

TORONTO'S PREMIER GAY LIFESTYLE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

MGT

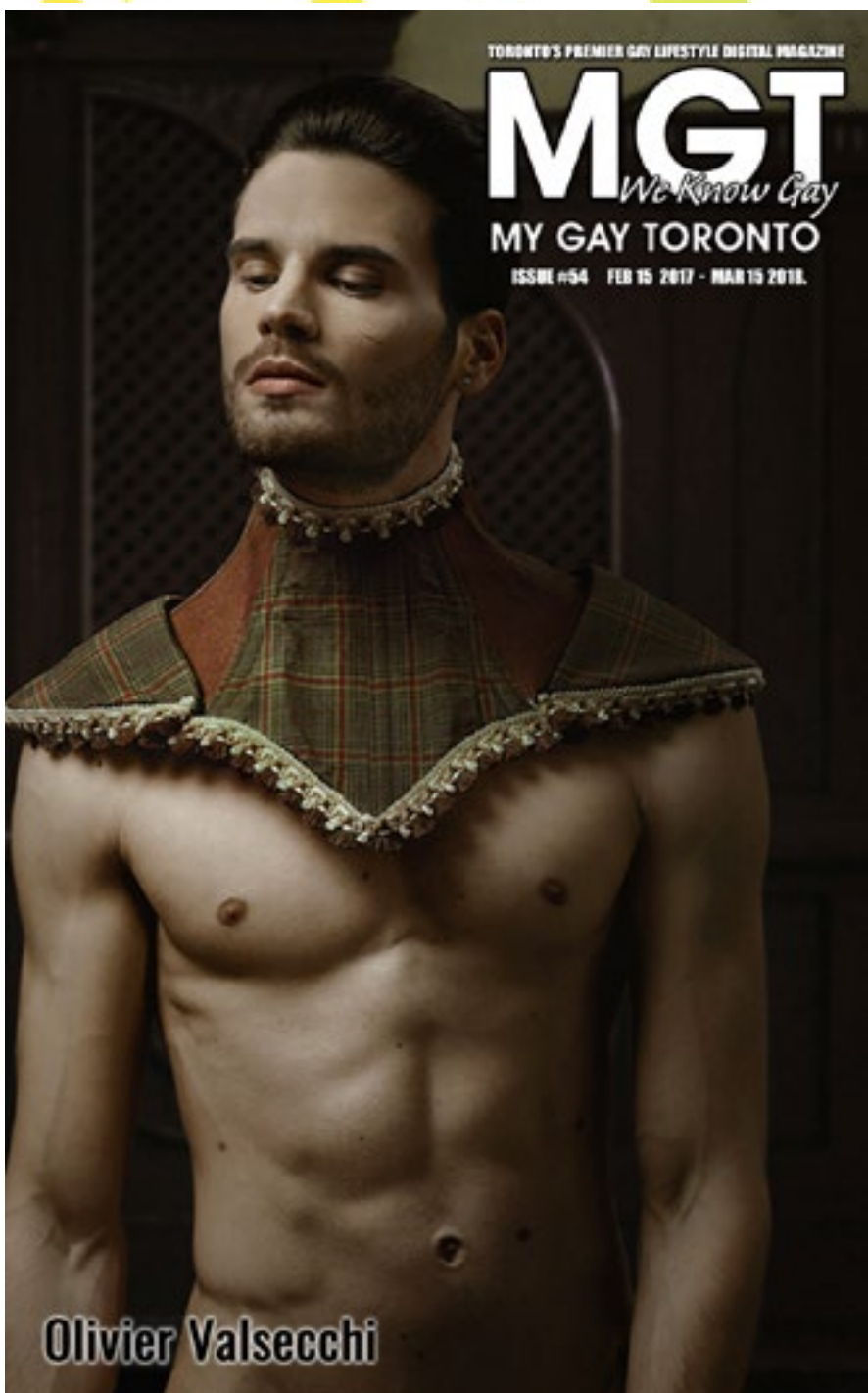
We Know Gay

MY GAY TORONTO

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Olivier Valsecchi



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Publisher:
REBEL MEDIA

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**
- ROLYN CHAMBERS**
- BIL ANTONIOU**
- LEE FANCY**

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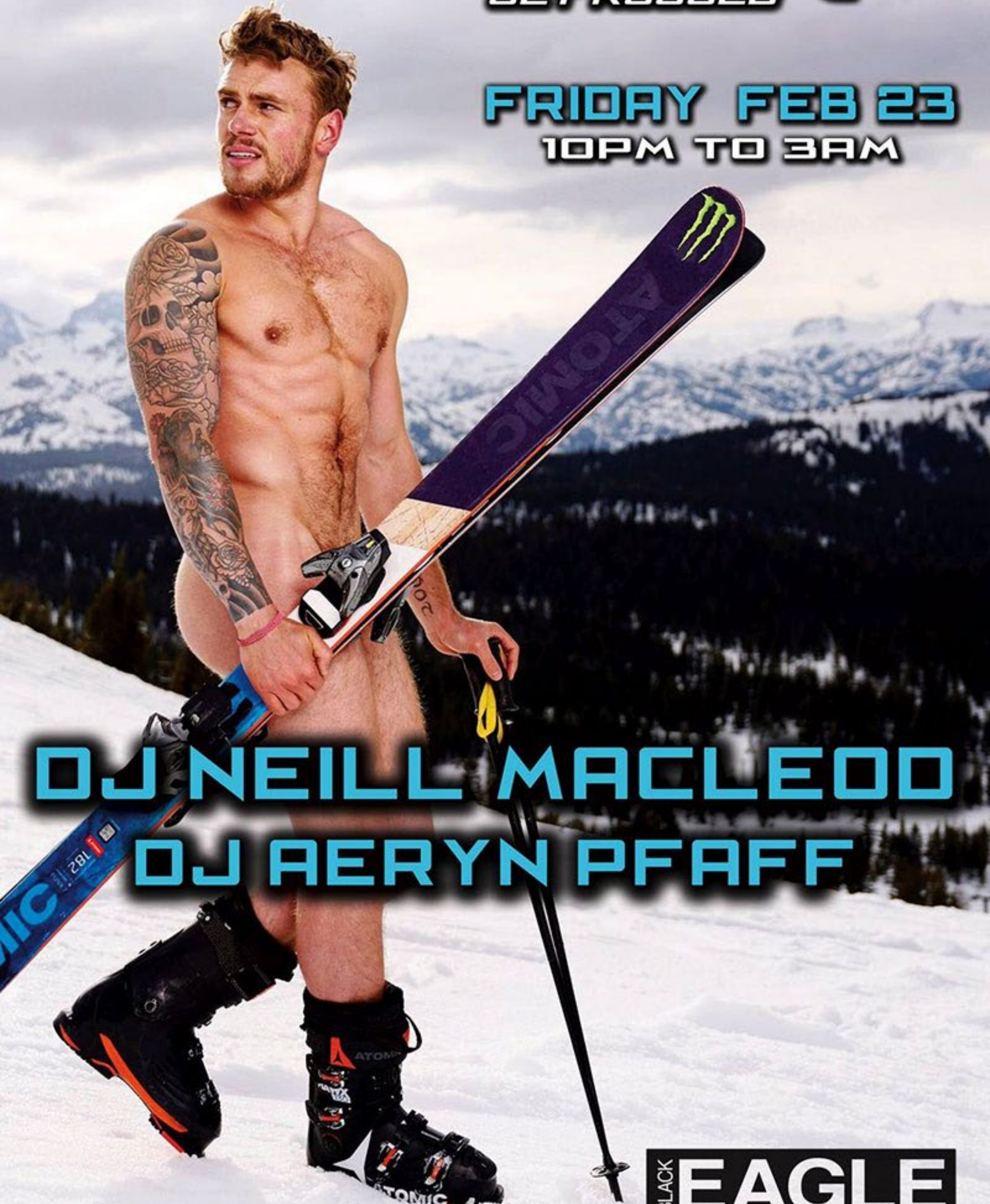
WOLF DADDY PRESENTS

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PAUL BELLINI



TOM OF FINLAND

A FILM BY DOME KARUKOSKI

I remember when I first discovered the artwork of Tom of Finland, back in the early '80s. I was turned on, but not just sexually. I was turned on the same way superheroes turned me on. The men were depicted with preposterously shaped muscular builds and penises the size of which has never existed in the human species. I was blown away because here was someone who created a whole world and lived in it, and back in a time when it would have been actually against the law to create this type of material.

Tom of Finland was a maverick, and a legend, and as gay men we owe him a debt. He broke down doors with his depictions of gay male sexuality. It's not for the prudish, but he was one of a kind, and a true activist (in that he put his life on the line). Whether you love or loathe sexual artwork, there is no denying that his impact on gay culture is significant.

Last year, the Fins rolled out the honours. Aside from a ton of merchandise with Toff pictures on it, the country splurged on an epic biopic. Directed by Dome Karukoski, it traces Tom's early years as a soldier, and how he dealt with his trauma by drawing hunks. Much is made of his relationship with his sister. Eventually, he is discovered by some Americans who bring him to Los Angeles to soak up the praise and begin building an empire.

The movie, it should be said, is more dignified than salacious, which, considering the topic material, might be a lost opportunity. You'd expect a lot more skin, but Tom of Finland has emerged as one of that country's greatest ambassadors. Finland even chose this film as their official entry for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards (it was not chosen).

So, see it. It's good, it's just not as good as Tom of Finland's actual drawings. Imagine a hardcore animated movie starring Tom's men. Now that would be amazing.

Tom Of Finland
Feb 23 - Mar 1
Imagine Cinemas
Carlton



DREW ROWSOME

Rhubarb returns for its 39th season

It's Rhubarb time again! From February 14 to 25, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is host to a galaxy's worth of adventurous theatre and audiences. Divided into "Week One" and "Week Two," each week presents core programming of six performances and nightly special presentations, parties and art installations. It is possible to go every night of the festival and see something new. There are no reviews allowed at Rhubarb but previous year's previews - 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 - proved to be startling prescient and completely faulty. There is always a performance that got its start as a Rhubarb seedling that sneaks under my radar.

So this year I enlisted the help of some theatre artists I admire who are part of this year's Rhubarb festival to get some insider expert advice. Much thanks to Bruce Gibbons Fell the writer of *The Communist Manifesto for Children*, Pearle Harbour the star and creator of *Pearle Harbour's Battle Cry* and Heath V Salazar who brings *Gay Jesus* to *Virgen* and drag king style to *Boiband the Boyband*.

Drew Rowsome: **Why is your production the must-see show at Rhubarb?**

Bruce Gibbons Fell: It's the public birth of this play: the first time an audience sees any of it. This child's delivery is going to be very raw; it will be a staged reading of some of my favourite parts. It'll be over the top and conceptual, with a piece of my heart in it too. There will be children. There will be Communism. There will be games. Maybe some dancing; maybe even a little blood. Or fever. Children get fever all the time

Pearle Harbour: Don't you feel that calamity in the air? Something big is coming our way, fast, and you have no idea how bad it's gonna be. And if we're going to war (and the Doomsday Clock is ticking down on that), you're definitely going to want Pearle Harbour by your side. *Battle Cry* is a drag concert extravaganza, featuring new orchestrations of wartime hits, reveals, revelations, and extra-special surprise appearances! *Pearle Harbour: Battle Cry* is going to be

Heath V Salazar: *Boiband the Boyband* and *Virgen* invite the audience into a world in which they have permission to be fallible. *Boiband the Boyband* opens conversation around elements of toxic masculinity, meanwhile, *Virgen* explores the compounded impact of past experience on the present day through the lens of queer sexuality. But both shows, though manifested through differing disciplines, make space for healing and celebrate the strength it takes to actively choose the ways in which we wish to grow.

Rhubarb is known for experimentation, scandal and shock. What do you hope your show is remembered for?

Bruce Gibbons Fell: I'd love for it to be a "What the farm was that? I want to see more!" situation. This is a distilled version of the play (with are references to 1950s movie trailers as well as quite conceptual games. It has a lot to do with what I call WASPtinos (White Anglo Saxon Protestant Latinos: the world I come from), which is pretty strange if you ask me, and also with childhood awakenings. We've all had some kind of awakening of that kind, and sometimes it's good to revisit them and go back to our first social scandals and shocks.





a foot-stomping, blood-pumping, tear-jerking, heart-stopping good time. But it's always about Pearle's audience: we are going to bringing people together using music that was written to tear people apart. But if you're asking what's gonna get people the rowdiest, we will have a live firing squad . . .

Heath V Salazar: I hope that when folx look back on their experience with Boiband the Boyband, they remember that we as people have the power to reclaim and define our identities in a way that honours all of ourselves. That just because we may carry several labels at a time, it doesn't mean that we are any less whole. I also really hope they dance. As for Virgen, I hope it helps folx recognize the potency of their existence. I want them to know that that potency is deserving of love.

What other shows, and why, are you personally excited about seeing during the festival?

Bruce Gibbons Fell: There is so much, and I'm so excited for all the Latinx artists in the festival this year! Otros Rostros (exploring Mexican masks); Random Closeness (I've been following this play for a while now); Pearle Harbour's Battle Cry (if you've never seen Pearle Harbour before, go!); Boiband the Boyband (a Latinx drag king boyband concert!); and last but not least, Empty Orchestra Dreamland which I direct and co-created with Jessica Zepeda and Benjamin McCarthy. It's a sci-fi karaoke extravaganza and dirty dance party for the end of the world, which will be the opening night party for the Rhubarb Festival on Valentine's Day.

Pearle Harbour: The emerging creators are such a gorgeous bunch this year, it's exciting to see what Rihannon Collett, Erum Khan, Kwaku Okyere, and Heath V Salazar are dreaming up.

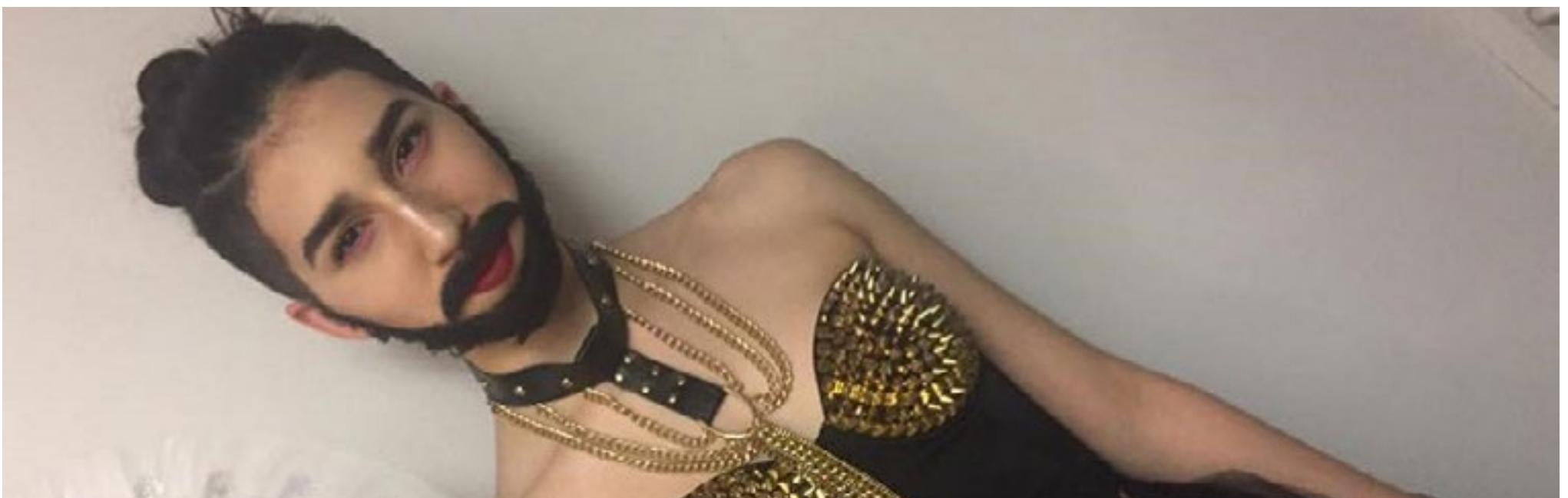
Heath V Salazar: White Girls In Moccasins by Yolanda Bonnell, Noor by Erum Khan and The Communist Manifesto For Children by Bruce Gibbons Fell.

Drew Rowsome: And I just want to add three more that I am excited about (and I like to get the last word in, hard to do with Pearle Harbour in the house): Gashkigwaaso by Waawaate Fobister who was so extraordinary in Agokwe, and The Seat Next to the King's Kwaku Okyere's Maame: A Queer Black Fairy's Tale, and Augusto Bitter in a new incarnation of Chico. Actually you can't go wrong with any Rhubarb performance, they're all short and intense and the unexpected one is going to be the one that takes your breath away.

Pearle Harbour: Our musical director Steven Conway is infectiously enthusiastic, so I'll echo him in saying we cannot wait for Misssick Vibrosis. Steven has no idea what to expect but that's how he likes it, and he fully expects to be blown (away).

More from the talented trio at drewrowsome.blogspot.ca

The Rhubarb Festival runs Wed, Feb 14 to Sun, Feb 25 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St. buddiesinbadtimes.com



Rumours: note for note but deeper

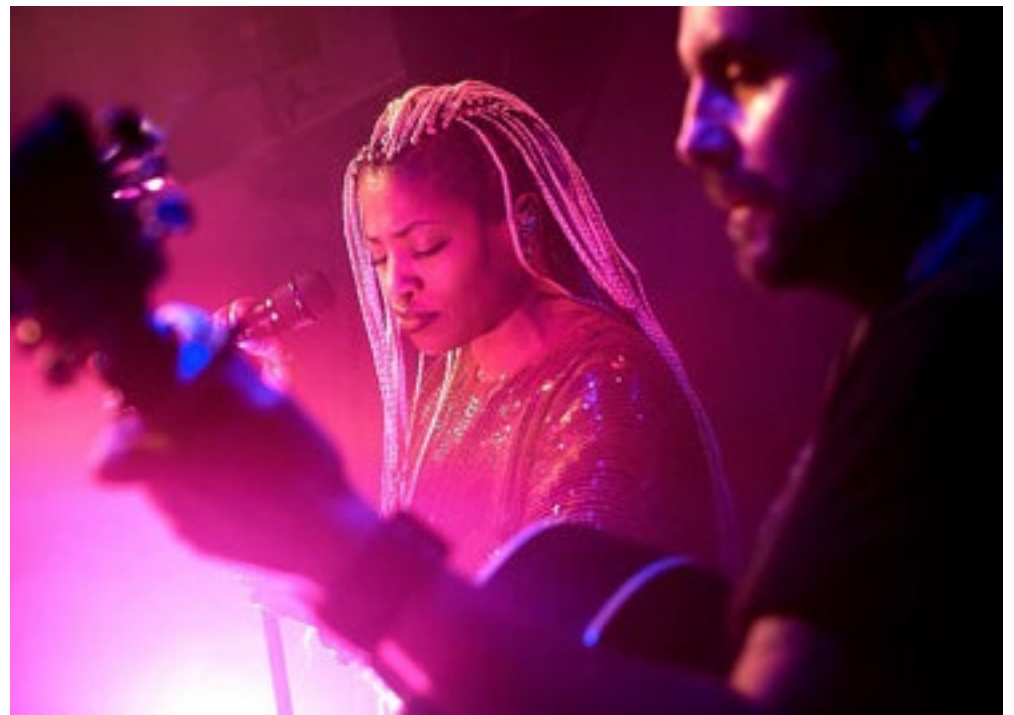
DREW ROWSOME



Rumours, the album, is part of the soundtrack of most people's life. I doubt there is anyone who is not familiar with the majority of the songs on the album, and I'm positive that there isn't anyone who isn't intimately familiar with all of the many hits. The story, the mythology, of the creation of Rumours is part of pop music folklore: much of the delicious tension embedded in the album is because never has so much cocaine, anger and sexual tension produced music that is as smooth as chilled white wine.

Rumours, the production produced at Coal Mine Theatre, plays with the instant nostalgia and the bitter backstory while pretending that it is simply a recreation of a beloved album. It is a comfortably bizarre and highly successful hybrid of wax museum, musical prowess and theatre. But it makes it a difficult thing to explain or describe, everyone's experience will be different depending on their relationship to the album Rumours and to life and love itself.

The Coal Mine Theatre is an intimate venue and the audience is close not only to the stage but to each other. The soccer mom and her obedient husband were, drinks in hand, ready to rock and relive some pivotal moment in their past. The theatre snob across the aisle was struggling to maintain his cynicism. The music producer a few rows ahead was schmoozing relentlessly, and the producer (Ted Dykstra billed as "Concept/Facilitator") of Rumours, sitting right behind me, was a bundle of toe-tapping glee that this pet project, this deceptive audacious idea, was working so well.



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In my context: I was given a copy of Rumours about a year after it came out. Being an aspiring rocker and nascent punk, Fleetwood Mac were lumped in with the other southern California bands that were far blander than what were then the contemporary idols in my limited musical world. But it was impossible to deny the craftsmanship, skill and sheer hookiness of Rumours. It was irresistible. And when I first heard the insistent beat, chord changes and indelible vocals of “Dreams,” I became a lifelong Stevie Nicks fan, surrendering to her weird mixture of camp, flakiness, charisma and rawness. I still remember clearly how the eight track in my father’s second hand truck would switch tracks mid-“Dreams” chorus. And I still believe that that is the reason that eight tracks failed as a primary music delivery system.

Emotions place a lot of weight to put on what is billed as just a presentation of a favourite album. On a musical level it is a recreation, almost note for note. The rhythm section, Jen Benton on bass and Steven Foster on drums, is rock solid, as tight and sweet as the recording. Keyboardist Derek Giberson fills in all the holes and cuts loose while remaining note perfect accurate on a piano solo. Mark Borkosky nails every guitar solo and all the strained nuances of Lindsay Buckingham’s unique vocal style.



The female singers of course have the most treacherous job: Nicks has an utterly distinct voice and Christine McVie is butter smooth and pitch perfect, with all the nuances buried under the tone. Wisely the duties are divided up and both Andrea Romolo and Sate are powerhouse singers. They blend into Rumours's shimmering sonics with only the occasional bursts of distracting melisma but the definite sense that they are longing to break free and revel in just what their own voices can do. The sound is impeccable, Roger Psutka is the hero at the soundboard, raising levels, blending tones, so that, and this is in a tiny space, each moment that needs to be heard, is.

Because it is presented as a concert there are some intrusive exhortations to sing along and unnecessary attempts to pump up the crowd. Departures from the album certainly, but I guess demanded in this context. The audience certainly appreciated it and sang lustily. If there had been space, I'm sure there would have been a lot of "look at me" interpretive dance. But I'm sorry, asking for a sing-a-long to "Dreams" is sacrilege.

On a non-concert level, considering Rumours as a piece of theatre, there are intriguing undertones culled right from the already-pointed songs. The setting, the clear sound and concert presentation, force the audience to focus on the lyrics. And the lyrics are a story. Again wisely, the songs are not re-interpreted or given cabaret style reinvention, they are just the lyrics as they appear on the album. What comes through is the agonizing futile attempts of Buckingham/Borkosky to match the women's star power with sheer force of will. That the attempt is made through guitar solos, the most traditionally phallic of all instruments, makes the triumph of the feminine all the more contemporary.

And through the entire performance, there is a sense of camaraderie that flows between the performers. They are trying to believe in the upbeat lyrics and smother the acidic ones with beauty. Love, and particularly love lost, is universal and carefully coating it in earworms and ear candy makes it palatable but no less painful. Nostalgia goes a long way to turning all memories into idylls which makes the final choice of "Landslide" an aptly odd one. As the refrain repeats, the melancholy grows and the theatrical aspect of this Rumours snaps into focus. We remember the album fondly, we sing along when we hear it on the radio (and I'm sure almost everyone who attends will dig out their copy for several spins, I did) but it belongs to another time in our lives, a time we are invited to peruse and make peace with. Something that is easier to achieve with those who went through it with you or in a communal theatrical/concert space.



Rumours continues until Sun, Feb 25 at the Coal Mine Theatre, 1454 Danforth Ave.
coalminetheatre.com

Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees

RAYMOND HELKIO



Sexual orientation and gender identification are recognized as protected human rights by jurisdictions throughout the world, including Canada (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and most provincial and territorial human rights codes), the European Union (the Charter of Fundamental Rights), and over 65 members of the United Nations that are signatories to the UN Statement on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Unfortunately, other countries do not recognize sexual orientation and gender identity as human rights and, further, persecute LGBT individuals. Iran is one such country, and this has forced thousands of LGBT Iranians to flee their homeland and become refugees, seeking asylum in countries that accept them for who they are.

An overwhelming majority of LGBT refugees flee to neighbouring Turkey, where they file claims for asylum with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR assesses each claim and if a claim is determined to be valid, the UNHCR identifies a new country for the refugee based on his/her circumstances. Often that country is Canada or the United States of America.

Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR) provides support and counseling to LGBT refugees. This support includes but is not restricted to financial aid for shelter, food and healthcare. IRQR follows up with their refugee cases from when they leave until they arrive in a safe country and are supportive during the entire refugee process. As of February 2017, IRQR was able to help process more than 1,500 refugee applications since 2005. Approximately 83 percent of refugees who approached IRQR were successfully granted refugee status. They provide consultations to about 90 clients per week including work with LGBT people who currently live in Iran, Iran's neighbouring countries such as Turkey, and in Canada. IRQR has worked closely with UNHCR office, NGOs and the government to assist refugees.

[More information or to make a donation.](#)

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BEACH
PARTY

DJ GRIND +
ROSABEL

RALPHI ROSARIO + ABEL

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MARCH 4 12-8PM

DANCE ON THE SANDS OF SOUTH BEACH
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WEEFIVE
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EDDIE FELIAS

MONDAY
MARCH 5



Heart Nightclub
50 NE 11th St, Miami

5AM-12PM
winterparty.com
#WinterParty25


NATIONAL
LGBTQ
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A vibrant collage of images featuring people at the Winter Party Festival. The collage includes individuals in various settings, some wearing event t-shirts, and a large crowd scene. The background is overlaid with diagonal stripes in shades of blue, purple, and orange.

25TH EDITION

WINTER PARTY FESTIVAL

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CHRIS HARDER WAS PORN TO BE A STAR

DREW ROWSOME



Chris Harder has starred in a tour of Charlotte's Web, been one of New York City's most in-demand go-go boys, written wittily for the Huffington Post, been awarded "Best International Male Performer" for his boylesque work and "Best of the Naked City" by the Village Voice, and has performed in over 52 hardcore porn films. Harder's current project, which we will be lucky enough to see April 26 to 28 at Buddies, is *Porn to Be a Star*, a one-man extravaganza.

"When I was writing *Porn to Be a Star* and certainly now that I've produced it a few times," says Harder, "I've found that the porn is the immediate hook, the gay porn, the 'We're going to see him naked!' But once you reel people in, my real goal is to surprise them and give them something unexpected which is the bigger story of the desire for fame and stardom. Gay men, and in many ways that is my target audience, should not expect just a sexy show where I take off my clothes and talk about getting double-penetrated, there's also a story and plenty of surprises built into the show."

One of my more pleasant tasks while doing background research before interviewing Harder, was to view a random selection of his porn oeuvre. What struck me, beyond the visceral appeal, was the many looks - innocent babyface to raunchy butch and everywhere in between - that Harder has donned, and how convincingly he delivers the set-up of each film. The man can act. "Directors that I work with, knew that I could memorize lines," says Harder. "Plenty of people can debate whether I did it well enough or like a real actor, but I always like doing the dialogue."

The porn itself also demands thespian resources. "I feel like there's this generalization that anyone can do porn as long as you can get naked in front of a camera," says Harder. "After being in porn, that's a false statement and not just from the point of view that someone has to have an idealized body type. As well as being naked in front of the camera, you have to be comfortable that your body is the work tool for that amount of time. Your body is the resource. Also a good porn scene has an art just like a dramatic scene. There is of course a literal climax but there is a way to physically, vocally, build a porn scene to make it believable."

Though Harder is firmly in theatrical mode with *Porn to Be a Star*, it is rooted in his porn past. "Part of writing *Porn to Be a Star* was to put something out there that wasn't the typical porn narrative of 'I got into porn and it ruined my life,'" says Harder. "Or I did sex work but now I'm done because I'm a better person and I'm glad I left it behind. I wanted to be able to tell my story about porn in a



way that was more sex-positive and also had a lot more hilarity and comedy. What I'd like people to take away from it is that there is humanity in porn and sex work. We've all been brought up on Boogie Nights and Showgirls and these other examples of really extreme sexuality in our culture that ultimately give us the idea that if we express our sexuality or give in to our sexual desires it becomes all-consuming."

If you have a favourite porn star, Harder has worked with him. And has taken mental notes. "Out of the nine characters in Porn to Be a Star, four of them are competing for the Porn Star of the Year award at the Dirty Dish Porn Awards and I play myself as one of them," says Harder. "You'd think that I'd feel closest to myself but all the characters represent either an opinion I have about the adult industry or a way that I felt myself at certain times. That's kind of the overarching theme of the show, that the characters become more identifiable as people but the world they live in is strange: the porn world. But at the end of the day, they really are people. And I become a little piece of all of them."





He also memorably portrays his mother. "People love when I play my mom because it's so unexpected," he says. "Not just that I'm doing a drag character, but because it has heart to it. That monologue is one of those places where people start to identify with Porn to Be a Star. We've all had those phone calls with our parents where they're trying to get through to us and we're trying to get through to them and there's a lack of understanding. They're full of love and compassion but there's confusion and hurt and I think people really tap into that."

The other audience favourite? "Without giving away too much of the show, people love the jokes I make about doing porn," says Harder. "There's one big kind of stylized scene where I go through what it is like to do a porn scene. There's a lot of hilarity in it that people seem to enjoy."

While Harder is juggling his multiple careers and focussed on making Porn to Be a Star a hit, he's also planning ahead. "I was just telling my boyfriend that in my fantasy world, I would, for a stage actor you think of Broadway as the final frontier. But any time I get to perform and get paid to do what I love is a gift. I know that's very cliché but it's a gift to have people trust you enough to come and see you perform. Not everyone gets that."





Part of the Porn to Be a Star experience, is Harder mingling with the crowd post-performance. “I like to make sure to thank people afterwards, it’s a way to give back. To be honest sometimes it’s just trying to gauge whether people liked it. If people make the effort to come support the show, I want to make the effort to be available if they want to talk about the show or even something as simple as take a selfie with me or say hello. It’s a way for me to say thank you.”

Harder is philosophical about his artistic progression. “I feel in many ways that my porn career has wrapped up,” he says. “I never planned it this way but I started to focus in other areas so I don’t get called so much for porn scenes. It’s just kind of been a natural progression. I don’t regret that it’s winding down but I also don’t feel like I have escaped something that was a trap or that I’ve decided to go to a more pure or sensible line of work. I’ve just kind of graduated to the next part of my life.”

Much more Chris Harder at drewrowsome.blogspot.com

Porn to Be a Star runs Thurs, April 26 to Sat, April 28 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St. buddiesinbadtimes.com, harderburlesque.com



3 NITES ONLY APRIL 26, 27, 28
BUDDIES IN BAD TIMES: CABARET

“HE TURNS GOGO INTO THEATRE AND BOYLESQUE INTO

CHRIS HARDER
PORN
TO BE A STAR

A MUST-SEE EVENT!”

— OUT Magazine

DIRECTED BY
VILLAGE VOICE
OBIE WINNER
DAVID DRAKE



THE STORY THAT UNZIPS ONE MAN'S LIFE

“AS REAL AS A CHRIS HARDER MONEY SHOT!”

— Michael Musto
Paper Magazine

“CLEVER AND CAMPY”

— ReviewHub

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IN BAD TIMES THEATRE NEXT DOOR

REVERY: #ShareTheLove for The Trevor Project

RAYMOND HELKIO



Revery is the new LGBT queer kid on the Netflix block and they are giving OUT and LOGO a run for their money. Original series, movies, podcasts, music, and more on the first global queer streaming service and at just \$5 (US) a month it's proving to be well worth the membership.

Last year Revery partnered with The Trevor Project to broadcast TrevorLive honouring Tom Ford and Kristin Chenoweth. Now, through their joint "#ShareTheLove" initiative, Revery will donate half of all annual subscription fees in the months of February and March to The Trevor Project's global initiative TrevorSpace.org.

"The Trevor Project is honoured to be 'Sharing The Love' with Revery these next two months," said their chief growth officer, Calvin Stowell. "Their commitment to help support TrevorSpace.org, the largest LGBTQ safe space online, will help us continue growing that platform so that every young LGBTQ person in the world has an outlet where they can safely be their true selves."

What to watch:

The Gay Husbands of San Francisco (original series)

The Gay Husbands of San Francisco takes a no-filter, hilarious look at the contemporary gay scene as it chronicles the lives and loves of six multi-ethnic gay men in the city by the bay.

More info: [Gay Husbands of San Francisco](#)

In the Dollhouse with Lina (original series)

In the Dollhouse with Lina is a weekly talk show. Think pop culture, fashion and throw-backs. Laugh-In meets Madame's Place with the dazzle of Bewitched and the sparkle of I Dream of Jeannie all inside a type of Pee-wee's Playhouse. Adding a lot of New York sass is the infectious Lina, hosting from within her DollHouse surrounded by her very own collection. Every week the mystery guest is revealed that day by a Magical 8 Ball. Guests include Whoopi Goldberg, Carson Kressley, Candis Cayne, Sherry Vine, Lady Bunny, Justin Vivian Bond, Bevy Smith and Shequida.





Butch and the Bear (podcast)

Butch and the Bear is a new comedy podcast starring AB Cassidy and Daniel Franzese (Mean Girls, Looking) with guests including: Amy Landecker, Heather Matarazzo, Drew Droege, Jonathan Bennett, Jessica Buttafuoco, Charlie Craig, Trey Pearson.

More info: [Butch and the Bear](#)



Dead for Filth (podcast)

From the spooky mind of horror personality and screenwriter, Michael Varrati, comes Dead For Filth, featuring all things queer horror and beyond. Dead For Filth brings the best queer & horror icons out of the closet and into the night to talk about the genre they love. Notable guests include Jeffrey Reddick (wrote Final Destination), Darren Stein (director Jawbreaker), Thomas Dekker (actor, lots), director Jeffrey Schwarz, and Veronica Cartwright (Alien, Body Snatchers, The Birds).

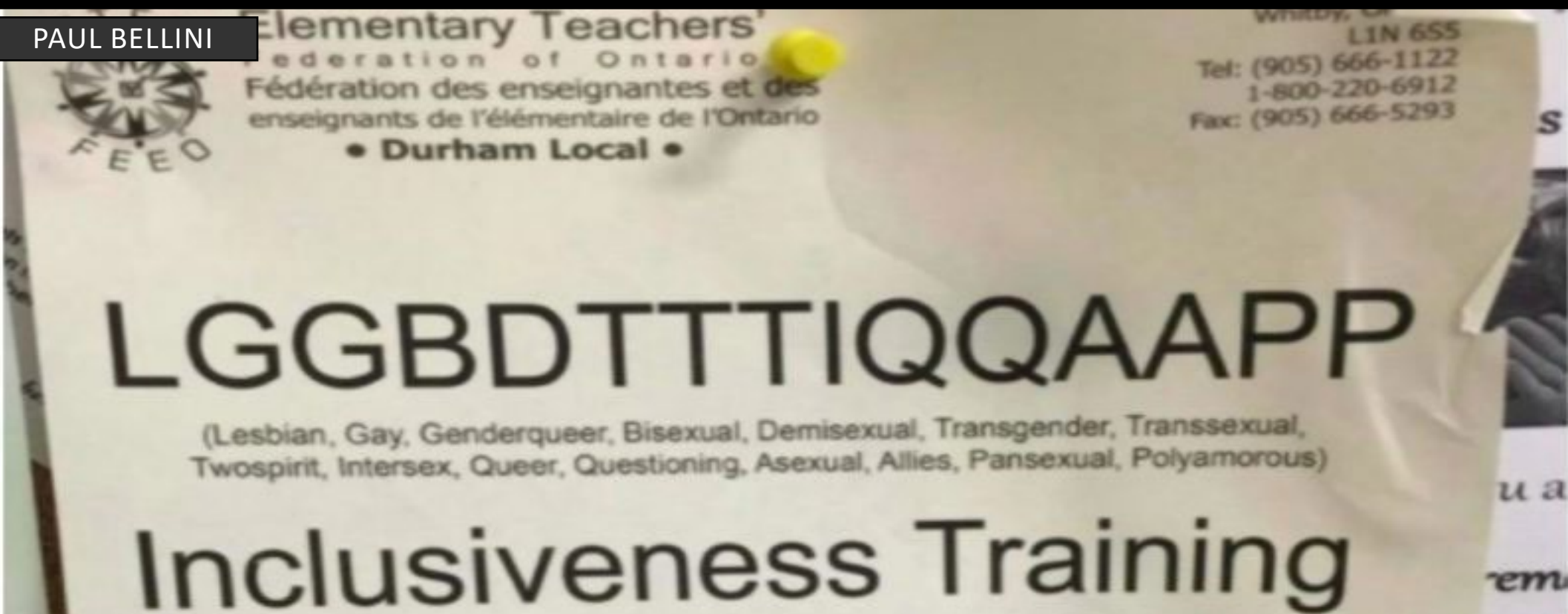
More info: [Dead for Filth](#)

unBEARable (podcast)

Big Dipper and Meatball have joined forces to bring you unBEARable! Listen every week as they talk bear culture, sex, snacks, and have in depth interviews with special guests including: Willam, Cubrina Bearly, George Unda, Rakeem Cunningham, Drew Droege, Jaymes Mansfield, Jeff Leavell, Nabor Arias, Vander Von Odd. More info: [unBEARable](#)

LGBTQAABCDEFGHIJKLMNPOQRSTUVWXYZ?

PAUL BELLINI



Although you'd think queers would have their hands full, the big kafuffle today was over the ever-growing acronym. What started as a very adorable "LGBT" toddler has grown into an ugly misshapen teenager.

Apparently, someone in England just added yet another new letter. For those of you who can't keep up - and that's pretty much everyone who is actually included in the acronym - here's what it now looks like:

LGBTQQIAAACPPF2K

It stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Questioning Intersex Asexual Agender Ally Curious Pansexual Polysexual Friends and Family Two-Spirit Kink. I have to ask myself, aren't 'questioning' and 'curious' just phases you grow out of in order to latch onto one of the other letters? Aren't 'Pansexual' and 'Polysexual' the same thing? And are 'Ally' and 'Friends and Family' either sexual orientations or the subjects of discrimination? And is it too late to add a question mark, which is about the only thing representing people like me in the equation.

Frankly, I think most queer people have just given up. In an emoji reaction chart at the foot of the article, 23 indicated 'Like', whereas 383 indicated 'Angry'. Even more telling is the Comments thread, edited for clarity.

"Kink is not inherently non-cis or non-straight."

"What's wrong with The Kinks?"

"Apparently you have no knowledge where the fight for LGBT rights started... May I introduce Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera."

"I'm not even from the western world originally, and I've come to learn that this whole story where Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera are somehow single-handedly responsible for the entire gay rights movement is nothing but

revisionist history."

"A trans woman threw the first brick at Stonewall but ok you have fun with your TERF [Trans exclusionary radical feminism] garbage."

"Even if it were true..Stonewall is not the definitive moment in achieving GLB equality."

"Not a brick, it was a punch, and it likely was a lesbian."

"There were also dozens of straight men at the riots. One of them, a folk singer named Von Ronk, was badly beaten and arrested. So why aren't we required to conjoin with all straight men? Or all folk singers? The entire argument is absurd. The makeup of a crowd at an event doesn't determine our identity."

"As a lesbian who has BEEN the victim of "kinky" abusive straight men, it is NEVER okay to allow them into our community. Straight men who like to beat women? Straight men who dress their partner as children and simulate pedophilia? They aren't like us. There's no similarity."

"Seeing all of you be ugly makes me reconsider a few things. stop being so old and crotchety, sad to say this to a group of non heteronormatives but it might be good for you all to open you eyes a bit and your hearts."

"It's because of this bullshit that I'm less inclined to tell people I'm gay because I don't want to be associated with the retarded way this community is going ... Grow up and grow a thicker skin."

Wow. So who gets to settle this endless debate? I leave it to big business. The corporate world seems to have roundly adopted the term LGBTQ+, so if that works for McDonald's, Mastercard, Mobil and Monsanto, then it works for me, too. Now can we all just go back to complaining about how long it took to catch that serial killer?

DREW ROWSOME



Gianni Versace: Vogue On, and The Assassination of

Four episodes in, extenuating circumstances have made *American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace* difficult to watch. There is no doubt that it is riveting and glorious television made by artists at the top of their craft, filled with soaring operatic flourishes and telling details, but it is also hitting too close to home. A fictional recreation of an actual horrific event unspooling while we are in the midst of the revelation, suspected but still shocking, that a serial killer has been operating in our midst, feels like some sort of post-modern meta-zeitgeist horror.

While the name Gianni Versace is familiar to every gay man and fashionista (the two don't always overlap despite popular opinion), his existence was far enough removed from my existence that I read and watched the coverage of his murder with more fascination than fear or anger. I do own a secondhand copy of the infamous Versace book *Men Without Ties* but it is softcore porn disguised as fashion. And the book did nothing to contradict my basic assumption that Versace's wares were situated somewhere between garish and camp. . And were totally out of my price range in any case. It was only years later when I visited The Versace Mansion in Miami, and felt the ghosts on the stairs where Versace died, and discovered how so much garishness and camp could be meshed together to create something spectacular.

The first two episodes of *The Assassination of Gianni Versace* do a great job of filling in the backstory and delving into the mind of Versace. Edgar Ramirez plays the designer with an exuberance and despair that causes real pain when it is snuffed out. Penelope Cruz is *Dynasty*-delicious as a version of Donatella Versace that we have all hoped is the truth. There is even a far too short appearance by Cathy Moriarty who we have seen far too little of since she scorched the screen in *Raging Bull*. And hopefully we will see more of Jay R Ferguson's FBI/DILF agent. It is very much a

Ryan Murphy production: teasing, gory, melodramatic and diva-packed.

Ricky Martin is beautifully sexy and sexual as Versace's partner Antonio D'Amico and it is exhilarating to see a gay couple that are portrayed with a sex life. A sex life that is not toned-down or monogamized for the mainstream. However Martin has been given little to do dramatically so far other than suffer and sob because the series shifts focus for the next two episodes.



The Assassination of Gianni Versace then moves backwards through time to track the previous killings by Andrew Cunanan. While still stylish in the extreme, there is a gruesome voyeuristic quality that is very disturbing. The third episode features an Emmy-bait turn by Judith Light that is extraordinary but the focus is on Darren Criss's Andrew Cunanan. From the first two episodes we have learned that Cunanan is a wannabe, taking the common gay stereotype and reality of exaggeration of social status and starfucking, to an extreme. And when his lies come undone, he becomes a killer, his delusions will not be denied.

Criss gives a chilling performance only partially offset by his good looks and charm. The duality, as it may have worked with Cunanan, reaches its apogee with the murders that have all the trapping of sexuality but none of the passion. The third episode is brilliant but difficult to watch, the fourth I almost turned off, there were too many distracting echoes amplifying the horror. Not only did Criss's stint in Glee recall the tragedies of Mark Salling and Cory Monteith, but the brutal murder of Cunanan's friends/exes and the BDSM games were just too close to current events.

Previously I would never have imagined that Criss dancing in a tiny pink speedo would be anything but tantalizing, here it creates a disturbing combination of revulsion and the erotic. A potent and nervy feat of filmmaking and I wish I were detached enough to have been able to appreciate. Criss is very good and obviously has far more potential than I imagined from his fall from grace in Hairspray Live! (though I, alas, didn't see his Broadway Hedwig which earned raves). He even sells the Murphy-patented symbolism that is so blatant it hurts: screaming into the ocean, cleansing showers, a bathtub splashed with blood.

There is a welcome thematic thread that blames the closet, of both the gay and HIV forms, for the killing spree that culminated in Versace's murder. It is heartening to see that concept as a dominant theme instead of a buried subtext. Max Greenfield, unrecognizable, plays one of the first survivors of the AIDS epidemic and his discussions with Criss's Cunanan (especially when contrasted with what The Assassination of Gianni Versace alleges was Versace covering up his own

sero-conversion, the official story is that he disappeared for a season to deal with ear cancer) are far more nuanced and realistic to be expected from a mainstream television series.

Struggling to process what I have seen of *The Assassination of Gianni Versace* so far, I picked up a review copy of *Vogue On Gianni Versace* that I had been sent and just not been able to get to yet. I've always had a hard time with fashion writing, the fab magazine "Style" column was the most difficult thing I've ever had to edit due to my cluelessness of the basics of style let alone analyzing it. I had only perused fashion magazines and *Vogue* for the photos and ads. I hoped that a bit of background on Versace, beyond his murder and pages of pretty frocks, might restore some balance. I never really expected to more than skim the text.



Author Charlotte Sinclair (who also wrote the Christian Dior book in the extensive *Vogue On* series) had a surprise in store. Quoting liberally from, and referencing, previous *Vogue* articles on Versace, Sinclair not only contextualizes why Versace's designs are important, but also tracks his business success. It delves only superficially into his personal life and history but those mentions resonate after all the post-murder press and particularly after what has been shown so far of *The Assassination of Gianni Versace*. She only touches on what she sees as a connection between Versace's famous bondage/leather innovations and his fate, but that is all it takes and it is tenuous and rather insulting theory in any case.

Sinclair credits Versace with creating the phenomenons of the supermodel and the superstar as model, and explains the significance of Criss' s aggrandizing remark that Versace created his own fabrics when he couldn't find what he wanted. She compiles enough details of Versace's early life to make a compelling narrative and creates folklore out of gossip. I never thought that I would understand how a "drape" works or why excess and glitter can have depth beyond drag and camp, but Sinclair renders it clearly, efficiently and in a highly readable style.

Vogue On Gianni Versace impresses me all the more so for all the phone calls, emails, pursuing line by line and compromise that it took to translate columnist Max MacDonald's sartorial insight and enthusiasms into what I considered to be compelling but understandable prose. In that sense fashion is like writing and like a television program: the style and surface are crucial, are what catches the eye and pleases, but it is delving into the depths beneath that makes it art. And I'll continue with *The Assassination of Gianni Versace*, it may be disturbing and flashy but then so is the best art.

***The Assassination of Gianni Versace* airs the FX network - MGT gives 4 out of 5 stars.**

Mel Malarkey's Odes & Acts is Lewd, Crude & Shrewd

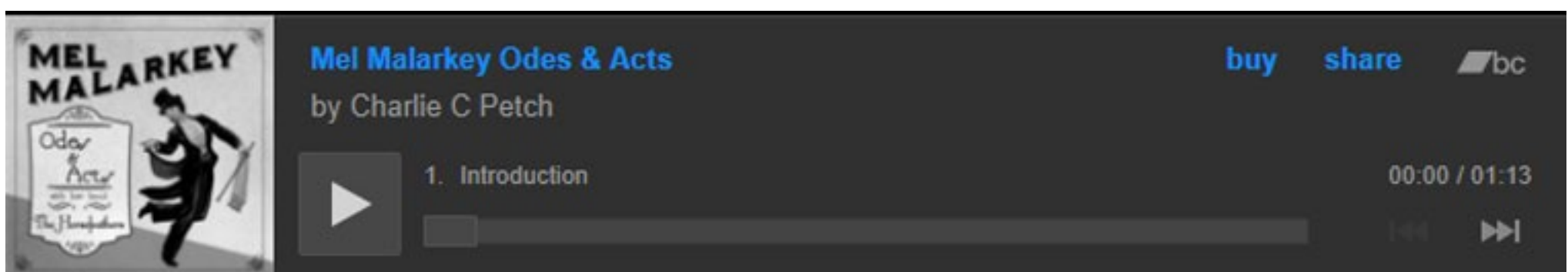
RAYMOND HELKIO



Charlie Petch has been a fixture of the scene for years and perhaps best known for his touring show *Hot Damn It's A Queer Slam*, an open mic contest which continues to attract an eclectic assortment of artists that blur the boundaries between poetry, performance and sexual politics. I've been to one of Charlie's slams in New York and the room was as alive as it was packed. A few years ago Charlie brought me in to be one of the judges during a show at *Buddies In Bad Times Theatre* and I was blown away by the often deeply moving works that people performed. One minute I was clapping my hands out of sheer joy and the next I was choked up from being enveloped in someone else's life journey.

Charlie Petch is also known as Mel Malarkey, the spunky saw-playing-alter-ego-diva of spoken word and she has a new offering in the form of *Odes & Acts*. Part vocal exploration with her band, *The Horsefeathers*, mixed by Michael Oesch, this spoken word album delivers what I've come to expect from Mel, the unexpected. This vaudevillian journey takes the listener deep into the shrewd, lewd and crude world of theatre embellished by a thoughtful soundscape using instruments such as the sousaphone, fiddle, banjo, piano, musical saw and trumpet. Beneath the silliness, each track contributes to a larger narrative, reminding the listener that living life on the fringes is not just an act of defiance, but an act of love for ourselves.

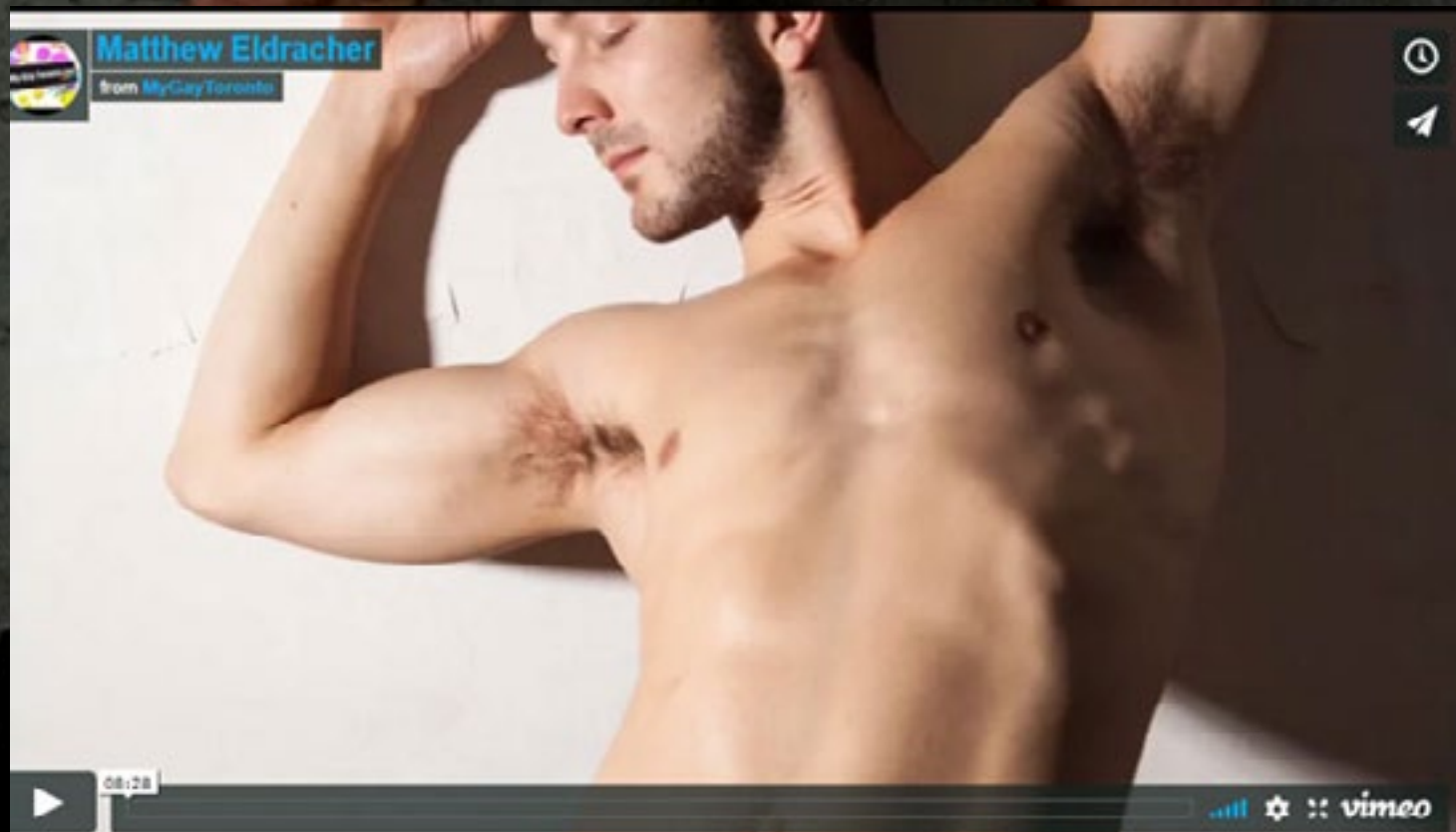
Listen to the album or find out more about Charlie [here](#).





Matt Eldracher

dancer, acrobat, model, burlesque and strip performer.



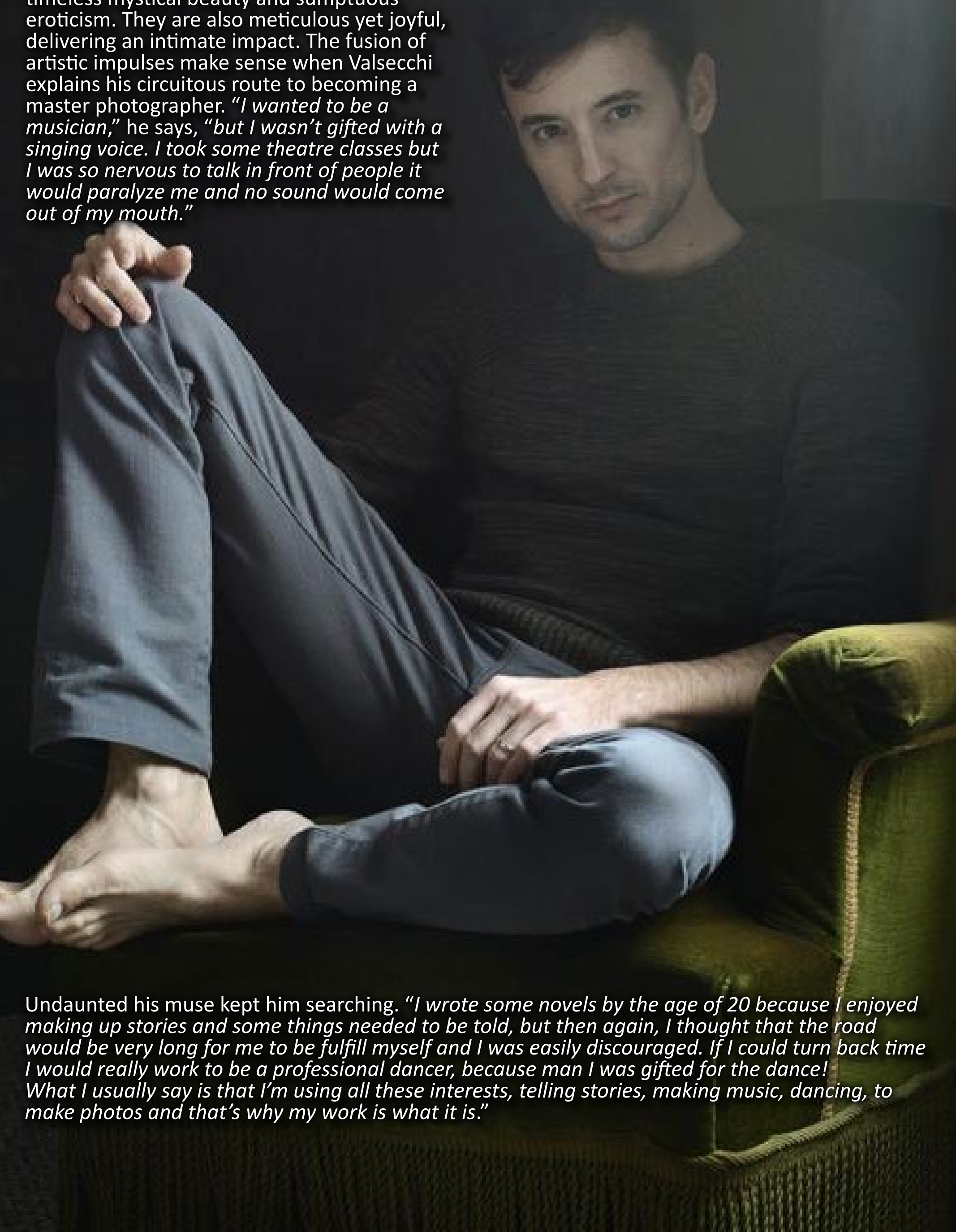
christeel.ca

MGT COVER PHOTOGRAPHER,

olivier valsecchi art and inspiration

DREW ROWSOME

The photos of Olivier Valsecchi have surfaced in dramatic series of photos, each distinct, each stunningly beautiful, but all containing a timeless mystical beauty and sumptuous eroticism. They are also meticulous yet joyful, delivering an intimate impact. The fusion of artistic impulses make sense when Valsecchi explains his circuitous route to becoming a master photographer. *"I wanted to be a musician,"* he says, *"but I wasn't gifted with a singing voice. I took some theatre classes but I was so nervous to talk in front of people it would paralyze me and no sound would come out of my mouth."*



Undaunted his muse kept him searching. *"I wrote some novels by the age of 20 because I enjoyed making up stories and some things needed to be told, but then again, I thought that the road would be very long for me to be fulfill myself and I was easily discouraged. If I could turn back time I would really work to be a professional dancer, because man I was gifted for the dance! What I usually say is that I'm using all these interests, telling stories, making music, dancing, to make photos and that's why my work is what it is."*







Valsecchi began creating promotional images for the music he was producing and used himself as a model. For many years the self portraits were his only photographic works. But his ambitions were growing. *“Some ideas can’t be done all by yourself,”* he says. *“When I came up with the ‘Dust’ series concept, I knew I would have to take a step back from the stage and really look at what is happening and how it’s all working. That’s the first reason. Second reason is that, from a single idea you can get many different images just using different models, only because they bring their own personal story and they inject variations in the project that you may not have thought about before. A series is often a collaborative work, and you as the narrator of the story have to improvise with the vibes and the magic that emerge from the models and the light you have created for them.”*

Expanding into collaboration, expressing through others was an evolution but Valsecchi doesn't discount more introspection. *"I haven't taken a picture of myself for a long time,"* he says. *"I think the last time was that yoga position I practiced with a contortionist friend of mine, and that was almost four years ago. I think I'm back into that type of energy right now. Very 'stretch your body and find your inner whatsoever.' Self-portraits are related to moods, and what you're living through. And also, it often happens that a portrait of someone else is telling a more personal story than if you are actually on the picture as a model."*





The "Dust" and "Time of War" series are distinct and instantly recognizable. *"I started the process in late 2008,"* says Valsecchi, *"trying things with different materials such as spices, with the idea of organic decomposition that I wanted the work to hold. I was at my parents' house for Christmas and we were around the fireplace, and then I was looking at these logs of wood burning into ashes and it was like hearing the sound of a key turning in the doorlock, it was like 'Eureka!' that dust was telling the story by itself. So I made bags of ashes and experimented showering models with it. I was still a student in a photographic school at that time. I ruined the studio, it was like walking on the moon, there was dust everywhere on every inch of that room."*





Valsecchi became even more ambitious with the multiple models it took to create the iconic “Klecksography” series. “Man,” he says. *“Klecksography’ was a nightmare to work on. Sure it was fun to stand among this group of naked people, but the work was so hard. Most of the pictures were planned. We worked as a team of about 20 people. We had drawings, or rather photomontages I had crafted out of pictures of myself striking different poses, and we were trying our best to make them work live. I had to let go some ideas because it was impossible to make them happen.”*





However Valsecchi's vision, if not always easy to realize, turned out to, with teamwork, be possible. *"King and Minotaur were rehearsed twice with a different cast because they were made on two different levels and it was really a challenge to make it look good. There was hard work on symmetry and on the casting because models had to look alike as they were working in pairs. In the behind the scenes video you can really feel the mess, the tension, and the work as a team. So obviously it was about sculpting bodies live, like a performance, and not digital manipulation at all."*







Valsecchi's inspiration is a wonderfully expressed dialogue about life, death and the beauty of the human form. *"It's more about finding your language and way to communicate, with visuals instead of words. I do remember looking at Pierre et Gilles' gay-friendly, erotic images when I was a teenager, but did they really inspired me to become a photographer myself?"*

Inspiration is everywhere. When I suggest that his "Amazon," "Boys in the Attic" and "Drifting" series have a timeless vintage patina, he replies, *"I'm nostalgic. That's crazy that you can tell that from my pictures. I'm a nostalgic and that's probably the reason why renaissance and classic paintings inspire me more than contemporary art. I am uncomfortable living in the present."*





There is always hope



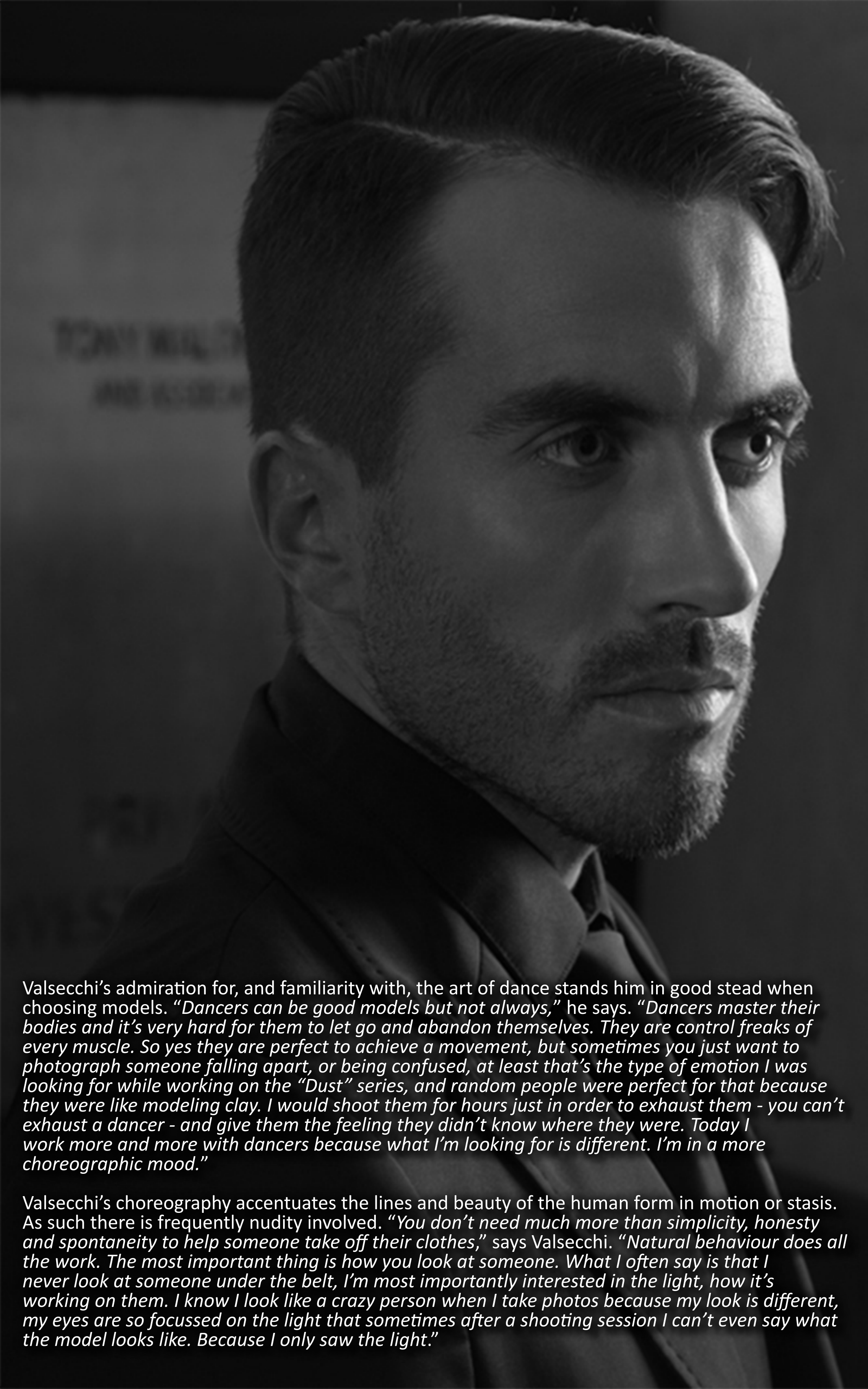


But Valsecchi is very comfortable creating contemporary commissioned portraits (though they too have that timeless mysterious flavour) or discovering a new inspiration. *“Being a fine art photographer, as I see it, is pushing the limits of portrait photography further,”* he says. *“There are models everywhere, I can find them either on the street, or on the internet or friends’ recommendations. I need to be seduced by the magic and sensibility of a model and I need to know that he or she is going to facilitate the shooting by listening very carefully to what I want to express, and make that idea their own, and incarnate it very naturally. You know the expression ‘He’s a natural?’ Well that’s we photographers are looking for. Some people are just inspiring by being who they are. Those who overplay can ruin a photo.”*









Valsecchi's admiration for, and familiarity with, the art of dance stands him in good stead when choosing models. *"Dancers can be good models but not always,"* he says. *"Dancers master their bodies and it's very hard for them to let go and abandon themselves. They are control freaks of every muscle. So yes they are perfect to achieve a movement, but sometimes you just want to photograph someone falling apart, or being confused, at least that's the type of emotion I was looking for while working on the "Dust" series, and random people were perfect for that because they were like modeling clay. I would shoot them for hours just in order to exhaust them - you can't exhaust a dancer - and give them the feeling they didn't know where they were. Today I work more and more with dancers because what I'm looking for is different. I'm in a more choreographic mood."*

Valsecchi's choreography accentuates the lines and beauty of the human form in motion or stasis. As such there is frequently nudity involved. *"You don't need much more than simplicity, honesty and spontaneity to help someone take off their clothes,"* says Valsecchi. *"Natural behaviour does all the work. The most important thing is how you look at someone. What I often say is that I never look at someone under the belt, I'm most importantly interested in the light, how it's working on them. I know I look like a crazy person when I take photos because my look is different, my eyes are so focussed on the light that sometimes after a shooting session I can't even say what the model looks like. Because I only saw the light."*

Which also explains Valsecchi's nonchalant attitude regarding nudity. *"I think erotic is less about flesh and more about vibes and attitude,"* he says. *"Dressed people can be more erotic and sexy than nude people. I think it's a question of what kind of energy you're holding. And the story you're telling."* Sadly the mainstream doesn't always concur. *"Unfortunately my work has been deleted so many times from social media that it became impossible for me to post anything without censoring it myself. Sad times we're living in, when a pubis is considered more offensive than a bloody massacre."*





The intellectual rigour and craftsmanship Valsecchi utilizes to create his work makes any thoughts of censorship particularly galling and destroys any arguments that art and eroticism are two different things. *“My personal point of view is that art requires a vision, and the technique to achieve this vision,”* he says.

“If you have a very bad and annoying voice, you don’t choose singing as a career. If you’re illiterate, you don’t write novels. If you want to make art, you have to strongly believe in your ideas, yes, but don’t neglect your technique. Some people will say that art is just having ideas and everyone can have ideas but sorry, I’m not buying that. Art has a mission: to make people dream, make people think. When people look at a piece of art and feel nothing and think nothing, well, I think we can agree that this is something other than a piece of art.”



More of Olivier Valsecchi's work can be viewed on his website

oliviervalsecchi.com

or the websites of the galleries that represent him:

Opiom gallery in Cannes (France) opiomgallery.com

Art 22 gallery in Brussels (Belgium) art22.gallery

and AFK Gallery in Lisbon (Portugal) www.arteafk.com





REMINGTONS™

#MeToo: a Full Frontal Attack on the Arts?

SKY GILBERT



FAVE SADOU/MEDIA/PUNCH/IPX VIA AP

#MeToo has become a full frontal attack on the arts. It's a shame, because the original aim of the movement was to combat sexism, everywhere. This was a noble idea. But #MeToo, unfortunately, has moved on.

Consider this. I go online or pick up my newspaper, and the latest salacious headline centres on a choreographer, symphony conductor, gay photographer, or even James Franco. Regrettably, such arts-related news leads to random editorial musings, which begin with thoughts like: "Fascinatingly, Albert Schultz was considered a 'pioneer in theatrical exploration' who 'pushed boundaries.'" Soon the pundits move on. They just can't help wondering, "Was Louis CK's shocking comic material - which often dealt frankly with sexual subjects - in any way related to his backstage sexual perversions?"

It's time to ask a much more important question. Where are the business and corporate leaders who are sexual molesters? Are we to believe that no women at Google, Exxon, Dupont, Apple, Tim Hortons or Canadian Tire have ever been molested by their bosses? Apparently. And yet we know this isn't true. The question is, why are people champing at the bit to punish potential sex criminals in the arts, while at the same time leaving corporate and business leaders unscathed?

If this continues it can only lead us to the

depressing conclusion that #MeToo is not an actual political movement destined to transform the sexual dynamics between men and women forever but just the latest google trend. I say this because unfortunately #MeToo (like every other movement in western culture) seems quite helpless when confronted with corporate capitalism.

On the contrary, instead of criticizing the arts, it is time to praise artists for their courage. Perhaps the reason so many arts organizations are confronting sexism is because the arts have always been at the forefront of this issue. And artistic environment environments - unlike corporate entities - are not generally confined to money-making enterprises, but instead quite often are politically aware institutions that seek to forge cultural change.

I do not in any way wish to minimize the significance of any attack on any woman, anywhere. In fact that's why I am raising this issue. Like Catherine Duneuve and other prominent French feminists, I must wonder if #MeToo has morphed from a feminist movement into an attack on artistic freedom.

And until the day a significant proportion of the overall constituency of rapists, molesters and harassers don't just happen be charismatic, googlable and tweetable stars of stage and screen, I fear for women.

Look Out! It's the Cavaliers vs The Roundheads!

SKY GILBERT



Everything old is new again. I was chatting with a female friend of mine about the #MeToo movement, and I said "I think it's becoming a movement about censorship." "Oh yes," she said, nodding, "It's the Cavaliers vs the Roundheads all over again."

I had to go Wikipedia and look up Cavaliers and Roundheads. It turns out that the Roundheads were the Puritan faction that tossed out King Charles I and the Royalist Cavaliers in 1649, and established The Commonwealth of England. They also closed down the theatres. And that's kind of what's happening now. The National Post tells us that comedy clubs are starting to post signs that say that "sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, and body shaming" will not not be tolerated on their stages.

So what's left that's funny?

But seriously folks, I don't mean to suggest that racist or homophobic or sexist comedy is the only comedy that's funny. What I do mean to suggest is that the concerns of social justice warriors, and the #MeToo movement - as valid as they may be in the social sphere - are starting to worm their way into the arts. And art is not the same as social justice. Because art is not real.

Shakespeare told us (sort of) that artists are all lovers and madman. The fact that Louis CK may be an asshole in real life does not make it right for you to limit distribution of his gorgeous, classic, Chekhovian TV shows. And yet this is the kind of thing people are talking about. I went to a queer conference a while back and somebody called for banning drag queens on the basis that their humour is "cruel." You're damn right it's cruel. I don't know how to tell you this, but cruel is funny. In the wake of the public excoriation of Albert Schultz, Eva-Lynn Jagoe suggested in The Globe and Mail that we should reconsider the worth of Edward Albee's Pulitzer prize winning play *The Goat* because "we have less sympathy for the man who has transgressive desires."

Wow.

I guess we'd better start banning work about 'transgressive' sexual desire.

It's time to get rid of Nabokov, and Joyce, and while you're at it, Shakespeare.

Yes folks, Puritanism is back; only it's wearing a disguise. Don't be fooled.

You may be against sexism, racism and homophobia, but that doesn't mean you have to be against art.

Oh well. The Puritans didn't rule England for long because they bored everyone to death. Let's hope the Puritan season lasts no longer here.

My GayToronto

SEAN LEBER



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My Gay Toronto.com

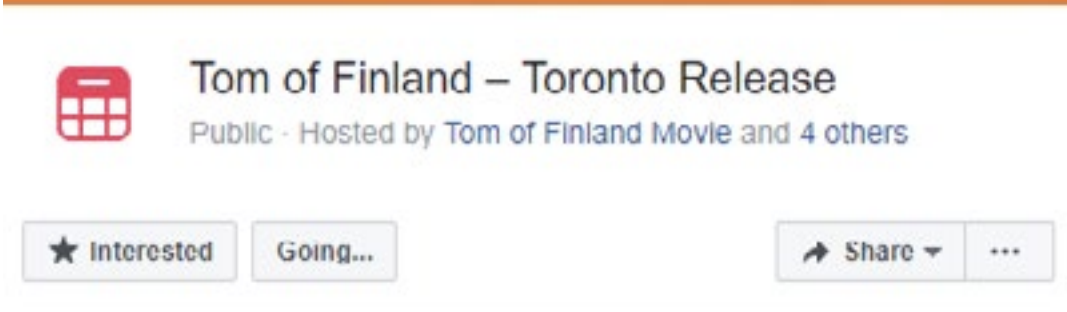
Photo by Cheryl Lifford

social media - Tidbits

X-Files Photoshoot From The 90's Is Going Viral Again, And It's Super Weird Even For The 2018



In celebration of the spring season of love, Addicted, the naughty little sister brand of ES Collection, has unveiled its "Lust" underwear collection. "This season's underwear collection is highly sensual and sexual but with a sense of humor," explains the collections' founder, Ed Suner. "It's sassy, jovial, and ironic but also fresh, sporty and stylish." The "Lust" collection features tight-fitting briefs in fire-y flames, neon leopard and superhero prints, emblazoned with tongue-in-cheek sayings like "Horny," "Love Me Hard," "Ready to Milk" and "High Class Hooker." addicted.es





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Some Hell: Patrick Nathan's extraordinary first novel

DREW ROWSOME ★★★★★



Never, in my memory, has such a bleakly nihilistic novel been such a unique pleasure to read.

Colin, the protagonist of Patrick Nathan's *Some Hell*, is having a difficult time coming out. Complicating the process further is his father's suicide, his autistic younger brother, his psychic sister who has predicted Colin's death in a mere three years, an estranged grandfather with a secret, and his mother who is unable to cope with the suicide and is unravelling. During the course of the novel, Colin and his mother also read from his father's journals, selections of which the reader is privy to. The journals are full of news stories of horrific incidents, apocalyptic musings, visions of hell, and the tragedy of wild horses stranded in the desert. The contents of the journals begin to seep into both their lives.

The coming out process is incisively written and is excruciating. The crush on his best friend that leads to disaster, an unrequited crush on a pedophile teacher, fantasies of forced sex (to evade responsibility) and even murder, a laceratingly bad body image, learning to masturbate and dealing with the guilt of his desire. It is impossible not to ache for Colin, to root for him, and to make empathetic connections to one's own most hidden and denied memories. It is extraordinary and written in a tight, matter of fact prose that achieves a relentless drive forward.

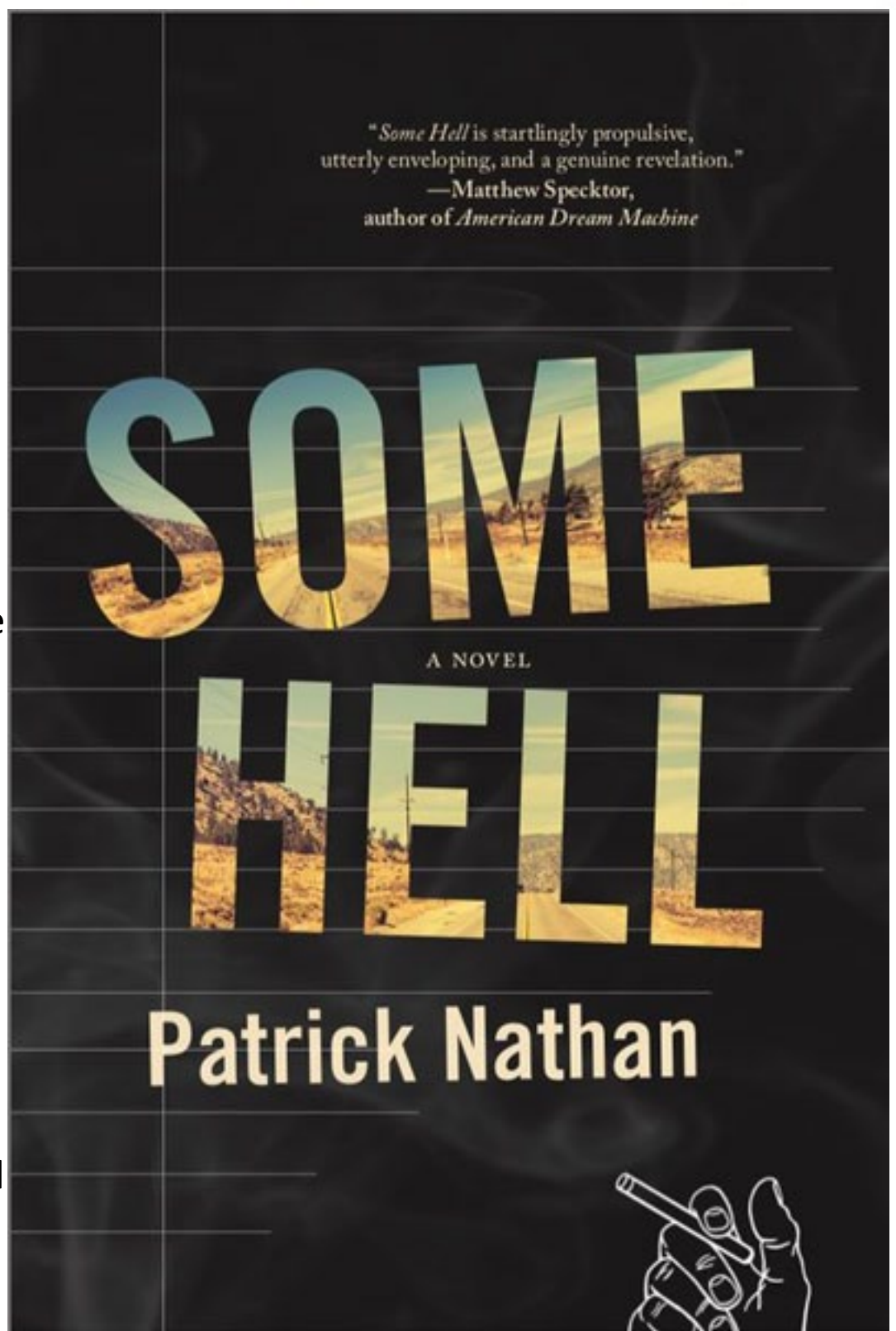
The mother, who modulates the narrative into a duet, has her own harrowing journey. Her grief and guilt are unbearable, and she turns to casual sex, a therapist and a smoking habit. Again the details are precise and telling, though in this case there is much that is implied and unspoken. The things unsaid reflect the fractured co-dependent relationship between Colin and his mother, only some of which has to do with their struggle to deny his sexuality. Their solution is a road trip that takes them to Los Angeles.



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Nathan weaves weather metaphors - snow, natural and unnatural disasters from the journals, the cold of home in winter versus the heat of LA - to echo and comment on states of mind. We all talk about the weather when we are avoiding talking about something crucial, frightening or forbidden. *Some Hell* climaxes with an - spoiler alert - apocalypse that could come right from the journals. BDSM, love and the ocean unleash a finale that lasts a mere two pages and is, while thematically apt and devastating, not as cathartic as probably intended.

It is the only weak moment in the book. Nathan writes so enticingly and uses just the right details to create complete characters and a solid sense of place. He also utilizes a clever trick of inserting short sentences, like poetic blips, that cause the flow to stutter. One briefly pauses, ponders, registers the importance, and then dives back into the addictive plot. *Some Hell* may be a novel of ideas, psychological upheaval and minutiae, but it reads like a thriller. There were many places where I wanted to turn away, but I just flinched inwardly and could not not continue.



Bang Bang: a darkly comic attack on appropriation

DREW ROWSOME ★★★★★



By this point in time one has unreasonably come to expect that a new Kat Sandler play will be darkly comic, full of unexpected moments and plot twists, all while tackling big themes and base impulses with wit and solid construction. That's a lot of pressure to put on a playwright/director, but if the prolific Sandler (Mustard, Late Night, Bright Lights, Liver, Cockfight, Sucker, Delicacy, Rock) is feeling the heat, it doesn't show. Bang Bang is a brave venture into dangerous territory and it is a resounding success: very, very funny and very, very thought-provoking.

The official synopsis - "A white playwright uses the shooting of an unarmed young Black man by a police officer as a 'jumping off point' for his hit play that is soon to be adapted into a major movie. As Hollywood comes knocking for the writer, he makes a surprise visit to the home of the officer involved" - is itself only a "jumping off point." Sandler stands the black vs white paradigm on its head right off the bat in order to question racial privilege and all assumptions on any side or variation. It is a ballsy pussy move and it pays off: it very quickly becomes impossible to form an opinion about anything before it is undercut, spun topsy-turvy, or proven faulty.

That this is done while getting consistent and hearty laughter from an audience is remarkable. The lines and jokes are funny in a lacerating way, piercing our perceptions and attitudes with a nasty preciseness. The laughter comes from pockets of the theatre, accompanied by questions of "Did she just go there?" and "Should I be offended?", with uncomfortable beats of surprise followed by full-gutted guffaws. The list of contentious topics touched on is dauntingly extensive and covers just about every Facebook/Twitter war of the last few years.



Of course none of these themes can be resolved theatrically without becoming pedantic and denying the opposing viewpoint, so Sandler wraps it all in meta-theatricality and launches a fusillade of theatre jokes and self-satire that is breathtaking in its hilarity. Which makes her point perfectly: just who does a story belong to and who has the right to tell it? Where does this white girl get the nerve to write about Black Lives Matter? The dizzying shifting of viewpoints and ideology layered with punchlines is tricky to time, the laughs could happen (or not) anywhere, fortunately Sandler has a dream cast who can pivot on a dime and land a gag with finesse.

Jeff Lillico (Tom on the Farm, Cinderella) is the playwright and he is sleazily ambitious, possibly well-meaning, and utterly fraudulent. The audience has to simultaneously embrace him and hate him which Lillico achieves with nerd-next-door earnestness. The point where Bang Bang pivots, is a recitation by Lillico that is sincerely heartbreaking, shockingly horrific, and uproariously funny all at the same time. All the cross currents and confusions fuse in an emotional maelstrom that is as disturbing as it is mesmerizing.

Khadijah Roberts-Abdullah (Prince Hamlet, Contempt) grows from mouse to monster to martyr and then whiplashes back and forth without a false note. She fawns giddily over the teen idol who wants to be a real actor, as believably as she melts down. Sebastien Heins (Brotherhood: The Hip Hopera, Mr Burns, A Post-Electric Play) could coast on looks,



physicality and charisma, as his wannabe movie-star character does, but instead he subtexts layers of vulnerability and anger that seethe beneath the pretty boy shtick. It is a glorious comic riff on teen idols, pretentious actors and theatre itself, with a bitter last line that resonates with tragedy.

Heins' vaudevillian sidekick Richard Zeppieri gives a master class in comic relief then ricochets from voice of reason to doofus to the heart of the matter while using a giant cookie for some Streepian scene-stealing. Anchoring it all is Karen Robinson (Prince Hamlet, Schitt's Creek) who runs an emotional gauntlet, steely one moment and breaking down the next, while delivering withering diva putdowns and side-eye worthy of Bette Davis in her prime. Robinson can get a laugh with a grammar corrections and she can command the stage with a look.

Bang Bang is almost an embarrassment of riches, to the point where the multiple climaxes in search of a resolution that Bang Bang admits does not exist, becomes exhausting and oddly anti-climactic. But with so many ideas landing on target and a blunt dissection of our failures as human beings, it is a rich experience without easy answers. While Sandler has set out to do exactly what Bang Bang condemns and satirizes, she has, with what she gratefully calls a "collaborative act," succeeded. And while we'll all be mulling over Bang Bang for awhile, we'll all be waiting with bated breath for whatever is next.

Bang Bang continues until Sun, Feb 18 at Factory Theatre, 125 Bathurst St.



Upstairs Inferno: historical horror made cathartic

DREW ROWSOME ★★★★★



So used to dire disclaimers before even the most innocuous of sitcoms, I barely paid attention to the stark black and white warning as *Upstairs Inferno* begins. Director Robert Camina (*Raid of the Rainbow Lounge*) isn't being oversensitive: not only are some of the "graphic images" horrific and heartbreaking, in context they move beyond trigger warnings into a deep place we don't always allow ourselves to travel to.

The fire at New Orleans' Up Stairs Lounge in 1973 is a moment in gay history that I had heard of and read a few articles about. What *Upstairs Inferno* does so brilliantly is provide not just a history, but also a historical positioning and places human faces on the tragedy. The first section is, despite the foreknowledge of what is to come, delightful and fascinating. Glorious archival photos of the Up Stairs Lounge and its denizens are interspersed with history, reminisces by those who frequented the bar, and sparse and effective narration by Christopher Rice. Rarely has a time and place, particularly a gay time and place, been brought to life so vibrantly.



A gay bar in the '70s was much more of a refuge and a communal space than it is now. The men describe not only the bar but how it fit into the culture of the time, evoking not only gay history but also segregation, drag, décor, sexual mores and New Orleans itself. The photos are breathtaking, men having fun in their prime with an innocence that hasn't been lost but that is of another era. This is never more effective than when it is contrasted with the men, decades later, talking, the ones who survived and are here to tell the tale. It is shocking and powerful to see men of a certain age, of the generation the plague claimed most of, bear witness in all their crisply filmed sagacity, beauty and vulnerability.

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NEW ORLEANS, MONDAY MORNING, JUNE 25, 1973

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29 KILLED IN QUARTER BLAZE

BLOOD, MOANS: CHARITY SCENE

Med Teams Race Time
Amid Confusion

By CLANCY DUBOS

A nurse's aide mopped blood off the floor while an intern drew more from the arm of a scorched patient.

Doctors in tennis shoes cut dead skin off the chest of a middle-aged man who moaned steadily while he was rocking on his side.

More ambulances arriving with more stretchers bearing more cut and burned victims—that was the scene at the Accident Emergency room of Charity Hospital well into Sunday



Arson Possibility Is Raised

By JOHN LAPLACE
and
ED ANDERSON

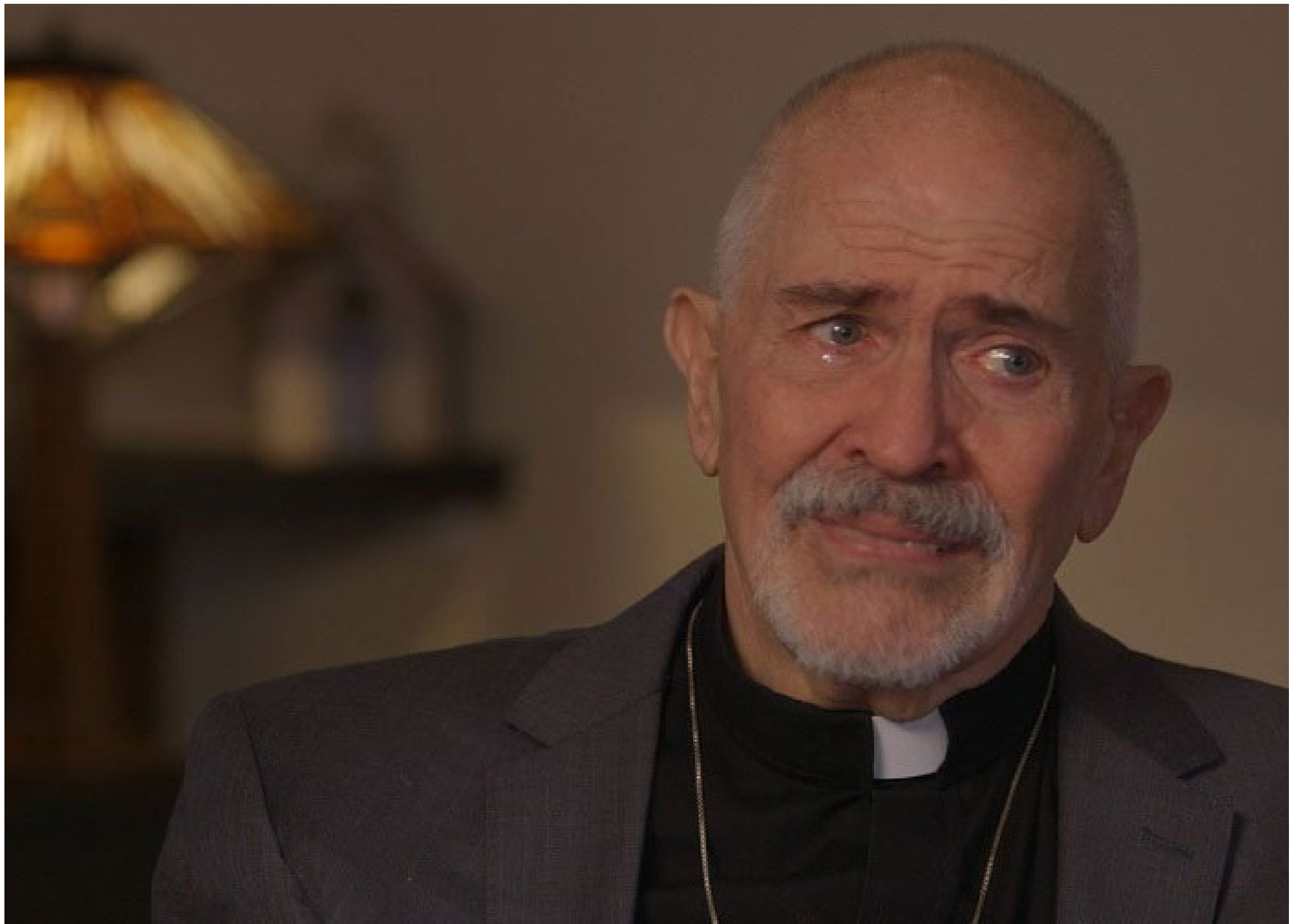
At least 29 persons were killed and 15 others injured—six seriously—when a flash fire swept through a three-story building housing three bars and some apartments in the 100 block of Chartres Street Sunday night.

The dead were either killed in the blaze or were mangled in the chaos to escape the searing flames which destroyed the second and third floors of the building.

New Orleans Fire Department Supt. William McCrossen called the holocaust "certainly as far as

Not only was the Up Stairs Lounge a place to drink, socialize and cruise, it also functioned as a performance space with what appears to be a ramshackle New Orleans' version of Charles Ludlam's Theatre of the Ridiculous. On Sunday afternoons the stage was ceded to the MCC who were just getting established in New Orleans. So a typical Sunday at the Up Stairs Lounge would be a church service followed by the "Beer Blast" and culminating in a sing-a-long of "United We Stand, Divided We Fall." That is until the night of the fire.

The section of Upstairs Inferno dealing with the fire is frankly harrowing. Because we have met many of these people, know a bit about their lives, the graphic images and narration pack a gut punch. And watching the interviewees trying to describe the indescribable as the emotions churn behind their eyes is painful and powerful. And all the more incisive as the aftermath puts gay life and homophobia into historical context.



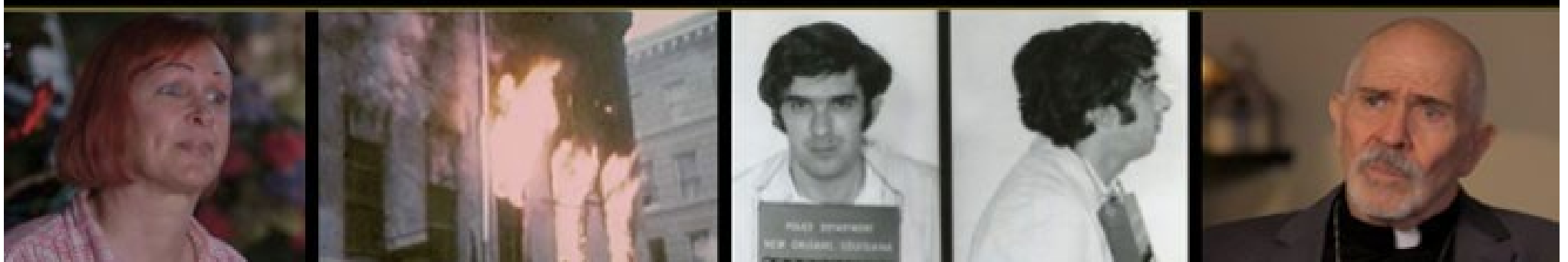
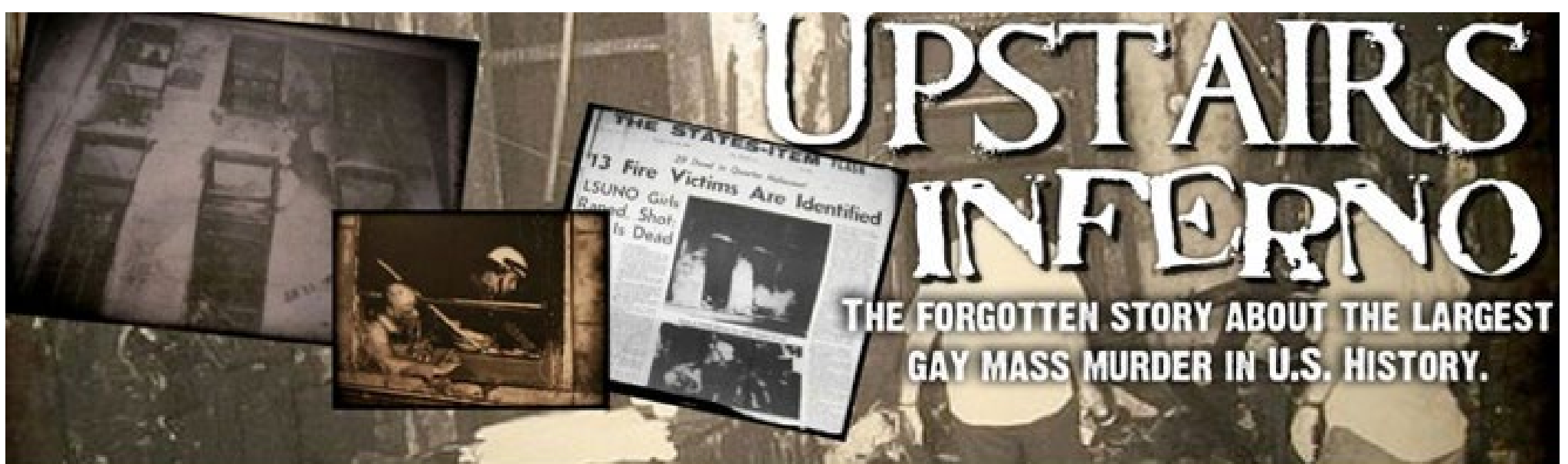
The MCC becomes crucial as the survivors and the gay community of New Orleans and beyond, struggle to heal. Or to even be acknowledged. We are reminded that at the time gay was not a sexual orientation, it was an “identity disorder.” Survivors had no counselling and many had to go back in the closet in order to go to work the next day, piling a trauma upon a trauma. News coverage was only achieved because it was “the first time that homosexuals would talk on TV in broad daylight.” There was never a police investigation beyond the fire marshal’s acknowledgment that it was arson. A memorial, and four of the victims were never identified or claimed, had to be held in a black Methodist church because they were used to “aliens” and no other church would let the homosexuals use the supposedly Christian space.



It is here that the first uplifting moment occurs, a real rousing demonstration of the indomitable gay spirit. A sassy queen, of course, makes a very southern point and gives Upstairs Lounge a jolt of adrenaline that leads to the conclusion. Upstairs Inferno posits that adversity is not enough, it took tragedy and horror to ignite the gay rights movement and make the LGBT community become a community and a political force. It is a point that we often forget, that an accumulation of indignities, indifference and prejudice, forged us into being the people that we dared to become. Watching the magnificent faces and listening to the passionate words of the men in Upstairs Inferno is more than a history lesson, it is compelling, devastating and ultimately cathartic.

caminaentertainment.com

Purchase.UpstairsInferno.com



The Greatest Showman

BIL ANTONIOU

★☆☆☆

HUGH
JACKMANZAC
EFRONMICHELLE
WILLIAMSREBECCA
FERGUSON

ZENDAYA

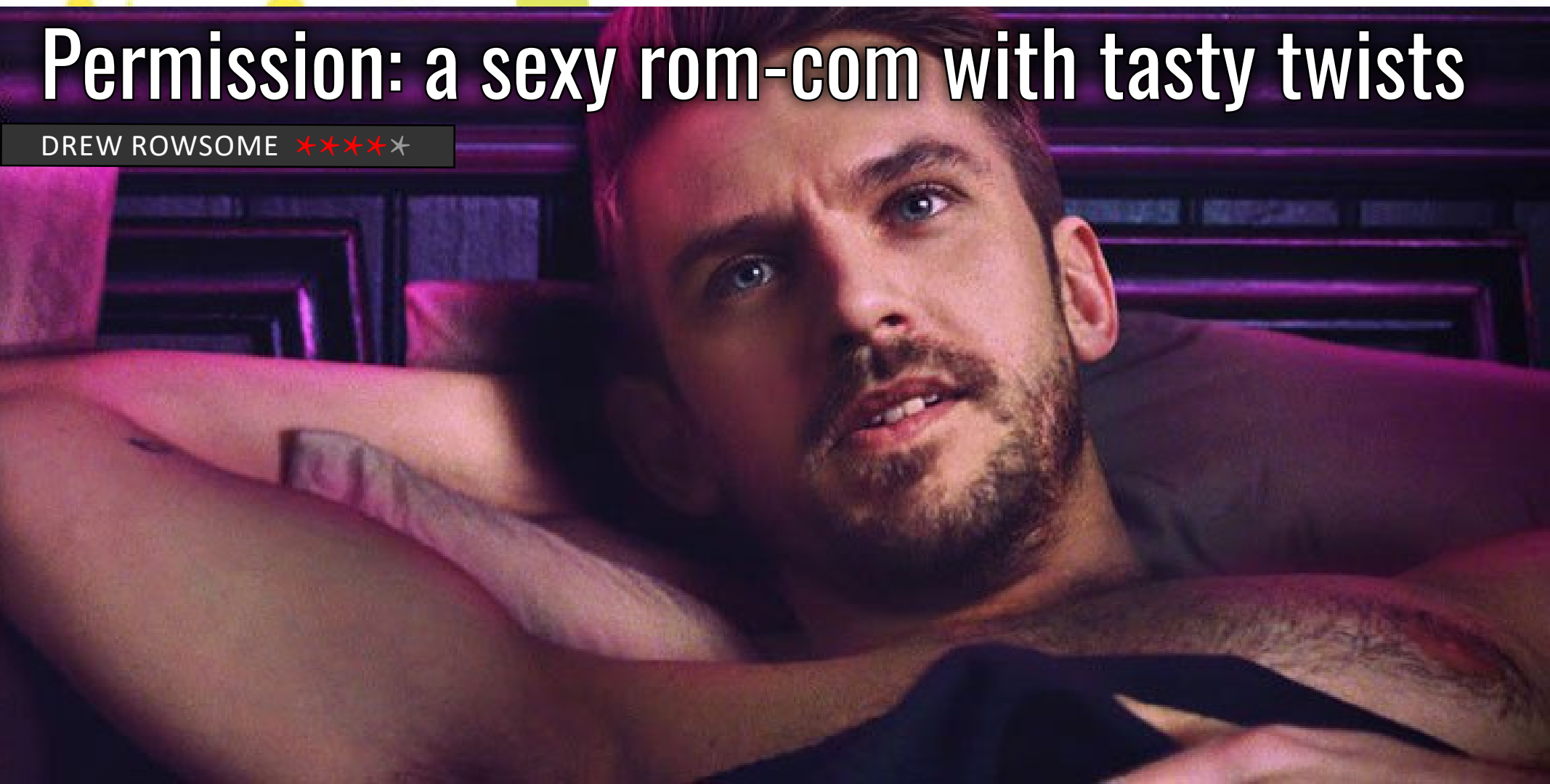
THE GREATEST SHOWMAN

The idea the film is trying to sell, of Barnum being a hero of inclusivity who celebrated people who were outsiders and outcasts, is ludicrous to say the least, and Michael Gracey might direct the whole thing without any substance because he has absolutely no idea how to deal with that particular central theme; then you get to a scene involving Queen Victoria that makes *The BFG* look like a documentary and you realize that he's not trying to deal with anything. There's no good reason to watch this movie, I'd call it a throwback to airheaded entertainment like *The Greatest Show on Earth* except Cecil B. DeMille cared about a good script even under the most inane of circumstances, but if you decide to go for it, do so for the unintentional laughs, which for me derive from the confused smile that Williams can't wipe off her face for two straight hours, and then just get the soundtrack since the songs are great when removed from this very odd context.

[read full review](#)

Permission: a sexy rom-com with tasty twists

DREW ROWSOME ★★★★★



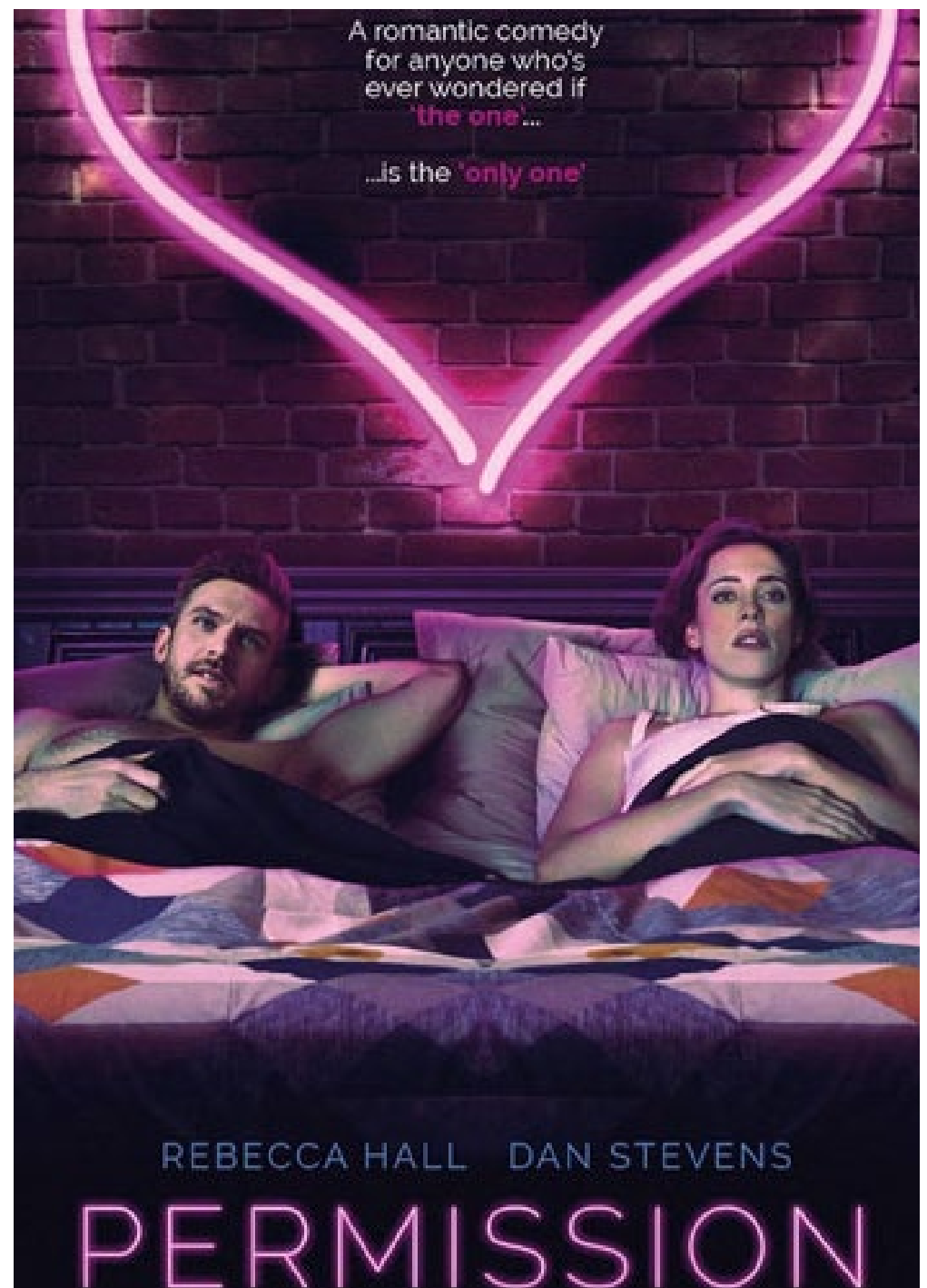
Permission is an amiable fusion between a romantic comedy and a sex comedy. Gorgeously shot (and populated with gorgeous male flesh) Permission follows the misadventures of a young heterosexual couple who have been together since high school. Will has been planning to propose but when Anna's gay brother's partner, Reece, learns over dinner that Will and Anna's grand total of sexual experiences are with each other, he questions their future. And of course, because the gays are always wise, Will and Anna come to the same conclusion and decide to open their relationship sexually to answer Reece's question about the quality of their sex life, "Compared to what?"

The trajectory is familiar: Will is eager, Anna is reluctant, but their first trip to a single's bar nets Dane, a sensitive singer-songwriter who is also built and hung. Will gets his opportunity with Lydia who, because she is played by Gina Gershon, is too much for any mere mortal. The couple weigh their issues, fall in and out of beds, explore the difference between love and sex and evaluate whether commitment is a comfort or a cage. It is all very charming, set in a fantasy muted-neon New York that inspires envy, and pushes the rom-com envelope in an enticingly sexy way.

Anna's brother is also her BFF and his partner is Will's college roommate. So they both get wise and unwise advice from a gay bestie. But the gay couple have issues of their own, the brother wants a baby and Reece doesn't. This inversion of stereotypes is Permission's best idea and it is done so subtly and casually that it is, if unbalanced in favour of the hets, delightful. And the gay couple actually get to have sex on screen and be as close to three-dimensional as a romantic comedy allows.

Rebecca Hall and Dan Stevens do fine work as Anna and Will. The hesitations and vulnerabilities they are trying to mask are all realistic and frequently touching. Stevens squirms with sexual insecurity quite comically and has a puppy dog sexiness that only misses the mark when one is reminded that this is a quintessential Ben Stiller role. But it is the paramours that elevate Permission. When the delicious Raul Castillo is utilized as a one-night stand in a mere cameo, the bar is set very high.

Francois Arnaud as Anna's fling that risks becoming more, is impossibly handsome and considerate. He also gets naked a lot and is as dream-like a pick-up as anyone could imagine.





Anna's brother, David Joseph Craig, flirts with a bear with a baby but it is the baby he covets. And that is unrealistic as Morgan Spector as Reece is sex personified, a hairy-chested (alas unfortunate tattoos) tall, dark and handsome specimen of a man who makes it hard to believe that Craig doesn't just toss the tyke. It's always a treat when men are the sex objects and Permission could be half as good as it is and still be totally watchable.

But director/writer Brian Cano has one more secret weapon. Where has Gina Gershon been? Her part in Permission - the adventurous if flaky divorcee with a settlement that allows her to indulge her whims - is small but upstages all. Gershon, with those pouty lips and husky voice, smoulders effortlessly while revealing a touching fragility. She is a free spirit adrift, gets one flawless double take, and even pulls off an exit gag involving yet another naked man and her indelible Showgirls attitude. She is a revelation, a sex symbol/movie star who is also Streepian.

Though Permission is bleak/realistic about relationships and not quite as daring as it wants to appear, it is amiable and (how many times have I used this word?) charming. Treading dangerously close to parodying rom-coms, Permission also has a sweet humanity in the characters as they struggle with love, lust and sex, and glides along so smoothly that one doesn't have time to reflect on the mundanity of more middle-class angst. Permission is a vanilla sex comedy, but then, as one of the themes of Permission states, vanilla can be quite tasty when it's served properly.



Sebastian and James Fanizza charm

PAUL BELLINI



James Fanizza is an actor, who made his debut in a commercial for NBC/Universal. He was in the Toronto-shot remake of *Carrie*, and on the TV series *Twelve Monkeys*. But acting only satisfied half of him. He longed to make his own films. *“Instead of just being an extra for hire, sitting around waiting for a phone call, I realized you can do your own work.”* So he started making short films.

His early short, *You Are Free*, won The Harold Greenberg Fund Short to Feature Award presented by the Inside Out Festival in 2015. Oddly enough, his first feature isn't based on *You Are Free*, but on another one of his short films, called *Sebastian*.

It's the story of a guy, in a shitty relationship, who meets a hunk from Argentina. They have a sudden romance, and in the end, the guy is forced to make a choice. None of that is surprising or unfamiliar, but there is a freshness to the movie that is surprising.

Mostly self-financed, Fanizza wore many hats. He wrote it, directed it, produced it, and stars in it. *“From start to finish, it took two years.”* He was lucky to find some excellent co-stars, like Alex House. *“Within 30 seconds of his audition tape, I knew he was Sebastian.”* He also splurged on Katya Zamolodchikova, the drag queen famous from Ru-Paul's *Drag Race* whose very presence makes the film much more desirable to distributors.

I enjoyed the acting, particularly a difficult speech about a past affair that took a tragic turn. And James looks good with his shirt off. *“I did do some extra push-ups closer to the shoot date,”* he admitted. Like I said, a filmmaker has to wear many hats. Just in time for Valentine's Day, *Sebastian* is a well-made, romantic gay movie that doesn't fail to charm.





My Gay Toronto.com

**FLASH
BACK!**

A trick for rent

JESSE T.



This is how the story goes...

9 p.m.

I meet up with friends for dinner and a drink to celebrate one of their birthdays.

1 a.m.

Eight drinks later, I'm leaving the bar with one of my friend's friends after flirting all night.

9 a.m.

I scurry across the city to meet my roommate, Andrew, at the rental office of our building. We're a week late paying rent again. Andrew's waiting and smoking a cigarette.

"You look like hell," he says when I reach him.

"Save it until I've had a coffee will you."

"Here," Andrew says handing me the cigarette.

"Finish this and I'll go in and pay my portion first."

When he comes back out I confess that I forgot something at the trick's place.

"I've left underwear at tricks places many a times.

Trust me it's not worth going back," Andrew says.

"Well, it's more than just a pair of undies," I reply.

"What, a hat? A scarf? Buy a new one."

"It's not really expendable," I try to explain.

"What was it?"

"The rent."

"What!"

"I can explain. Yesterday evening I was doing errands and way behind schedule. I knew I wouldn't have time to go to a bank this morning, so I took out 600 dollars last night. But since I was running late, I didn't get a chance to go home before meeting my friends. I put the money in my sock to make sure I wouldn't lose it. However, when I went home with that guy it must have fallen out of my sock when we got naked."

"And you didn't notice?" Andrew asks.

"I was drunk."

"You total ditchpig."

"I know, I know," I whine, checking the rest of my pockets to no avail.

"Call the trick."

"I don't know his number."

Andrew rolls his eyes.

"Let's go back," I say, and we head back to this guy's condo. I ring the buzzer.

"Hello?" he answers.

"Hi, it's Jesse from last night."

"Oh, what's up?"

"Um...you didn't happen to find 600 dollars on your bedroom floor did you?"

"I did."

"Oh thank God! That's my rent," I exclaim. "Can I come up?"

"Sure," he says and buzzes me in.

"You are so lucky he's an honest guy. He could have lied and kept the money," Andrew says as we cross the lobby.

"How embarrassing," I say but feel more relieved than anything.

"Most people rent a trick, you leave your rent at a tricks," Andrew says.

We both get in the elevator and burst out laughing.



The Purge

MR. X

Over the past couple of years – and we are talking almost a decade – I been going on line and chatting. No big deal. Like everybody else who's done the same thing, I've acquired over a thousand contacts on my cell phone with whom I may have exchanged brief chats. However, the chats eventually ended and their names and contacts ended up in my cell phone without me knowing any idea of who they were or what they were into. Of course there were the odd ones with whom I've stayed in contact and that's what brings me to my story today.

I contacted a former trick out of the blue and we exchanged a few hot texts back and forth. After about a week of back and forth, he eventually invited me over for a fuck date. We arranged a day, a time and off I went. He lived in a basement. His mattress was on the floor. The apartment was a balmy -30C. He was high as a kite.

And I think he shares a spiritual connection with his pet dog. I left, and promptly erased him from my phone.

This started me on my odyssey.

Over the past few weeks, I have been systematically going through my phone and contacting every single person who is on there whose contact info I don't recognize. I also established a set of criteria that allows them to stay in my phone or not:

- * They have to be a bottom. I'm not going to waste my time keeping tricks in my phone if they aren't even going to satisfy me sexually.

- * They have to live in Toronto. Let's be honest – I'm not going to be travelling around the world looking for sex. I can get that here.



- * They have to send me a picture to remind me who they are. Of course I send them a pic of myself to remind them who I am. It's amazing how far a good picture can get you. Sometimes, all I say is "Hey", and send them a pic of me fresh from the gym. They have no idea who I am, but they know I'm hot and that's enough for them to respond.

- * They have to be able to host. I live with my boyfriend and I don't do bath houses. You do the math.

- * They have to respond to me within half an hour after I send them the message. If they're only responding a day after I initiate contact, I may entertain the idea of keeping their number, but it's definitely a strike against them.

The whole experience is empowering. Men have responded curious as to why I'm contacting them, but for the most part they have been welcoming. I would say 60% of the men haven't replied to my texts. Of the remaining 40% who did, I found enough reason to get rid of about half. The remaining 20% are fucking hot and a hell of a lot of fun.

I have subsequently taken my profiles off of all of those incessant websites where I acquired all those numbers in the first place. I could have kept going and collected more contacts, but why?

I had all the social media I needed already at my fingertips.



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Photo: David Hawe



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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, and contributing editor.



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



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



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



Lee Fancy is contributing editor and listings coordintor.

My Gay Toronto.com



EDITORIAL INQUIRIES

editor@MyGayToronto.com

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

partner@MyGayToronto.com