Loftin.**



The Houston GLBT Political Caucus held its Donor Appreciation Dinner on August 11, 2021, at the Houston Club. Pictured are **Mayor Sylvester Turner** and Caucus president **Jovon Tyler.**



Montrose Softball League Association held its Awards Presentation and World Series Send-Off at BUDDY'S on August 14, 2021. Pictured are Jerry Award Recipients **Cassidy Cryer and Corbin Strong.**



The Montrose Makers Pride Market, in the South Beach parking lot, was held on August 14, 2021. Pictured are **Victor Hugo, Pride Market host Crystal Murley, and Christopher Kidd.**



On August 17, 2021, EPAH held its August Dinner Meeting and Elections at the Health Museum, with food catered by David Alcorta. Pictured are **Jack Berger, Susan Snider-Smith, Fran Smith, Laura Pfister, John Palmer, and David Alcorta.**



On August 19, 2021, Lone Star Volleyball Association held its End-of-Summer Social and Awards. Pictured are Volleyball Association members.

Classy and Brassy

Lady Shamu is Houston's crazy, cussing drag grandma.

By **SAM BYRD**
Photo by **ALEX ROSA**

Lady Shamu's rise to drag fame is a whale of a tale. After starting her drag career on Halloween in 1987, she went on to claim Miss Gay Houston Newcomer 1991, Miss Gay Hispanic Energy 2001, Miss Gay Texas USofA At Large 2003, Miss Globe At Large International Emeritus, Miss Houston America 2014, Miss West Texas America 2015, and Miss Viviana's 2015. She's also a proud drag mom to more than 20 drag children who now have drag babies of their own. In fact, "The Haus of Mu" just held its very first family reunion on August 28. She agreed to spout off to OUTSMART about what has kept her afloat all these years.

Hometown?

Odessa, Texas

Pronouns?

She/Her/Him/He/That/It/Bitch

What's the story behind your name?

In 1988, SeaWorld opened in San Antonio. It was around this time that my brother Adam, his partner, Chris, and several friends traveled to San Antonio. Chris and I would swim in the hotel pool, and every time I swam underwater from one side to the other, Chris would yell out, "It's Shamu!" All our friends would laugh, and they too started calling me Shamu. Every time I would get in drag, I would tell my friends to not call me Shamu, because it genuinely hurt my feelings. After a while, my friend Vanessa Castillo sat me down and told me, "Look, bitch, you're a big girl. Just add 'Lady' to the name 'Shamu' and they won't be able to use that against you. Once they learn your name, they'll never forget it!" So Lady Shamu was born. I have always credited Vanessa for being my drag mom.

What got you interested in drag?

I enjoyed hurting my feet with 4-inch heels.

Describe your drag persona.

The sweetest, sexiest, funniest, man-stealing, plus-size Gramma!

Follow Lady Shamu
at [facebook.com/ladyshamu](https://www.facebook.com/ladyshamu)
or on Instagram at
[lady_shamu](https://www.instagram.com/lady_shamu).



Favorite ways to support the community?

As the director of charitable events for Hamburger Mary's Houston, I was able to help nonprofit organizations raise well over \$400,000 for local charities. I also raise money at every performance for local charities, and try to help others as much as I can. We are still in a pandemic, and showing compassion to others can really change a person's perspective in many ways.

Any thoughts about National Hispanic Heritage Month?

I am a fourth-generation Mexican American. My family has been in Texas since before it was part of the United States. I am so very proud of seeing the progress and contributions to our country by the people that worked hard to achieve their dreams. My family started as migrant field workers, and now we have nurses, business owners, and many other talented professionals. I am also the first Hispanic male from my high school to ever win Miss Texas!

Most embarrassing moment on stage?

Slipping on the floor during the evening-gown competition at the preliminary pageant the year I won Miss Texas At Large. That was a very humbling experience. I literally was on my hands and knees in my evening gown—in front of the judges!

Favorite artists to perform?

Whitney Houston, Adele, Mariah Carey, Dua Lipa, Stephanie Mills—everything and everyone. I love all music.

Favorite Spanish-speaking artists to perform?

Rocío Dúrcal, Amanda Miguel, Gloria Estefan, and Jennifer Lopez.

#TeamPaulina or #TeamThalia?

Team Rocío Dúrcal!

Where can people see you perform?

Weekend brunch shows at Hamburger Mary's, appearances at Rumors in Galveston, and behind the Walmart on Yale Street. ▼



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