

TORONTO'S PREMIER GAY LIFESTYLE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

MGT

We Know Gay

MY GAY TORONTO

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Publisher:
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Founder & Creative Director
SEAN LEBER
seanl@MyGayToronto.com

Editor:
DREW ROWSOME
editor@MyGayToronto.com

Questions:
questions@MyGayToronto.com

Advertising inquiries:
partner@MyGayToronto.com

Contributing writers:

DREW ROWSOME
PAUL BELLINI
RAYMOND HELKIO
SKY GILBERT
BIL ANTONIOU
ROLYN CHAMBERS

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by Raymond Helkio



The multi-talented Amanda Lepore
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Braving encounters with the Legends of Horror
by Drew Rowsome



Heroine gets cooking
by Paul Bellini



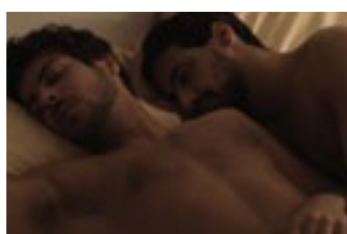
Trans Meditations and Other Collaborative Queries
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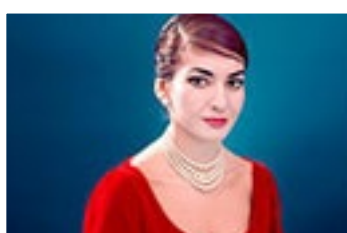
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by Drew Rowsome



Getting intimate with the glorious diva Maria Callas
by Drew Rowsome

PLUS MUCH MORE!



RAYMOND HELKIO

Nathaniel Bacon Stars As Frank N' Furter: Rocky Horror Show (Live)



Are you ready to do the time warp (again)!? Having sold out for the past seven years, the *Rocky Horror Show (Live)* is back for Halloween! This horror cult classic which tells the story of a newly engaged couple who pay a call to the bizarre residence of Dr. Frank-N-Furter.

Nathaniel Bacon stars as Frank-N'-Furter, the self-proclaimed "sweet Transvestite from Transsexual Transylvania" and principle antagonist. Having won the Broadway World Toronto Award for Best Actor in a musical, Nathaniel's background is in singing and modelling. And while it's true that Nathaniel makes for delicious eye candy, if you've ever seen perform then you know he's more than just a pretty face, chest, arms, abs and legs. Originally from Lindsay Ontario, Nathaniel is considered to be one of Toronto's queer theatre darlings. I caught up him to ask him a few questions about his current work with the Rocky Horror Show.

Raymond: **What aspect of your character Frank-N-Furter do you most identify with?**

Nathaniel: I'm a very unconventional person and I have a strong distaste for the status quo. So I really relish the opportunity to throw off the shackles of normality and embrace the weird, fun and wacky. I also have a deep love for old horror/ sci-fi films and B-movies so this particular style of dark camp comedy comes easily to me.

Raymond: **What has been the most challenging part of this role?**

Nathaniel: Physically, my Frank moves completely differently than I do. He is very snakelike and has an intense sort of hyper-femininity. So finding his physicality was a challenge. That and just walking the fine line between what people expect of Frank (because of Tim Curry's iconic performance) and making him my own, unique version of the character. Though I have worked very hard and I think I have managed to do that.



Raymond: **What do you know now that you wish someone had told you when you started?**

Nathaniel: That a career is a long, slow build toward a body of work and that no part lost or gained will make or break you. It's all about persistence and a dedication to exploring your craft and improving yourself.

Raymond: **After the Rocky Horror Show, where can fans see you next?**

I'll be appearing in Sky Gilbert's newest show, *Shakespeare's Enemy* at Buddies In Bad Times this spring.

The Rocky Horror Show (Live) - The Lower Ossington Theatre - September 22nd-December 23rd, 2018 - TICKETS: <https://tickets.ticketwise.com/event/the-rocky-horror-show-toronto>



PAUL BELLINI

Catching up with Amanda Lepore

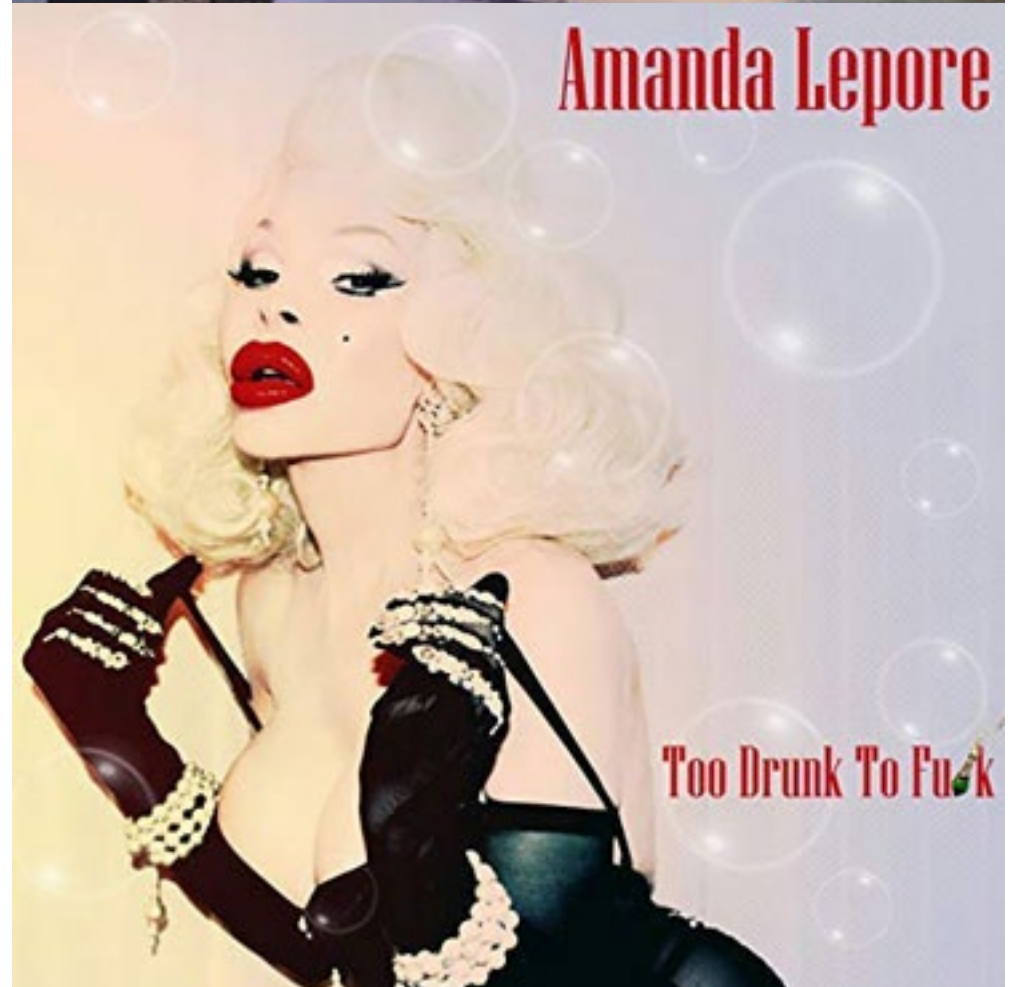
The trans model Amanda Lepore has had a charmed career. “The number one transsexual in the world with a fully functional vagina,” as she calls herself, began transitioning in her late teens. She married a guy but soon left him to move to NYC, where she worked for Patricia Field and hooked up with the notorious Club Kids. Meanwhile, the surgeries continued. Amanda’s lips achieved epic proportions. She has had her face put on a Swatch, she led pride marches, she appeared in cult movies and rock videos, she has a doll modelled after her, and she has a signature fragrance. She is a true star.

Then, in 2011, she released a CD called *I ... Amanda Lepore*, but it should just be called *Greatest Hits*. Written and produced by Cazwell for Peace Biscuit Records, it’s an amazing product. If you’ve seen any drag shows in the last few years, then you’ve heard these tracks, particularly “My Hair Looks Fierce” and “My Pussy.” Now, she has a new single out, called “Too Drunk To Fuck,” and it’s gorgeous.

“I like performing,” she tells me by phone. “I was really shy when I started in the club scene in 1990, but then I started modelling for David LaChapelle and I got better and better at it. David used to make me take off my clothes and I would have to go to these parties naked, and it seemed to make people happy. I take really good care of my body, and I think I look better naked than clothed.”

As great as she is a recording artist, it’s as a fashion icon that she really excels. “I don’t follow fashion, I wear what I like. I’m influenced by the old blonde bombshells like Marilyn Monroe, Diana Dors, Jean Harlow, Jayne Mansfield and Vargas drawings. Vargas inspired the transparent dresses. I also like Jessica Rabbit. I like showing curves. I have to have five inch heels. I guess it’s from having been a dominatrix. I also like fashion from the ‘90s like Galliano and Gaultier. But I don’t really follow fashion at all. It’s more a personal style thing.”

The influence of Marilyn Monroe is especially significant. “I don’t love the sad part of her life, but I like the MGM thing that she hated. She didn’t





want to be that glamour girl, but I love it so much. It's very exaggerated, hyper glamorous. She knew make-up tricks and was ahead of her time. Everyone was matte then but she highlighted with weird things, like what everyone does now on Instagram. She did all that then, with Vaseline and eye shadows. She did her lips three-dimensional, she would use cotton under her lips to push them forward. She was self-created. I like that about her, too."

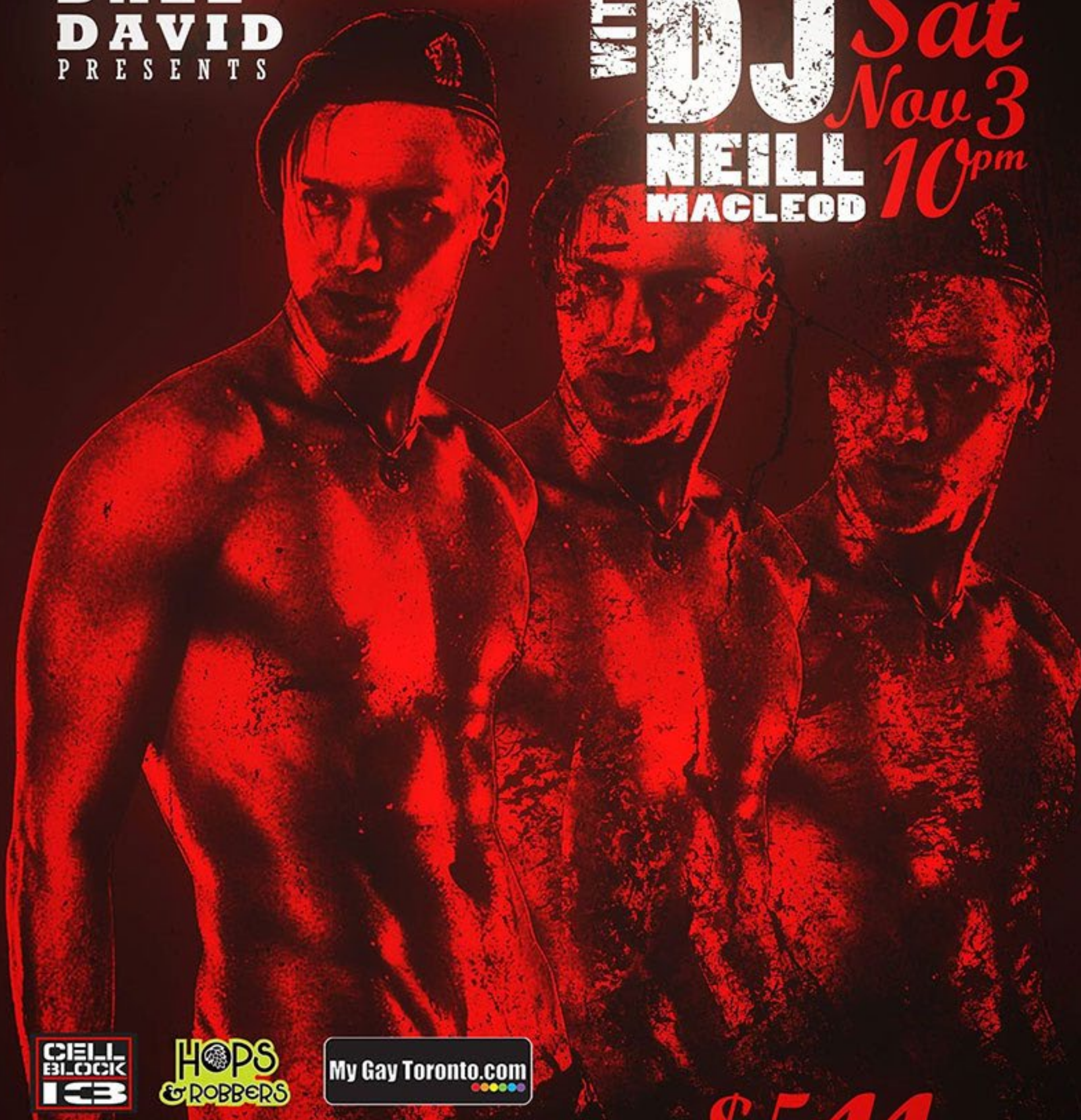
Last year, Amanda co-wrote a book with Thomas Flannery Jr. called *Doll Parts* and it's loaded with provocative photos. She also tells me a new CD is just around the corner. Clearly, she shows no signs of slowing down. The rest of us will just have to catch up.





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before 11 pm
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ROLYN CHAMBERS

Black & Blue 2018

The Veteran & The Virgin



Perspective is everything. My first Black & Blue was in 2001, two years before the events of 9/11 (which affected attendance greatly) and one year before this world-renowned circuit party reached its majestic peak. Everything else since then, though spectacular, has been a slow decline in numbers which has, of course, lead to smaller venues, smaller productions, and an aging demographic. In fact rumour had it that it was to officially shutter its man-made fantasyland doors for good two years ago. But here it is still is. And so, it seems, am I. After officially ending my decade long run, reporting on every festival for *fab* magazine for ten years straight (not chemically or sexually of course), on request of MyGayToronto, alongside my newfound friend from Ohio (who has never attended before) I make my return to the 28th Black & Blue entitled: Chrome.

Arriving Saturday night I unfortunately miss Bal En Cuir, the Friday night leather party. Nick, my Black & Blue virgin, however raves about the manly action he witnessed on the dance floor of Lion D'or as DJs Marc Paquet and Tom Stephan held court.

“Oh my god it was amazing,” Nick sighs. “Guys





were groping each other and giving each other hand jobs. Oh and the music was great.” He only had to take half a Cialis.

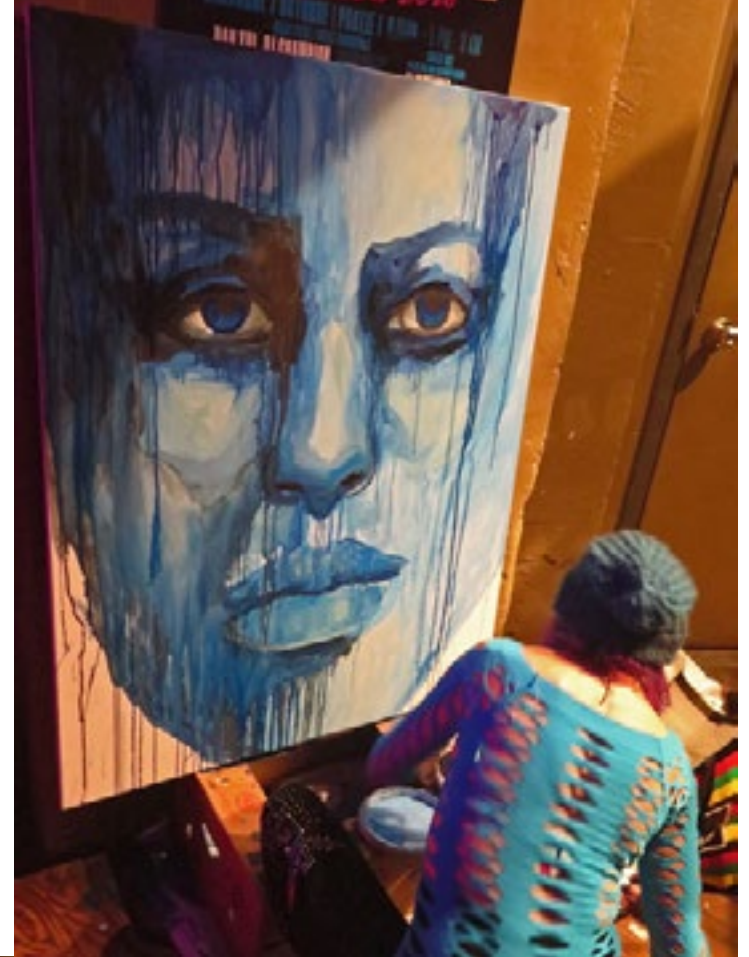
The following night Hanger hosts District, a nondescript event in a recently renovated warehouse space. The venue’s smooth high white walls encase all inside like a large padded cell used to calm the criminally insane. But instead of relaxing the sexually untamed corralled men, most dressed in minimal black, it produces an energy of horniness that ripples throughout the room, bouncing back off the walls





and keeps the party going, with the help of DJs Stefane Lippé, Alain Jackinsky and Ben Bakson until 5am.

As I get ready for Sunday's main event, my mind travels back to my first Black & Blue. Held on the huge playing field of Montreal Stadium it attracted almost 20,000 people from all over the world who were privileged to witness many mega performances on multiple stages that left lasting impressions on those who witnessed them. This year, upon returning from my five-year sabbatical I felt like I was at Fly Nightclub on a Saturday night. Okay a really, really busy Saturday night. Added to this, the main party is split up into two venues. The first party begins at 5pm at the M-TELUS Centre (formerly Metropolis) and goes until 3am while the second party opens its doors at 2am and lasts until 10am at Club Soda, just a hop, skip, and a bump away. Splitting





the party is odd (I think TELUS probably has a no late-party clause) but I'm glad I get to experience Metropolis once again. Its elaborate theatrical domed ceiling is the ideal environment to bring about mystical visions . . . even with someone hands down your pants.

At its height Black & Blue held its smaller Military Ball here each year. Tonight's main event just fills the dance floor while its second floor balcony is ghostly empty. But those who do come out are in good spirits. Visually there is little decor, the go-go dancers are oddly grouped and somewhat boring, but the shows are fully fun. Beginning simply, a cute, charming, shirtless diablo busker boy captivates with his coy cupping routine done to the beat of the music. Expecting singer Ultra Naté to perform her hit diva tracks like I've seen her do so many times before, I was surprised to realize that she was the



DJ we had actually been dancing to for the last hour or so. In the five years I'd taken off though she had, apparently, dived headphones first into the DJ pool, practiced her back-beat strokes and was now swimming in the deep end with the big boys. After her impressive set Ultra Naté exits the booth, takes centre stage and finally belts out her hit, "Free," to an appreciative audience who cheer her on with visions of parties past probably dancing in their heads. From this point four other shows quickly follow before New York's Roger Sanchez closes the night, including drag performances by Jimmy Moore and Rainbow, a homage to the late Aretha Franklin by Johanne Blouin (accompanied by aerialists), a hunky shirtless electric violinist, and of course the BBCM dancers. It was a little taste of what once was, but I was spectacle-starved and thankful for the visual aperitif.



Before heading to Club Soda we pop by our AirBnB to change, unwind and watch some fierce Thierry Mugler fashions shows to get us in a theatrical mood. With catwalk moves we enter the divinely dark dance floor to strut ourselves to the beats of DJ Abel who is giving us some delicious Thierry-Tracks (our new name for beats that make us prance). We never actually make it to the end and unfortunately never hear Barcelona's DJ Angel Morales express himself on the turntables (or maybe we did), but we leave the party, and Black & Blue behind, with smiles on our exhausted faces.



As they say, everything comes to an end. Though Black & Blue has been reduced to a much smaller version of its once grandiose self, it's still an event to be experienced. For Nick, my Black & Blue virgin, this was very true. In a Facebook post he said about the experience, "You have opened my eyes to a world of such supreme beauty." Perspective is indeed everything.





RAYMOND HELKIO

Streaming Queens: Laverne Cox, Sandra Bernhard



Streaming Queens: Laverne Cox, Sandra Bernhard
24 Sep 2018.

“If you can ride the subway in drag, you can do anything!” -Queens of Kings

Revry, the Gay Netflix, is back with a fall line-up of super-queer shows but to help you sort through them, here’s our list of what’s worth a watch.



Carl(a) - Orange is the New Black’s Laverne Cox sizzles up the screen in the multi-festival winner feature film Carl(a). It’s the story of a trans woman struggling with rejection from her family and doubts from the man she loves while she raises money to complete her transition. Carla must choose between being true to herself or being someone she isn’t for someone else.



SECS and EXECS - The Emmy Nominated SECS and EXECS follows the chaos of four bosses and their

assistants and set at Kathletics, a women’s wear company owned by Kath Fairchild who is played by that fabulous fireball Sandra Bernhard.



Queens of Kings - Drag culture has been around for years, but only recently with the success of shows like RuPaul’s Drag Race has this subculture achieved mainstream success. While this is an incredible accomplishment, the spotlight is often focused on a singular view of what drag can be and as Miz Jade notes, “We have to make sure we remain inclusive and remember we are one HUGE dysfunctional family and that is ok. My Queens of Kings experience was nerve wrecking. I try to keep my pedestrian life and my drag life separate. Doing this show, I had to bare myself in BOTH walks of life. I work my ass off and I do it with a smile on my face. I hope people see that and get a lil glimpse of the day and life of a queer weirdo.”

Queens of Kings showcases a diverse variety of drag performers in the evolving Brooklyn drag scene; the series is a cavalcade of legendary Brooklyn drag performers who prove New York has remained the herald of drag culture. Each episode focuses on the intricate duality of The much anticipated season three of Queens of Kings is out featuring RuPaul’s Drag Race Season 10 Winner, Aquaria. Following episodes featuring drag icon Scarlet Envy.



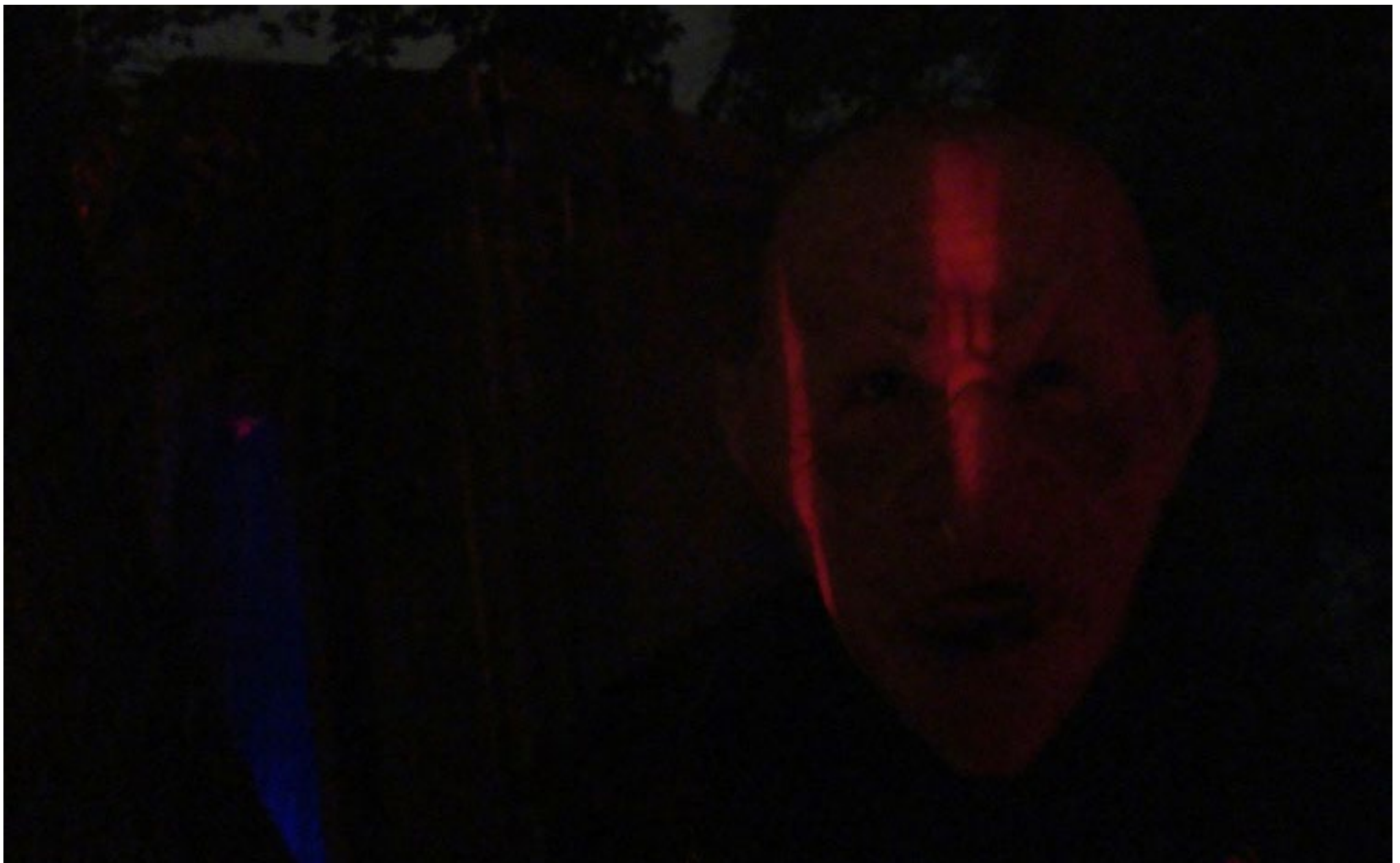
DREW ROWSOME



Legends of Horror

a stroll in a garden of terror

On a crisp autumn night, with the hint of Halloween on the horizon, what could be more delightful than a stroll through the grounds, courtyards and dank tunnels of an ancient castle? Yes, the garden is full of rustling, bones and creatures that leap out threateningly, and the fountains in the courtyard bubble with blood and flames, but there is a serenity that descends, a graveyard stillness, that is quite calming and tranquil, punctuated only by screams of terror and laughter. Admiring the autumn colours may do it for some, but I'll take a haunted house or dark maze over the wonders of nature any day. Or preferably night.



Legends of Horror at Casa Loma is as much fun the second time around as the first. Most of [what made the 2017 edition so stellar](#) remains, and the upgrade this year is “featuring The Vampire Circus.” Many of the creatures are contortionists, and aerialists are suspended amongst the skeletons that dangle from the trees or by chains in the set pieces. A pond is inhabited by salamander-esque Black Lagoon denizens who writhe provocatively and though they hiss threateningly, they are as alluring as the mermaids who lure hapless horny sailors to their deaths in the depths.



The circus theme is not otherwise prominent - discounting the occasional appearances of scary clowns who jump out to induce slapstick screams - but the bloodsucker in charge makes his presence known by sneaking up behind, lurking and eventually taking centre stage. He seems to have less minions this year but he has invested in many more mechanical props that startle when they are triggered by one's approach.

After braving the entranceway, we are greeted by a host who, in his best dulcet Vincent Price tones, briefs us on the rules: do not stray from the path as Legends of Horror is not insured for death or dismemberment by the things that live in the bushes, do not touch the “ghosts” as they will touch back and “drag you to hell,” and do not use a flash. I unintentionally break the last rule and while the ghoul merely covers his eyes in agony, a security guard politely requests that I refrain from using my camera in that manner. All of the security are scarily





congenial - to provide a false sense of safety amidst the horrors? - particularly one who compensates for the paucity of flesh, blood and ectoplasm cast members, by materializing with a deep-voiced “Boo!” not once, but twice. Effectively both times.

There is a special guest star who makes an appearance that is more startling and disturbing than I expected. He is a more recent horror legend but just as iconic and considerably more frightening than the classic monsters we have learned to love. But the wraiths whose provenance is murkier that loom in the courtyard are as magical and haunting as the icy fingers of the breeze. The steam punk fire dancers are a nice touch and they match the goggled dead eyes of the figures encased, but still alive, in the glass and mirrors of the funhouse maze under the big top.

The dioramas are less effective simply because they are less interactive and while beautiful and/or horrifying to look at, they are a letdown after the perfect meld of form, function and fear that is the tunnels that have lured us there. The blowoff is a photo op and it really would make sense to add a gift shop to exit into. When we entered, the aforementioned host took note of my “I Survived Nightmares Fear Factory” t-shirt (worn brazenly to pump up my bravado and nerve) and chuckled, intimating that I was in for much worse. Legends of Horror is a quantitatively different experience, more sensual creepy chills that flat-out mindfucking terror. I would have bought a t-shirt.

Legends of Horror *continues nightly until Wed, Oct 31 at Casa Loma, 1 Austin Terrace. legendsofhorror.ca*



PAUL BELLINI

A window in on Heroine



One night, I was walking up Church Street. There was a drag show in the window at O'Gradys. I crossed the street. There was another drag show in the window at The Garage. Then I got to my destination, Glad Day, where there was yet another window show. And I thought to myself, "How much is that drag queen in the window?"

I was there to watch *Comedy Cocktail - A Mixed and Mashed Variety Show*. Hosted by Heroine, it was a lively concoction of cute young male stand-ups, a trans comedian, and a few drag queens. It was pretty good. The biggest laugh of the night came from Chansa Showers. Explaining her drag name, she said, "Some people think my name is about getting pissed on. Others think it's about crying. Why not both? No one can see you cry when you're being pissed on."

I spoke to Heroine afterwards about her hosting style, which utilizes a lot of Karen Walker from *Will & Grace*. "I came out during an episode of *Will & Grace*. I used to watch it with my mom. I said to her 'I have something to tell you.' She said 'Are you like Will?' I said 'No, more like Karen.'"

Heroine, whose name is Matteo Cassano, started doing drag in 2007. "It was for a Halloween show hosted by Proud FM's Deb Pearce. Donnarama offered to paint me like Marilyn Monroe, but I didn't

want to shave so I called myself Harilyn. I had a huge bush with crabs stuck to it in reference to *The Seven Year Itch*. But I knew if I was going to continue I needed a more serious name, so I picked Heroine. At first I used the last name Marks, but Dean at Woody's suggested that I drop it, just in case certain opportunities came along. It already got reaction on social media. Someone sent me facts about heroin use, and someone else complained that the name was triggering and offensive and all that."

After being fired by Crews for doing a fundraiser elsewhere, Heroine was asked to host the New Year's Eve party at Glad Day in 2016. "Two months later I started *Camp*, and then did the *Drag Race* screening parties, and also did *Gay 101*, which required a lot of research. The queer comedy nights are meant to be an open forum. Sketch is allowed, so is burlesque. It will fill the Thursdays at least until *Drag Race* returns."

Interestingly, Heroine is not a big RuPaul fan. "When I was writing for *fab*, I once interviewed RuPaul and it was the worst interview of my career. I wasn't given the copy of his new book in time and I hadn't read it. I asked 'Why did you decide on that for a drag name?' and she said 'That is my real name' and from there it just got worse. *Drag Race* has turned us all into brands. Now we have to monitor every little thing we do."

So if you crave another injection of Heroine (pardon the lame pun) other than her weekly *Glad Day Thursdays* and the Sunday night show at Woody's, she also hosts the *Dumpster Raccoon Film Series* at the Revue Cinema. And she'll be co-hosting *Queen of Halloween* at Woody's on Oct 23 and hosts her own birthday show Oct 28, also at Woody's.





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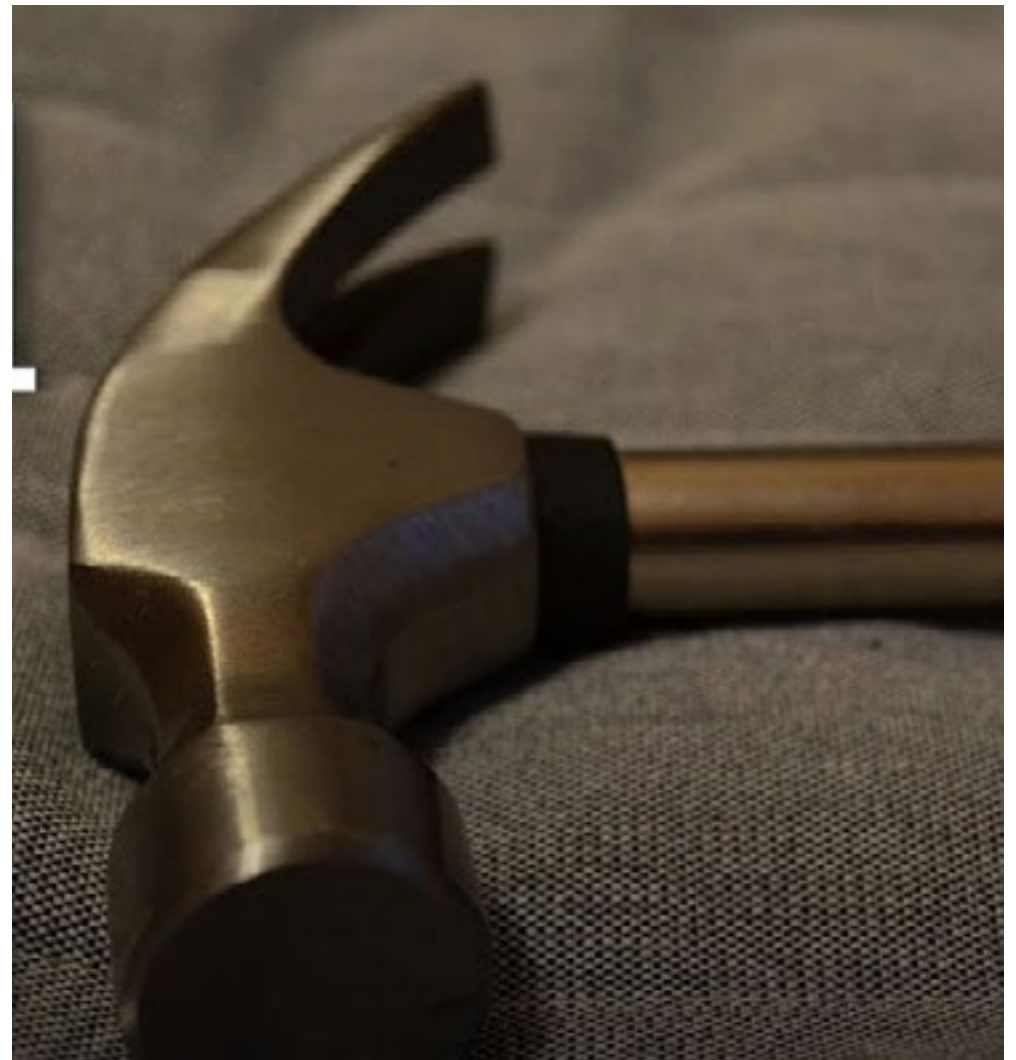
It's a Mad, Mad World!

I'm not sure that movie title would be allowed today (It was a very bad movie, released in 1963 — but it featured a lot of great stars!). In fact, I have concerns about one of my favourite old Beatles' songs "Maxwell's Silver Hammer." Remember? It's a song about an insane, brutal, serial killer who mainly kills women. And it's quite a cheery tune. No, "madness" as it used to be called, is no a laughing matter these days. And as we get more and more politically correct in the arts, it may be time to bury some old favourites deep in the cold, cold ground.

I thought about all this recently when I attended a play that had been funded by an arts program for artists with disabilities. I was certainly very pleased that these artists (some of them forgotten by the world) had this opportunity for funding, and I must say, the work was nothing if not interesting.

But it struck me that I hadn't seen these artists perform for quite a long time. At least not since I ran Buddies in Bad Times Theatre 20 years ago. Yes, they were Buddies in Bad Times Theatre alumni. And they are very talented people. I have no idea what their *disabilities* are; but when I worked with them I certainly knew what their *abilities* were. I also knew that for whatever reason, it was not just their sexuality that made them appear different to the outside world. There was another elephant in the room. But at Buddies these people were known only as 'artists,' not as 'artists with disabilities.' And suddenly I wondered — is it a good thing that they are classified that way now?

I mean, of course it's important that excellent work be funded, perhaps how it is funded doesn't matter. But it strikes me that the aesthetic we were promoting at Buddies back in the '80s and '90s was perhaps more radical than we thought. I was a great disciple of Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. In his controversial book Jaynes suggests that in 'pre-conscious' civilizations (which we now view as 'primitive') everyone in society heard voices, usually the voices of the God(s). We have now, generally speaking, lost this gift. In the modern 'civilized' world, we classify people who hear voices as schizophrenic. Jaynes suggested




that there are others able to hear voices — people we now call 'artists.'

Shakespeare says much the same thing when he says that "the lunatic, lover and the poet are all of imagination compact." I know it sounds very romantic and old-fashioned, but I do think that most real artists are more than a little mad. At times, when I was the artistic director of Buddies so many years ago, I felt that I was running a lunatic asylum. Not that I classify myself a non-lunatic — in this case one of the inmates was running the institution! And in fact this *was* true — because some of the artists working there were *in fact* the documented walking wounded of the mental health care system.

So which is better? Is it better that we have a special classification for artists with mental disorders? That 'sane' artists now do 'sane' work, and artists who are 'mentally ill' do 'mentally ill' work? Or would it be better if we lived in a world where artists are not separated by medical classification. What if instead we understood that all art is by nature, mad? And that all artists, are, by vocation, unhinged? And that being mentally ill is an important element of their ability to shake up everyone else's rather boring, complacent little world?

But then again, I might just be crazy.

PAUL BELLINI



Dangerous jokes

Last week, all of Canada shit its pants with the news that Jian Ghomeshi had the nerve to publish an article. Judging from the over-reaction of the media, you'd think that maybe he killed a hundred children with his teeth.

South of the border, the same diaper-filling occurred when Louis CK popped into a New York night club to do a comedy set. Again, the over-reaction. "Fierce backlash" declared ABC News, no doubt referring to several tweets. But there were also no reported walk-outs, so how bad could it have been? Sadly, the media no longer offers us perspective. They're too busy using the sizzle to sell the steak.

We all know that about a year ago, five women issued statements that Louis CK jerked off in front of them. Sure, he asked first, but still. The ensuing frenzy caused him to retreat from the public eye. He also dodged a bullet when the terrible movie he directed, *I Love You, Daddy*, was pulled just before its release. But the scandal also killed the TV show *Better Things*, which he created for his friend Pamela Adlon (already famous as the voice of Bobby on *King of the Hill*). It also resulted in him leaving *One Mississippi*, the show he created with Tig Notaro, whose career he was instrumental in shaping back when she was just a writer with cancer.

Repeatedly, we hear that the accusers blame Louis for ruining their stand up careers. But were they any good in the first place? I had to know, so I went to YouTube to find out. Dana Min Goodman and Julia Wolov were a duo from Chicago who have written on lots of TV shows. The other two, Abby Schachner and Rebecca Corry, don't have a lot of clips. Were they just starting out? The scant evidence did show that all four seemed to be comfortable with raunchy comedy, were all nice looking, and relatively funny. But those of us in the show biz world know that there are lots of reasons why it doesn't always happen.

'Stand up comedian' is the only profession I can think of where you require only an audience and a microphone. And good jokes, of course. You do not need corporations such as Netflix or HBO or CBS. You don't even need the media. So what's to prevent Louis CK from a comeback? Nothing. At a certain point, club owners will risk the ire of the twitterverse because they'll be packing the house. I for one welcome him back, because an intelligent and perverse stand-up with his performance skills comes along once in a very long time. He actually told a joke, which when paraphrased said, "Pedophilia must be really good, or else who would risk doing it?" It's shocking and ugly, but it's also darkly true. Great comedians always make us see the world in a new light.

The message boards seem to indicate the same desire for Louis' return. A woman named Barbara Dwyer wrote, "OK, I get it. LCK is a jerk. Fine. How much penance should he have to do? Is he not entitled to make a living? ... I am not even defending him here. It's a valid question." The same might be asked of Ghomeshi.

Ultimately, the marketplace decides. The club owner can be as contrite as he wants, but he knows, and lots of other promoters also know, that audiences want Louis CK. They want to laugh at his peculiar and dangerous jokes. They want to enjoy his skewered perspective. But they might enjoy it even more if he helped create opportunities for his accusers. Assuming they don't throw it back in his face the way Tig Notaro did.

WOLF DADDY PRESENTS

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Trans Meditations and Other Collaborative Queries



To mark **Buddies In Bad Times Theatre's** 40th anniversary, they have created a special slate of events including the return of *Trans Meditations*.

It's a chance to let your queer hang out and join in what can only be described as an evening of mayhem in the bunker. **Patricia Wilson** leads a cast of queers for a variety show of quirky, and queenly proportions. It's more than a show, it's an experience that you'll want to bottle and bring home. "Wow that was so crazy and so beautiful at the same time, I'm glad I left the house tonight!" said one audience member.

Playful and provocative, *Trans Meditations and Other Collaborative Queries* will pack in solo and collaborative readings from the minds of Patricia Wilson and **David Bateman** with guest appearances by **Hélène Ducharme**, **Brock Hessel**, and **David Ramsden**. Live accompaniment and original compositions by **Stewart Borden** with projections by **Raymond Helkio** and all hosted by the lovable **Keith Cole**.

Stick around after the show for a throwback "Sissy Saturday" (yes, on a Friday!) party with **DJ Lushus Lix**, the cast and crew from *Trans Meditations* and a host of other indelible characters.

[Trans Meditations and Other Collaborative Queries](#)

Friday, October 19, 2018 - Doors at 7PM, show at 7:30PM - Sissy Saturday (on a Friday) Party at 10:30PM - PWYC - More info on their [facebook page](#).



DREW ROWSOME

laughter and muscle

"I love it when models are really creative and bring their own props and ideas," says photographer James Critchley. Even more so when they have a "sense of humour and are willing to get naked in the freezing English weather."

James Critchley

This issue's MGT Cover Photographer



JAMES CRITCHLEY
P H O T O G R A P H Y



JAMES CRITCHLEY
P H O T O G R A P H Y



Critchley's models are usually at least partially naked and they do seem to be having a good time. "I used to be a model, which has helped me enormously with my career," says Critchley. "I also have a wicked sense of humour which puts clients at ease. I find laughter is the best remedy for relaxing in front of the camera. I like to make the models laugh, smile and relax. It amazes me that this generally isn't permitted with other photographers. It's got to be fun to get the most from both of us."

That sense of play extends into all aspects of Critchley's work including his fashion and family portrait photography. "I love interacting with the families and I banter with the models," he says. "The male physique photography is expanding more rapidly than the family photography. I also have a third side to the business, which is my most profitable area, book covers. I have sold over 90 book covers in the last year, from images of both the male physique and the family photography."





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JAMES CRITCHLEY
PHOTOGRAPHY



JAMES CRITCHLEY
P H O T O G R A P H Y



He enjoys the process regardless of the subject. "Family photography is so much fun as I love getting the family to interact and laugh. Fashion model photography can be more challenging as you need more of an eye for the detail. Fitness model photography is my favourite type because I like to show the models' bodies to their very best potential."

As Critchley's self-portraits reveal, he himself is a chiseled - and always smiling - specimen. "I have a passion for muscle and bodybuilding," he says. "I take great pleasure in knowing what my models go through to look good for a photo shoot. My models are inspirational and keep me motivated. I hope my photographs inspire people to keep fit and healthy."





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While the models are always the central focus, Critchley is also attuned to the surroundings. "I loved landscapes and sunsets," he says of his original impetus to pick up a camera. "I was inspired by nature. I have a reputation for being a great outdoor photographer, which I believe could also be from my previous profession as a landscape architect. Physique photography has now become my passion especially when entwining it with nature."

The physique photography is never stagy but always exuberant, dynamic and quite simply sexy. "I like photos that tell a story and provoke emotion," says Critchley. "Eroticism plays a large role in my work, I try to keep it playful and fun but with the view of them being able to be displayed on social media."

The client always comes first. "I try to find out what the model's want out of the photo shoot. Many of my clients are male erotic dancers and they ask for provocative images. They are easy to work with. Some models are more timid and I try to help them get those sexier shots, as on social media those are the shots that get the likes." Even photos never meant for social media are fair game. "I have photographed staged images at the request of couples. And working with real couples at their request, they are generally at ease and ready for action."



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Critchley cannot recall a difficult or awkward photo shoot but he does know the one he found the most amusing. "Getting famous well hung stripper Marshall Arkley naked in a snow covered Scottish loch with a penis pump and very bemused passing walkers," says Critchley with a laugh. "Every photo shoot is individual."

There is wonderful joie de vivre that pulses through all of Critchley's work, and also a striking humbleness. He says of his photos that it is "A great honour to photograph some of these muscle men, most of which are not models but everyday guys." If those are everyday guys in his hometown of Dursley, when can we visit? He doesn't miss a beat, "Anyone is welcome to visit my country home in the Cotswolds. At first I photographed my gym buddies but now my reputation brings fresh models from all around the world to my studio."



JAMES CRITCHLEY
P H O T O G R A P H Y





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P H O T O G R A P H Y



Critchley's artistic output encompasses puppies, families, vistas, lots of brawn and a consistent playfulness. Is there a dark side to his artistic vision? Just in time for the Halloween season, Critchley describes his fantasy photographic scenario. "A gothic-themed werewolf and vampire shoot . . . Using my muscle models."

James Critchley's latest images can be found on his Facebook and Instagram pages or at jamescritchley.co.uk.

For personalized photo shoots or images: jamescritchleyphotography@hotmail.com



JAMES CRITCHLEY
P H O T O G R A P H Y

PHOTOS BY SEAN LEBER

MyGayToronto



DREW ROWSOME

Michael De Rose is merrily rolling along

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG IN CONCERT

music and lyrics by
Stephen Sondheim

book by
George Furth

directed by *Christopher Wilson*
musical direction by *Scott Christian*



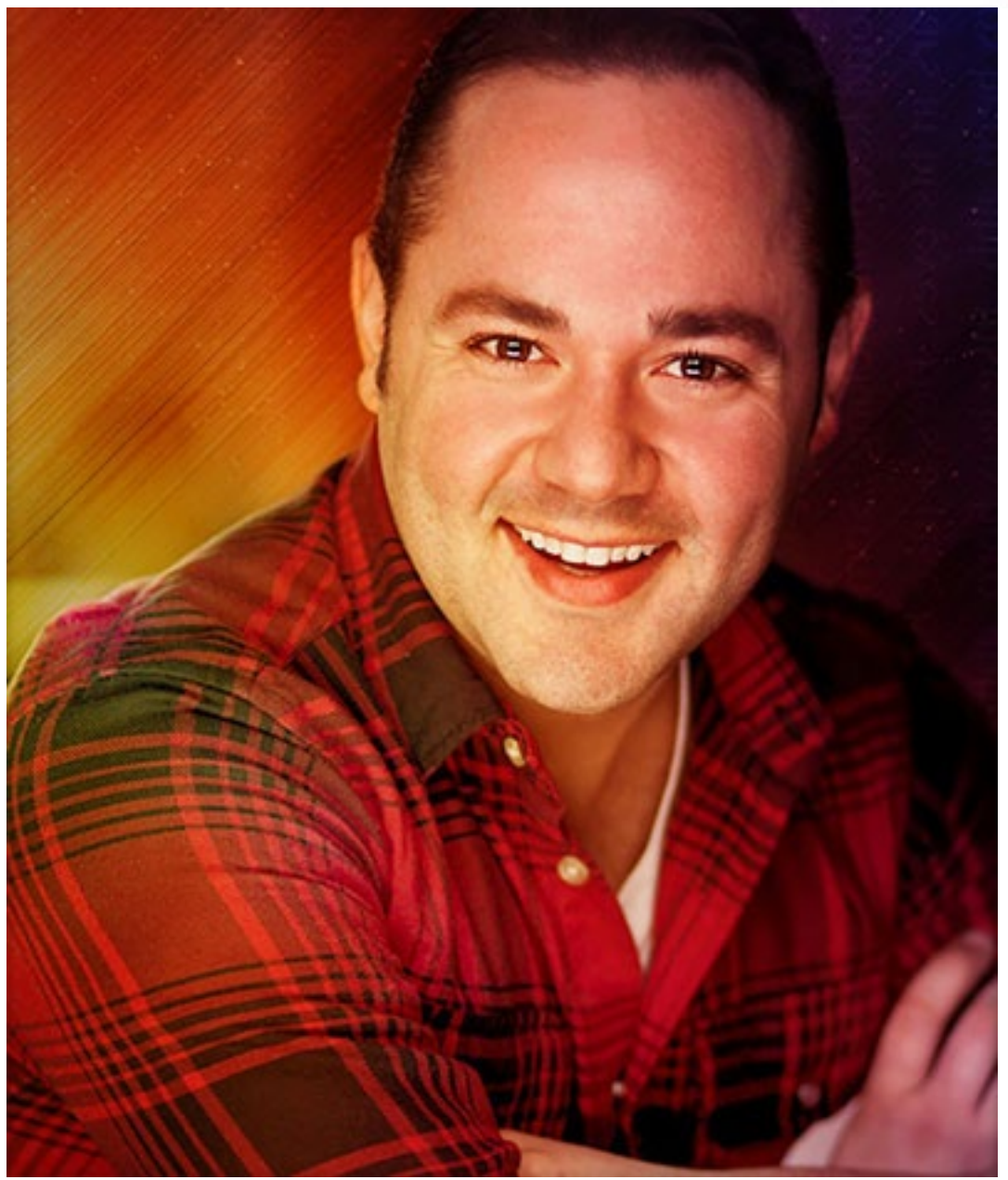
October 17 & 18 7:30PM

Al Green Theatre (Miles Nadal ICC) | 750 Spadina Avenue

We're opening doors
Singing, "Here we are!"
We're filling up days
On a dime
That faraway shore's
Looking not too far
We're following every star
There's not enough time!

"I loved this score from the second I heard it," says Michael De Rose of his part in the Toronto Musical Concerts performance of *Merrily We Roll Along in Concert*. "Opening Doors' often feels like the soundtrack to my journey through this business. The biggest difference between our version and the first version to open on Broadway, is that we will not be wearing the infamous sweaters indicating who we are playing . . . as far as I know."

Merrily We Roll Along was, like many of Stephen Sondheim's works, a commercial flop before being recognized as the masterpiece it actually is. The unique structure was blamed for *Merrily We Roll Along's* initial failure. "I play the character of Franklin," says De Rose. "He is a guy who gets swept up in artistic success, and in the process, loses sight of himself and those closest to him. *Merrily* begins at the end, where Frank realizes he's made a mess of his life, he's ruined multiple marriages of his own, his two closest friends Mary and Charley are at similar breaking points in their own lives and they find themselves rather estranged from one another. The musical then works backwards from that to examine how these three artists arrived at this point, and where they deviated from the path they initially set out on."



Though De Rose's career is continuing to ascend, he relates. "I think I'm ideal for it, and this is true of the entire cast," he says, "because I live and work as an artist, and so I understand it's cost. It is a lifestyle that has asked me to make sacrifices in order to do the work. So I understand how Frank could turn around one day and realize that he's missed something. It's hard not to think of my own choices which has asked me to reevaluate the relationships and milestones that I missed just to get to this point that I'm at. How would I be different if I hadn't missed those moments, if I had taken another road?"



The cast is loaded with heavyweight performers like Ryan Kelly ([Assassins](#), [Gash!](#), [Into the Woods](#), [The Trouble with Henry](#)), Lana Carillo ([Cannibal the Musical](#), [The Little Mermaid](#)) and David Lopez ([Company](#), [Hello Again](#)) who have also been in previous Toronto Musical Concerts productions. “I’ve always loved Ryan Kelly’s work,” says De Rose. “He approaches the characters he plays with an intelligence and an attention to detail that I find jaw dropping. Lawrence Cotton’s voice is unreal. Lana Carillo’s Gussie is fierce. Anwyn Musico singing ‘Not a Day Goes By’ will stop the show. Lizzie Kurtz effortlessly connects to Mary. Without trying to sound cliché, in every rehearsal there is a moment where someone in the cast takes my breath away.”

The mastermind behind Toronto Musical Concerts is producer, instigator and cast member Christopher Wilson ([Andy Warhol Musical: In Rehearsal](#), [Two Kittens & A Kid: A Gay Man Raising His Inner Diva](#)). “Christopher and I have been trying to work together on a Toronto Musical Concert for 100 years now,” says De Rose. “I got an email asking if I was interested in working on *Merrily* while I was out west working on [Jukebox Hero](#) over the summer, and from there the fates aligned. Christopher is maybe the kindest, most open hearted person I think I’ve met. It’s as simple as he works from a place of love and respect, and he cultivates an environment where love, kindness, and joy are the priority. I think we’re all circled around him because we as a cast all share similar values. And he’s brought together a group of people who are working on this piece because, like him, we’re all big Sondheim nerds.”

Those roles may be in the future but De Rose has a solid resumé, having made an impression in both Sky Gilbert’s [My Dinner with Casey Donovan](#) and a production of [Grease](#). “Both pieces are actually explorations of sexuality. *Casey Donovan* was about an isolated and insecure gay man getting an opportunity to go on a date with a handsome porn star whom he initially thought was completely unattainable. It explored internalized discrimination in the queer community around body image and status. *Grease* gets into some of those things too with a much more heteronormative lens. I think the difference is that working on *Casey Donovan* with Sky, we were focussed on investigating what made the characters tick, what made them sexy, what made them ugly, how they were different at the



beginning of the story, versus who they revealed themselves to be by the end. Grease is a big flashy musical and more about the humour, fun and nostalgia that reminds audiences of their own journey through adolescence.”

Sondheim meshes dramatics and deep themes with music making for the best of both worlds. “No matter what the form, I approach performing in the same way,” says De Rose. “I’m trying to create a fully realized three dimensional human in all forms.” Rapidly approaching (February) is the Toronto debut of [Jukebox Hero](#) which has even different demands. “Foreigner’s music demands that - specifically men - have to sing much much higher than what Sondheim writes. The process of working on *Jukebox* was different because we were creating it on our feet, whereas the groundwork is laid in Sondheim’s work. I think singing Sondheim can feel more intellectual, where singing Foreigner feels more emotive. In *Jukebox Hero* there’s joy in the discovery of how the scenes lead to these big popular, iconic tunes . . . that gasp when you go: of course this scene led into ‘Cold as Ice.’ Whereas in Sondheim’s music, the the joy is discovered in the ingenuity of the lyrics.”

Before *Jukebox Hero*, De Rose is tackling another iconic role, or a variation on an iconic role, in Ross Petty’s annual panto, this year *The Wizard of Oz*. “I am about to fill some big pumps, actually they’re very comfortable orthotic runners” says De Rose of replacing the beloved Plumbum. “I am very excited about becoming Sugarbum. I think my research into who she is has been going on my whole life in the way I’ve studied women in entertainment whom I adore. She’s Bette, Judy, Liza, Angela, Barbra, Idina, Patti, and each of *The Golden Girls*. I think I’ll be bringing all of the great dames of the theatre together to create Sugarbum. She is unflappable, and I can’t wait to put those orthotics on.”



But right now, De Rose is concentrating on *Merrily We Roll Along*. “Whenever there’s an opportunity to do a little jig - it is very much a concert, we’re doing just enough movement to lift the score off of the page - with Ryan Kelly and Anwyn Musico, it’s difficult to resist. We’re all just a little bit older than the original Broadway cast was, so most of us have actually lived through some of the moments our characters are moving through. So, we’ll be performing the version where a group of people who love this score bring their own lives and experiences to the iconic music and text. We want to tell this story clearly and honestly, so that our audience not only can marvel at the intricacies of the book and music, but also find catharsis in the original message that Hal Prince and Sondheim were exploring in their conception of this piece.”

More Michael De Rose at drewrowsome.blogspot.com

Merrily We Roll Along plays Wed, Oct 17 and Thurs, Oct 18 at the Al Green Theatre, Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, 750 Spadina Ave. merrilywerollalong.brownpapertickets.com



The Nether

when Sims explore their basest urges



Photos by Tim Leyes

The Nether is a crime procedural set in the near future when life online has supplanted life in a bleak reality. It is also a prediction that those Sims who seem so cute and harmless will eventually, if not already, begin indulging their darkest and most perverse instincts.

Playwright Jennifer Haley is primarily concerned with the question of what is moral and/or permissible online and in fantasy. What is real? What are the consequences of role playing? It is a delicate and frequently troubling area to explore, there are many things that we do casually online - from trolling to dating profile hyperbole to porn consumption - that we would be unlikely to do in real life. Haley ups the ante by presenting Papa who runs a bordello for pedophiles called The Hideaway.

Haley's vision of the future is teased out as we learn more about the characters and their dilemma. And both sides are presented as morally, potentially, superior which makes for occasionally queasy viewing. Before entering the theatre, great pains were taken to make sure that each audience member read and understood that

Warning: while nothing graphic whatsoever happens onstage, *The Nether* has violent and sexually explicit content, including rape, murder, suicide and pedophilia, that may be deeply disturbing to some. Please be advised.

While the creep factor is high with anything to do with pedophilia, there is a further twist involving an axe that is truly horrifying, as the blade scraped across the floor, the entire audience cringed. And that isn't all Haley is concerned with, *The Nether* probes glancingly but with force into gender roles, sexual fluidity, climate change, whether role play is a safe release or an encouraging stimulant, and the price of fantasy. At one point the characters and their avatars share the stage and it is initially disconcerting as that blurred line of reality that Haley is exploring has been erased.

Director Peter Pasyk ([Sisters](#), [The Circle](#), [Late Company](#)) and set designer Patrick Lavender ([The Circle](#)) set the action in two interlocking and telescoping spaces, one presumably the real world and the other locked in a server. The real world is defined by beams of light and a chair while the online is richly detailed and colourful courtesy of scarily just-too-realistic projections by Nick Bottomley. We understand

the seductiveness even if we don't share, understand or condone the desire.



The cat and mouse exchanges of the investigation are between Catherine Cullen as the authority figure and David Storch ([Cake and Dirt](#), [Arigato, Tokyo](#)) as The Hideaway's creator, and then Cullen and Robert Persichini ([Category E](#)) who is one of the clients. Storch rages and cajoles, and is as smooth and slippery with Cullen as he is, in a quite different and disturbing way, with Hannah Levinson ([Fun Home](#), [The Sound of Music](#)). Persichini's character wants to become a "shade" and end his existence in real life to live online. He blusters and struggles, and is charmingly, horrifyingly amoral. Persichini is so good that a major twist and reveal, reframes his performance and makes it all the more shocking and creepy.

Levinson is spunky and straddles the line between avatar seductress and innocent child in a way that makes the skin crawl. It is a precocious performance but that may just be concerns for her mental health by inhabiting such a dark space. Her sparring and romantic partner is the also just-



too-realistic in his casual masculine appeal Mark McGrinder ([The Normal Heart](#), [Clybourne Park](#)). He is as close to a romantic hero as *The Nether* will allow, and his conflict of choosing between duty and unwanted desire in a morally ambiguous world(s) flits across his face in a terrifying manner. All of the cast has to play double layers as an ensemble and, no small feat, make it crystal clear.



The warning proves all too apt, *The Nether* is uncomfortable theatre full of ideas that induce squirming and afterthought. McGrinder says, in a play where trees are a tragic metaphor, “You can only hear the wind if it has leaves to blow through.” For the first time in memory, as the lights came up after the curtain call, not a single person reached to check their phone. There are consequences to spending too much of one’s life online, *The Nether* shows them to us.

The Nether continues until Sun, Nov 4 at the Coal Mine Theatre, 1454 Danforth Ave.
coalminetheatre.com, studio180theatre.com

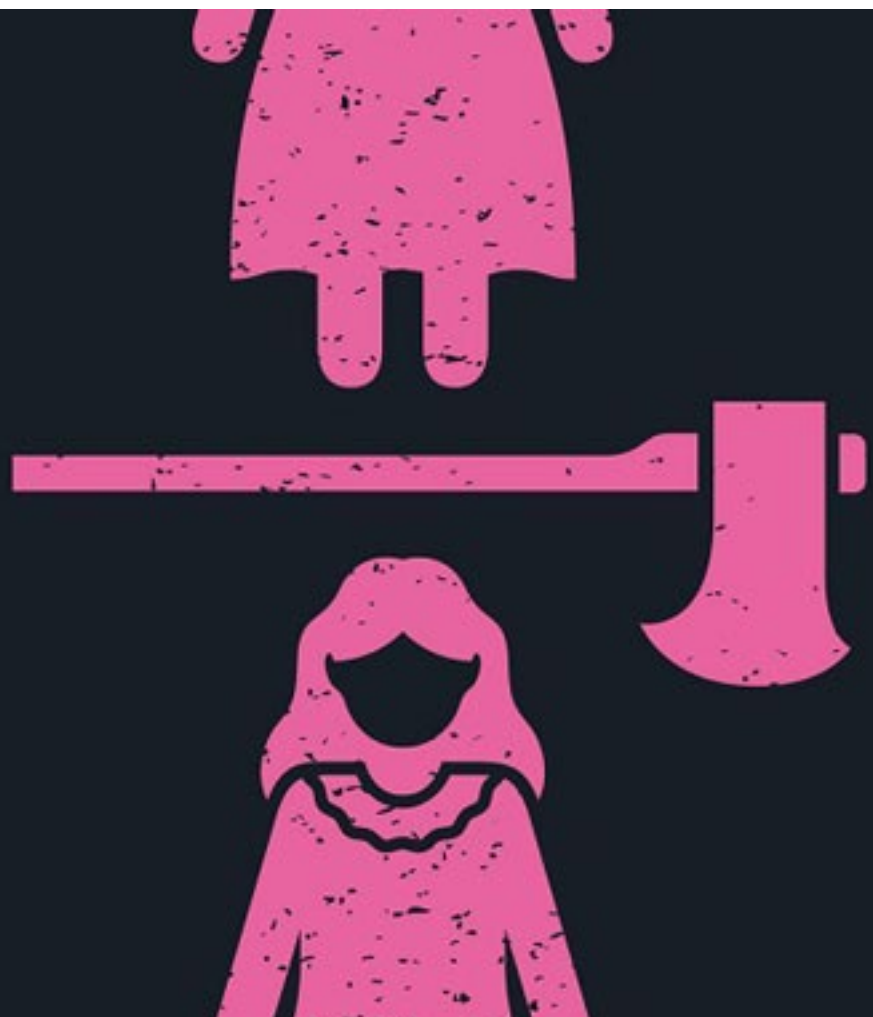
THE NETHER

By Jennifer Haley

Oct 11–Nov 4, 2018

Previews: Oct 7, 9 & 10

A co-production with
studio180theatre





OVER

30

HOT DANCERS

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DANCERS

DAILY

5PM-2AM

463

CHURCH

 Flash on Church

 flashonchurch



Harlem Duet:

a magical and powerful 7 stanza blues

Photos by Cylla von Tiedemann



Utterly enthralled and deeply unsettled, I sat at the keyboard trying to process the experience of *Harlem Duet* into words. I wanted to type that the play is magical and powerful and that everyone should go see it, but was, possibly am, unable to translate that into an explanation. There are so many themes, ideas and political statements woven through *Harlem Duet* that it is plucking at threads in a tapestry to try to describe the totality, pointing out brushstrokes in a painting, discussing word choices in a poem, counting the bars and modulations in a blues song.

The plot traces Billie's descent into madness when Othello leaves her for another woman. It is important to note that he leaves her for a white woman. Not only has Billie's love been betrayed, but the whole crushing weight of systematic racism is pushed to the fore. That cultural, historical force is illustrated with interludes travelling back in time, Billie is not the first woman to suffer. And she will not be the last.

It is a complicated structure made simple, the connections more evocative than literal, through linking symbols and words. *Harlem Duet* slices directly to the heart, the subconscious, with devastating impact and no fear. Sexuality and race are two contentious, difficult issues and by framing them in a deeply personal and poetic way, playwright/director Djanet Sears fearlessly explores without making conclusions, indicts without making a statement.

The language roils across whatever stylistic impulse is necessary to convey the mood. *Harlem Duet* begins with beautiful and sensual, as befits a play riffing on *Othello*, Shakespearean prose. The character Magi, played in a precise star turn by Ordena Stephens-Thompson who spins the comedy to



giddy and earthy heights, speaks in fluent sitcom. There is even a section where Billie and Othello argue in academic jargon that fails to intellectually freeze the heat between them. The disparate styles, and time periods, don't clash or confuse, they somehow meld into a concrete glowing whole.

Harlem Duet was first produced in 1997 and many lines and ideas inspired knowing rueful laughter. What it means to be black in 2018 is sadly little different from 20 years ago. And neither is how men calculate their sexual and emotional appeal to their advantage. What may have been originally intended as a call to arms, now echoes as bitter contemporary nostalgia. While that makes *Harlem Duet* timeless (in a better world it would make it dated) adding an undertone of melancholy that is an intense spice.

Virgilia Griffith ([Ma Rainey's Black Bottom](#), [The Wedding Party](#), [They Say He Fell](#)) as Billie rarely leaves the stage and her performance is as bewitching as the magic Billie strives to conjure with potions. Ricocheting from invincible to shattered, from siren to withdrawn, she creates a solid realistic person who is overwhelmed by the oppression of arbitrary fate. Beau Dixon ([Ma Rainey's Black Bottom](#), [Hamlet](#)) as Othello has sexual charisma to burn, but there are layers that Dixon peels away to reveal the heart and broken soul beneath. It would be easy for this Othello to be a villain or a callous stud, but his final reveal, and it is a shocking and heartrending one, gives us not an explanation or excuse but a character submitting to metaphor and historical convention.

Tiffany Martin and the aforementioned Stephens-Thompson are levity, wisdom and sass, as well as facets of both black and female cultural tropes. And what a joy it is to see Walter Borden ([Gerontophilia](#)) on stage with his rich, sonorous voice





filling the Tarragon. As “Canada,” Billie’s father, he is not only a comment on colonialism and shattered dreams, but he holds centrestage for a monologue on love that pulls *Harlem Duet*’s disparate times and styles into focus. All with the stripped-down power of his voice and eyes.

I struggled to find a dimly remembered quote that in my mind I attribute to Bessie Smith but it could just as easily be - skipping across as many genres as *Harlem Duet* - Otis Redding, Prince or Diana Ross in *Lady Sings the Blues*. Whatever the source, paraphrasing, they said that to sing the blues one must sing pain with joy and joy with anguish. Sears calls *Harlem Duet* a “7 stanza blues,” a concept made concrete by the evocative musical accompaniment of Bryant Didier and Cymphoni Fantastique. Like the blues, the set is slowly stripped as bare as the eviscerated relationships, to reveal the artifice of theatre.

Days later, long after sitting mesmerized in the theatre, haunting images and ideas keep surfacing. Billie futilely packing away sprigs of cotton. The moment the audience is shown what Othello has been using as a hat rack. The Hottentot Venus statue, the handkerchief and greasepaint directly referencing *Othello*, Stevie Wonder’s *Songs in the Key of Life*. The alchemy bottles and books that don’t contain answers. The importance of hairstyles. The line “The skin holds everything in.” *Harlem Duet* is magical and powerful and everyone should go see it.

Harlem Duet continues until Fri, Oct 28 at Tarragon Theatre, 30 Bridgman Ave. tarragontheatre.com



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Studio 54

the rise and fall and rise of a disco pleasure palace



There is a sequence in the documentary *Studio 54* where the camera tracks down the opulent hallway towards the entrance to the dance floor. Sylvester's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" explodes on the soundtrack while a montage of photographs and film clips dazzles the eyes. It may not be exactly as overwhelmingly wonderful as actually being at Studio 54 in its heyday, but it gives a powerful approximation of what it must have felt like.

Studio 54 follows a standard biographical format - background on the two creators Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, the creation of the concept and the nightclub, the wild success and the wild goings-on, the tax and drugs bust, the demise, and the aftermath - but director Matt Tyrnauer has deeper intentions than just rehashing scandals. If he had just rehashed scandals, *Studio 54* would still have been an entertaining film: the found footage, newspaper clippings, photographs and interviews are exhilarating and contain much that was new to at least this viewer.

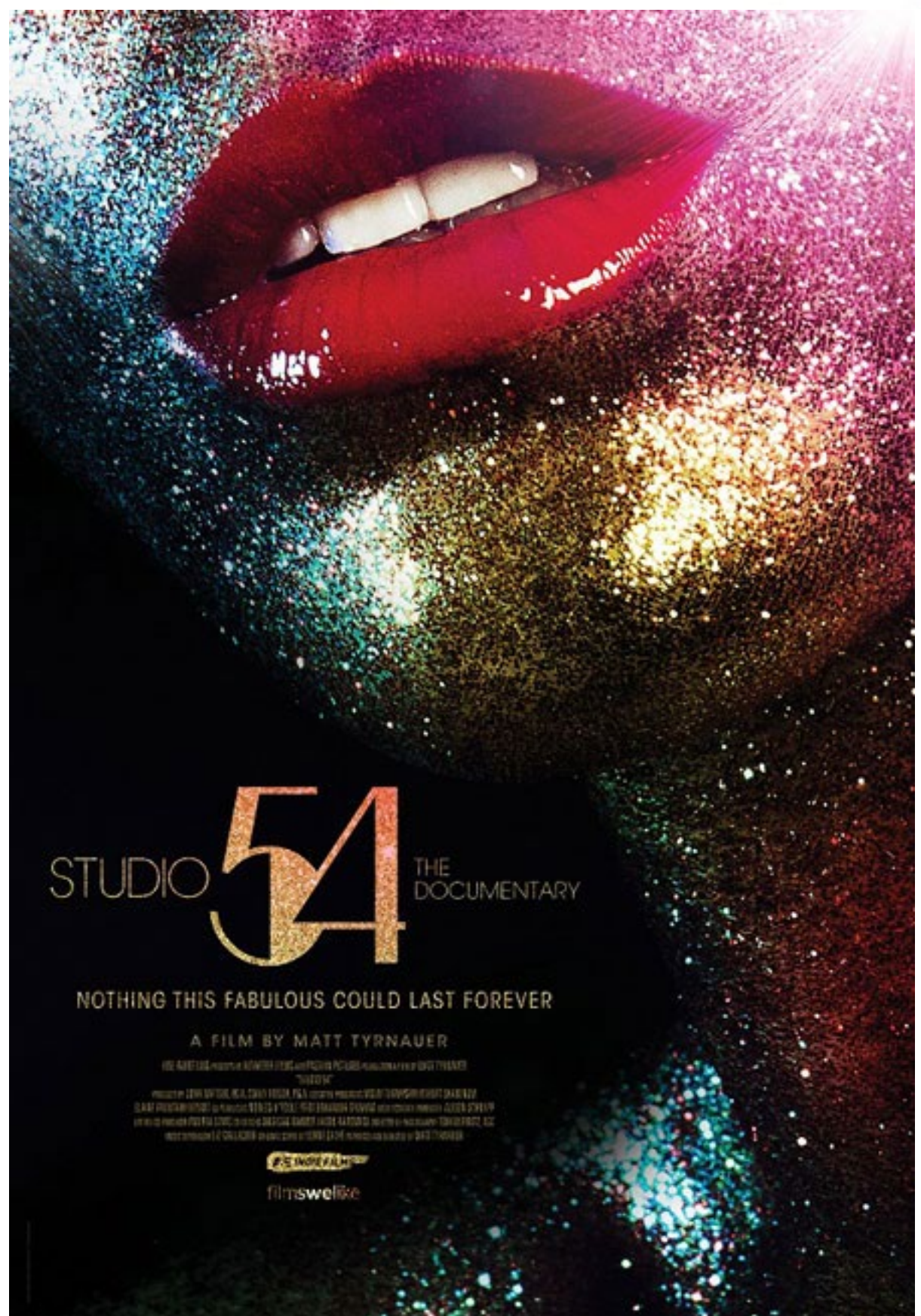
Tyrnauer is interested in placing the Studio 54 saga in a cultural and historical context, specifically, as he did in the must-see [Scotty Bowers and the Secret History of Hollywood](#), a gay context. We are told that models started joining their hairdressers and make-up artists at gay clubs which were far superior to the straight version. Inevitably straight men followed, were forced to be tolerant, and the entire disco scene, and the nightlife that resulted from it, blossomed. Nile Rodgers notes that black culture, where disco originated, is mixed in there too, it is the mixing of cultures and sexualities that was radical and groundbreaking.

Various narrators explain that it was a "safe space." One claims it was the first place that gay men could kiss in public. A pair of drag queens or trans folk, or just dressed to the tits fashionistas, explain that they feel not only safe but included. Steve Rubell tries to explain the door policy by explaining they want couples "or gay men." And when the culture at large turned on disco, the "disco sucks" years, Tyrnauer

frames it as virulent homophobia and racism.

Studio 54 also posits Studio 54 as the fuse that ignited celebrity culture that quickly mutated into the dominating horror show that it is now. *People* magazine began at the same time and a publicist explains how she made a fortune getting paid for every celebrity she wrangled into the club. And paid again for every newspaper headline mentioning a celebrity at Studio 54. It is funny and deeply terrifying.

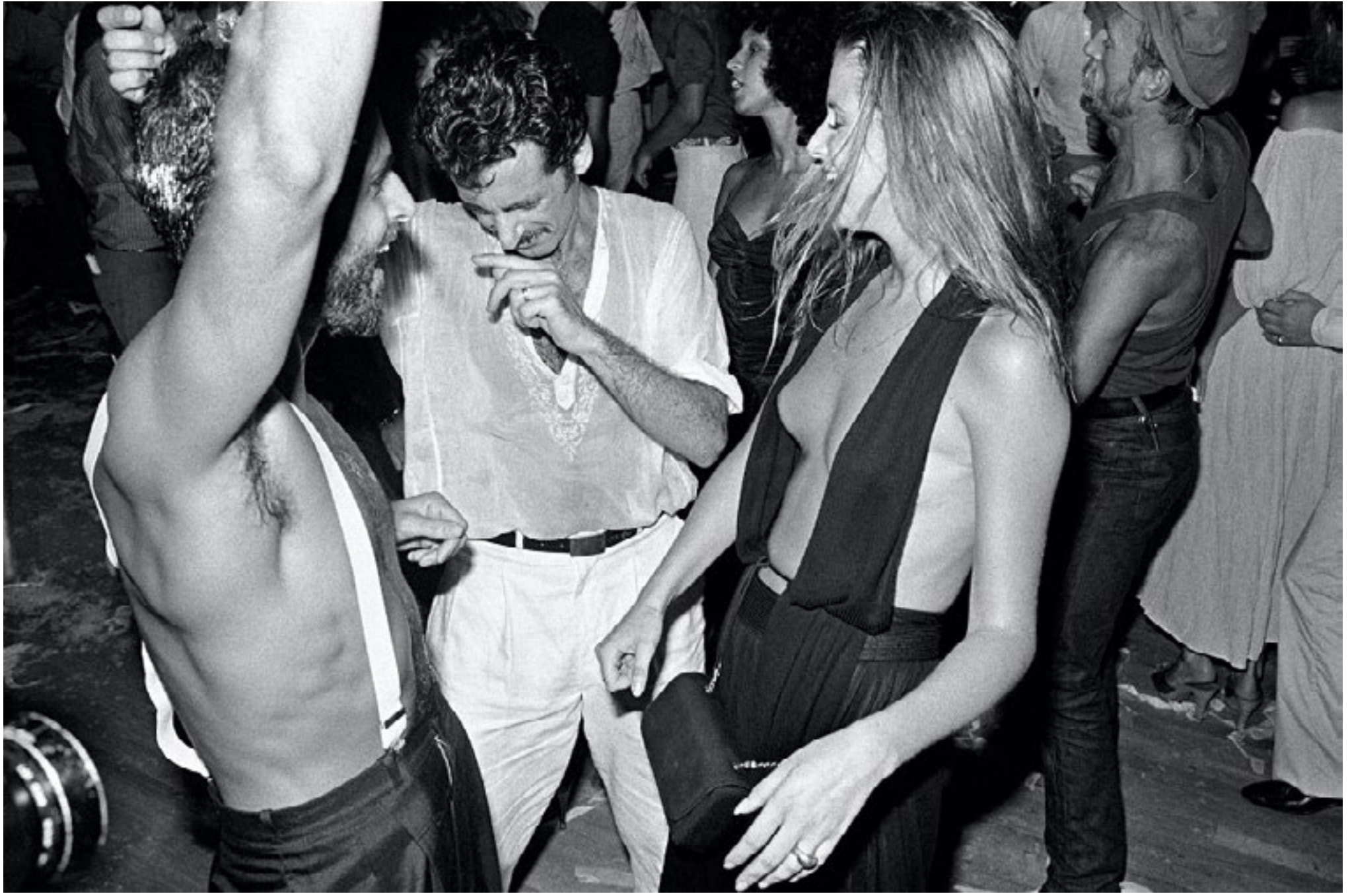
Hundreds of names - Halston, Capote, Cher, Bianca, Andy - are dropped and their photographs flashed across the screen. That is part of the appeal of the legend of Studio 54, the celebrities who were stars before the label lost its lustre. The only complaint about *Studio 54* is that the salacious details are only alluded to, but that is more than compensated for by a truly mind-boggling interview with a youthful afro-ed and acne-peppered Michael Jackson who claims he comes to *Studio 54* for the "escapism." Celebrity culture eventually, as it does to all celebrities, destroyed Studio 54: the people excluded wanted in.



There is a possibly unintended tension to *Studio 54*. The main interviewee is co-owner/co-creator Ian Schrager who was the behind the scenes force at the nightclub. He tells the story of the rise and

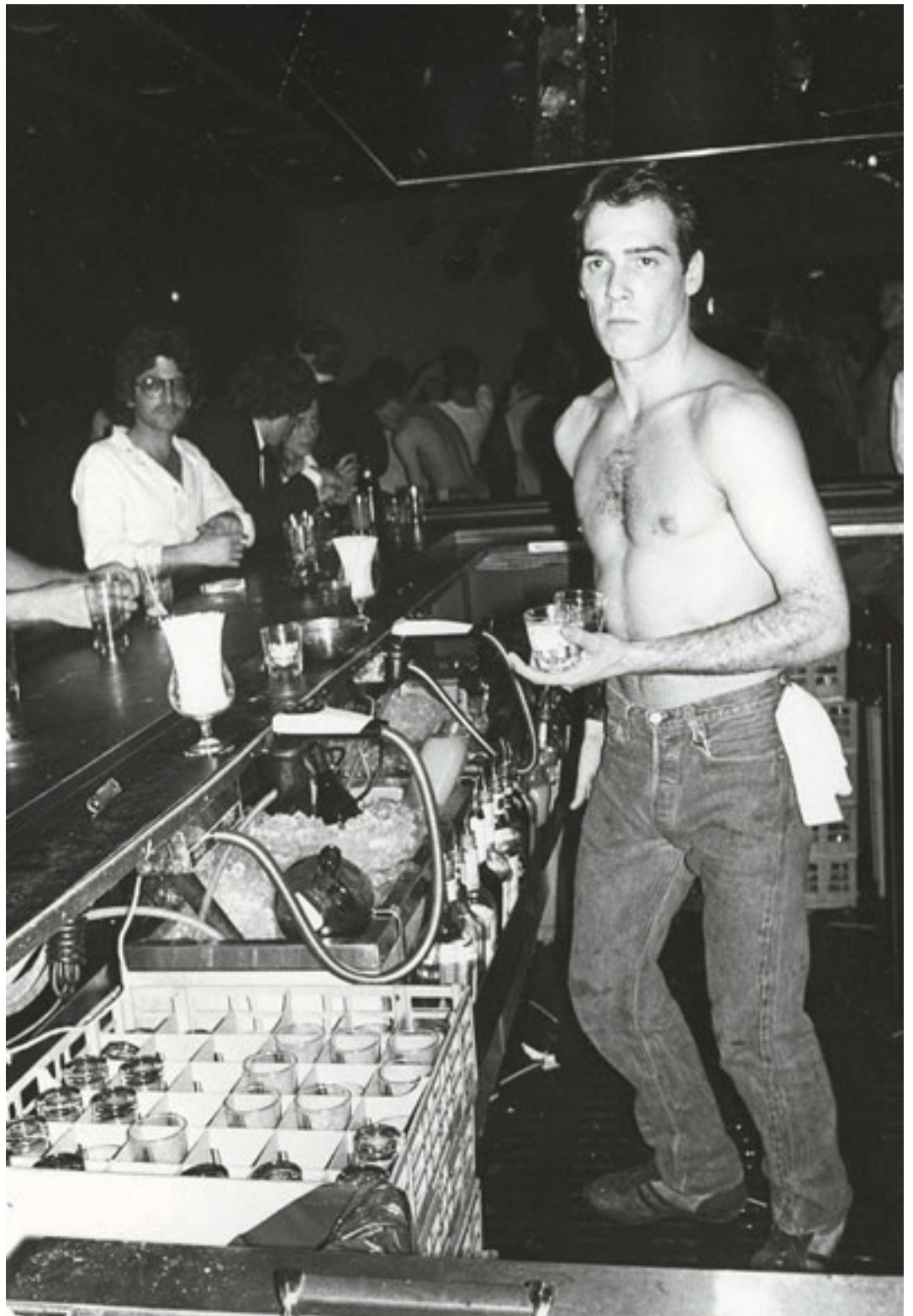


fall and makes a point of telling us that this is the first time he has spoken on camera. He is still an extraordinarily handsome man but he hedges on some details, feigns innocence or ignorance, and is often contradicted by the visuals. He is also contradicted by the prosecutor who raided and charged the nightclub owners and put Schrager and Rubell in jail.



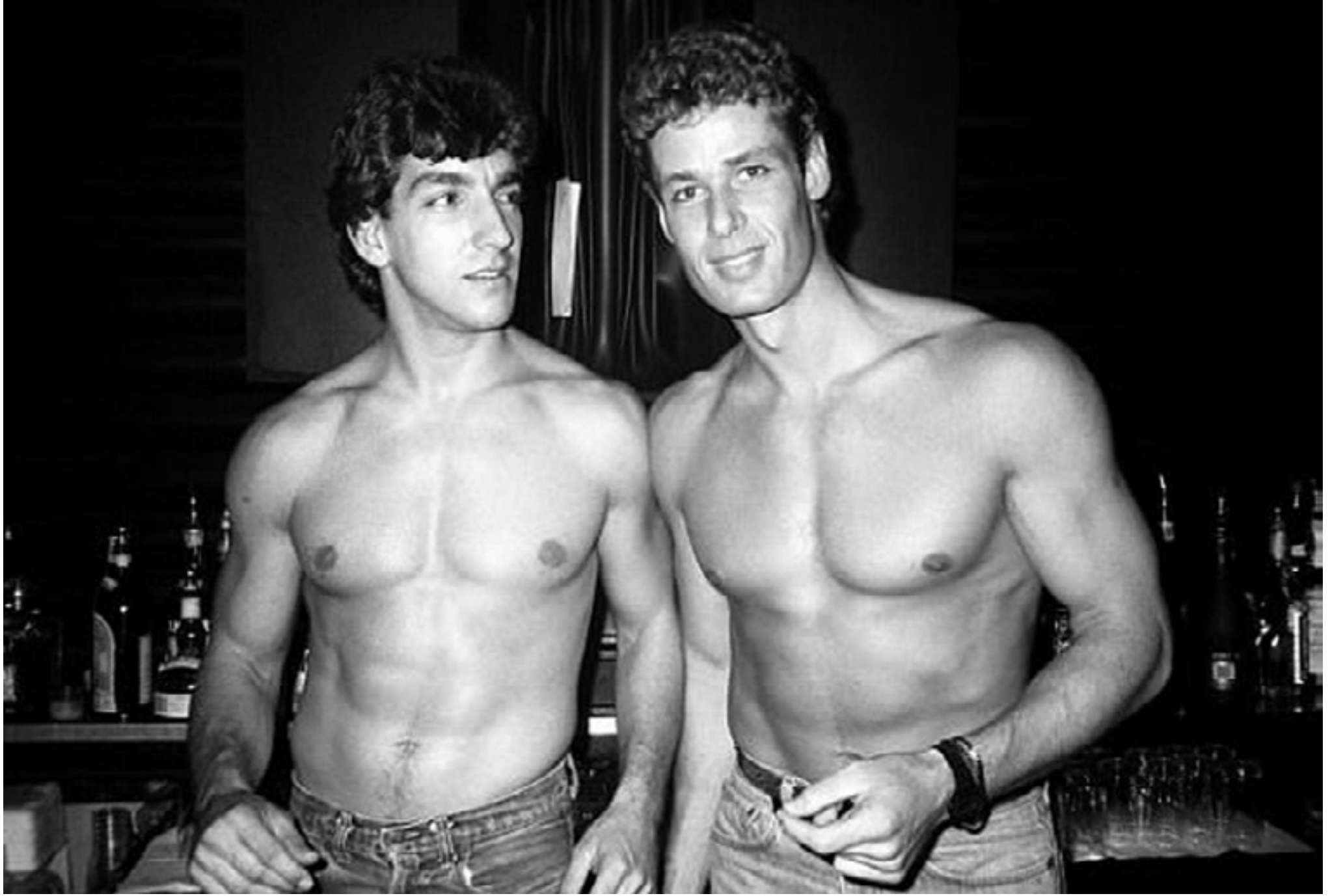
There is a suspicious thread that suggests that Schrager was convinced to talk in order to promote his current business venture, a chain of boutique hotels (and possibly a coffee table book about Studio 54, the proofs of which he is shown admiring). He does get a brief advertorial at the end and a metaphorical send off. Studio 54 was designed as theatre (and mainly by Broadway production veterans) which was a new concept for a nightclub in the '70s. The staff were referred to as "cast members," and the clientele encouraged to think of themselves as stars. Schrager drily notes that he and Rubell also invented the concept of boutique hotels aka hotels as a theatrical experience.

It is also unsettling to watch footage of Schrager and Rubell interacting with their lawyer, Roy Cohn. Cohn is now such a villain that it becomes impossible to root for Schrager and Rubell who should be the heroes of the film. Tyrnauer doesn't shy away from Cohn's closeted creepiness and the parallel to the blustery bullying that the US's current excuse of a president who, not incidentally, learned that style when Cohn was his lawyer. Schrager may have wanted to tell his story but he quickly loses



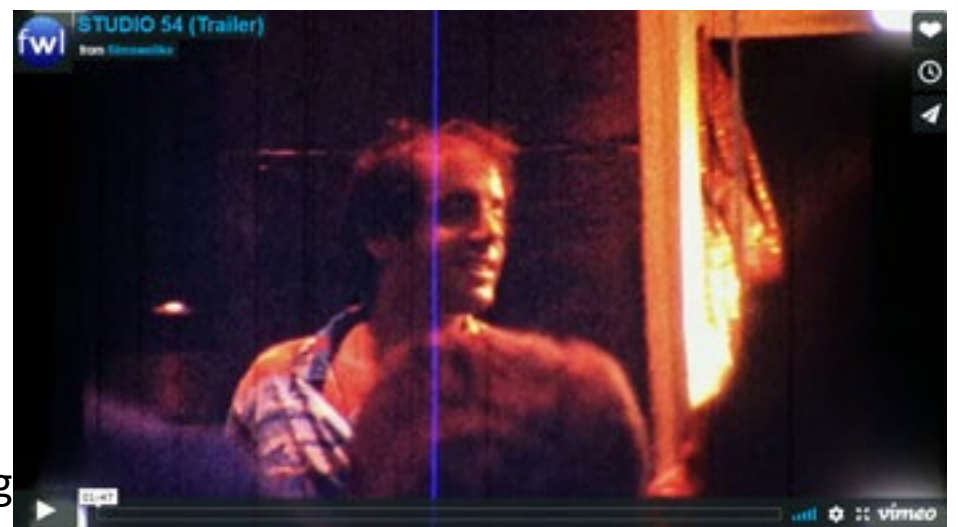
any empathy through guilt by association with Cohn. The creation, which after all is the title, pushes him off stage.

Of course nothing so glamorous, exciting, and, as is demonstrated repeatedly, operating outside of the law could survive. There are very entertaining, and scary, descriptions of how to ignore the need for a liquor license - Cohn managed to keep them open and liquor licence free for over six months - and of where the common slang term "party favours" originated. The sheer magnitude of what Schrage and Rubell skimmed off the top is quite startling.



Rubell manages to hijack the film a few times. Schrage is obviously still lost without the extrovert to his introvert and Tyrnauer places the film firmly in the sexual freedom space between the invention of the pill and the arrival of AIDS. Rubell was inspired to embrace his gayness by being part of Studio 54, but he still denied publicly that he had AIDS and his mother was heard to ask at the funeral why her son had never married. It is a glorious and gory snapshot of a horrible time in our history and a warning about complacency.

There is a lot of history and cultural contextualizing in *Studio 54* but overlaid and driving it, at 125 bpm, is the magnificent thrust of disco itself. The opening with Sylvester is sublime, the finale with The Andrea True Connection is irony with a beat. For a genre that "sucks," disco has never been so expressive. Niles Rodgers shakes his head ruefully and notes that the party before the co-owners went to jail was as much fun as the opening (with Diana Ross and Liza performing a duet, how could it not be?). Partying in the face of certain ruin and despair is disco, and I'd like to think, gay style personified.



I hope the Ted Rogers Hot Docs Cinema cranks the sound to 11.

Studio 54 screens Fri, Oct 12 to Thurs, Oct 18 at the Ted Rogers Hot Docs Cinema, 506 Bloor St W. hotdocscinema.ca

DREW ROWSOME

Mar(The Sea)

a threesome with tentacles



A gay couple Xavier and Eduardo, still sexually enthralled and affectionate but with an unspoken tension between them, vacation at the seaside Portuguese town where Xavier grew up. They are staying with Cristovao, a friend from Xavier's childhood with whom there is an unspoken tension. In Cristovao's mother's house.

All three of the men are stunning, prone to shirtlessness, and have deep expressive eyes that are constantly filled with reticent emotion. The sexual tension, in all directions, is a powderkeg. They frolic on the beach in Sean Cody-esque montages, get drunk, and cast longing and nervous glances at each other. It seems we are in for an arty gay love story or menage à trois. But the lush music layers on a discordant edge, and the mother, Sylvie Rocha, is troubled and seemingly disapproving. And Cristovao has a creepy fascination with an octopus corpse . . .



Mar, Portuguese for “Sea,” takes a subtle turn and becomes an erotic gay horror film. To reveal more would ruin the fun, but it is a taut little twist that is quite cleverly done. Even more enticing is that the horror angle reframes what has come before allowing director/writer William Vitoria to deliver a witty satire on every angst-filled languid art film one has ever endured. Suddenly those long pauses, stares into the distance, and oblique dialogue fragments are filled with portent. A second viewing is delicious fun as all the clues have been carefully laid out as explicit non sequitur macguffins.

I watched a screener and was left with two wishes. Firstly to see it on a large screen because the scenery - the tourist board of wherever it was shot should have provided funding and demanded credit - and the actors are so spectacular. Lourence Seruya, Diogo Taveres (who also co-wrote the script) and Joao Santos Silva are handsome, scruffy and make one fantasize of the potential menage becoming an actual à quatre.



Silva is the main object of desire and the homme fatale, both of which he easily embodies. While his physicality, abundantly on display, is exemplary, it is his emotion-filled liquid eyes that draw one in. Beautiful homoerotic-bait men in horror movies have a long lineage and Silva can proudly take his place among them. Silva's subsequent role was in *O Grande Circo Místico (The Great Mystical Circus)* which made a bad impression at Cannes but which I am now even more eager to see.

Secondly, I wish that *Mar* was longer. A film featuring a handsome trio of gay men romping on the beach and in bed, can hold one's attention for much longer than *Mar's* 24 and a half minutes. And one is left with an insatiable desire to know what happened next. There is so much subtext and mysterious richness that lingers, begging to be resolved. But maybe that is for the best. Not a moment is wasted and love, sex and horror are all best depicted in short intense doses. And the final image is just what it needs to be, a summation, a mystery and a salute to the classic twist of a good horror short story.



The day after we watched the screener, I got into a long discussion with my other half who had been somewhat disturbed by *Mar*. He had a quite different interpretation of the film, placing it in solidly in the horror trope of the monster or outsider as a symbol of the predatory homosexual and the struggle

to escape the closet. Because the interactions were between gay men, I, living in my gay bubble, had not even considered that as a theme. But, on contemplation, it is a perfectly valid, if quite different from my experience, reading of *Mar*. He, being born in the Azores and growing up in a Portuguese family, found Sylvie Rocha's performance the pivotal one. He chided me for missing such an obvious analysis, "You just don't know what a Portuguese mother is like . . ."



Mar has a special screening on Wed, Oct 17 at 7pm at Imagine Cinemas Carlton Cinema, 20 Carlton St with three other short films. marbywilliamvitoria.com



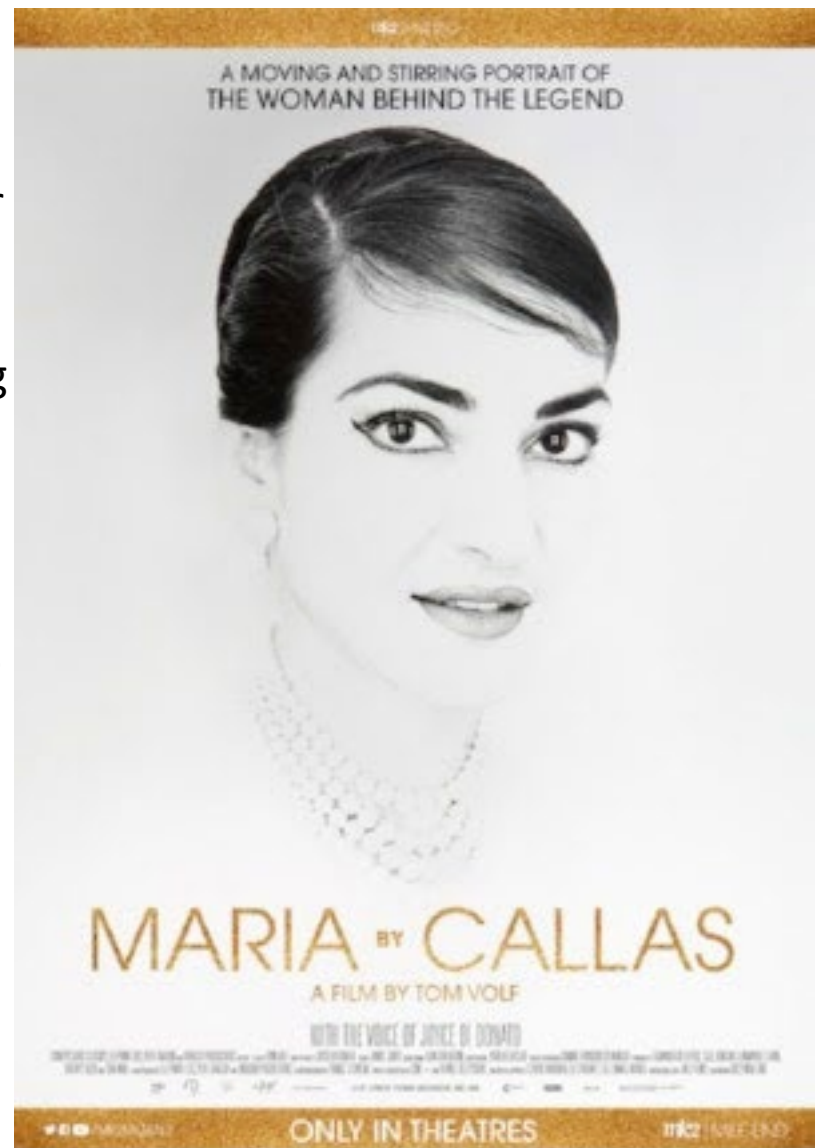
Maria by Callas

getting intimate with a glorious diva

There has been much fervent debate over whether Maria Callas was one of the greatest voices of our time or one of the most hyped. She was definitely one of the first celebrities to achieve a worldwide popular fame. And I would argue that her ability to directly communicate the passion in the music she sang makes her one of the greatest singers as well as a great star. She says in *Maria by Callas* that she has “the gift of having something I can expose to the people, give to the people and be understood.”

Callas fans and opera queens will be enthralled by *Maria by Callas*. Those who have avoided opera as an incomprehensible art form, may just be converted by *Maria by Callas*. Director Tom Volf is an unabashed fan and the documentary treats its subject reverently. It is less biography and more hagiography. This is blatant in the length of the clips he uses of Callas singing. She is never cut off, nor is a song fragment used to make a point. These are full performances and they are sublime.

Volf has restricted himself to using what film and photographs exist of Callas and to narration using her own words, culled from diaries, letters and interviews. The



structure is chronological and the entire film is framed by excerpts from a long-lost interview with David Frost. Callas is defensive, regal and startlingly vulnerable. She talks about the difference between “Maria” and “Callas” and casually regrets that whoever she is has been subsumed by this creation of her career. It feels that we are being set up for an artist swallowed by a character, doing unintentionally what Bowie and Madonna used as an artistic tool.

There is a lot of footage of Callas descending from airplanes and navigating relentless paparazzi. Even the Super 8 footage of her at home, wandering lonely or playing with her dogs in luxurious gardens, is presented so that we see the physical boundaries of the frames and are kept at a distance. It is remarkably intimate for such a public figure of the time and is also a

perfect metaphor for how caged she must have felt. The sound mix likewise is in conflict as her words, read impeccably by Joyce DiDonato who is herself an opera singer of renown, gently struggle to be heard above the omnipresent background music. She tells us her career, her singing which she loved, consumed her life, Volf lets us hear and see it happen.

Because of the lack of narration, the story of Callas’ life is only sketched and there are huge gaps. It makes one want to read a thorough biography, but she was enough of a celebrity that most will have at



least a faint grasp of her history. This technique can seem teasing but it can also pay off with devastating emotion as it does in the cleverly edited and arranged section where Callas meets, loves, loses and regains Aristotle Onassis. A letter to Grace Kelly thanking her for flowers gives a heartbreaking clue. Subtlety becomes an aria.

The backstage footage is remarkable as are the moments when Callas takes centre stage and sings. It is admittedly disconcerting in this era of edits and beats, to watch a singer build a song, construct a performance and put considerable physical effort into creating the sound live. Her voice is glorious but there are tiny flaws that she worries, works around and corrects. It is fascinating as well as a treat for the ears. Some of the segments seem long by 2018, even by mid-'80s, standards but it pays off in a television appearance where Callas leans back and lets the gorgeous sounds and hair-raising emotions pour out of her. It is riveting from beginning to end.



Volf is perhaps too careful as the dark parts of Callas' life are only implied. It is as if he wants to believe the optimism in her letters and words. But then so do we. So Callas' mother just disappears, Callas is always thin, her diva reputation is earned, but sadly her gay fans, who sustained her declining years, don't get a solid thank you. Callas is constantly surrounded by men who trigger one's gaydar and her comeback concert rivals her rival Garland. Among the television news interviews with the men camped out for tickets to Callas, is a charming and alarming interview with a fan who gives a rationale for his fanaticism that is a primer on gay icon worship. He is outdone only by the man carrying a life-size cardboard cut-out of Callas.

The fan describes Callas' "sheer raw genius" which is ironic in an art form that demands incredible control and technique. And that is the dichotomy of both Callas' art and her life, she was able to express so much so directly through her music, let us viscerally feel the emotions of a character, but even using her own words, her inner life remains a fascinating enigma. But if she doesn't quite know where Maria and Callas begin and end, how can we, or Volf, presume to know?



*Maria by Callas opens Fri, Oct 26 at the TIFF Bell Lightbox, 350 King St W. tiff.net
 Maria By Callas also screens Wed, Nov 7 to Sat, Nov 17 at the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema,
 506 Bloor St W. hotdocscinema.ca*



social media - Tidbits



THE CHANTY SHOW LIVE ALBUM DROP



MyGay Toronto.com
Published by Sean Leber [?] October 11 at 11:40 AM
Oct 11th National Coming Out Day
https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=B8q6vV_QHvQ

YOUTUBE.COM
National Coming Out Day - A Message from Toronto Pflag
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Tasha Jade shared The Noise Witch's event.
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FOR MY LIVE MUSIC LOVERS ❤️ DJs - LIVE MUSIC - OPEN JAM SESSION! ❤️ Tis' the season to get spooky, so grab a pal and shuffle on down to the party at 187 Augusta Avenue on OCT 27th. 🍷 Free shot with every entry 🍻 Come dressed in your best 🎃



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Ending the HIV Epidemic in Toronto

It's up to us! Come out and discuss how we can end the HIV epidemic in Toronto, together.

The world is at a tipping point in stopping HIV. We have the knowledge and tools we need to prevent new infections and improve care. Cities around the world have joined the UNAIDS call to become Fast Track Cities. They have made a commitment to try to end the HIV epidemic in their city.

These cities are changing the way they work. They are finding new ways to connect with hard-to-reach populations. They are making it easier for people to get tested. They are strengthening their prevention programs as well as support and treatment services. And they are fighting stigma. Their efforts are paying off. They've seen dramatic drops in new infections and better more comprehensive care for people living with HIV.

We believe Toronto should step up and join this global initiative. It's up to us. Please join us, share your ideas and let's work together to end the HIV epidemic in Toronto.

Thursday, November 1, 2018. 519 Church St, Toronto
5:30 to 8pm — Presentation and Town Hall meeting

The 519 is an accessible facility with a ramp, elevator, and all-gender washrooms.



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!



EDITORIAL INQUIRIES

editor@MyGayToronto.com

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

partner@MyGayToronto.com

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