

TORONTO'S PREMIER GAY LIFESTYLE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

MGT

We Know Gay

MY GAY TORONTO

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RAYMOND HELKIO

My Michelle

New documentary about drag legend Michelle DuBarry



“Even drag queens get old but their glitter never fades.” - Carolyn Kelly

Carolyn Kelly is an award-winning independent filmmaker from Toronto, who has embarked on an ambitious journey to document the infamous Michelle DuBarry. As the world’s oldest living drag Queen, Carolyn hopes that by telling this story we can better learn how to treasure and listen to our elders.

Shot over five years, this is a compelling life story combining interviews from family and friends, archival footage and years of snapshots dating back to childhood. We watch Russell literally transform into Michelle

Carolyn and Michelle happen to be good friends but they originally met at a Mr. Leatherman Toronto brunch upstairs in what is now the Churchmouse and Firkin pub on Church Street. Carolyn was in the process of wrapping up her second film when Michelle walked in looking fabulous and flirty so she went over to say hello. “I had met her years ago when I first moved to Toronto. I was alone at PM Toronto (which later became Zipperz). Michelle started chatting with me and she was so kind and lovely. She was the first Drag Queen I'd ever met and I never forgot how nice she was to me that day.” Fast forward to the day when the two reconnected, "Michelle, you're going to be my next documentary film. You wait, I'm going to follow you with my camera. Well she flipped her hair and said ‘What, little old me dear?’”

Michelle is a Toronto treasure, a Guinness World Records holder, the first drag queen seniors award recipient, not to mention she’s lived through Toronto’s turbulent LGBT history and arguably has made one of the most significant contributions to our community as we know it today. From her involvement in The Imperial Court of Toronto to the numerous fundraisers she has participated in over the years, she has contributed a small fortune to the community.

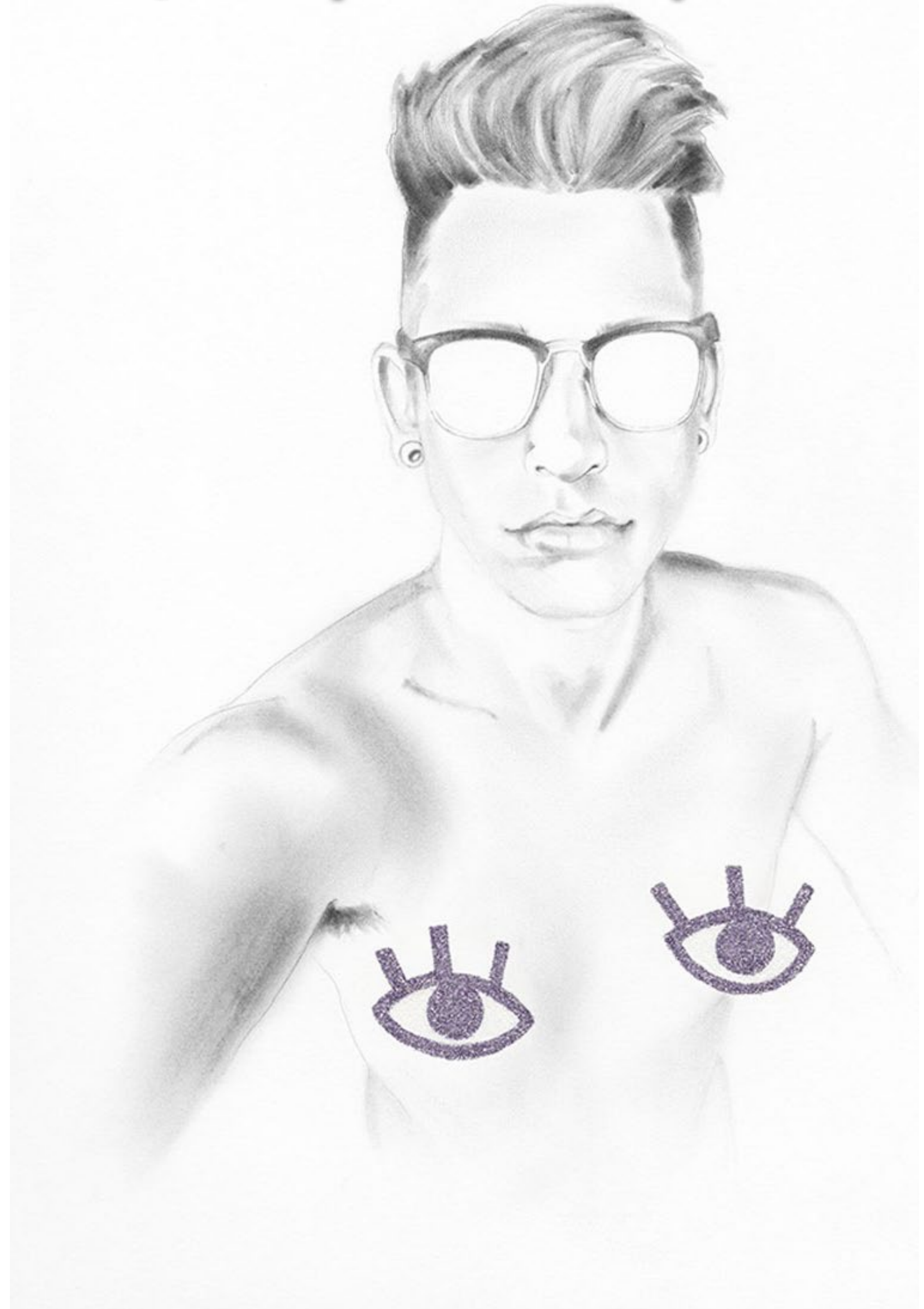
Today Michelle lives on a small pension, yet still shows up to do a number for just about every fundraiser she’s invited to.

Carolyn’s favourite memory of Michelle is something she still does whenever they are just hanging out at her apartment, “She’ll spontaneously pop a crazy wig on her head and give a cheeky face. No makeup, sometimes no pants even!”

The most challenging part for most filmmakers is generating the funds required to complete the project. Some funding has been secured but the filmmakers have just launched a \$20,000 crowdfunding campaign in order to create a film worthy of a great queen. If you want to be a part of this history film you can contribute [here](#).

RAYMOND HELKIO

Today's Paper: A Group Exhibit



Angell Gallery presents Today's Paper, a survey of new artworks on paper by some of Canada's best emerging and mid-career artists, selected by associate director Bill Clarke.

Paper is arguably the oldest material on which artists have made work. Historians haven't determined an exact date for paper's invention, but it is believed that paper, as we know it today, first appeared in China around 100 BC. Canvas, by comparison, appeared in Europe in the 13th Century, but wasn't commonly used by artists for painting until the 15th.

Today's Paper showcases a broad range of recent paper-based works by Canadians based in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Brooklyn and London (U.K.), ranging from Colleen McCarten's sewn geometric patterns that re-visit the legacy of minimalism to Kim Kennedy Austin's flocked works based on illustrations from vintage Canadian magazines.

The show emphasizes the variety of styles and subjects conveyed on paper, from Ryan Quast's humorously abject emojis, Luke Painter's and Tristram Lansdowne's architectural flights of fancy, Ted Barker's graphite works that are easily mistaken for vintage photographs, and Jason McLean's stamp-pad indexes of Canadian celebrity. Unique and highly personal takes on figuration are produced by Spencer Hatch, Chris Ironside, Andrew Salgado and Sarah Letovsky, while Steve Driscoll, Gavin Lynch and Rebecca Chaperon present visionary interpretations of the landscape.

The Smithsonian, the MoMA New York, the Tate, the Art Gallery of Ontario and many other institutions possess extensive paper-based collections, proving that such works are worth acquiring and looking at. According to a recent article in the online newsletter Artsy, art on paper is an accessible way for new collectors to obtain work and has started appearing more frequently at art fairs because of the intimate experience a work on paper conveys. In a world of digital devices, a pencil or brush making a mark on paper feels comfortingly nostalgic. Paper grounds us in the real world and calls attention to human gestures.

George Passmore (of the internationally renown artist duo Gilbert & George) states in a recent interview in U.K.-based Elephant magazine: "People don't do a drawing with a pencil. It's done with their heads, their souls and their sex." Indeed, drawings, and other paper-based art forms, are enduring, expansive, engaging and experimental.

Today's Paper - July 27 - August 25, 2018



PAUL BELLINI

Over the “Rainbow” with ECHO V

Boy bands are, by nature, ridiculous. Designed to wet the panties of the prepubescent, they harmonize on treacly ballads and perform smooth dance moves. It all started in the '60s with The Monkees and The Osmonds, then carried on with Menudo and the New Kids on the Block, finally exploding in the '90s with the likes of Boyz II Men, Hanson, The Jonas Brothers, and most recently One Direction.

Wikipedia blames the a cappella barbershop quartet as the model for boy bands, but it isn't just about the singing. It's about the sexuality. Who wouldn't want to fuck a boy band? That's the whole point. (Just ask Lou Perleman, the impresario who created, and came on to, so many of the boys in his roster, which included Backstreet Boys, NSYNC, O-Town, Take 5, and LFO. He died in prison where he was serving time for running a Ponzi scheme and defrauding the bands of millions of dollars.) The sexual appeal of the boy band is so iconic that in 2002 Catlina released a gay porn called Boy Band. You can just imagine what its like - lots of scenes where microphones become dicks. There are also others, like Staxus' Bare Boy Band, and Channel 1 Releasing's BoyBand. Most recently CockyBoys teamed up with Chi Chi LaRue to create One Erection, who actually appeared at the Hustlaball in Las Vegas in 2016.



Now, after years of hoping, we finally have a legit all-gay boy band. Called ECHO V, they're a careful assembly of diversity (two black guys, an Asian guy, a blonde and a Mexican) and they have just released their new single "Rainbow." "Rainbow' is about unapologetically owning your multifaceted-ness and realizing that you have to live for yourself. It's a journey to self-discovery and the strength it takes to live life in the open, day in and out," claims Mike. Really? I thought it was about rainbows. Like the other four members Gama, Randy, Devin and Jay, he seems to have no surname. "I hope listeners find something fresh in ECHO V," he says. "Is it overzealous to hope they find the voice of a generation?"

The video for "Rainbow" uses footage of a Pride march and veers from black-and-white to colour, just like in The Wizard of Oz. It gives face time to all five cuties, and the singing ain't bad. As far as sexiness goes, I could definitely watch Gama in a gay porn scene. But who, ultimately, is meant to be the audience for ECHO V? Will they appeal to young girls, or to the young girl residing in most gay men? All we can do is check out their videos and let our ears, and cocks, decide for us.

Visit <http://www.echovmusic.info>

PAUL BELLINI

Fall Into Dance



If you're into dance - and who isn't? - then brace yourself, because this year's Fall for Dance North is coming October 2nd to 6th and you won't want to miss it.

Here's just a sample of what's coming. Red Sky Performance offers a special edition of *Adizokan* with the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra. It's a genre-defying work integrating dance, film, Indigenous vocals and music by Eliot Britton. Then Compagnie Marie Chouinard will bring an excerpt from a full-length piece about to make its premiere at the Venice Biennale Danza 2018.

Los Hijos Del Director brings its ebullient and energetic Havana-based company to make their Canadian debut with a striking work set to a driving techno score. And the high-energy crew of Soweto Skeleton Movers brings its amazing comedic contortionism, frenetic footwork and their unique brand of *Pantsula* (a dance form originating in South Africa during the Apartheid era inspired by jumping on and off moving trains).

There's also the all-female a cappella [Obeah Opera](#) 2019 which retells the narrative of the Salem witch trials through the eyes of Caribbean slave women. Then Compagnie Herve Koubi explores his own Algerian origins and journey through a combination of capoeira, martial arts, urban, and contemporary dance tinged with evocative Islamic imagery.

There is also the radical flamenco innovators La Otra Orilla; *Canto Ostinato*, created for *Introdans* by legendary choreographer Lucinda Childs; Ballet Kelowna, dancing to jazz tunes by Dean Martin, Rosemary Clooney and Perry Como; and finally, a team-up between international dance fixture Anne Plamondon and rising star Emma Portner.

In addition to these great shows, there will also be public performances, master classes and workshops, artist talks and more, most of it taking place at either the Sony Centre or the Ryerson Theatre. And if all this can't satisfy you, then you may have to start your own dance company, which isn't such a bad idea. For more information, go to ffdnorth.com

RAYMOND HELKIO

DONNA: The Queerest Of The



They were one of the gayest things at this year's Pride festivities. I caught their act in the parking lot in front of Ho's Team and it was delicious! I realize it's not fair to compare one band to another but for the sake of describing their sound, it has to be done. If Jimmy Somerville had sex with Donna Summer and the Bee Gees (yes, all at the same time) their offspring might sound like DONNA. A trombone, violin, synth drums, a keytar, and smooth vocals make Donna a fierce experience. Catch them live at The Gladstone Melody Bar on Thursday, July 12, 2018 or wait until later this month when they drop their first track on Toronto. To stay in loop find them on social media.

Jonathan aka Poolside Baby: vocals
 Thomas: synths, synth drums
 Haig: guitar, live mixing
 Leah: keytar
 Gabrielle: trombone
 Mark: violin

How long have you been together as a band?
 Haig: Thomas and I had been talking about starting a musical project before the summer of 2017, but neither of us really could agree on what that looked like. It wasn't 'til Leah came to Toronto that summer that things started to make sense.

Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when the idea for DONNA first came about?

Leah: I was living in Vancouver and missing all these guys a lot. Thomas sent me an email and it was just a sound file – the catchiest song I'd ever heard him write. That song became "Bad Habit" the last song on our current setlist. I thought, "Omg, I've never played music like that before. I NEED to move to Toronto and make that musical project a reality."

Please share a favourite memory from playing this years Pride.

Thomas: Jonathan aka Poolside Baby singing while holding his chihuahua.

Haig: Thomas' partner grooving onto the sidewalk directly in front of us and a huge dance party breaking out on the street in the rain!

Gabrielle: Getting attention from random people who saw us in the street and just started dancing. And all the people who messaged us later saying they stumbled upon us and really loved it! We have an awesome fanbase of supportive friends, but it was exciting to reach a new audience.

Jonathan: We actually held off the rain with our Pride energy. It's like the storm of toxic masculinity was creeping forward to say "haaii" and we pushed it back with our posi vibes. Having the crowd just feed off our energy, and give us the amazing feedback with their weird dance moves – that was so tops/bttms.

Leah: What Jonathan said.

What would you say has been the most rewarding part of creating this band?

Jonathan: This, personally as Poolside, has been a huge creative outlet for me. I come from a rather traditional background of musical performance, and I've always been challenged by the industry standards of how a man/woman should act/be/create. Creating with this band of open, accepting and "heck yes" people has contributed to the fearlessness of my identity as an artist. We are rambunctious, we are deviant - I love feeling like I'm embodying this electric queerness.

Leah: The feeling of hard work paying off, and not in a boring serious way but with energy that just redoubles and rebounds. DONNA was a long time coming. But we didn't start playing shows until this spring, when we really knew we loved what we had. And it turned out the people who came to our shows ended up loving it as much as we did!

Gabrielle: It think it's both rewarding and challenging to work with people who have so much musical training, while making music that is so exciting and new. And I've never been in a band that makes people dance, so that is super rewarding. *gushy voice* I love my band.

The most challenging?

Gabrielle: It's the other side of what I said above. Having formal musical training, but then trying to turn it into something fun and new.

Leah: I always say being in a band is like being in a romantic relationship. But instead of between two people (or three hayyy throuples!) it's between six. So there's more to coordinate logistically, more people's feelings to think about . . . I thrive on that kind of stuff though. In a kind of self-punishing sense.

Who are your musical influences?

Gabrielle: In terms of DONNA, I'm obviously a huge Donna Summer fan. And Diana Ross. And I'm a big Bee Gees gal. But in general, anything where someone's wearing triangle sunglasses, you know? And honestly, Vulfpeck is kind of out left of field in terms of the other stuff, but they are an influence for me because they have a sick lady trombone player.

Jonathan: Mine are ever-shifting, but soprano diva Maria Callas is a huge influence of mine. I had a poster of her in my bedroom as a kid. Rufus



Wainwright was also one of my favourite musical artists growing up. He was queer and I identified with that. I was a kid and in the closet and his albums on repeat inspired me to pursue music.

Leah: Say what you want about "Despacito" – it was a banger. And DONNA got together the summer you couldn't go two steps without hearing it. So really you could say we were born out of Justin Bieber's whiny, soulful bops. Plus he's obviously an iconic lesbian.

What do you think is the biggest challenge facing the gay community right now?

Leah: A big one is divisiveness within the community itself. On a petty level, there's so much gatekeeping, and finger-pointing, and policing of who can call themselves what and which label is allowed to be used when. And on a way more dangerous level, there's the really hateful and disturbing internal prejudices and discrimination – like TERFs and SWERFs, and just non-intersectionality in general. There are so many outside horrors, we don't need them within our community too. If we don't elevate queer people of colour and trans and bi people and queers with disabilities and everyone else who needs to be heard, we'll erode and crumble from the inside out.

Jonathan: There are still kids growing up and facing bullies, or small-minded parents and identity suppression from their communities. The gay community is worldwide now thanks to social media, but we have to realize that not everyone



is safe in their homes/schools/streets. We have a lot of work to do as big bro/sis/sibs in our own queer community of accepting, caring and defending those who are at risk. Trans youth, Black youth, Indigenous youth - and the list grows to include new Canadians. The challenge will be how we can help more, as there is still so much injustice - and yet we are so comfortable and reap so much benefit and freedoms that many who are equally deserving are denied.

If you were to give advice to a young queer who is struggling to break into music, what might that be?
Jonathan: Look to what other queers are doing for inspiration. Ask yourself why a lot. Ask others why. Don't be afraid to experiment and be yourself. And ask for help when you need it.

Leah: Despite all the bad stuff – and maybe in part because of it – today's youth are so much more woke than we were. Remember that you are queering a space just by being in it. And as a baby gay, never feel embarrassed about the bands you like – they're all fodder for inspiration and growth down the road. I literally came out to myself while listening to Ani DiFranco, so . . .

In your perfect world, where would DONNA be five years from now?

Leah: It's Season 15 of RuPaul's Drag Race, and two New York queens have just tearfully sworn they'd always be sisters and then lip synced the mainstage down to a DONNA banger. It's not even our biggest song – Ru couldn't afford the rights to that one. Every single DONNA member is a guest judge. We look on as the two queens embrace, crying. "Now THAT," says Ru, "was a lip sync for your life." He donates his entire fortune to a trans charity. Neither girl sashays away.

Jonathan: If not opening for Beyoncé, then dead.

DONNA

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PAUL BELLINI



JACK TRACY

finds Satisfaction

Last year, I was a judge for T.O. WebFest, a film festival devoted to YouTube clips. The results were a mixed bag, but one thing stood out - the performance of a gay man called Jack Tracy. He was in a web series called History, which he writes and directs and stars in, and there is a raw scene where he breaks up with his boyfriend. It was so real I was embarrassed watching it. That's talent.

Now, at the age of 35, Jack Tracy is trying his hand at recording. "Satisfaction" is the first single from his CD Older. Tracy was a corporate lawyer in New York, working 80-hour weeks, making lots of money, living in a swank upper west side apartment with his partner, and for all intents and purposes, appearing to live the NYC dream. But at 31, he realized he was not fulfilled and that he couldn't live the rest of his life that way. So he took everything he learned — business acumen, creative writing, ingenuity — and threw them all into his passion for film and music.

Older is '90s pop-inspired, featuring heavy dance numbers, soulful ballads and quiet storm bedroom jams. "I made every musical element on this album," Jack explains. "Every drum line, clap, synth chord . . . I wrote every melody and harmony, choreographed every dance and edited every video." He's a one-man band.

Like many a gay boy of my generation, he spent a large part of his life learning Janet Jackson dance routines. "Miss Jackson is everything. That's my formula. Madonna queens: fight me." And then there's History, which is definitely worth watching. "If they're going to do a gay project, we'll always be the heroes," Tracy says of Hollywood. "Hollywood only serves us when it is profitable to serve us, and in a way that is first and foremost driven by what they think we will buy. I have more interest in truth, the beautiful and ugly kinds." So do I, Jack, so do I.

Visit <https://www.jacktracy.lgbt>

Follow on Twitter @ NecessOutlet



PAUL BELLINI

Shakespeare as Derek Kwan likes it



“It’s amazing to be doing a show during a sunset,” says Derek Kwan. “At a certain time, near the end of the play, the sky turns purple. It’s beautiful to embrace that.”

The show he is referring to is *Rosalynde* (or, *As You Like It*), the Shakespearean comedy which Driftwood Theatre has set in 1918. It will play in over two dozens public parks throughout the region for the next several weeks, ‘a tour of the provinces’ as they used to say in Victorian England. “In 1918 in Ontario, there was the war, the suffragette movement, and the Prohibition movement, so it puts the play in a different context. For instance, the banished duke is in the forest and we determined that he would be making moonshine.”

Kwan plays Oliver and Silvius, but he also gets to perform with a puppet. “We’re almost like a circus,” he laughs. He recently won a Toronto Theatre Critics’ Award for his work in *Mr. Shi and His Lover*, but he might also be familiar to audiences for his work in *Blood Wedding* at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre. “My background is in classical music, though I’ve been acting since I was a kid. Acting is about community, about providing interesting perspectives and sharing that with an audience. I love that aspect of it.”

Like every actor, he makes ends meet by doing TV commercials. “I was in a big commercial that got pulled because it was racist. It might have worked but they were too literal. The premise was that there was a dictator passing judgement on a bunch of inmates, and in the script it said ‘North Korean’ and so they went with something that was recognizably Asian, and it was just too close to home. If they had also cast other races it would have been more funny and made its point without being just so real.”

But the thing he likes most about *Rosalynde* is that it is set in the great outdoors. “Essentially, we’re in a different location every evening. We drop in and drop out,” he says. “We play wonderful locations. We act with trees around us. The play takes place in nature and our entrances and exits are determined by whatever is around us. It’s a lot more organic. I’m looking forward to Ingersoll where we get to play the Cheese Museum.”

Ultimately, Kwan is very centred in his profession. “The type of theatre I prefer to do is intimate,” he says. “A lot of it has to do with creating the Canada that I want to live in, and believe in, and demonstrating that on the stage.” *Rosalynde* sounds like just the type of show that can do that. So long as the flies aren’t too bad at this time of year.

Rosalynde will run from July 13 - August 12, 2018 including five performances in Toronto starting July 26 at Parma Park. For more information please call 844-601-8057 or

DREW ROWSOME

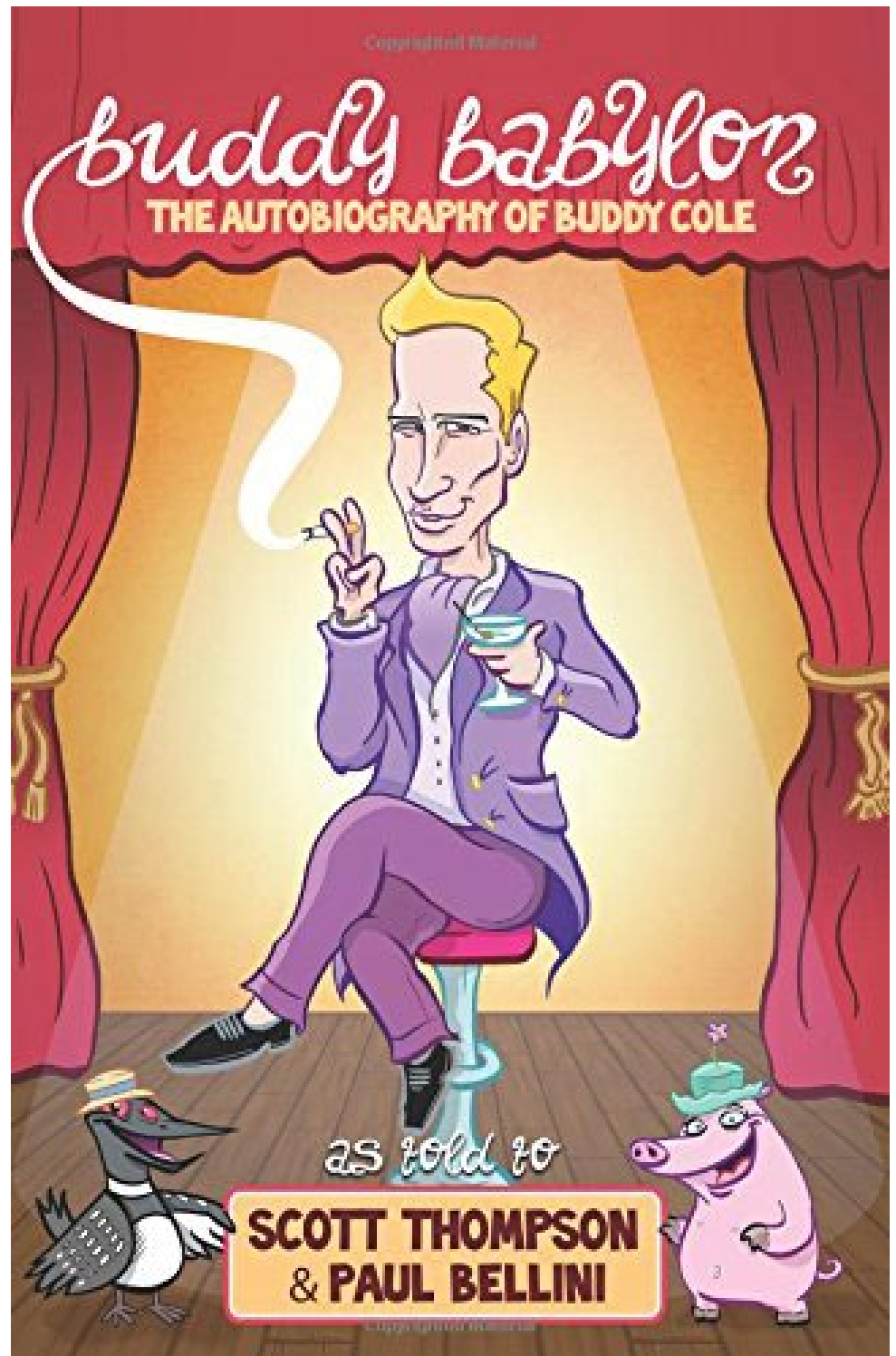
Buddy Babylon

we need Buddy Cole in these troubled times

In May 1998, as soon as it came out, I bought a copy of Buddy Babylon. Like every discerning comedy fan and gay man with a sense of humour (they do, alas, come without and it is not as rare as it should be), I was a fan of Scott Thompson's creation Buddy Cole. Appearing far too sporadically on the consistently hilarious Kids in the Hall, Cole was/is a happily effeminate and lisping gay man who never censors himself and was/is unapologetically sexual, fabulous and proud. In 1998 this was a revelation, both that the character spoke uncomfortable truths and that gay men were finally, maybe, ready to use self-satire to confront the world.

Buddy Babylon is not a collection of Cole's witticisms or monologues, it is an autobiography "as told to Scott Thompson and Paul Bellini." I had known Thompson and Bellini for years (not well enough to get a free copy) and was well aware of both their comedic chops, contentious working relationship, and propensity for tall tales. I took the book with me on a tip to my eccentric aunt's summer retreat in the wilderness. It was, as usual, a raucous drunken sojourn and portions of my copy of Buddy Babylon were read aloud to shrieks of laughter after a raucous drunken dinner. I finished the book the next afternoon, by the pool, and at my aunt's request, lent it to her to read at her leisure. She had laughed loudly at the previous evening's aural version but, many bottles of wine later, could not remember a word.

When we left for the return journey back to civilization, I asked my aunt what she thought. "Shit," she said. "I left it in the downstairs bathroom where I was reading." I shrugged and assumed I would get it back some day. Shortly after that, after another raucous drunken dinner, my aunt caught her husband in flagrante delicto and a bitter battle of a divorce ensued. The summer retreat was sold off and my copy of Buddy Babylon assumedly went with it. I like to think it is still sitting there at the side of the toilet, atop, Buddy is almost always on top, the stack of moldering Macleans, Reader's Digests, Cottage Life and the well-thumbed and stained copy of



August House's Outhouse Humor and Farmer's Almanac.

It made sense to me. Buddy Babylon is uproariously funny and laced with subversive sly wit and satire, but it is also a soufflé of sorts, a selection of poisonous bon bons, best digested in small doses though perhaps not while clenching one's anus. And I think Cole, Thompson and Bellini would agree.

Flash forward 20 years. Thompson and Bellini have both established distinguished careers and Buddy Cole made a triumphant return to television as the best commentator, and arguably the most spectacular event, of the Sochi Olympics. And not only did Buddy Cole hit the road with his Apres le Deluge tour, but Buddy Babylon, which had fallen out of print, was revised and reissued. I idly wondered if the memoir would read differently after 20 years - the world has changed,



I have changed - and if my long-lost copy was now a valuable rarity being hawked on eBay by some lumberjack.

Though I have interviewed [Thompson](#) several times and crossed paths several times more, and have worked with [Bellini](#) for over a decade, I still had to buy a copy. Actually I chose to buy a copy (from Glad Day Bookshop, 499 Church St, who could also use a plug) as the first edition of Buddy Babylon was not a bestseller and Thompson and Bellini need, deserve, the royalties. In fact Buddy Babylon was pretty much a flop. Too gay, too risqué, too ahead of its time? As Thompson said to [tv.avclub.com](#) (yeah, I know I should have done my own interview),

For many reasons, it didn't get attention. I think it's the funniest thing I've ever done, but at the time—because of homophobia, people didn't even review. Or even look at it . . . It came out from a major publisher—Bantam Doubleday Dell but almost nobody reviewed it anywhere. There were like two reviews that came out, and they both just slammed it, completely missed the point of it. And that broke my heart, because, my god, it's an actual book. We slaved over that book. I've never worked so hard on anything in my life, and it really hurt to have it completely dismissed. But I'm hopeful it won't be this time.



Apres le Deluge is selling out and garnering great reviews, and I bought the last copy of Buddy Babylon in stock at Glad Day (I'm sure they have more by now) so I hope that this is a solid comeback for Buddy Cole. We need him in these troubled times. Yes, gay men are more accepted but effeminate men certainly aren't in an era of "masc for masc." Yes, gay men are more accepted but with the far right/alt-right making political gains and even gaining power, that may not last. Yes, gay men are more accepted but that doesn't necessarily spill over to any other underdogs ostracized because of gender, sexuality, race, religion, etc, etc. Yes, gay men are more accepted but has their sense of humour evolved?

We need Buddy Cole in these troubled times.

As Cole says mid-book:

My goal is not to shock and horrify, but to tell the truth. And if that truth shocks and horrifies, well . . . maybe you should get out more.

Buddy Babylon: The Autobiography of Buddy Cole starts strong with the recounting of a Canadiana childhood that is Margaret Atwood or Stephen Leacock or Robertson Davies on acid - it may even have been plagiarized from Celine Dion's epic and equally hilarious Celine Dion: My Story, My Dream. No matter how deeply into mainstream culture gay culture has penetrated, many of the witticism, arch comments, references and gags are simply, deliciously, gay. Cole's tongue is planted firmly in his cheek when it isn't rim shotting or rimming.

The satirical targets are many with an emphasis on the gay professions of modelling, theatre, contemporary art, hustling, fashion and recovery. An overly long parody of spy thrillers - featuring George Hamilton (sensitively rendered) and Imelda Marcos - stalls the mid-section, and many of the more surreal elements - Siamese twins and Imelda Marcos - don't quite gel. But as Cole approaches the climactic "let's put on a show to save the farm" finale, flavoured with romance novel hyperbole, Buddy





Babylon focuses and pulls the threads together, gaining a momentum that redeems the previous episodic structure.

As a historical document, Buddy Babylon is even more intriguing. Twenty years on, those satirical targets are still as ripe for puncturing and the jabs land with precision. Cole's art exhibit, theatrical endeavours and ass modelling are as eerily accurate and absurd in a post-Hirst, post-Lepage and post-Kardashian world. It is the AIDS jokes that really resonate. They were contentious when Buddy Babylon was first published and they are shocking now. It is a daring gambit but an important one. Buddy Babylon uses dark, dark humour to get to the underside of the plague, to the gay version, telling the truth about how we reacted and how we coped and how shallow we were. It is high wire, risky comedy and it hurts to read even though it is very, very funny.

Buddy Cole is self-centred, flamboyant, and confident to the point of pathology. He is all of us. He is an uber-gay. He is maddening and delightful. Buddy Babylon is, even on a second reading, still too rich, too full of comic asides, too fabulously frothy, too laced with subtle gay innuendo, to be read in one sitting. For the third reading, I will defer to historical precedence and put this new copy in the bathroom atop, Buddy Cole is almost always on top, of the stacks of pristine [fabs](#), Vanity Fairs, Rolling Stones, Rue Morgues and the well-thumbed and stained anthology Forever Butt and The Wonderful Private World of Liberace. I think that's fitting.



SKY GILBERT

Memorializing the marginalized: DANNY COCKERLINE is a hero

One Properties is planning a new condominium building at 66 Wellesley Street, the northwest corner of Church and Wellesley. There have been various proposals put forward; the last one I read about was for a 442 unit building with a sheltered, two level high, 320 square metre public plaza, one that will have sliding doors that open during the good weather and that can be used “for community events throughout the year.”



Well if what is meant by “community” here is gay and lesbian community, I’m not entirely sure if there is a gay community anymore, nor am I sure of where it is located. I know that what is left of what used to be called the Toronto gay and lesbian community can be seen in the handful of bars and restaurants near the corner of Church and Wellesley.

But if One Properties wishes to honour that community, I, for one, could care less about a public plaza and, apparently, (gee whiz!) another grocery store.

What we need — prominently displayed on the property — is a memorial to Danny Cockerline. I remember looking at that cheery old four story apartment building at 66 Wellesley Street East and feeling sad because it was going to be demolished.

Then I remembered why. Once I went to visit Danny Cockerline in his apartment there, which as I remember it, was very charming and colourful (like Danny himself) at the back of the building on the second floor, with a lovely deck that overlooked the alley.

Who was Danny Cockerline? You can read a beautiful memorial for him by Rick Bebout at the url below.

https://walnet.org/csis/news/toronto_96/xtra-960104.html

Danny was an out of the closet male sex trade worker/activist/pornstar at a time when that particular type of individual could actually exist. He stood up for gay men — and most of all for sex in general — at a time when few were willing to do so — throughout the scourge of AIDS. In fact, he was HIV positive, and he took his own life in 1995 — at a time when AIDS itself and the treatments for HIV were mostly lethal. And the rest of us slutty gay guys — the ones who refused to feel shame about our sex lives — we understood why he had decided to commit suicide in the prime of his young, proud life.

I know this suggestion may fall on deaf ears. Times have changed. Gay men don’t take to the streets and proudly defend their right to have sex for money, in bathhouses, on the street, or in a backrooms. Gay men wear cute little bowties, get married, and try to assure the world that they are just the same as straight people. We live in a world where most gay men have sex secretly on online apps, and scorn the notion of ‘flaunting it’ in one of those ‘old fashioned’ gay bars. They certainly scorn what Danny Cockerline could so often be seen doing: standing outside his signature place — Woody’s — scantily clad, camping it up. But Danny Cockerline is an important part of our history and I, for one, am proud of him, and I believe he must be remembered.

I doubt anyone will listen to what I say here. But I had to say it.

RAYMOND HELKIO

What To See at the LGBT Feedback Film Festival

The monthly Feedback Film Festival presents it's LGBT line-up slated for July 26th starting at 7pm at The Carlton Cinemas in downtown Toronto. It's a pay-what-you-can event and because there is an audience feedback section at the end it's a film buff's dream. My top three picks for this month are below, but for the full listing, [click here](#).

WHO I AM

17min, UK, LGBT/Drama

Directed by [Monika Wilczynska](#)

'Who I Am' is a drama short film based on true events, with an original script written by Monika Wilczynska. It is a coming of age tale about Elijah, a young transgender teenager from a very religious background, who has to try to reconcile their identity with their faith and their family's expectations of them. With the help of anti-conformist Lisbeth and their friends, Elijah learns not to compromise their own integrity in face of prejudice and adversity. The film inquires: can an LGBTQ-identifying person benefit from religion whilst staying true to who they are? Why is it important to tackle identity in regards to religion? How restrictive is our perception of spirituality and divinity? Who I Am does not attempt to answer these questions, but it aspires to open the dialogue to the public on subjects that have been under-represented or taboo for far too long.



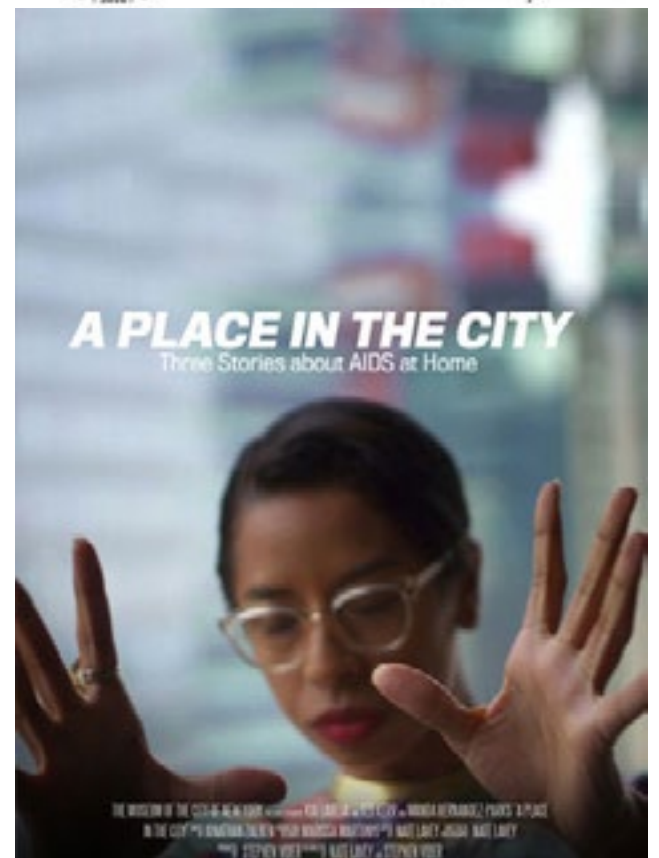
A film by
Monika Wilczynska

A PLACE IN THE CITY

18min., USA, LGBT/Documentary

Directed by [Nate Lavey](#), [Stephen Vider](#)

A personal and intimate look at how caretaking, housing, and family intersect with experiences of HIV/AIDS today.



MASQUERADE

10min., USA, LGBT/Drama

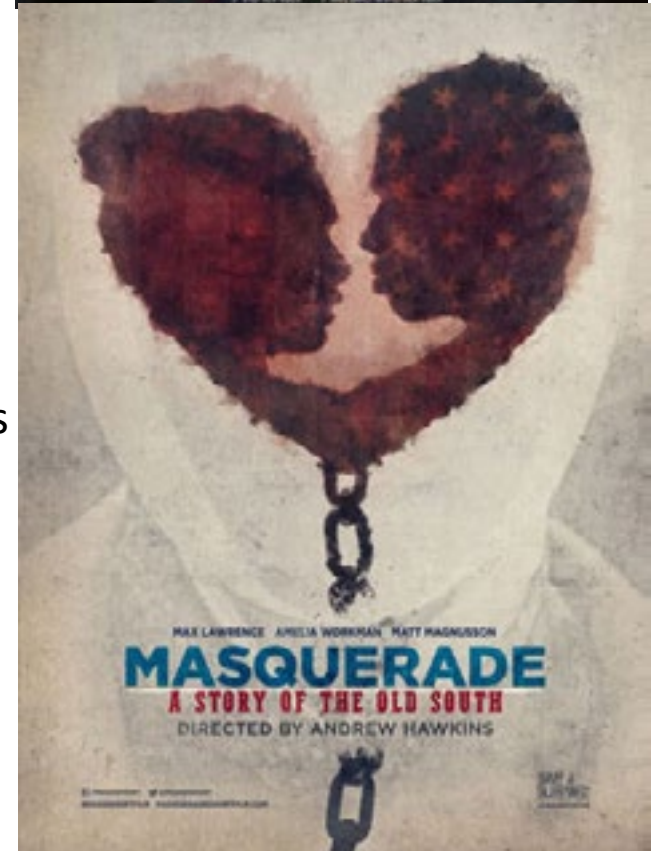
Directed by [Andrew Hawkins](#)

1848 Virginia. Slave couple Sam and Ninny execute an escape after their slave master George makes an unconscionable advance.

'Masquerade, A Story of the Old South' is an uncommon slave narrative, capturing the experience of both African Americans and gay people during this complicated time.



July 26th starting at 7pm at The Carlton Cinemas in downtown Toronto



SKY GILBERT



Leave The King and I

It's so sad that people are wasting time attacking The King and I. Yes, this gorgeous Rogers and Hammerstein classic (no one is creating anything that matches it today!) is racist.

Yes, it is old fashioned. Yes, it presents stereotypes of non-white people. And yes, it underplays the atrocities of western oppression and destruction of non-white cultures by the very premise of a western 'teacher' cheerily warbling her wisdom to the King of Siam.

But.

May I ask a simple question?

Why is The King and I being revived now?

I'll tell you why. Because we are so culturally bankrupt that we cannot come up with a work of art that measures up, yet is modern and relevant.

I am gay. If I visit New York I am to be treated to a revival of The Boys in The Band. The Boys in the Band is the gay theatrical equivalent of The King and I. It was a supremely entertaining, ground breaking play in its day. Nowadays, with gay marriage, AIDS, meth culture, and PrEP, it's about as relevant as my great grandma's handbag.

Yet everyone seems very excited to see it again.

Why?

Because people who go to the theatre these days are afraid to see anything that deals with gay culture as it is, now, in 2018.

Our culture is bankrupt. We have two choices, equally unappealing.

First we can go to old revivals of musicals at Lower Ossington Theatre/The Royal Alex, and when we're done, curl up in front of the computer and turn on Netflix, and when we're done with that, lie in bed watching 30 second youtube videos of cats (those are my fave things! they don't require a helluva lot of concentration! And God knows what I can get up to at the same time!).

Or.

We can attend an avant-garde production of a not very well written, preachy play about how horrible cis-gendered people are, or about how horrible men are, or about how horrible white people are. These plays have admirable premises— as an aging drag queen I'm not big fan of straight white men! But the only alternative to corporate-mind-numbing-mega-musical-Netflix culture is plays that bore you to death with their self-righteous moralism because they are not so much plays as they are preachments to the 'woke.'

The fault dear Brutus, lies not in these old classics, but in our cultural bankruptcy.

So please don't blame The King and I.

Blame ourselves.

RAYMOND HELKIO

Global Conference on LGBT Human Rights



Leaving No One Behind: Equal Rights Coalition Global Conference on LGBTI Human Rights and Inclusive Development

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced in his [statement on Human Rights Day](#) that Canada is hosting Leaving No One Behind: the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC) Global Conference on LGBTI Human Rights and Inclusive Development in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, from August 5 – 7, 2018. Canada and Chile are co-chairs of the [Equal Rights Coalition](#) (ERC) – the first-ever intergovernmental coalition dedicated to the protection of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people around the world. The ERC offers key opportunities both to advance this important human rights agenda internationally and to build a new kind of multilateral organization, one that is nimble, closely integrated with civil society and able to respond to rapidly evolving situations. NGOs interested in participating non-government organizations (NGOs) interested in participating in the ERC Global Conference should apply through the national LGBTQI2S human rights organization, [Egale Canada](#), who is overseeing the international NGO selection process. Applications are due by May 9, 2018.

The ERC Global Conference is the only global conference of its kind in which states, development cooperation agencies, civil society, multilateral agencies and organizations, private donors and other relevant stakeholders come together with a shared commitment to advance LGBTI human rights and inclusive development. Building on the first ERC conference in Montevideo (2016) as well as past LGBTI conferences in Washington (2014), Berlin (2013) and Stockholm (2011), the Vancouver conference will continue to provide opportunities for high-level diplomatic engagement and working-level collaboration among ERC stakeholders.

This year's conference will focus on the following objectives:

- Building knowledge (on global trends, gaps and best practices in advancing LGBTI human rights and inclusive development).
- Building networks (across states, development cooperation agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs), international organizations and other stakeholders).
- Building norms (to help further advance LGBTI human rights and inclusive development through diplomacy and development coordination).

For registration details and updates about this conference, please [click here](#).

RAYMOND HELKIO

8) - In Rehearsal

Bed and Breakfast

Paolo Santalucia and Gregory Prest rehearse to be a cast of thousands



MORE VIDEOS

0:20 / 2:15

YouTube

“It’s a very funny play,” says Paolo Santalucia of *Bed and Breakfast*. “The play opens in a bedroom with two men in bed and that is not treated as a joke, it’s treated as a very real thing. It’s a couple we don’t often get to see as leads in a play, often times gay couples in comedies are relegated to secondary or tertiary characters. Playwright Mark Crawford puts them front and center and in charge of telling the whole story. The central point of this comedy is the relationship, and out of that truth and honesty and love comes these amazing characters who enter the life of these two men.”

Bed and Breakfast is also a high wire act. “The two actors in the play end up having to play 12 characters each,” says Santalucia. “It’s a really exciting thing for an audience to participate in.” Santalucia muses for a second when asked whether the performances are in the Charles Ludlam style with lightning quick costume changes, slamming doors and multiple entrances and exits, or created with Daniel MacIvor and Lily Tomlin’s more theatrical alchemy.

“It’s a bit of both,” he says. “We’re having a lot of fun in rehearsal figuring out exactly what the style is. Ann-Marie Kerr who is directing us is so well suited to this kind of work. Not only is she an amazing director of theatre, she’s also an incredible clown and has a lot of experience with physical theatre and mime. We’re trying to figure out what we’re trying to achieve character by character. Some don’t need anything, it’s all in the body and in the voice. Then there are others who need more than that. Some of the more flat out comedic characters can just come out and if they’re only present for one or two scenes or a couple of lines, we might just turn around and

we’re that character. Other characters go out a door and quickly put on a hat or coat and then walk back in as another character.”

It all requires a great amount of planning and technical maneuvering on top of becoming the characters. “All the costumes are very quick changes,” says Santalucia. “Some of them appear as if by magic. Where they are, where they come from, is going to be exciting for an audience. Some of the costumes we’ve had to double or triple and hide them all over the set, so that certain characters can appear all over the place or wherever they need to.”

Fortunately Soulpepper has great resources. “Ken MacKenzie who’s the costume designer and Alexandra Lord the set designer, as well as Gregory Prest and I, we’ve all come through the academy here at Soulpepper. So we have a collaborative sense, we love working together, finding those challenges and opportunities and solving them together. Even though this play only has two actors, it’s a whole team. Even though it’s a comedy, it’s very technical. We have to break things down into little bits, it can take eight hours to rehearse six pages of this play. We’re lucky to have a long rehearsal period.”

Santalucia’s co-star, fresh off a star turn in [La Bete](#), is also a co-star offstage. “Gregory and I have been together for six years and this will be the first time in all of our six years of working here that we’ve ever been able to play a relationship that’s true to the relationship we play in real life,” says Santalucia. “We’ve played best friends, we’ve played enemies, all kinds of relationships but we’ve never played lovers. It feels wonderful and beautiful to be able to do that. That’s pretty



extraordinary, a play that can present a queer couple who are a queer couple offstage.”

And instead of too much togetherness, Santalucia claims it is invigorating. “We take our work home whatever we’re doing, we have a lot of fun working together,” he says. “It’s so nice to have a play where it is just the two of us. Knowing that we can do a line run a night without driving each other crazy is so helpful. We’re having fun surprising each other with aspects of ourselves that we didn’t know existed. Familiarity is not breeding contempt. As artists and as partners there’s nothing more exciting than entering into something very scary and also extremely rewarding.”

Santalucia deserves a reward after his star turn in *Amadeus* was derailed by the upheaval at Soulpepper. Santalucia’s ego doesn’t appear bruised. “We’re humbled by what happened but also excited to be moving forward in new and exciting ways,” he says. “The reality is that there’s so much amazing work that has happened here, is happening here, and will continue to happen here, the current atmosphere is one of excitement and positivity. The new season is going to be different programming and that’s exciting for artists because change for us is not a scary thing because we’re used to it. Plays and parts come and go, and you adapt really quickly. Every night is different because things change. When you take a bunch of people who thrive on spontaneity and put them in a situation where things are adapting and developing, all it does is make people more excited to respond and change themselves to the situation. We’re all excited, primed and ready to go.”

And different programming has advantages. “Everyone has learned from the situation the ways that



we can continue our mission and continue it in a way that is more inclusive, in varied communities,” says Santalucia. “I think Bed and Breakfast is very reflective of that. It’s a small example of the changes happening here. For all sorts of communities to be represented here. Bed and Breakfast takes all the tropes we see in a farce and applies them to a relationship we rarely get to see in a comedy, a relationship between a gay couple. Underneath the hilarity there’s a fair amount of politics that go on, in really subtle but very amazing ways.”

Santalucia has created memorable characters in [The Taming of the Shrew](#), [The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?](#), [Animal Farm](#), [La Bete](#) and now is adding 13 more. Does he have a Bed and Breakfast bestie? “My real favourite is a real estate agent named Carrie,” he says. “She loves cats and she loves Facebook. She is a real treat to fall into. She’s very loud, very funny and completely ambitious and small town, but she has one of the biggest hearts of the whole play. Her relationship to the LGBT community is hilarious and surprising, so playing her is a great joy.”

In Bed and Breakfast, main characters Brett and Drew inherit Brett’s family home and comedy ensues as they adjust to running a business and being out in a small town. Has it inspired Paolo and Gregory? “I love the idea of having a beautiful home in which people come and go - cooking breakfast for a bunch of people would be really exciting - but when you break it down . . . We were just in Niagara on the Lake with all the beautiful homes. We took a picture of one that was like the bed and breakfast from the play. And when you step back and take a look at what these places offer, you ask what are we doing in the city? It’s so easy to be seduced by such beauty when you’re in the country, those beautiful Victorian homes, charming people all in a good mood, and it’s sunny. Then you realize it’s also a beautiful day and what’s it going to be like when it’s winter and there’s three feet of snow and it’s cold and the hotel is empty . . . I think reality would set in quickly. I’d be the first person to say we should do it and the first person to say, this is a terrible mistake.”

Bed and Breakfast runs Sat, Aug 11 to Sun, Sept 2 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, 50 Tank House Lane, Distillery District. soulpepper.ca



DREW ROWSOME

Genitalia: the PENIS and debate about art vs porn



Every month, [MGT](#) digital magazine features a photographer whose work has caught the eye of publisher Sean Leber. No slouch of a photographer himself, Leber hunts out artists who are capturing the male form in intriguing, unique or erotic ways. Leber makes first contact, makes sure they are amenable, and then passes the contact information on to me, so that I can conduct an interview and write the text.

All of the photographers, whether well-known professionals or artists on the cusp, have a story to tell and all of them have fascinating tales to tell of how they turn their vision into imagery. Sometimes there are language barriers, sometimes political concerns, but always there is a narrative about the drive to create and we manage to translate that into words that hopefully complement and add depth to the photos. Until the issue you are reading now.



The photos that Leber directed me to are stunning, ranging from classical nudes to dudoir to some vivid experiments with body paint, both transformative and decorative. The common thread seemed to be a photographer finding his vision, building on imitation and discovering his own voice in the process. In his response to Leber's inquiry he provided a short bio in which he described himself as an amateur artist who after working professionally shooting weddings, boudoir and family photos, had grown bored and wanted to explore his creative side.

There was also an addendum where he talked about his father taking him to museums and teaching him to appreciate art which helped inspire the bodypainting. He also added, "When it comes to the human body, it's the greatest and purest canvas. A person's sexuality belongs to them and them only. Art doesn't see sexuality. Art only sees color." Here was another story to be told and I was psyched to speak with this artist, even if, as he lives in a rural area in the deep south of the US, it was going to be by email.



I began to google for background and the story became even more interesting. The photographer works for a promotional magazine for a tourist area, shooting commercial and very slick portraits of local merchants, sports teams and politicians. He also has many promotional videos touting his skills as a boudoir photographer, specializing in couples, and offering special promotions. The boudoir photographs of women are much more suggestive than the photographs of the men, less explicit in terms of nudity but deliberately seductive, displaying their sexual attributes. The boudoir photos meet the gaze of the viewer, while the boudoir photos strove to attract the gaze of the viewer.

The photos of couples that I saw (and most of the promotional material used buzzwords like "no rules," "no limitations," and "frank," so there may be many that are only in the collections of the subjects) were romantic and beautiful. In one series, which I won't identify, the photos achieved an extraordinary fusion of eroticism, self-empowerment, love/lust and political commentary. All of those photos are of opposite sex pairings.

One of the video ads was filmed at, and was aimed at the attendees of, a bible conference. A twitter photo of the photographer in his "new favorite t-shirt" featured hashtags used most frequently by evangelicals. A search for the shirt's origins led to a Christian pop singer who is either quite popular or has a lot of financial backing in the quest to conquer that particular market. All of these clues - and remaining aware that making assumptions about someone's life, leanings or opinions based on social media presence is dangerous - led me to phrase my questions carefully, attempt to open a dialogue and keep my mind open to a viewpoint that was potentially foreign, but intriguing, to me.

I was apparently not careful enough. And we are aimed specifically at the gay and allies market. I received a polite note back thanking us for our interest in his work and that he would go over the questions and decide whether or not we would be "allowed" to show his work in our publication. I felt uneasy about the tone and replied with links to previous interviews with photographers (including one which he had re-tweeted a homoerotic photo by), assurances that I wanted to create a dialogue, and a reiteration of my sincere admiration for his work and a desire to share it.

The reply was ominous. And intellectually precise and challenging. The photographer explained that "I am a conservative and hold my faith closely, I believe everything that's in it when it comes to Salvation, healing and eternity. I also believe in traditional marriage." He also explained that, referencing a well-known abstract artist, his work was about form and process, not about eroticism or sexuality. While some artists "try" to combine eroticism and art, he believes in keeping them "extremely separated."

He acknowledged that his boudoir photos are sensual in nature, but that was at the client's request. His creative work is about colour and life. He said that his father had taught him at an early age the difference between porn and art depicting the human body. Unfailingly polite, he said that he

understood where we were coming from but that we were misinterpreting his work by focussing on nudity, eroticism and sexuality.

There is a huge gulf between his artistic intentions and my interpretation of his work. I had hoped to bridge, or at least try to understand, that disparity but perhaps it is too large. Or I am too encased in my bubble of beliefs to be able to empathize with his? My description of his work as erotic was intended as a compliment but I suddenly saw how it could also be seen as imposing a homosexual hedonistic interpretation onto his work. As author E A Bucchianeri malaprop-quoted, "Art is in the eye of the beholder, and everyone will have their own interpretation."

Or, as Freud famously said, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." So presumably sometimes a penis is just a penis.

Or is it?

I had made the automatic assumption that photographing or depicting a penis was an act of eroticism, created for the gay gaze.



For an appendage that is a small percentage of the human body's mass, male genitalia gets an oversized percentage of attention and carries considerably more mythic and societal weight. [I have been banned on Facebook repeatedly](#) for the mere suggestion of male genitalia, even though each time it was in an "educational, humorous or satirical" context. Interestingly enough, there is not a stated exclusion for artistic use. I would not have been able to post the photographs of the photographer in question on Facebook without being banned again.

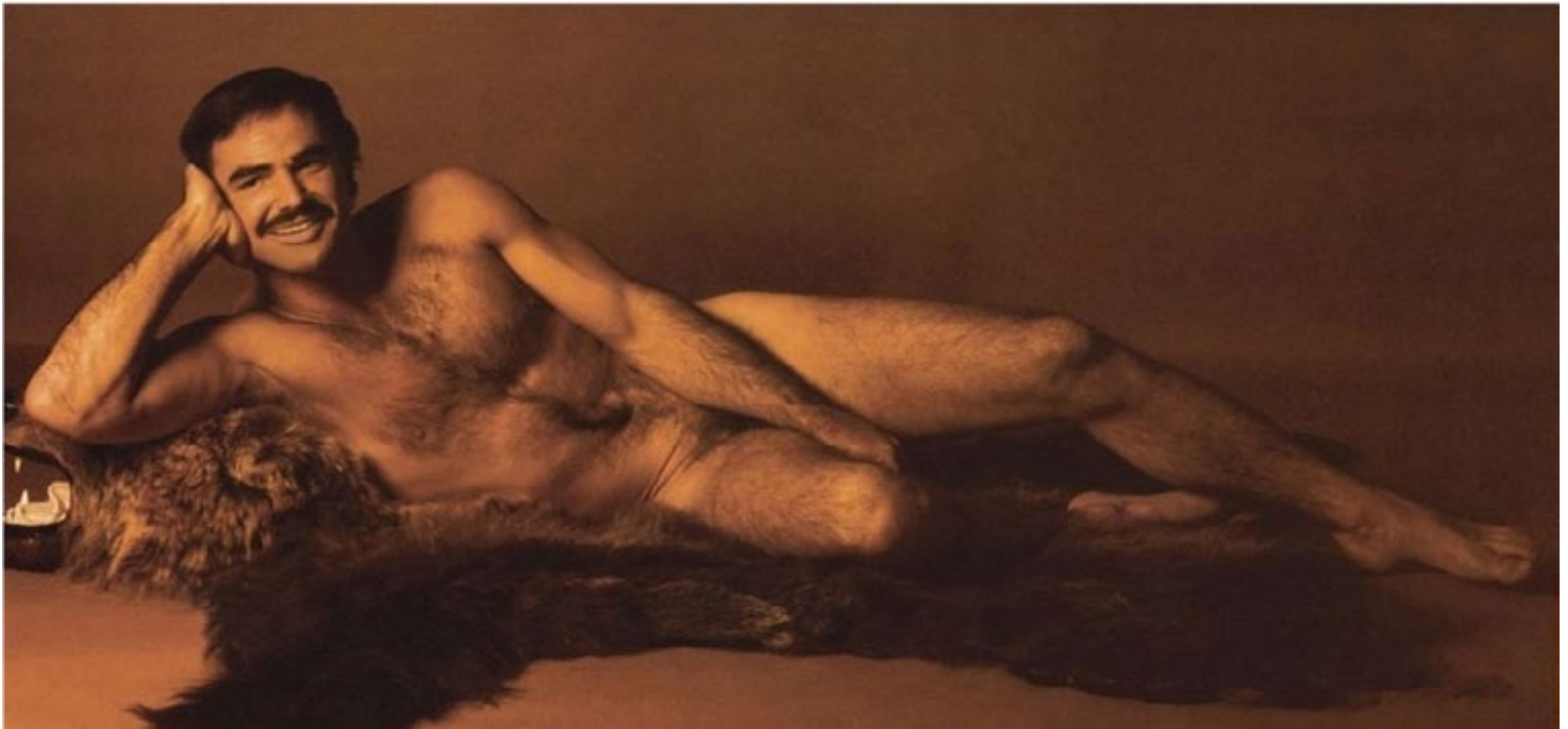
Historically, male genitalia has drifted in and out of public acceptability. Ancient Pompeii, in 79 AD, used a graphic stone phallus as public directions to the nearest brothel. Greek statues were not complete without genitalia though they were the opposite of size queens, historian Paul Chrystal writes in *In Bed with the Ancient Gods* that,



The small penis was consonant with Greek ideals of male beauty . . . Big penises were vulgar and outside the cultural norm, something sported by the barbarians of the world.

At some point during history all penises became "vulgar" and ancient works of art were given modesty-preserving disfiguring fig leaf coverings. Even Michelangelo's masterpiece David, a statue of a biblical hero commissioned by the city of Florence for public display in 1501, has been fig leafed. But then again, a replica of David was de rigueur in closeted gay home design, a signifier and an erotic statement, but safe because it was classical art. Can art, can penises, have it both ways?

The great era of beefcake photography arguably began with Eadweard Muybridge's studies of bodies in motion, how the body worked. Muybridge's work was scientific - he also photographed dogs, horses, etc - which probably prevented them from being seen as erotic. A convenient ruse to avoid censorship, or more likely jail, was that the photographs were scientific or health advice or exercise instructions. They were all of that, but they are also now [historical documents and art](#). They also provided the first nude male scandal when Jack Lalanne, who went on to build an empire as "The Godfather of Fitness," casually displayed all of his musculature.



In 1972 Burt Reynolds posed for his famous Cosmopolitan centrefold which, while not explicit by today's standards and shot by renowned fashion photographer Francesco Scavullo, destroyed his hopes of having a serious career. The issue was so successful that the next year saw the debut of Playgirl and a coy spread featuring Lyle Waggoner of The Carol Burnett Show fame. And of course After Dark was featuring chorus boys, Broadway actors, popular singers and Arnold Schwarznegger in the all together - at least one penis an issue - in an entertainment magazine subtly aimed specifically at gay men.



Of course, simultaneously, gay porn was struggling to become, if not acceptable or mainstream, not illegal. The visual representation of Greek statuary and the photographs of Colt Studio Group is strikingly similar. Except for the size of the penises. By 1967, gay men were already [trained to be size queens](#). Nudity on stage and on film was cause for condemnation or praise, a battle over porn versus art. How much ink was spilled touting the naked human body as something natural and not to be hidden away? More than the spunk that was spilled utilizing it as porn.

In the same period pop music was shaken up by David Bowie's gender bending and casual if calculated bisexuality. He also tried to push the boundaries of artistic nudity, explaining to [Dylan Jones](#) that even in the '90s, his collaboration with Laura Ashley was censored.

[They erased the minotaur's genitals, which is the fourth time something like this had happened to me. I wasn't allowed to show my genitals on the inner sleeve of Aladdin Sane, nor on the cover of Diamond Dogs, nor on the cover of one of the Tin Machine LPs. I've been de-balled four times! It says a lot about Western attitudes towards male genitalia. I mean, breasts don't seem to be hacked off in the same cavalier fashion.](#)



Throughout film history female nude scenes have been ubiquitous with even stars feeling pressured to disrobe on screen, while it was still [shocking, and extremely rare, for male actors to do the same](#). Female models posed nude with abandon but when Yves Saint Laurent presented a full frontal male nude in a 2002 perfumer ad, it was decried as the downfall of civilization. Clever marketers used this to their advantage, selling flashes of peen as daring works of cinema. Cable television was the first, with shows as varied as Spartacus and Jackass building their publicity on male nudity. And not to be forgotten are the late lamented men of Naked News.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers got a boost when bassist Flea took to strutting on stage nude, taking a page from Jim Morrison's playbook of provocation and seduction. Even little teen idol [Justin Bieber got into the act and attempted to revive his career by leaking nude photos](#), a staple gambit of reality TV stars and boy band members wanting to be seen as men.



Is it any wonder that we have fraught relationships with visual representations of male genitalia?

By now, I have wandered considerably from my central dilemma: have we been conditioned to assume that a penis exposed is an erotic and/or obscene act? Am I being taught a lesson by a conservative evangelical about the sanctity and innocence of male genitalia? Am I subconsciously a perv salaciously discovering the sexual in studies of form and light? Am I overthinking this way too much?

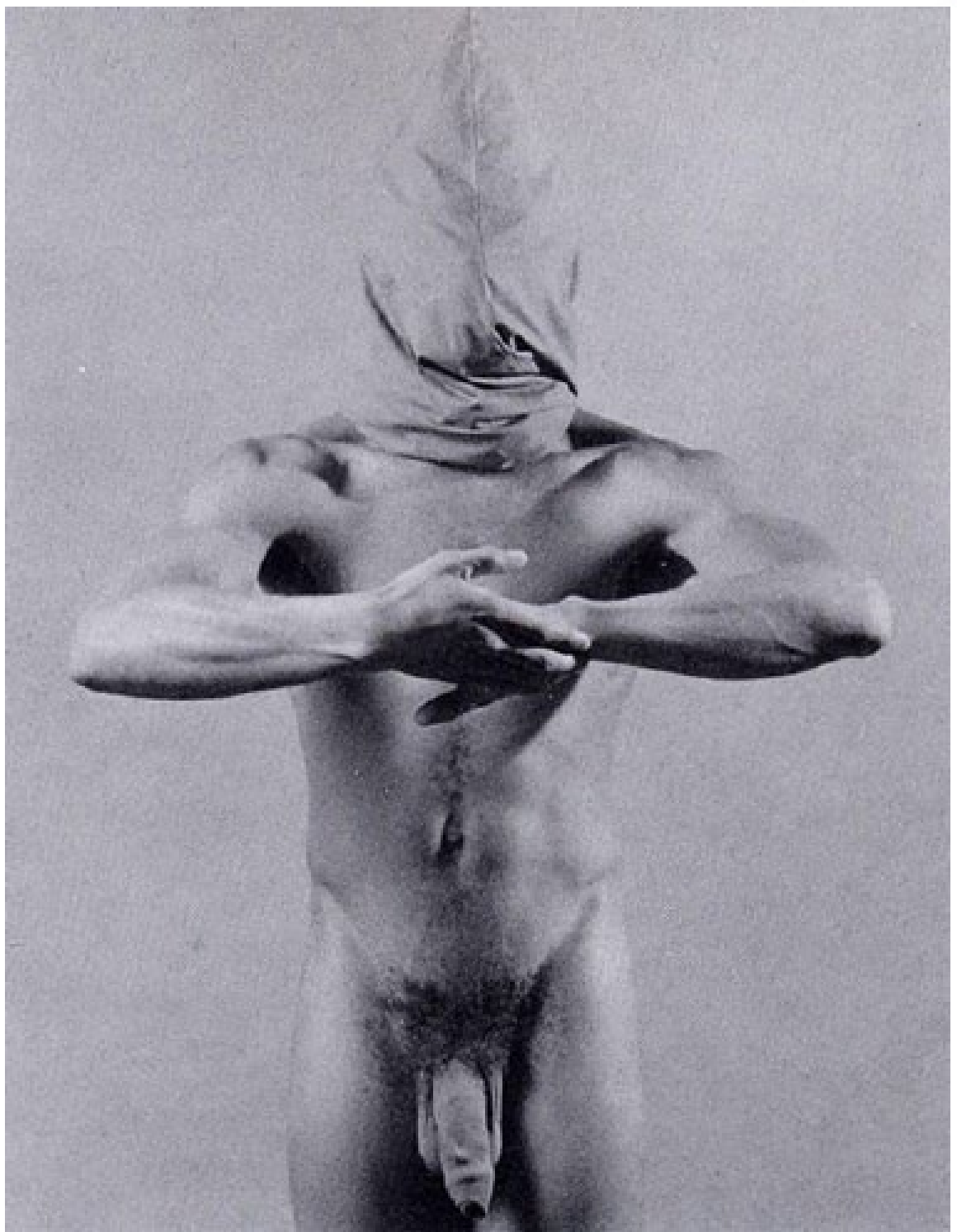
I think of [Robert Mapplethorpe](#) and the uproar over his photographs, particularly the BDSM photos and the black male nudes. A retrospective of Mapplethorpe's work was censored for obscenity, one defensive argument being that the photos were about light and form, not the raunchy or risky content. That sounds familiar. But its also disingenuous. The content is part of the photo's art, commenting on homophobia, sexuality, racism and documenting marginalized subcultures. They are also deliberately provocative, contrasting the content with the form.

Leber suggested I talk to one of the first photographers we featured, [Daniel Decot](#), whose work not only echoed Mapplethorpe's direct aesthetic but Decot is busily preparing a gallery showing of his collection of black male nudes. The photographs are extraordinary, tackling the same issues as Mapplethorpe but without the faint whiff of fetishism.

"Naturism is totally usual for me cause my parents were, so ever since I was a child 'I see naked people' around me," says Decot. "I used to go every year to Greece for the best beaches for naturists. It's very different from nudity in a sexual setting cause it's about rest and release, not about tension."

As he is a naturist and so are many of his friends, nudity in Decot's photos is not a big deal. "The aesthetic is the purpose for me," he says. "If sometimes there is more erotic potential, it's not a problem. It can create something very interesting, a connection between me and the model, visible in the photos. But I prefer a more sensual mood, or something suggestive, in my pictures."

Decot notes that male nudity is "probably not entirely accepts as a female nude," but "the obscenity is in the eye, in the brain, of the people looking at the nude. It depends on background, education, how comfortable people are with their sexuality." However he also says that "some photographers do make porn with a certain kind of nude male, and yes, it's just porn, nothing more."



Decot doesn't censor himself, and surprisingly claims never to have experienced censorship, even on social media. Nor does he judge other artists. "I do my stuff and let the others do what they want to do," he says. "When I was 18, I discovered the drawings of the artist Rex. There are some really hard pictures, but for me it's art. That's probably my level for porn/art. Any representation of a nude male, or a nude female, has something sexual. It's about a nude boy. Even religious paintings show eroticized nude bodies. Portraits of Sainte Thérèse Davila having an orgasm are very erotic."

Not to apply too much interpretation on Decot's thoughts, but while he sees male nudity as natural and beautiful, he also seems to appreciate the erotic potential. It seems a healthy way to approach what can be a fraught subject. And much the way I approached interpreting the work of the photographer whose work is not on this cover of MGT.

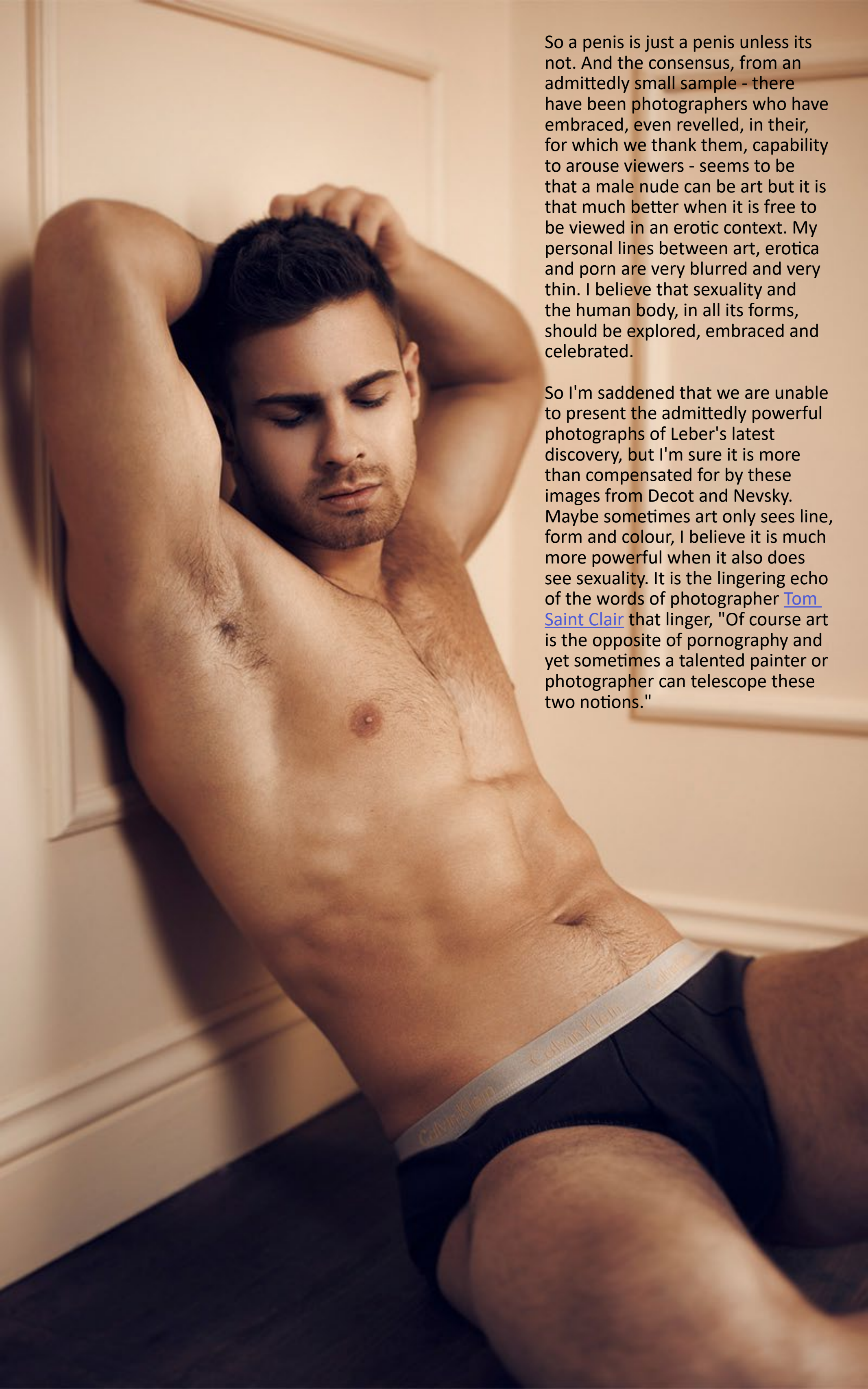
We have featured many photographers who supplied us with photos featuring nudity. And we have had many debates about featuring nudity in the pages of MGT. We always based our decisions on artistic merit, even if the photographs were deliberately provocative or erotic, they were artistically engaging. The first major debate we had were with the mischievous and sensual [Mitya Nevsky's](#) BDSM-flavoured photos.



Nevsky also has a unique point of view as he, while coming to fame with the homoerotic book *Russian Guys*, has chosen to, at the moment, concentrate of his lush and searing photos documenting his world travels. "Of course I prefer to shoot nudes rather than clothed," says Nevsky. "I always watch the line between erotica and porn so that it is not vulgar. Although I've seen porn photos that look very artistic."

Nevsky has very clear opinions, "I prefer of course nude pictures of men, sexual desire is a very strong thing. Historically, in our civilization a woman's nudity is considered more aesthetic than male nudity, but this is due to the fact that the percentage of gays was not very big. To compete with the opinion of the majority of people is very difficult. This situation was changed only in the 21st century by gay culture." Of course he also says, "Sometimes I try to cover up or disguise the penis to look more sexy and so that people are able to dream."

If a photograph including a penis is automatically branded as porn or obscene, Nevsky says, "This is primarily due to education and stereotypes." Looking at a photo of a nude male as just line and form is possible but he believes that, "We should look at it both ways." The only photos that Nevsky finds obscene are "Dilettante photos in which the photographer did not do any work, did not find the right light. Or did not find an idea or colour harmony. Just a muscular guy in a photo is not interesting."



So a penis is just a penis unless its not. And the consensus, from an admittedly small sample - there have been photographers who have embraced, even revelled, in their, for which we thank them, capability to arouse viewers - seems to be that a male nude can be art but it is that much better when it is free to be viewed in an erotic context. My personal lines between art, erotica and porn are very blurred and very thin. I believe that sexuality and the human body, in all its forms, should be explored, embraced and celebrated.

So I'm saddened that we are unable to present the admittedly powerful photographs of Leber's latest discovery, but I'm sure it is more than compensated for by these images from Decot and Nevsky. Maybe sometimes art only sees line, form and colour, I believe it is much more powerful when it also does see sexuality. It is the lingering echo of the words of photographer [Tom Saint Clair](#) that linger, "Of course art is the opposite of pornography and yet sometimes a talented painter or photographer can telescope these two notions."



MITYA NEVSKY PHOTOGRAPHY





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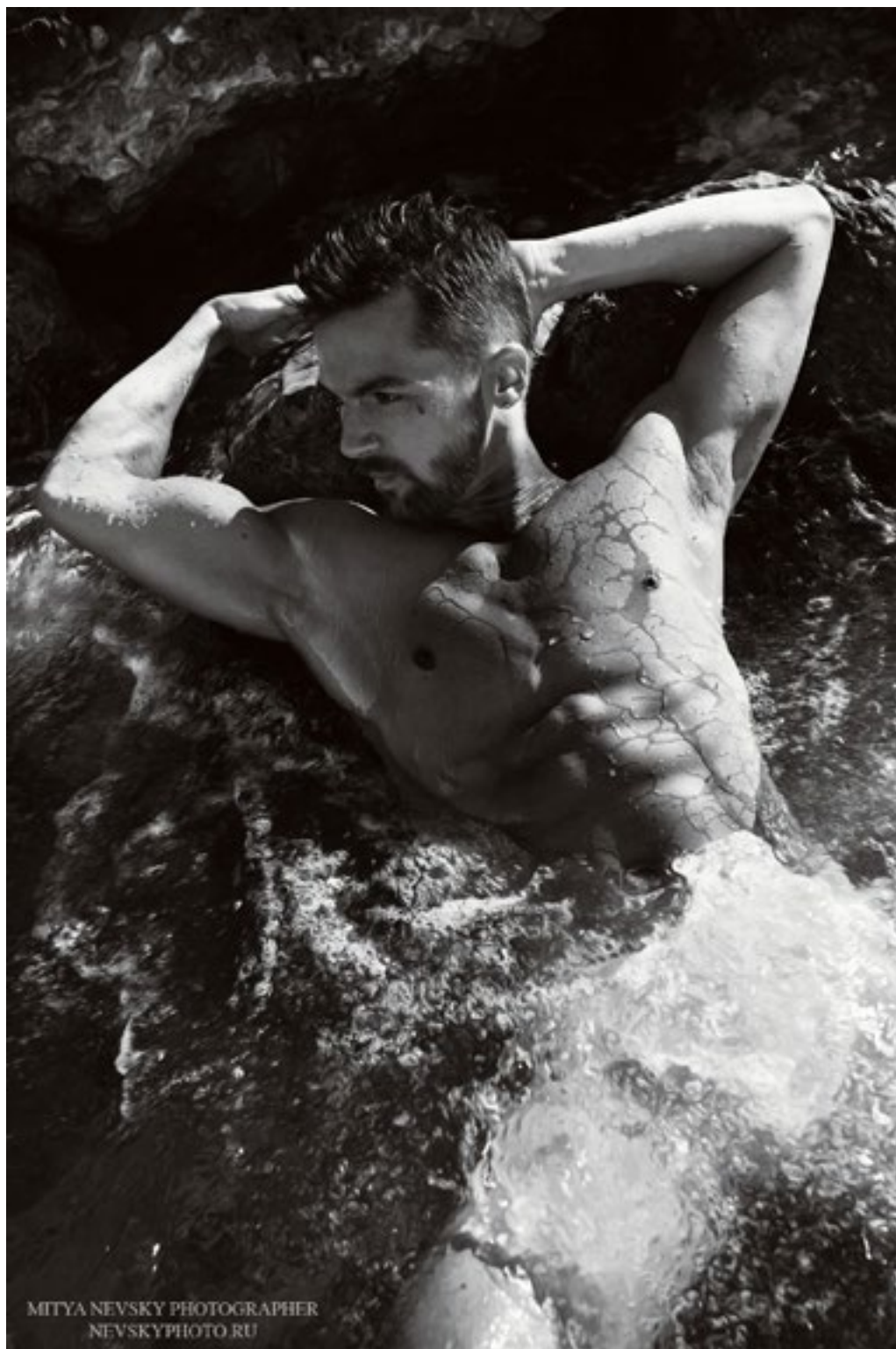


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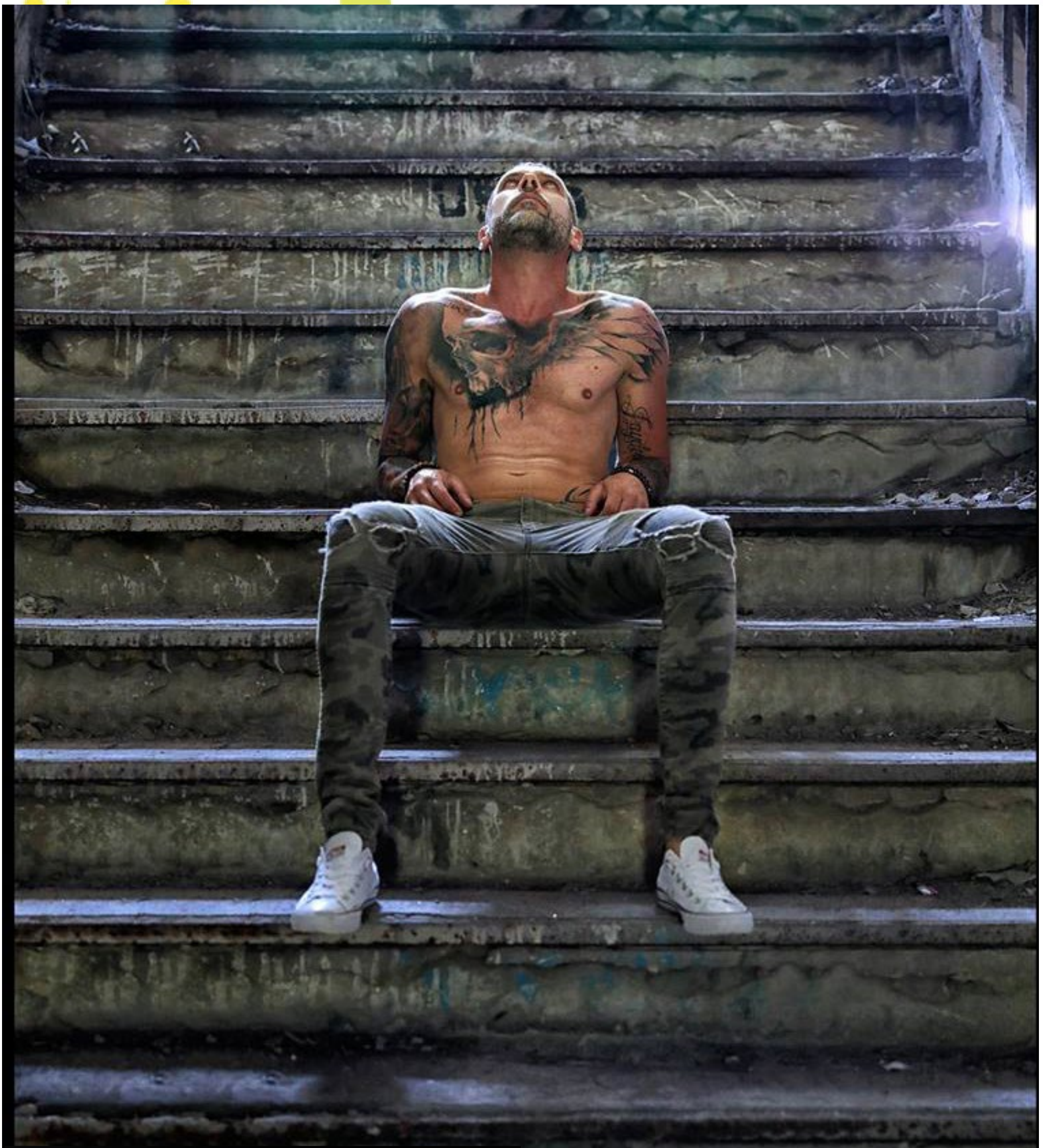




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Just Call Me Lady

an open letter to an icon about her memoir

Dear Mandy,

I was very eager to review your autobiography *Just Call Me Lady*, but unfortunately I find myself unable to do so. Instead, I am writing this open letter in the hopes that it will serve to be as effective in promoting your book as a review would be. And to explain why this is a billet doux instead of a considered critical analysis. There are two reasons.

Firstly, when we chatted at your book launch, you politely requested that I “write something scathing,” so that you could then cry foul and be a hapless woman scorned. It would make for good publicity - a form of publicity that you have experienced many times, turning a negative attack into a personal or business triumph. I can understand wanting to use a strategy that you are familiar with, that you have had to use many times.

As you quip in *Just Call Me Lady*,

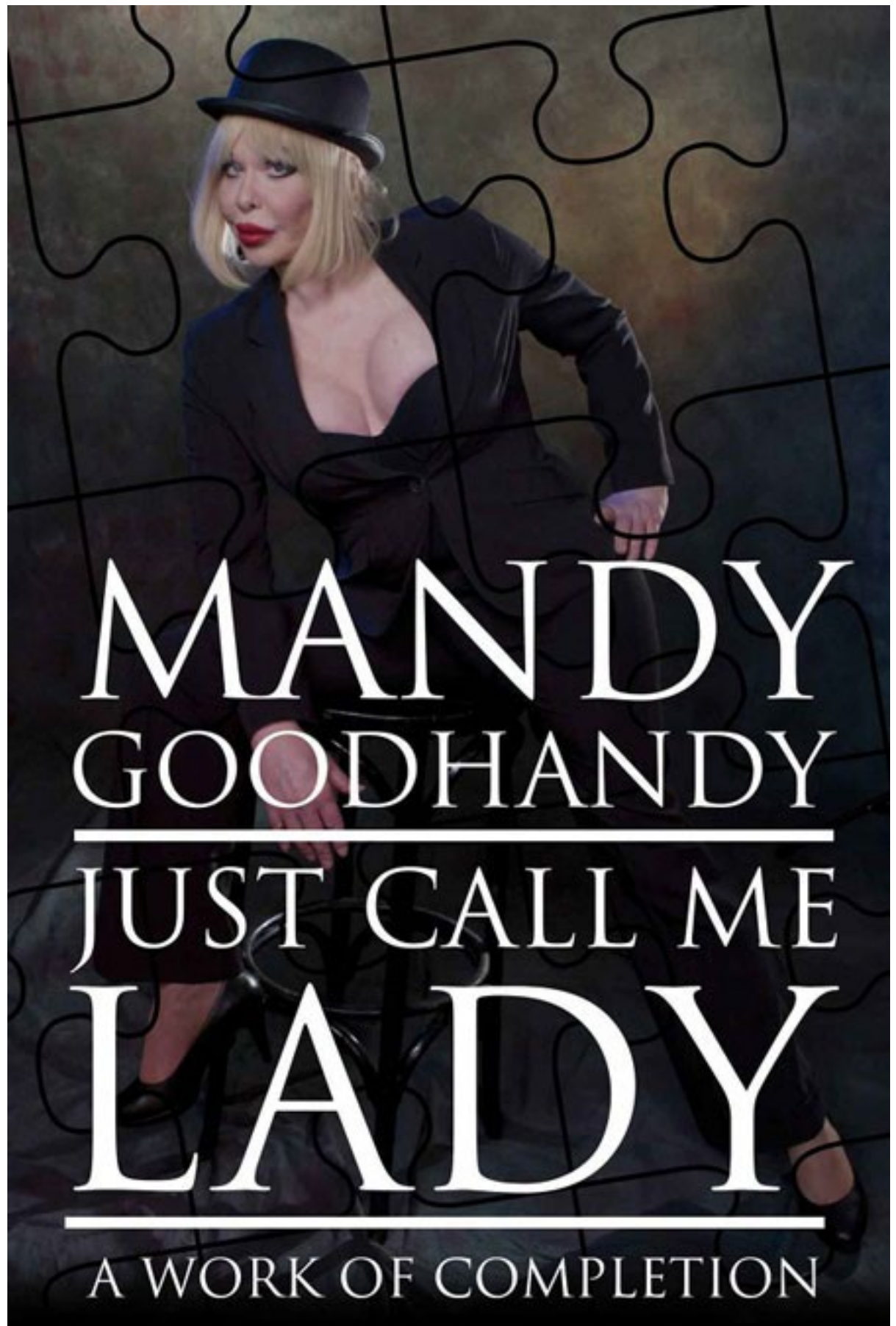
[screw that old adage about taking lemons and making lemonade, in my case, I make lemonade then splash in a healthy amount of vodka](#)

Feel free to toss any vodka my way, but I have nothing scathing to write.

Just Call Me Lady is a fabulously fine book whether judged as a revealing and honest autobiography, political/sexual analysis, an activist tract, or a sustained feat of comic writing. I enjoyed it immensely, laughed frequently and was moved more often than I expected.

Which brings me to the second reason (because really, if I stopped myself every time I started to write a review that was contrary to the author/playwright/filmmaker/etc’s wishes, this would be a blank blog). “More than I expected” is key. While I would never pretend to be part of your inner circle of intimate friends, we have interacted many times over the years, both professionally and personally, and it has always been a joy. Beyond my admiration for all the work you have done for our community, I have an abiding respect and thankfulness for the warmth you have displayed. I had grave concerns about maintaining objectivity, that my individual reaction would overwhelm my attempts at critical detachment.

That acquaintanceship also concerned me before reading *Just Call Me Lady*. I felt that I knew a good portion of your story already from interviews, your comedy and hosting routines,





and the production of [Tranny](#). There are large segments of Just Call Me Lady that reiterate events and emotions that I have heard you speak of before (as well as several that I lived through at the same time you did, just from a different vantage point). However the prose is polished, and studded with one-liners or sly innuendo, so that the familiar becomes fresh. I can only imagine how powerful and exhilarating it would be for a reader unfamiliar with the history and mythos of Mandy Goodhandy.

As to the parallel events, I was working at [fab](#) during roughly the last half of Just Call Me Lady. I remember the non-smoking strip club, the Diamonds Lounge in Mississauga, your episodes of Kink, the titillation of the t-girl nights, the live porn shoots, the year of 100 spankings, and of course the debacle that almost robbed you and Todd as your well-deserved honour as grand marshals at Pride. You were, are, a respected icon and a trailblazer.

An illustrative aside: at one point while at fab the tourist board brought in a group of journalists to show them the best of the city in hopes they would write glowing reviews and boost gay tourism to Toronto. I had met many of the journalists from trips to other destinations and once they arrived they got in touch. Their itinerary consisted of both the unavoidable and the venues that could afford to provide freebies in exchange for press. But all good journalists and travel writers know that one has to go beyond the official itinerary in order to find the real angle, it's

called investigative journalism as opposed to quid pro quo advertorial.

While all the journalists were quite content to be wine, dine and liquored up, they all wanted to know what was the up and coming thing, what was unique, "Where was the story?" And they wanted to know where Goodhandy's was and what night to go. Journalists, from around the world, had heard of Goodhandy's and wanted to experience it for themselves. Here I can insert one scathing indictment of Just Call Me Lady: while the latter part of the book is fascinating as a look at the business of mixing business and sex and necessity, I believe you severely underplay just how revolutionary and important it was when you and your business partner Todd Klinck opened Goodhandy's.

Not only did you shatter barriers for the trans community but Goodhandy's opened its doors to [the black queer community](#), the asian queer community, the fetish and leather communities the musical theatre community, stigmatized communities, sex workers, voyeurs and exhibitionists, naturists, [club kidz](#) - every marvellous magnificent misfit who didn't conform to the monolithic current gay standard. At a time when LGBT meant being mainstream and vanilla in order to be acceptable to the mainstream and vanilla, Goodhandy's was blithely celebrating the outcasts and oddities and perverted who were, ironically, having more, and better and healthier, sex and success than the prevailing puritans.



When a closet door is kicked off its hinges, it shouldn't be closed again, it is for walking through hand in hand not to be slammed once one has scuttled through oneself. That I think is the strongest and most important component of *Just Call Me Lady*. The book's huge overriding empathy with no self-pity attached. With a few tweaks, *Just Call Me Lady*, could be a self-help manual: how to succeed in life, love and business by accepting one's desires and organic structure and refusing to let anyone shame you for it. (You could word it much better Mandy and probably add a lightly self-deprecating joke so that we readers wouldn't feel inadequate for not having achieved self-fulfillment yet).

How to manage strippers, navigate the medical establishment, keep a sense of humour and grace under pressure, counter ignorance and ridicule, be an efficient sex worker, work the world wide web for fun and profit, choose an appropriate toilet, handle a heckler, live with social anxiety: all valuable lessons, especially while woven into the saga of finding and embracing one's true self. There were several places where I took notes even though you were careful to warn us that everyone has to find their own way, this is just what worked for you.

I have been rambling and trying to explain my enthusiasm for *Just Call Me Lady* while ignoring another crucial aspect, the entire first half or the autobiographical component, the early years. A memoir by a member of a minority has a heavy expectation attached to it. Will *Just Call Me Lady* be the breakthrough book, the one that explains the trans experience to the mainstream?

Of course not. Just as there is no definitive coming out story, no one size fits all racial, religious or marginalized story, there is no trans textbook. But there is now one specific memoir by one specific lady that tells a very entertaining and enlightening story that is also universal.

Familial relationships, surviving bullying, and the intense pressure to contort oneself into what society expects, are familiar tropes in autobiographies. Thankfully your prose and humour make it real and unique. The passages on furtively exploring and discovering one's sexuality are achingly beautiful and painfully poignant. The process of becoming a gay man, getting through your first closet door, rang true and relating so intensely with that process supplies an affinity to the next step, to the liberation of the "little girl" you denied but knew was there waiting to blossom. Very well done with bonus points for the sea cadets and musical theatre anecdotes, and the ruminations on love.

Just Call Me Lady is so empathetic, not only to all outsiders or even villains but specifically to yourself, that it spills off the pages and into one's soul. Forgiving is not just a theme, it is a manifesto, a handbook for living, that is charming and wonderful. And not to be confused with ever backing down or surrendering one's hard fought for sense of self. *Just Call Me Lady* is very empowering in a very ladylike - using your definition of "lady": "refined, polite, and well-spoken - manner.

I have no idea if this will help you sell books but I would, and will, encourage anyone and everyone

to read it if only for the sheer enjoyment of a rollicking tale. I just want to say thank you for what is a labour of love, self-analysis and rallying of the troops.

Fortunately I did just think of a scathing comment. Just Call Me Lady is subtitled "A Work of Completion." Please. Did sifting through your memories and organizing them to catalogue your evolution in a humorous and spellbinding way teach you nothing? The Mandy Goodhandy of today, the author of Just Call Me Lady, is inevitably going to transform further, accomplish more, create things not conceived of yet. The little girl may have grown into a lady, and a damn fine one, but I doubt the adventures are over yet. I hope not, I'm looking forward, a few decades hence, to You Can Still Call Me Lady or Just Call Me Lady II or One, Two, Three Times a Lady.

With thanks, admiration and love,

Drew

(A subtext of Just Call Me Lady concerns finding one's voice, explicitly including a musical context. Now that Ms Goodhandy has found her voice, she is stretching it in a collection of stylish standards and personal favourites also entitled Just Call Me Lady.)

Just Call Me Lady is available at Glad Day



Bookshop, 499 Church St. gladdaybookshop.com
Just Call Me Lady the CD is launched on Sunday, July 22 at Jazz Bistro, 251 Victoria St. jazzbistro.ca



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Friday OCTOBER 5

VIP LAUNCH OF CARNAVAL DES COULEURS @ BAR LE COCKTAIL

TWINKLE PARTY @ SKY CLUB

ASSOCIATED AFTER-HOURS @ CIRCUS

Saturday OCTOBER 6

BRUNCH @ RESTO LE SALOON

PARTY DISTRICT @ HANGAR

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Sunday OCTOBER 7

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- Mohawk Barbier •

Brandon Hackett is putting himself out there

“I was never into sports growing up,” says Brandon Hackett. “I was more of an indoor kid.” Technically, he is still indoors, as he has been performing in Second City MainStage shows for over two years. The current show, *The Best Is Yet To Come Undone*, is his fourth. “It’s a great job to have, but its six nights a week with very few breaks so I’m a little rundown.” He wants to travel, but he’s not sure being swallowed up by Los Angeles is necessarily going to be part of his career path. So what is next for Brandon Hackett?

“I’d like to be a writer or a show runner,” he tells me. “When I was on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, I liked the rigour of the writers’ room. Writing sketches for that show was exhausting. I would have to write five or six sketches in a single day. It was a challenge. I got to appear on the show as well.”

Hackett is gay. “I haven’t told my mom yet. But she knows. She’s seen my shows.” After an all-male Catholic college education that included musical theatre, he took classes at Second City until he was good enough to audition for their shows. He claims to never have had a gay-negative experience onstage, but there was this one time. He does a bit in the Second City show where he can take anything on earth and somehow directly relate it to the musical *Cats*. Its like *Six Degrees of Gayness*. “So once I said the name of some wrestler and just as I’m about to go into it some guy yelled out ‘No’. He just couldn’t deal with his hero being gay. But it is different for me, as I had my first stirrings when I watched wrestling as a kid.”

Though not overtly political, Hackett does believe that his comedy is “inherently political. I say things about being queer in a way that isn’t gay panicky or othering.” He cites Conan O’Brien and Steve Martin as his absolute favourite comedians. but also mentions Josh Thomas and several others. Let’s face it, he loves comedy and he loves the camaraderie. “The people with whom I make comedy are very mindful of others. We come together to be creative and be silly, to make something fun even if it’s just a fart joke.”

Finally I ask Hackett if he has any advice for youngsters coming up in the biz. “Don’t be afraid to be who you are when you are writing comedy. Put yourself out there. Treat the audience as if they were just as smart as you. And never punch down.”



DREW ROWSOME

Romeo and Juliet



Photos by Dahlia Katz

On a hot summer night, the fate of two star-crossed lovers unspooling under the stars is a heady mixture of culture, entertainment, and appreciation for the wonders our fair city has to offer. This *Romeo and Juliet* is briskly accessible without losing any of the magical cadence's of Shakespeare prose. Set in a vaguely modern setting, the Capulets and Montagues are presented as rival rabid soccer fans. The conflict that exists between the two households of Verona is not only logical but also colour-coded. And the sports metaphor allows for much energy and bounding about the stage.



Frank Cox-O'Connell moves smoothly from actor ([Hamlet](#)) to director, guiding an exuberant cast through all the beats of the plot by keeping them in constant motion. A long comic speech by Mercutio that tests modern sensibilities? A shirtless Mac Fyfe delivers it with all the faux-casual bravado of an audition for *Guys Gone Wild: 1595 Edition*. The tricky prologue that also provides somewhat necessary information? Give it to Benvolio who in the hands of Peter Fernandes ([Love and Information](#), [Onegin](#), [King Lear](#)) who is not only the incarnation of the one picked last for a team so the first to come up with a quip, but also has that rare ability to hold attention while dispensing dry information dynamically. The two of them manage to make soccer louts magnetic.



Fyfe crosses paths with Jenny Young's dithering nurse and comic sparks emphasize her sexual frustration, a counterpoint to the title couple. Naomi Wright ([Kiss](#), [Julius Caesar](#), [A Room of One's Own](#)) traverses the leap from distracted to grief-stricken, while Jason Cadieux ([Love and Information](#), [The Wedding Party](#), [King Lear](#)) is both a benevolent father and a benevolent Father. Jakob Ehman ([The Circle](#), [Nature of the Beast](#), [Cockfight](#), [Donors](#), [Firebrand](#)) is a strutting Tybalt, suffused with the confidence and menace of an aspiring athlete or fanatical fan.





But all of the proceedings depend on the performances of Romeo and Juliet. Rachel Cairns ([Bunny](#), [Hamlet](#)) begins as petulant - her Les Miz waif tank top is a signifier of her outsider status, a musical theatre fan among soccer hooligans - and becomes obsessive, her love for Romeo is a creepy, but completely realistic, combination of boy band fandom and sexual desire. David Patrick Flemming, as he did in [What a Young Wife Ought to Know](#), projects desire and desirability with an intensity that focuses on the object of his desire but radiates into the audience. He is also a very physical Romeo as he rock climbs while also declaiming his passion with rhythmic precision.

When Cairns and Flemming lock eyes in the midst of a chaotic party scene and swirling dry ice, somehow the focus remains on the connection between them. Somehow love at first sight seems not only plausible but a *fait accompli*. However the ill-fated lovers deliver the poetry in a contemporary colloquial style, rendering it crystal clear but also slightly flat. Their physical chemistry - both with each other and with the audience - carries them through, but the death scene is robbed of some of its pathos. The downside of soccer hooligans and dreamy schoolgirls, is that is hard to be too concerned with their fate no matter how tragic, dramatic and metaphorical.

As the curtain call continued to raucous applause, a young couple formerly seated on the grass right in front of the stage, stood and began to make out passionately. Not quite passionately enough to interrupt their videoing of the moment, with the stage and bowing cast in the background, for posterity, or more likely social media. Inspired by Romeo and Juliet? Perhaps. Or so consumed by the dichotomy exposed by this production that they had to add a meta-theatrical layer to the evening? We'll never know unless we stumble across it on YouTube. But young passion, no matter how artfully framed and digitized, can't possibly compare to the live experience of the fate of two star-crossed lovers unspooling under the stars.

Romeo and Juliet runs Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday until Sat, Sept 2 at the High Park Amphitheatre, 1873 Bloor St W. canadianstage.com



DREW ROWSOME

A Midsummer Night's

a magical circus full of fairies, scantily-clad lovers, an ass and a glory hole



Photos by Dahlia Katz

In my review of [Romeo and Juliet](#), I waxed rhapsodic about the joys of spending an evening in the open air at Shakespeare in High Park. Actually I have waxed rhapsodic in every review of Shakespeare in High Park over the years. But this being Canada, this is the first year I have seen two productions back to back without being subjected to a downpour interrupting one of them. Not only is the experience double the culture and entertainment value, it also points out just how versatile the setting is. And just how versatile, and I need to add exuberant, the cast is.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was the first production I ever saw at the amphitheatre in High Park, and it is a play that I'm sure I will see again. It is perfectly suited to Shakespeare in the great outdoors: it is silly, funny and, it's only claim to seriousness is a Shakespearean stab at meta-theatricality. A quartet of lovers have their signals crossed while a troupe of fairies are play revenge games on each other. The fairy Oberon, a very dashing Jason Cadieux ([Love and Information](#), [The Wedding Party](#), [King Lear](#)), gets his hands on a love potion, that is applied to the eyes (sly theatre symbolism as well as the obvious love is blind metaphor), and hi-jinks ensue.



Upping the comedy and theatricality, director Tanja Jacobs ([La Bete](#), [Love and Information](#)) turns the



stage into a circus tent and floods it with jugglers and scantily-clad acrobats. Peter Fernandes ([Love and Information](#), [Onegin](#), [King Lear](#)) is not only Puck and our host, but also a comic magician. It is a smooth way to ease the audience into the magical events to happen and Fernandes is so amiable, and so hungry for applause in an old time show biz parody, that he strolls away with every scene he graces. A casual thumbs-up stopped the show until the laughter died down, wielding a slice of pizza did the same with groans of disgust and delight.

The four lovelorn humans are mainly defined by their desires, we really don't need to know more about



The scenes satirizing theatre, and Cauleux nails them, culminate in a weird epilogue that may have

made more sense in Shakespearean time. There are a lot of references packed into a rather lengthy play within a play. It comes very close to stalling the momentum that has been built. Jacobs grabs a page from Charles Ludlam and utilizes Mac Fyfe's physical comedy skills to have him transform himself from an imperious duke to a reluctant drag performer repeatedly and rapidly. With pratfalls.



The bit also serves to remind the audience of just how many quick changes there have been throughout. Offstage in one outfit and character, then, in a split second, back as another. Thematically and in plot, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a three-ring circus and Jacobs treats it as such. The clowning is broad - Ehman and Cairns 69, Cadieux winks through a glory hole joke (a salute to the nearby cruising grounds?), and Fyfe is the butt of a rimming gag - and successful. Sexual innuendo plays well on a hot summer night. Whether Shakespeare's ruminations on theatre shine through is debatable, but Jacob's, the cast's and the creative's love for theatre does. And that love is as infectious as Fernandes' sleight of hand shtick, everyone will wax rhapsodic.

A Midsummer Night's Dream runs Wednesday, Friday and Sunday until Sun, Sept 2 at the High Park Ampitheatre, 1873 Bloor St W. canadianstage.com



DREW ROWSOME



The Ding Dong Girls

everything is better in cocksucking dress



Powerful, edgy, with a soupcon of skank

Drag den mother Marni MacDonald bestows that effusive praise upon her current - they are ever-shifting - favourite, but it could easily apply to The Ding Dong Girls as a whole. Giddy and silly with eye-popping costumes and performances, The Ding Dong Girls is a delightful concoction. The only complaint about this musical saga of the travails and triumphs of the conception and birth of a drag troupe, is that it has been hemmed in by the time constraints of a Fringe Festival slot.

The program notes that this production is “an abridged version of a longer, two-act musical.” That I cannot wait to see. Book authors Christopher Richards and Gordon Bowness deliver The Boys in the Band-esque bitchy banter in a Cabaret-ish structure, with musical numbers commenting or contrasting with the misadventures of the madcap queens. There are serious issues at play and this truncated version unfortunately doesn’t have time to let them percolate and ripen but, when there is so much glamour, action and gay abandon on stage, subtlety and solid structure be damned.

An intriguing debate about whether drag should be performance art, political or just entertainment adds thematic depth, and with a running time of under an hour (feels like minutes), that is enough to add satisfactory heft to a quick rising soufflé. The musical numbers by Lisa Lambert are serviceably catchy and lyrically witty. From the moment the statuesque and vocally powerful (with a soupcon of skank) Graham Conway ([Peter Pan](#)) launches into the familiar melody, “Somewhere over the . . .” and subverts it with “. . . top,” the audience knows it is in dexterous and skillful hands.

Conway explodes across the stage, long gamine legs and eyes that flash double entendres if not triples. He is imperious, overbearing and prone to insecure giggles. In true drag style, there should not be any room left on stage, or off, for the supporting cast. Except that all of them assume the others are the supporting cast. Nic Mencia builds slowly from recalcitrant to revolutionary, and his/her number in defense of drag as art instead of entertainment, life instead of death, is a stunner. Joel Schaefer takes a cliché blossoming ingenue routine and belts it through the back of the theatre, somehow making smug innocently endearing.

Oscar Moreno ([Thank You For Being a Friend](#), [Altar Boyz](#), [Shadowlands](#)) doesn't get a solo number, but he doesn't need one. Strutting, stretching, flouncing and repeatedly stripping to skimpy skimpies, Moreno makes sure the spotlight, and the audience's riveted attention, never leaves Mindy Melons. Moreno is such an extraordinary physical specimen that one only recalls his quick wit with a quip, or the physical exaggeration of a gesture to drive the drag speak deeper, in hindsight. Gawking can override critical faculties.

Comic relief comes in the form of Miss Fiercalicious who dances with abandon and confidence but limited virtuosity. That is the sweetest sugar in *The Ding Dong Girls*: it was opening night and there were the inevitable wardrobe malfunctions, lighting miscues and timing glitches. All in a night's work for an amateur drag troupe. Or not. The text has a built-in narrator, the beatific Mama Dominatrix who gives a master class in drag style and grace. Any potential mishap is neutered with a quip or an eyebrow cocked to kill. The rest of the cast has absorbed that well-honed skill - Mama Dominatrix was the very first Miss Woody's though she seems freakishly well-preserved to have earned that honour - and doesn't hesitate to apply it.



The Ding Dong Girls is partially based on Mama Dominatrix's experiences in a drag troupe in the early '90s, a vocation she shared with Richards who also created the kitschy-couture costumes. While *The Ding Dong Girls* is far from a history lesson, it does evoke a nostalgia, a memory mood, placing the audience at the heart of the magic that drag can create. And the political potential it has. Mama Dominatrix's smile as she watches and, without leaving her throne, weaves in and out of the action, and she effortlessly drags the audience into her reverie.

And her smile is a skank-eating grin when the entire audience can't resist singing along with, "Everything is better in a cocksucking dress."

The Ding Dong Girls continue until Sat, July 14 at Factory Theatre, 125 Bathurst St as part of the Toronto Fringe Festival. fringetoronto.com

DREW ROWSOME



Featherweight

There is a lot of information, a pun, and a descriptor packed into the title of Featherweight. But then there is a lot packed into the play Featherweight. Not only an uproarious comedy that had the audience in stitches, Featherweight also tackles some very heavy subjects that made for some squirm-inducing moments. Plus a couple of jump scares and a bar serving real alcohol.

The plot is a sitcom premise on steroids, riffing on [American Gods](#), Cheers, Night Court and Underage Anal Sluts 2. Meek millennial Jeff



has just been killed in a bike and truck collision, and his soul has been sent to The Paddock Tavern for judgement by Anubis, the Egyptian god of the dead. Anubis is having a personal/work crisis, hence so is her assistant Toth. Instead of weighing Jeff's heart against a feather, Anubis adds in his browser history. It is a clever conceit but it is only a jumping off point for more - zanier and profound - ideas and themes.

Playwright/director Tom McGee packs the script with one-liners and visual gags. But the laughs are in service of serious discussion on racism, misogyny, rape, father/son relationships, revenge porn and, particularly, complicity in all of the above. There are perhaps too many ideas but instead of being scattershot they ricochet, playing off each other and building. It also helps to confine the audience to the environs, temporarily a theatrical stage instead of a drunken one, of The Paddock Tavern. The action happens on all sides and from all directions with the inevitable interactions which are surprisingly entertaining.

The cast is uniformly excellent and their energy is barely contained by the four walls, certainly not by the fourth wall. Michael Musi ([Late Night](#), [Liver](#)) fidgets and blusters as an everyman suddenly confronted with his potential guilt over a host of crimes. As his former obliviousness fades into dawning horror, Musi juggles empathetic, vileness and slapstick haplessness, sometimes all in the same sentence or pratfall. Amanda Cordner is a regal goddess who oozes sensuality and can't quite cover the cracks where her vulnerability is leaking through. She is also a master class in double takes.

But it is Kat Letwin ([Late Night](#)) who has the showy role as Toth who channels a multitude of characters during the trial. Letwin takes the gift of a role and plays it to the hilt without ever losing her dignity, the thread of the convoluted narrative, or a sense of reality. She is quite simply hilarious. Her final speech is the climax of Featherweight and is almost shocking how much the audience has invested emotionally in her comic character. That the ending is abrupt and inconclusive is secondary, we have been moved and given lots to think about.

Featherweight is produced by McGee and Kat Sandler, who comprise Theatre Brouhaha. Sandler, who also dramaturged, is familiar to most discerning theatre-goers and certainly anyone who reads this blog, so it is hard to resist comparing Featherweight to her work - there are a lot of similarities, in a very good way - but if they are to weighed against each other, the scale will not plummet. The funniest and most heartbreaking line I have experienced in a long time comes midway through Featherweight. Musi casually tosses out, "It smells like Honest Ed's," and the entire audience groaned, guffawed and then sighed sadly from somewhere deep inside before laughing again. Here's hoping that Featherweight has an afterlife ahead of it.

Featherweight is remounted on Sat, Aug 4 and Sun, Aug 5 at The Paddock Tavern, 178 Bathurst St. theatrebrouhaha.com



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CHERI: Theresa Tova Seduces!



CHERI: Theresa Tova Seduces!

Stewart Borden, July 13, 2018

From her off-stage opening line to her brilliant closing line at the piano, Theresa Tova is mesmerizing and seducing.

Tova is playing Lea, an aging ex-courtesan, who takes the audience on an elaborate journey through life, love, sex, growing old, age-appropriate dressing, and scarves. Her dialogue is brilliantly written (by Sky Gilbert) and is putty in Tova's hands as she savours each word, unhurriedly, taking the audience from laughter to deep contemplation to laughter smoothly and skillfully. Easily one of the best performances of the year, do not miss it.

She (and the audience) are distracted by the cute piano player who reminds her of her one true love – Cheri. Played by Dustin Peters, (who also wrote the music and accompanies Lea on the baby grand), the pianist acts as a competent foil for Lea, never revealing much, but giving plenty of material for her to springboard into yet another enthralling subject. After all, make no mistake – the night is all about Lea, she wouldn't have it any other way!

The staging is simple, with a couch and a decanter in what one imagines to be an overly ornate drawing room, and a beautiful shiny black piano. There is no need for anything else. The words provide all the imagery needed.

This play (notice I didn't say musical), illustrates my personal favourite way of incorporating music into theatre. Well written dialogue, interspersed with a few well-written songs that are allowed to breathe uncompelled to move the plot along, and some very well-played piano adding drama at key points. Perfect. See this show.

A few memorable lines for those that saw the show: "then double it", "pianist", "g-string".



Andy Warhol Musical

In Rehearsal - singing and dancing at The Factory



Andy Warhol Musical: In Rehearsal could very well be, once it is done with workshopping, retitled Andy Warhol! The Musical!. A subtle distinction, but the current title is conceptual while the apparent aim is for one of those brash '80s musicals that strove to dazzle and entertain - [Cats!](#), [Chaplin!](#), [Evil Dead the Musical!](#), or [Stop the Planet of the Apes](#), [I Want to Get Off!](#) - by musicalizing an unlikely source.

Andy Warhol Musical: In Rehearsal is a straightforward docudrama illustrating the story of the rise and fall of Andy Warhol's famous/notorious The Factory and the famous/notorious people who worked or hung out there. The history lesson is narrated amiably by [Christopher Wilson](#) ([Company](#), [Assassins](#), [Into the Woods](#)) who uses his charisma to create a singing and dancing cross between [Charles Gray's Criminologist](#) and William Holden's Joe Gillis. Other members of the exceptionally talented cast occasionally take over, mainly to introduce the musical numbers meant to illustrate or emphasize the trajectory of the character being presented and discussed.

The two threads co-exist uneasily, while the story of The Factory inhabitants are inherently riveting, there is little new information presented, and the central thesis seems to be that Warhol callously used and then casually discarded everyone who entered his orbit. The conceptual framework of the "In Rehearsal" part of the title starts big with a production number featuring the entire cast singing and dancing "Love Me." It rivals the audition scenes from [A Chorus Line](#) or [All That Jazz](#), with the extra high kick of dancer desperation applied to real life characters.

When the entire cast belts and gyrates, there is a power that rolls off the stage and carries the audience along. It is exciting that Toronto has such a pool of talent to choose from that it can fill a stage with powerhouses, but alas the music and lyrics don't quite match that level of expertise. The rhymes and tunes are generic except for a few unusual intervals that stumped the abilities of even such fine singers. This is particularly unfortunate because Andy Warhol Musical: In Rehearsal's intro music is [Lou Reed's](#) "I'm Waiting For My Man" and the extro is "Walk on the Wild Side," both of which are, decades later, groundbreaking, insanely catchy and speak volumes about the scene they were conceived in. Is it time for Lou!?

There is clever interplay with the looming projections, Warhol has never looked scarier, evoking the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, and a musical chairs bit lifted from [Evita](#) where the women, the bio-



women, in Warhol's universe compete for his attention. Devin Chin-Cheong's dance number as Freddie Herko upstages the rest of the choreography, not only for its expansiveness compared to the vogue-esque group choreography, but for his skimpy costuming and breathtaking torso (even though the audience is brutally disappointed that it is not historically accurate, as we are told, Herko's suicide dance was done in the nude). Jewelle Blackman ([Once on This Island](#)) has Nico's sang-froid conjured to icy perfection except for her vocals which are blistering red hot.

The first persona we meet is Duff MacDonald's feisty Jackie Curtis before he picks up large chunks of the narration as the rough trade Billy Linich. It is a deft exploration of duality, sexuality and the universal vulnerability of gender roles. The last is Chase Winnicky's Candy Darling who delivers a devastating monologue and a power ballad that would have broken hearts if it were as well written as it is delivered. Stacey Kay is a sassy Brigid Berlin and Sarah Gibbons ([Obeah Opera](#), [Falsettos](#)) a regal Viva. The show itself may be "In Rehearsal," but the entire cast is ready for the spotlight.

The history lesson becomes contemporary commentary with the cast absorbed in their cell phones while singing what Andy Warhol Musical: In Rehearsal posits as Warhol's mantra, "You've got to be completely disconnected from the human race/If you want to get through the day face to face." It is a smart moment linking Warhol's philosophy to our current epidemic of alienation and incivility, but were there smart phones in the '60s? Or is that part of the "In Rehearsal" theme? A similar link between Warhol's misogyny and the #MeToo movement is tenuous if worthy of exploration, and linking his trans/drag superstars to misogyny puzzles.

This Fringe workshop production should help pinpoint where some of the problems are and the creatives are requesting feedback on their website - I can hear theatre queens revving their engines from here. But the cast truly is stellar and they manage to pump the material into an engaging and fun show. It make take more than 15 minutes, but Andy Warhol! The Musical! is imminent.



Wednesday, July 4 @ 7:00 pm
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The Pansy Craze

history, homosexuality and let's put on a show

I wish there were better photos with which to sell *The Pansy Craze: A New Musical*. It is great fun, empowering and something that we need a lot more of. The Fringe Festival is a great space in which to try out ideas that don't fit the mainstream, and *The Pansy Craze* is one of those ideas that is just waiting for the mainstream to catch up.

The basic concept is that in the prohibition era there was a brief "craze" for risqué acts that included female impersonation, gender bending and homosexuals. Creator Avery Jean Brennan takes this historical nugget and applies it to a backstage rom-com musical with delightful and devastating results. Yes *The Pansy Craze* is a little rough around the edges but there is so much heart, talent and let's put on a show bravado, that it is irresistible.



Sixty minutes is not enough time for all the weaving threads and thematic political activism to be explored, but short and succinct packs a punch. Basic costuming - cleverly gender-based and sexy - and the use of masks gives an overall thematic consistency but it would be wonderful to see *The Pansy Craze* given full utilization of the lights, glamour and big stage it deserves.

Backstage musicals hinge on love and thwarted love and love found through combat and competition. Stir in homosexuality and the transgendered and it just becomes more enticing. Teddy Moynihan is the classical leading man channeling the host from *Cabaret* and he lures us into this delicious den of inequity. We would follow him anywhere. Gladly. He runs a talent agency that will supply anything that the speakeasies demand. And fortunately they are asking for pansies.

Stephanie Hood is the star performer whose broken ankle turns her into a star burlesque stripper. Her routine is sexy, desperate and just needing better lingerie. Her "husband" Shaquille Pottinger discovers his sexuality and gets to bring down the house in a loose-limbed power-voice finale that is a joy to witness. Kira Renee is the lesbian club-owner who is the comic relief with a voice that lifts the rafters, and Peter Mundell ([Carrie: The Musical](#)) is the Broadway producer who dashes and fulfills dreams. Sansom Marchand, who bears an uncanny resemblance to [kink.com](#)'s Sebastian Keys, gets to play all the villains but does it with sex appeal to spare.

But Devin Herbert is the star. A "female impersonator" who refuses to abide by the rules and nails a number, that cribs a little too closely from Jerry Herman's "I Am What I Am," of empowerment that has the audience cheering. They are extraordinary, flouncing, glamorous and strutting perfection. The world needs more defiant drag queens or trans triple-threats or simply star power. When Pottinger rips into a reprise of Herbert's "obscene" theme song, I, and most of the audience, had tears in my eyes.

Tragically, I came to *The Pansy Craze* on its second to last performance. I left singing "I Am What I Am" but that is in no way to discount what Brennan has created. Catch the last show if you can, you won't regret it.

The Pansy Craze continues until Sun, July 15 at the George Randolph Theatre, 736 Bathurst St as part of the Toronto Fringe Festival. torontofringe.com



The Girl in the Photograph

powerful investigation of sexual coercion or liberation

#MeToo can be muddled and *The Girl in the Photograph* dives fearlessly into questions of complicity and guilt and seduction and coercion and... The play, which is also autobiographical, doesn't shy from the complications of love, lust and guilt.

A 14-year-old girl is seduced by her theatre teacher/director. Or does she fall in love? Is the inequality of the relationship, he is a cad who has done this before, worth it as he opens her eyes to both her sexuality and to the power of theatre and creating? Tough questions that are thought-provoking, daring, and refuse easy cathartic answers.

Andrea Cabeza, who is also the creator and is drawing on life experience, gives a raw performance that moves through intense emotions at a rapid speed. If she isn't baring her soul, she convincingly acts it. She has able support on what must be a rough journey from Tamara Almeida as the wisecracking teacher's assistant, enabler and former victim, and Erin Roche as the interrogator and also the other woman (ie: the wife. There is always a wife or significant other).

But it is David Chinchilla who has the most difficult, and slippery, role. He is the seducer, the villain, the emancipator, but also has to be appealing to explain how this happened. With his glistening eyes, smooth patter (he makes the dissection of Shakespearean prose sound like an erotic act), and slabs of pecs just barely revealed, he is the quintessential bad boy. You know he should be resisted but he is just so damn sexy and smooth.

Director Victoria Urquhart takes a text that is still forming, a strict dramaturge would be helpful, and moves the cast through some awkward scene transitions all while keeping the emotions and performances pitch-perfectly real. There is some toying with dance as a transitional device and some help from guitarist Owen Gardner but a little more faith in theatricality and the suspension of disbelief would have let the ideas shine. And alas the mystery alluded to in the title is mcguffin and falls flat.

There is a very clever bit where the two watch a telenovela and Cabeza's character realizes that she has become a melodramatic cliché. It is shocking and funny. Because of course life, love affairs, and particularly 14-year-old versions of the two, are melodramatic and right out of a telenovela or cheesy soap opera. Portions of *The Girl in the Photograph* are in Spanish and it adds a realism that boosts the drama. If the entire play were in Spanish with surtitles, it would be hailed as a revelation.

Tragically the night I attended the air conditioning in the theatre was underused. While the sheen of sweat on Chinchilla's chest certainly added to the experience of *The Girl in the Photograph*, it also underscored the length of the piece and a certain amount of repetition. The story and themes are powerful and achingly familiar to anyone who has ever fallen for the wrong person, and the performances are strong and razor sharp powerful, with a polish and a bit more nerve (and comfortable temperatures) *The Girl in the Photograph* will be extraordinary and a contentious addition to a debate that we should be having.

The Girl in the Photograph continues until Sun, Aug 15 at Factory Theatre, 125 Bathurst St as part of the Toronto Fringe Festival. fringetoronto.com



PAUL BELLINI



Three tales of love in the Shadowlands

Shadowlands is a new movie by Charlie David. Actually, I think it's three episodes of a TV show packaged as an anthology, which went on to win him the First Time Director Award at the qFLIX Philadelphia Film Festival. The theme is love. The first story is set in 1928 and features a mad plastic surgeon who kills people. Lots of blood. The second story is about two cuties on a camping trip in 1951. They go into the woods to fuck and meet another hunk. The three-way in the middle of the movie is quite erotic. The third story is a downer, a sad tale of a man who paints saints while dealing with a dying lover. This last one also stars Charlie David.

Overall, it's not bad. The production values are excellent. Lots of effort went into the art direction, and it is gorgeously shot by Charlie's long-time collaborator Nico Stagias. The guys are all very hot. Some of the costumes are pretty wild. The locations are striking. Not everything is perfect. At times I felt it was trying too hard, and at other times it veered into the ludicrous. But doesn't that describe almost every gay movie?

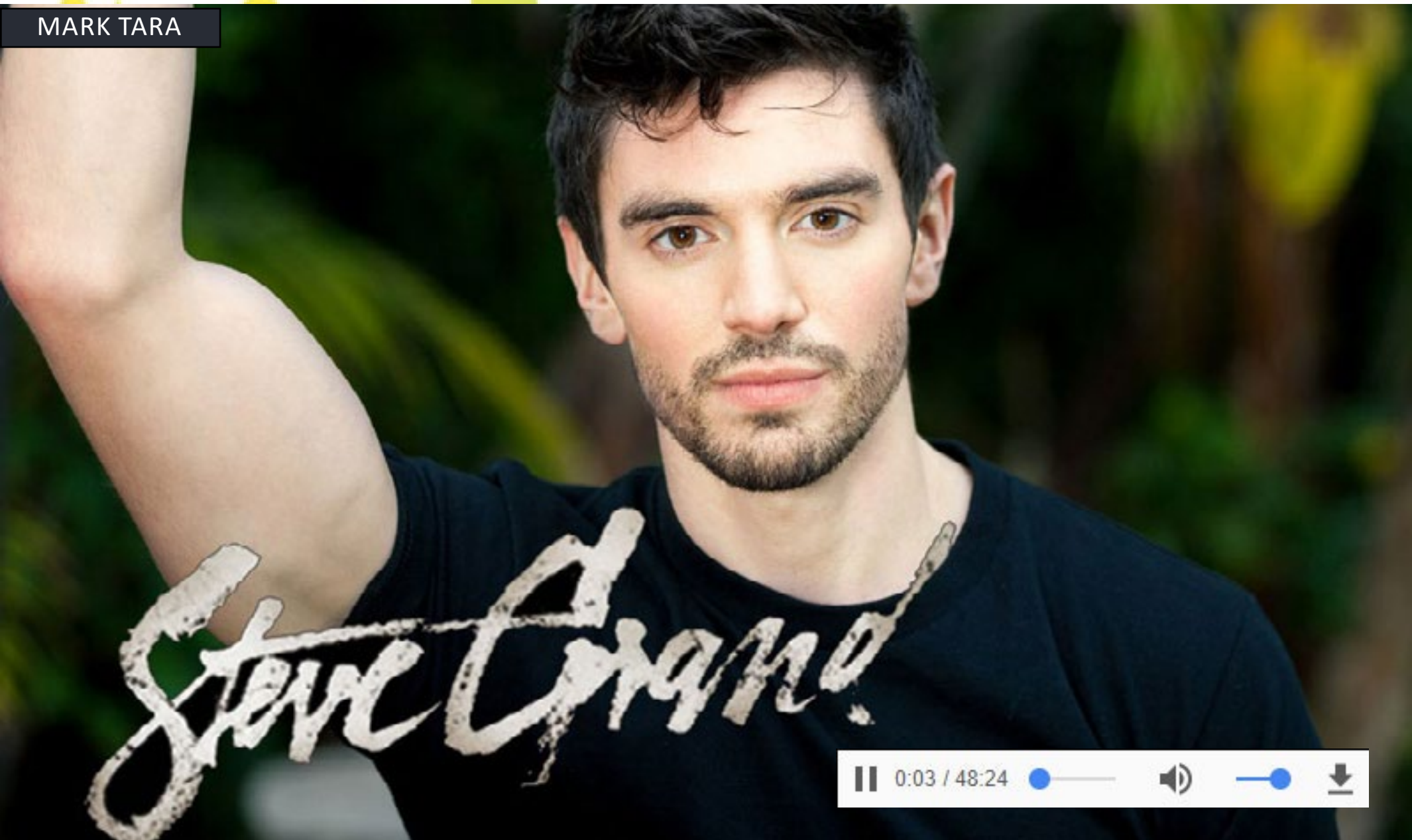
Charlie's been around for a while, and he's done a lot of things both in front of and behind the camera. His production company, Border2Border Entertainment Inc., has produced such shows as Mulligans, Judas Kiss, I'm A Stripper, I'm A Porn Star, and Positive Youth. He's sold his work to Showtime, HBO, MTV/LOGO, and OutTV, among others. He's a busy guy.

I admire Charlie's energy and his productivity. Shadowlands may not be to everyone's tastes, but it certainly is ambitious and well-made.

Shadowlands is available on [OUTtv and OUTtvGo](#) in Canada and on [Vimeo worldwide](#).



MARK TARA



Recently I caught up with openly gay American singer/songwriter Steve Grand.

In 2013 Steve's music video for the song "All American Boy" (depicting a Gay crush/relationship) went viral. Within months Steve found himself on CNN, Good Morning American and even Larry King Now! Now he's on Rainbow Country with me, Mark Tara

MARK TARA
RAINBOW COUNTRY
 Tuesday's Midnight @ CIUT 89.5FM

In this interview we talk about his new album, Not The End Of Me, Grand's most personal to date, his coming out to his family and more!



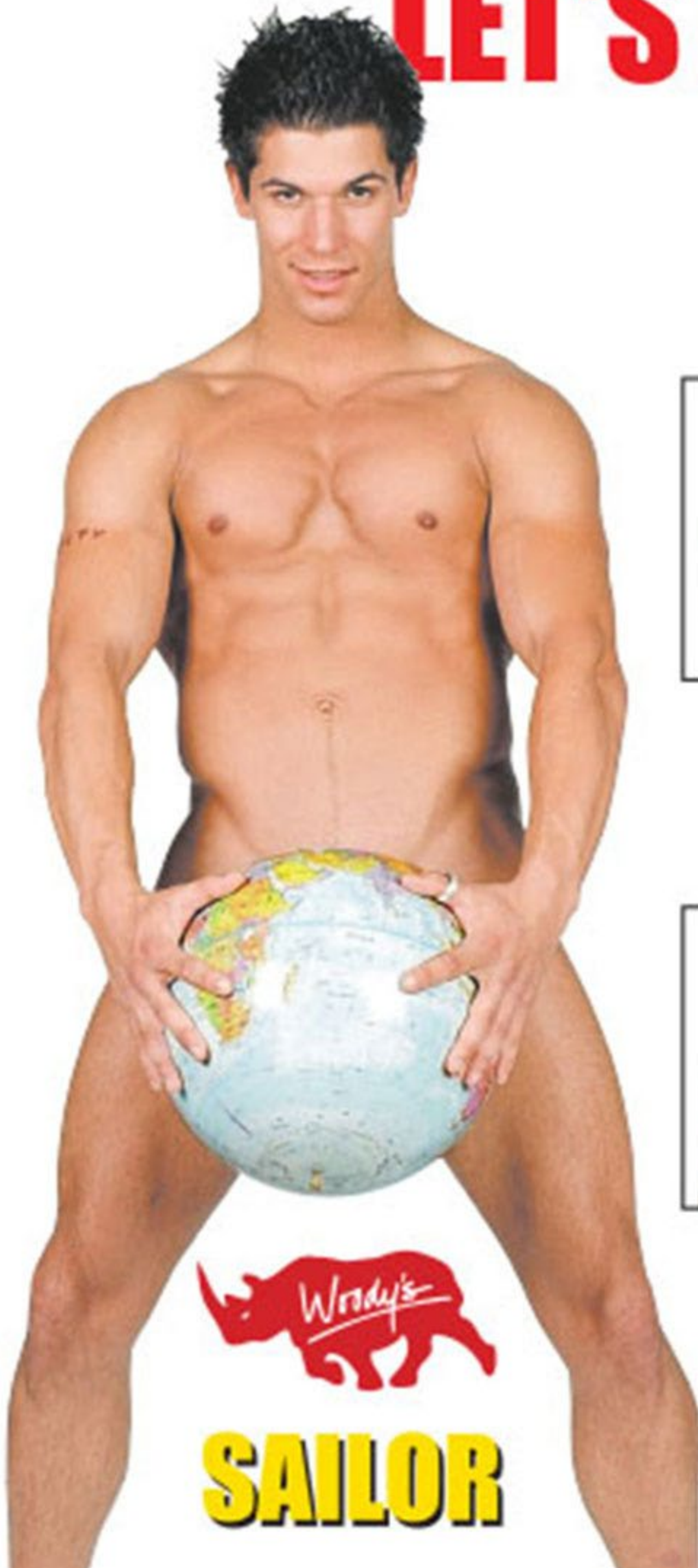
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A full-body photograph of a very muscular man with a dark beard and mustache. He is shirtless, showing his well-defined chest and abdominal muscles. He is wearing olive green cargo pants with a dark blue belt. A large, black-outlined rectangular tattoo is on his chest, containing the Remingtons logo. The background is a dark, textured wall with some water droplets.

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We Know Gay



Drew Rowsome - MGT Editor, a writer, reviewer, musician and the lead singer of Crackpuppy. drewrowsome.blogspot.ca.



Sean Leber - Founder, MGT Creative Director.



Raymond Helkio - is an author, director and award-winning filmmaker. He cofounded TheReadingSalon.ca



Paul Bellini was a writer for The Kids in the Hall and a producer for This Hour Has 22 Minutes, and columnist at Fab Magazine...



Bil Antoniou - is an actor and play writer. He is also movie reviewer who has been writing for myoldaddiction.com



Sky Gilbert - Canadian writer, actor, academic and drag performer. skygilbert.blogspot.ca



Mark Tara radio host 'Rainbow Country' CIUT 85.9 FM and personality. marktara.com



Rolyn Chabers was a fab columnist and currently social columnist for Daily Xtra!



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