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In this issue we wrap up our look at some of our most respected Community Heroes, including DJ Blackcat, Salah Bachir, and Martha Chaves



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From the **Publisher**



I don't know about you, but I'm always inspired by others. The stories of people doing inspiring and important work, leading the charge for change, or just living their authentic lives. This is what brightens up my day, and lights some fire beneath my butt to work on being the best version of me that I can be.

I am also a huge advocate of preserving our community stories, and the stories of our community's heroes. Many people in the community know this about me through my work here at INspired Media, publisher of PinkPlayMags, and my volunteer work at our community's annual celebration, the INSPIRE Awards.

That was what we set out to do this past year. To preserve history. At our editorial meeting to plan the 2018 theme, we decided on "Community Heroes: Then & Now". The theme was intended to work side-by-side with that of our talk show "On the Couch" (which is produced by our sister publication theBUZZ), as last year was all about "Creative Heroes: Then & Now".

So we set out on what we thought was an important journey. Number one, if you are going to tell people's stories, you have to do it authentically and respectfully, and this being a visual media, we need to frame it all in charismatic images that speak of the people whose stories we are telling. Number two, there is no possible way that within four editions of PinkPlayMags (and 8 episodes of "On the Couch") we would be able to spotlight all of the good, lovely, hard working, and inspiring people that we have in our community. The choice was not going to be easy. So what we can do is give you the best mix, or the tip of the iceberg if you will, of our community heroes.

I am proud of the work our writers, lead by our Editor-in-Chief, did over the four editions of your loved mag. We began with **Rev. Brent Hawkes**, a spiritual and community leader whose courage has inspired the world. Our summer cover featured **Krystin Wong-Tam**, a politician who's been fighting the good fight at Toronto City Hall for many years. Our previous fall issue was with **Patricia Wilson**, a matriarch at one of the most important spaces in our community, Buddies in **Bad Times Theatre**. These were just the main features, and many other heroes were also profiled in the pages of each issue.

You haven't had time to read all these fabulous past editions and learn all about these wonderful people? What are you waiting for, head over right now to www.pinkplaymags.com and locate the archives section. You will be glad you did.

The journey continues in this edition, where we bring you the stories of **DJ Blackcat**, a hero who's responsible for some very important community events, along with the wonderful community philanthropist, **Salah Bachir**, and the very funny gal **Martha Chaves**.

After this we're off for a little break, and relaxation for the Holiday Season with family and friends. Then we will be back in 2019 for another really exciting theme, and NO I'm not going to tell you what it is!

Okay, you twisted my arm, I'll give you a hint, think cinema.

Happy Holidays and thank you for reading,

Antoine Elhashem
Publisher

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winterplay!

**Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer
Community Seasonal from PinkPlayMags
Free • Winter 2018**

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Cover Mykel "DJ Blackcat" Hall

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Published by

INspired Media Inc.

Operating INspiredcreative (www.inspiredcreative.ca), and publishers of The Pink Pages Directory, PinkPlayMags, theBUZZ, and The Local Biz Magazine.

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From the **Editor**



Well, here we are, another year coming to a close, culminating in the final edition of our **Community Heroes: Then & Now** series that tells the stories of individuals who have made an impact on our city by adding their unique voice and personalities to our wonderfully diverse community.

For our cover feature, writer Joey Viola caught up with Toronto's **DJ Blackcat**, who has been spinning tunes and throwing down parties for over a quarter of a century now. He tells us how the industry has changed, and why his current parties are attracting some of the biggest crowds in the city. He also brings us up to speed on his out of town gigs and other production projects he's working on. As well, Raymond Helkio caught up with the fabulous **Salah Bachir**, activist, philanthropist, and business owner, to learn about his successful company and fundraising efforts, while Cat Grant sat down with comedian **Martha Chaves**, to discuss what it was like beginning life in Canada as an immigrant lesbian, and how she embraced this through her comedy routines.

Also in this issue, our **Travel** feature is on two Tennessee cities that celebrate their long-standing music history. Both **Memphis** and **Nashville** have seen visitor numbers steadily increase over the past several years, as newly transplanted entrepreneurs, artists,

and musicians change the shape of the city. Our **Fiction** excerpt is from "Steel Animals," by Toronto author **SK Dymont**. Their debut novel that takes readers through an underground adventure of queer proportions. Our **Hot Artist** feature spotlights **Thom Bierdz**, a *Young & The Restless* alumnus actor, turned writer/artist. He discusses his latest book, and talks about the paintings he creates that help him heal from past tragedies. Kelly Wilk wrote this issue's **Community Cornerstone** piece on the always active **Egale**. She chatted with Executive Director, Helen Kennedy, to find out about their current projects, including a new homeless shelter and a youth outreach program.

As always, we have **Horoscopes** by Julie Antoinette, **From The Heart** by Mychol Scully, and **Event Listings** by Sherry Sylvain. We close with our **Looking Back** column, written by Vince Ciarlo, who transcribed Toronto drag queen legend **Michelle DuBarry's** reflective thoughts on some of the many friends she's encountered over the course of her lifetime, and remembering those who are no longer with us.

Enjoy the read, and here's wishing you all the best for the holiday season and beyond!

Bryen Dunn
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DJ BLACKCAT

OVER 25 YEARS OF DETERMINATION, DJING, AND DANCEHALL

By Joey Viola

Anyone who likes to attend LGBTQ+ events in Toronto is likely familiar with DJ Blackcat. His sound, aesthetic, and parties have a long history in this city's queer scene, and even now, you can catch him spinning at some of the most popular and integral community spaces around.

Mykel "Blackcat" Hall's sound has been starting the party since the spring of 1992. His first gig was at an event called "Banji Boy," put on by well-known Torontonians event coordinator, Gilles Belanger, but he has gone through some fine tuning since the early 90s.

"When I first started DJing it was mostly house music. I eventually started spinning R&B, Hip-Hop, Dancehall and Soca, because my crowd wanted that and it wasn't being played anywhere in Toronto's LGBTQ+ clubs."

DJ Blackcat is of Jamaican descent and his

roots have had a strong influence on the type of artist he has flourished into. "Dancehall is very important to me," he explains. "I cannot go a night without spinning some Dancehall. I would have some pretty upset people on my hands," he laughs. "But seriously, Dancehall and even Hip Hop have become so mainstream and popular now, you can hear it pretty much anywhere you go in the community. 25 years ago, that was definitely not the case."

Initially, DJ Blackcat was one of the only black DJs spinning in Toronto's LGBTQ+ community. Rightfully, things have changed, but even one of the most diverse cities in the world was privy to racial bias when it came to hiring entertainment. "I've been fortunate to work with some up-and-coming POC DJs in the community now," he says, "but when I started, there weren't many of us. I was one of the only male black DJs for many, many years, but now there are many male and female DJs! It's exciting to see that growth. It's exciting to see what they do and what they're going to do next." Thankfully, DJ Blackcat was, and still is, one of the freshest and most exuberant DJs he



speaks of.

“I’ve been DJing for over 25 years now, so I’ve had a few memorable moments in my career,” he recounts. “One of the most memorable was when I had my first gig outside of Toronto. It was in Chicago, and I had never been there before. The crowd loved me, and they loved the music I played for them. From that moment on, I tried to get gigs out of town and ended up spinning all over the US, Jamaica and England!” An impressive collection of opportunity; DJ Blackcat is humbled and determined to continue spinning abroad, sharing his talent, and learning from the experiences. “I hope I have the pleasure of continuing to do this through 2019!”

He goes on to discuss his icon, Janet Jackson. “Is it strange that I don’t know how to put into words what this woman means to me. I don’t believe I can put the words together to describe the impact she has had on my entire life. She is amazing as a person, and she is amazing as an entertainer. I can’t think of anyone else that could be a better example of what I want in my life and career. I’ve met her once and I got pulled up on stage and she sang to me at one of her concerts. She used one of my mixtapes for her warm up when she was going out on tour, and she makes me smile every day. I just love her.”

Then, of course, there’s his biological family as well. “It’s interesting the topic of influences in your life. I guess if I had to think about it really hard, besides *Janet Jackson* and *Oprah*, my greatest influence in my life would be my family. My mom and dad taught me to always get up, get out there, and get the job done. People are depending on you to do what you have to do. I never stayed home from school or work. I think my mother and father missed a day or two of work at most, in their entire time that I’ve been alive. I don’t believe they ever directly pushed us in any one direction, but they did say whatever we do we should be great at it and do it to the best of our ability.”

Along with playing for sponsored events and charities, balls and galas, local award shows and

industry nights, DJ Blackcat coordinates his own events as well. *GO HARD* is a seasonal event that takes place at the famed *Club 120*, and *The Urban Jungle* is another popular event of DJ Blackcat's, that saw over 1,000 people in attendance in 2009. "I never had so many people at an event of my own in my entire DJ career," he exclaims.

Besides being a DJ, however, Mykel Hall originally got into the performance industry to become an actor. "I went to *George Brown College* for their acting program," he discloses. "I've done some commercials and acting and performing in different things, but I put my acting on the back burner when my DJing started to take off." Many would be surprised to learn that Mykel also likes to perform in drag every now and again. "My persona name is *Pussy Noir* and she comes into town once or twice a year in October. She puts on a show and then leaves," he laughs. "Pussy lives in Paris!"

Back on the music side of things, DJ Blackcat wants to get into producing. "I'm just starting to get my feet wet by doing some mashups, but in 2019, I'm hoping to push my producing even further, by working with a long time friend and amazing DJ by the name of *Vjuan Allure*. If you don't know about him you need to. Google him LOL. That's my DJ brother and he's at the top of the game. He also signed me to his record label called *Elite Beatzz*."

"2019 holds a lot of exciting things for me. First off, I will be doing more traveling as a DJ. I've already booked Montreal, Washington, and New York City. I'm hoping this year is the year that I'll head back to England and Europe as well. Also, here at home at my *GO HARD* parties are all about R&B, Hip Hop, Dancehall, Soca, and house music. We get down and dirty with it. And I think that's why the night continues to be very successful, and one of the busiest monthly parties that happens in Toronto. I know many people would like to think it's a black thing, but I like to think of it as a music thing. Everyone is welcome, and everyone is included, as long as you're down for the sound. Along with myself as resident DJ,





some of the top names in Toronto also spin alongside me. Names like *DJ Craig Dominic*, *DJ Pleasure*, *DJ Prestige*, and *Lissa Monet*. It's a party every month when we get together." #gohardorgohome

Having been honoured with the *Lifetime Achievement Award* this past May at the 2018 *INSPIRE Awards*, it seems there is no stone Mykel Hall cannot overturn. "I received the award for my good work in the LGBTQ+ community, but when I got the phone call, I was having a pretty bad day. I remember that soon changed with the news. I am still so honoured."

From the early 90s to the late 2010s, Mykel "Blackcat" Hall has been a force to be reckoned with in Toronto and abroad. His stylings, strength of character, and leadership have paved a path for future generations. "If I had one piece of advice for DJs coming up, I'd say make sure you learn to mix. Learn to put two beats together. There is nothing worse than listening to a DJ chop-up a track, even accidentally. I am from the old school generation of music and it seems to me that mixing is a thing of the past. It's a shame because you would still be called a good DJ, and it never goes out of style to mix music smoothly. It sure never goes out of style for me!"

DJ Blackcat's GO HARD parties have been going strong for eight years. Be sure to check out the next annual Denim Pumps and Boots party on Sunday February 17, 2019.

Joey Viola is the Co-Founder of MoJo Toronto and an LGBTQ community leader who utilizes his passion and flair for the art of writing by bringing a fresh perspective in reviewing entertainment and advocating for equality, tolerance, and social/political justice.



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by Raymond Helkio

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SALAH BACHIR

ARAB, QUEER, AND PROUD

What you may know about Salah Bachir is that he's a philanthropist, a community advocate, a two-time *Pride Toronto Grand Marshal*, recipient of an INSPIRE Awards Lifetime Achievement award, and probably one of the most bejewelled personalities in Toronto.

AND in many ways, Salah's jewellery is a metaphor for his activism, a symbolic reminder that being visible, and to take up space as an LGBT person, is a powerful form of activism in itself.

"This past Sunday I went to the Baycrest Gala. I wore jewellery and brought my husband. When it was over, I came home and watched the Sunday NFL game."

-Salah Bachir

A typical day for Salah is packed meetings, lunches with clients, and a quick trip to the gym. While no two days are alike, Salah usually ends his day with kidney dialysis at 4:30. With his sights set on a possible transplant in the next

year, Salah continues his hectic schedule juggling between his role as the President of *Cineplex Media*, philanthropist, and chair for many of our community's most significant fundraisers. Despite Salah's hectic schedule, he recently set aside some time for an interview with *PinkPlayMags*.

RH: What has been the most challenging part of being an openly gay business owner?

SB: I've been very lucky in that a lot of people were very supportive. I'm sure there were people that didn't give me business, but I never took it personally. There are a lot of people who have faced a lot worse stuff than I've faced. I've been lucky enough that I was in the entertainment industry that was a little bit more open than other places. I came out to my uncle who was a mentor of mine at an early age, and I was waiting for all the drama and everything, and there was none. And when I came out to my parents, my mother said the loveliest thing I've ever heard, "We love you whatever you are. We kind of knew already. I want you to have a kid that is half as nice to you as you have been to us."

RH: What has been the most rewarding part of being openly gay at work?



SB: The old cliché, that you're not living a lie. They have to accept your partner or your husband, the way I would accept any straight person's partner. I think there is so much stress if you're living your life as a lie. It's like that old Zen saying, the way you do one thing says a lot about how you do everything else.

RH: If I could grant you magic powers, and you could change one thing about Toronto's LGBT community, what would that be?

SB: I don't think I have magic powers <chuckles>. There are a lot of people who want to impose their views, but I think it's important to let every different thing flower, and nourish people. A lot of people fought pretty hard to get this far, so it's important that new ideas be entertained and not crushed right away. Any community has these issues, not just the gay community. I see it in the Arab community and in other places as well. Then with things like Pride, there's a whole united front with all kinds of groups. I remember at the beginning people said we shouldn't have corporate sponsorship, shouldn't have this group or that group, the whole idea was a united front and everybody who supports the community, but things can get bogged down by the personal infighting.

RH: It was amazing to see you as Grand Marshal for the 25th anniversary of Pride Toronto, so that was like obviously a big honour. What did it feel like to have the crowds cheering you?

SB: I was the Grand Marshal five years earlier as well, but this time it was right after the Orlando shootings, and there was a lot of Islamophobia, and a lot of negative stuff. Also coming out of the Arab world, we had about eighty people in the parade, including the likes of *Atom Egoyan*. They were carrying signs with the names of the people that were shot in Orlando. Our float was a mixture of gay and straight people, and we played Arabic music and wore Arabic robes. It was also a message to places like Iran who say they have no gay people. I think the sign on the back said: *Arab, Queer and Proud*. I was sending a message that, yeah, there are a lot of gay people in the Arab world.

RH: What advice would you give to a young queer person entering the world of business?

SB: Be yourself. I think that's the biggest one. Be bold, and know who your friends are, as they'll be your early supporters.

RH: How did the Chancellor position come about at the Ontario College of Art & Design University?



SB: That was a total surprise to me actually. Jamie Watt from their board of governors approached me, which I believe was based on my background in the art world and other community work I've done. I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it, because I wasn't sure if I had the time, but I'm really loving it.

RH: Do you have anybody you looked to as a mentor?

SB: *John Bailey*, who heads up *Famous Players*, was a friend and a mentor when we entered the business. There's a lot of people who aren't necessarily mentors, but they are good friends who you can run any ideas by, seek advice, or just have a lunch. Certainly *Ellis Jacob*, who is the CEO of *Cineplex*, is a great friend and I've run a lot of ideas by him, and *Andy Pringle* has helped me out a lot with different fundraising projects. It's part of what makes it easier to fundraise, because there are a lot of friends I've relied on over the years. An old Marxist saying is, "Social relations are capital," and in a lot of ways that's still true.

RH: I would add, that anytime you're behind a project, it adds credibility to it. You pick projects that really matter and resonate with people.

SB: I don't have as much money as a lot of other people, but I think the great thing about it is being able to build those relationships. *The 519 Gala* is a great example. We sell out pretty

quickly, and it's a very expensive table to buy, but a lot of friends over the years see the value of *The 519*. When we do a gala, we try and entertain people, and not have huge speeches. People know why they're there, and they've already paid a lot of money for it, so you don't need to go on and on. Feed people first, and then put the entertainment on, and send them home at a decent hour.

RH: What do you know now, that you wish you had known when you started out?

SB: Don't take it personally when someone says no. Do your homework first, and if you are passionate about what you are doing, people will believe in you and support you.

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Raymond Helkio is an author, director and filmmaker. He graduated from the Ontario College of Art & Design University and is co-founder of The Reading Salon.

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Martha Chaves

Refugee, Activist, Comedian



by Cat Grant

Comedian **Martha Chaves** is the 2018 winner of *Best Stand-up Comic in Canada* at the *Canadian Comedy Awards*. She's a seasoned comedian with over 20 years of experience, having performed at *Just for Laughs* multiple times, as well as all the other major comedy festivals in Canada.

Her style is infectious, candid. Her natural ability to relate to a wide range of audiences, makes her a very popular headline comedian at clubs, colleges, festivals, fundraisers, and corporate functions. Her versatility has brought her all over the world to entertain specific audiences – including Canadian Peacekeeping Troops in Egypt, Israel, and Afghanistan. She also went to Mexico and Central America as a delegate-entertainer of the *Nobel Women's Initiative*, led by Nobel Peace Prize Award Winners.

She riffs on identity, gender, politics, and family, and sometimes they all intertwine. At a recent

show here in Toronto at the *Comedy Bar* she talked about how she was drawn to march in the U.S. Women's March after the last presidential election. She joked that it was because she desired a pussy hat, but truly it's because marching for what's fair and right is in her blood.

At the tender age of three, Martha sat atop her father's shoulders as he marched for his own political causes in her birth country of Nicaragua. "My parents were lawyers, my mother was of the first generation of women lawyers in Nicaragua. She graduated in 1960." Martha divulged.

Born and raised in Managua, Nicaragua, Martha's parents celebrated life's triumphs and struggles with wit and humour. It's not surprising that Martha is clever and funny. When I asked who first made her laugh, she quickly quipped, "Whomever tickled me when I was a baby."

She discovered as a baby that she could make other people laugh, however she was not a class clown in school. "I went to an all girl Catholic school, and nothing is more frightening than a nun that heckles." Martha joked.

During her youth in Nicaragua they didn't have stand-up comedy, but she liked comedians. "We saw comedians in movies, like *Cantinflas*, a Mexican character. When I arrived in Canada my favourite comedians were Robin Williams, Lily Tomlin, George Carlin, and whoever I saw in shows on TV when I didn't speak much English," she explains. When Martha first came to Canada, she claimed refugee status, a testament to her perseverance and talent, and how far she has come from that humble beginning. "My favourite comics now are Elaine Bosler, and a bunch of my peers, that I won't mention so nobody feels left out," she smiles.

In 1996 Martha decided to pursue her own career in comedy, and started training formally. "I took many workshops with people like Andy Nulman, the co-founder and CEO of *Just for Laughs*. As well as, Judy Carter and Beth Lapidès."

Her very first gig was at the *Comedy Nest* in Montreal, upon graduation from the course with Andy. Martha confesses, "It felt scary and exciting." Following this, she auditioned just like everyone else for a spot in subsequent *Just for Laughs* festivals.

Martha came out around 2009, and her stand-up now reflects LGBTQ lives, while championing as a lesbian of colour. Since then, she wrote and performed a series of one woman plays; *Staying Alive* (2010), *Fragile* (2012), *In Times of Trouble* (2014), and *Rebel Without a Pause* (2017). She's headlined Canada's first LGBTQ comedy show, *Queer and Present Danger*, which travelled to more than 25 cities, as well as, *The Ethnic Rainbow*, Canada's first comedy show featuring LGBTQ comedians of colour.

She's an outspoken activist that speaks to schools about anti-bullying, who spoke at an annual 4/20 Campaign on Parliament Hill, and who took part in a comedy marathon for the *Canadian Association of Stand Up Comedians* (CASC), which sought to assert that stand up is an art form that should be eligible for government arts grants.

Her inspiration on a personal level is accredited to her wife with whom she resides in the heart of Toronto's gay village. Professionally she cites her friend and mentor Jody Williams, a *Nobel Peace Prize* recipient (1997), as truly inspirational.

Martha has been in several movies and television shows, including two nationally televised

comedy specials, *Comics!* and *There's Something About Martha*. She's performed to an audience of 43,000 strong at the 2015 *Pan-American Games* opening ceremony, and hosted the 2016 ACTRA Awards.

There are many wonderful things to be excited about when Martha is on stage and entertaining an audience, but she admits that her favourite part about performing is, "the connection I make with the audience." And connect she does. Her ease and warmth make Martha easy to relate to, and even if she wasn't on this funny path she would have a career that involved connecting with people. Martha admitted that she would have pursued the occupations of "a translator/interpreter or a comedy teacher" if not on stage.

Her dream gig would be to have her show at *Carnegie Hall* in New York City.

Currently Martha is a regular on CBC Radio's *LOL*, and *Because News*, and can also be heard in *The Debaters*. As well, this year she had the distinct honour of performing for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the *Egale Identity Gala*, which she emceed.

Coming up she's headlining a holiday show in December at *Hugh's Room* in Toronto, along with several corporate holiday season gigs. "I'll be touring South America in January," Martha adds as well.

This Queen of Canadian comedy has a future as bright as her mischievous smile. And where would she like to be in one year's time? Martha cheekily, and perhaps prophetically proclaimed, "At a house on the beach in Nicaragua, after my smash sold-out hit show at *Carnegie Hall!*"

www.marthachaves.com

Cat Grant is a multidisciplinary artist currently focusing on multimedia portraiture, and illustrating children's books that she also writes. She also has her own column *She Beat* in the BUZZ magazine, is a senior reporter for *On The Couch*, and is a published poet. You can find her as *Granted Arts* on Facebook.



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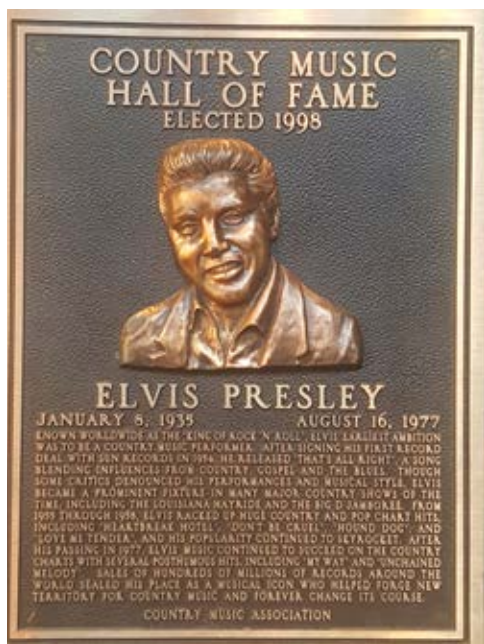
When one thinks of Tennessee, often the first thing that comes to mind is the music history that has stemmed from this grand state in the American south. The stretch of the *Americana Music Triangle Gold Record Road* that runs between Memphis and Nashville is often called the Beale to Broadway trek, referring to the infamous streets in each city where music began, and where it continues to this day.

Memphis – Birthplace of Rock’n’Roll

Of course one can’t think of Memphis without an image of **Elvis Presley** coming to mind. *The King of Rock’n’Roll* put this city on the music map, by taking traditional rhythm and blues from Beale Street, and catapulting it to the world stage. Fans have been flocking to Graceland ever since the day he died back in 1977. More than 40 years later the fascination continues.

The *Guest House at Graceland* opened in 2016, and is the largest hotel built in Memphis in over 90 years, featuring 430 guest rooms and 20 specialty suites, each with design and décor supervised by Priscilla Presley. Although not located downtown, it is across the street from the recently opened, *Elvis Presley’s Memphis*, an entertainment and exhibit complex over 200,000-square-feet in size, that features everything one ever wanted to know about this man’s life. It includes thousands of artifacts, from gold records to concert outfits, a stage for live performances and movie screenings, two themed restaurants named for his parents, *Vernon’s Smokehouse* and *Gladys’ Diner*, and two private custom designed planes, the *Lisa Marie* and the *Hound Dog II*.

Long considered the “Home of the Blues” and “Birthplace of Rock’n’Roll”, the city is marked by a history of music that stretches far beyond Elvis, with locations like the *Memphis Rock’n’Soul Museum*, *Blues Hall of Fame*, and *Stax Museum of American Soul Music*. *Sun Studio* is where Elvis recorded his first song, and also launched the careers of Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis,



Carl Perkins and B.B. King. *Royal Studios* was constructed as a theatre in 1915 and converted into a recording studio in 1957, where legendary producer Willie Mitchell created magic for many of the greats, including Al Green. Today his legacy is carried on by grandson “Boo” Mitchell, where the magic still continues, with the international smash hit, *Uptown Funk*, being recorded there. There’s a wall of fame with signatures of musicians who have passed through the doors, including Canada’s own Drake.

Learn the history, then experience it today at any of the numerous bars and restaurants located along the famed Beale Street, a melting pot of delta blues, jazz, rock’n’roll, R&B and gospel. Check out *Rum Boogie Cafe*, *B.B. King’s Blues Club*, *Silky O’Sullivan’s*, or the *Hard Rock Cafe*, among others along this three block downtown strip.

Not to be missed is the *National Civil Rights Museum*, built upon the grounds of the now infamous *Lorraine Motel* where **Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s** assassination occurred outside Room 306 on April 4, 1968, sparking race riots that changed American history. The museum tells the story of the *Civil Rights Movement* through films, artifacts, oral histories, and interactive media. The museum is one of 10 Tennessee sites located on the *U.S. Civil Rights Trail*.

Of course, a visit to Memphis wouldn’t be complete without some southern cuisine: *The Rendezvous* offers an intimate experience with excellent barbecue, the *Blues City Café* has an atmosphere of blues music with a side of soul food and ribs, and *The Arcade Restaurant*, which has the honour of being Memphis’ oldest restaurant, founded in 1919. It was a favourite haunt for Elvis, and still retains that 50s diner feel today. For something more modern day, try *The Gray Canary* for oysters, a selection of Italian-style small plates and entrees, and the olive oil cake for dessert, or the *Majestic Grille*, offering fine dining inside an early twentieth century theatre, complete with Hollywood memorabilia.

There’s actually a fairly large LGBT community in Memphis, with organizations like, *Friends of George’s*, an LGBT-themed community theatre organization, and the *Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center*, that presents many events around the city, including the *OUT Loud Comedy Showcase*. For nightlife, start off with a pint at *Dru’s Bar*, then ramp things up at *The Pumping Station*, before hopping on over to *Club Spectrum* to dance the night away.

Nashville – Music City, USA

Driving to Nashville can be done in around three hours, but there are a few worthwhile stops in between for music lovers. *The West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center* in **Brownsville** is where a mecca of Tina Turner memorabilia is housed in the one-room schoolhouse she attended as a child, having grown up in nearby **Nutbush**. Also, be sure to stop in **Jackson**, home to both the *International Rock-a-billy Hall of Fame* and *The Carnegie Center for Arts and Heritage*, featuring *The Tennessee Legends of Music Museum*, which has exhibits on Sonny Boy Williamson, W.S. Holland, and Carl Perkins.

From its very beginnings, **Nashville** grew from a foundation built on music. Music has been the common thread connecting the life and soul of the city with its people. It has also long been known as the “Songwriting Capital of the World.” The *Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum* is a must-see, featuring 350,000 square feet of state-of-the-art galleries, archival storage, the 800-seat CMA Theater, and the *Taylor Swift Education Center*. The *Musicians Hall of Fame & Museum* features detailed information on the talented musicians who played on many of the



greatest recordings of all time, and also houses the *GRAMMY Museum Gallery*, which pays tribute to music's cultural history and, of course, the GRAMMY Award.

Many music greats also have their own dedicated museums. The *Patsy Cline Museum* houses the largest collection of Patsy Cline artifacts in the world featuring personal letters, photographs, costumes, clothing and household furnishings. The *Johnny Cash Museum* gives visitors a chance to see a side of Cash many people didn't know existed, featuring authentic and interactive exhibits, the museum tells the story of Cash's life, from childhood through his entertainment career. The *George Jones Museum* features an interactive booth where you can sing with George. You can also peruse his platinum records, along with exhibits devoted to each era of his life and career. Over on historic **Music Row**, *RCA's Studio B* is Nashville's oldest recording studio, where everyone from Elvis to Dolly recorded their hits. Be sure to stop by Jack White's *Third Man Records*, the second location, after the original opened in Detroit in 2001.

Live music can be seen and heard every day and night of the week at the world-famous honky-tonks, located on Lower Broadway. While definitely touristy, this is also the place where many musicians honed their skills before going professional. Stop by *Tootsie's Orchid Lounge*, *Robert's Western World*, or *Legends Corner*, as you never know who might be the next rising star on stage. Undoubtedly the most famous music landmark in the city is the *Grand Ole Opry* and *Ryman Auditorium*, renowned for its exceptional acoustics that has hosted musicians from Chris Isaak and James Brown to Patsy Cline and Bruce Springsteen, as well as current and rising stars of all musical genres.

When heading out on the town to catch some live music, there's no shortage of venues anywhere in the city. Places such as *Exit/In*, *Mercy Lounge*, *Station Inn*, *Douglas Corner*, or the legendary *Bluebird Cafe*, keep the vibe going every night of the week with all genres of music. If you get the munchies, try one of Nashville's hot chicken joints, such as *Hattie B's* or *Martin's Bar-B-Que*, or head to *5th and Taylor* for their Beer Can Chicken or the Pork 4-way. Or for something with a side of music, check out *Merchants Restaurant* located in the historic 1892 Merchants Hotel building, which saw many notable Nashville legends darken its doorway, from Hank Williams to Dolly Parton.

The city is fairly easy to navigate, and is divided into several small neighbourhoods. *12South* is one of Nashville's hottest hangouts, with chic shops, restored homes and a varied collection of restaurants, bars and coffee shops. *East Nashville* has some of the most diverse restaurants and bars, and has quickly become the hip place to hangout. *Wedgewood Houston* (WeHo) is a thriving creative community of art galleries, artist cooperatives, recording studios, designer shops, along with fantastic restaurants, delis, pubs and bars. Upscale restaurants and a vibrant nightlife have made *The Gulch* the hottest new trendy neighbourhood, and if you really want to party hard, head to *Elliston Place Rock Block*, a block-long section of the city that is home to some of the loudest nightclubs in town.

In terms of LGBT culture, there's no "gay village," however there are plenty of places to party throughout the city. *Stirrup*, *Blue Genes*, *Purple Hays*, and *Trax* are where guys head for an early evening cocktail, or late night rendezvous, while the ladies mingle at *Lipstick Lounge*. Late night revellers should head for *Play Dance Bar*, which offers up drag and dancing, or the more upscale lounge vibe of *Canvas*, which has an open-air outdoor dance floor.

What are you waiting for?

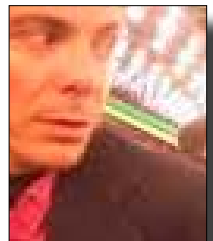
Although "*The South*" has a reputation for not being LGBT friendly, this is more a generalization than the norm, as for the most part both Memphis and Nashville are very open and welcoming to everyone. **Memphis Pride** is September 28, 2019, and **Nashville Pride** is June 22 and 23, 2019.



With both Memphis and the capital of Nashville offering up a multitude of cultural and cosmopolitan options to explore, it's no wonder why tourism is on the rise. Whatever it is that draws people here, whether it be the music, mouth-watering cuisine, or warm hospitality, there's no denying it's a great vacation destination. On your mark, get set, let's do the Tennessee Two-Step!

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Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities.





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by Harlan Boll

Hot Artist

Thom Bierdz is known worldwide for his portrayal of Phillip Chancellor III on *The Young & the Restless* (1986 to 2011), but some may not be aware that he's also an accomplished artist and writer. He regularly paints gay couples, whether they are inspired by straight icons in his *Fantasy Marriage* series, or real gay lovers who have commissioned him. He also recently published his second book, *Young, Gay & Restless*, described as a Hollywood celebrity sex memoir.

His previous candid memoir released in 2009, *Forgiving Troy*, recounts the murder of his mother by his paranoid schizophrenic brother Troy in 1989. Then, in May 2000, he lost his other brother Craig to suicide. The book was made into a documentary, and Bierdz also appeared on and narrated an *Investigation Discover Network* episode of *Evil Lives Here*, titled *The Soap Star's Secret*. Bierdz himself has also previously dabbled in film-making, releasing his art film, *Heart of The Oak*, in 1997, which went on to win a couple of festival awards.

"I HAD TO write *Forgiving Troy* years ago because I was living an incredible bigger-than-life journey, essentially paranormal events leading me to reunite with my paranoid schizophrenic brother in prison who killed our mom. This new sex book started out as me merely adding my sexual assaults to a compilation of anonymous men's," he explains.

Beyond his iconic role on Y&R, being the first openly gay contract player on a major daytime drama, he also had recurring roles on *Melrose Place*, *Murder She Wrote*, and *Matlock*. After acting, Bierdz has devoted most of his life to painting, and has won a couple of awards for this work. The art world acclaimed Thom when Scarlett Johansson hosted his *Soicher Marin Gallery* show.

Bierdz is also president of the *American Art Awards*.

"When I do expressionism canvases I can just spill my subconscious, trusting the brush. What emerges are symbols for my current dramas, which make up my series of 100 BLUE X paintings, which I consider my best and most original work. I just did this large HEALING MEADOW for a charity incorporating 30 ways to heal," he confided.

Bierdz' life is a classic American story, beginning with a humble, uneventful childhood to Hollywood stardom. And then slowly, systematically, a return to a humble, but hardly uneventful, private life. He stated, "Creating in general I think is productive, if not the whole meaning of life. Being in this creative vortex probably keeps me healthy, and aligned with intention and dreams/aspirations."

Young, Gay & Restless is self-published, and available through Thom's website. His story is told with both poise and humour, and covers such topics as, growing up closeted and Catholic, sexual assaults, trysts with stars, a proposition from a bishop, romance with a famed billionaire, noncommittal relationships, social anxiety, taboo fantasies, many plastic surgeries including penile enlargement, psycho fan roommate, online hook-ups, gym sex, a mid-life crisis, leaving Hollywood and society, impotence, rekindled romance, and a narrow escape from serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer.

Most of his artwork is available to view and purchase via his website as well, with prints starting at just \$35.00. Notable individuals who have purchased Thom's works include, Terry Bean, Lauralee Bell, Jim Bullock, Kristin Chenoweth, Sandy Dennis, Robert Gant, Scarlett Johansson, Jaason Simmons, Suzanne Somers, Connie Stevens, and Lorraine Trousaunt.

www.ThomBierdz.com

Compiled by Harlan Boll, an independent publicist, specializing in literary, personality, theatre, music, event and non-profit PR.
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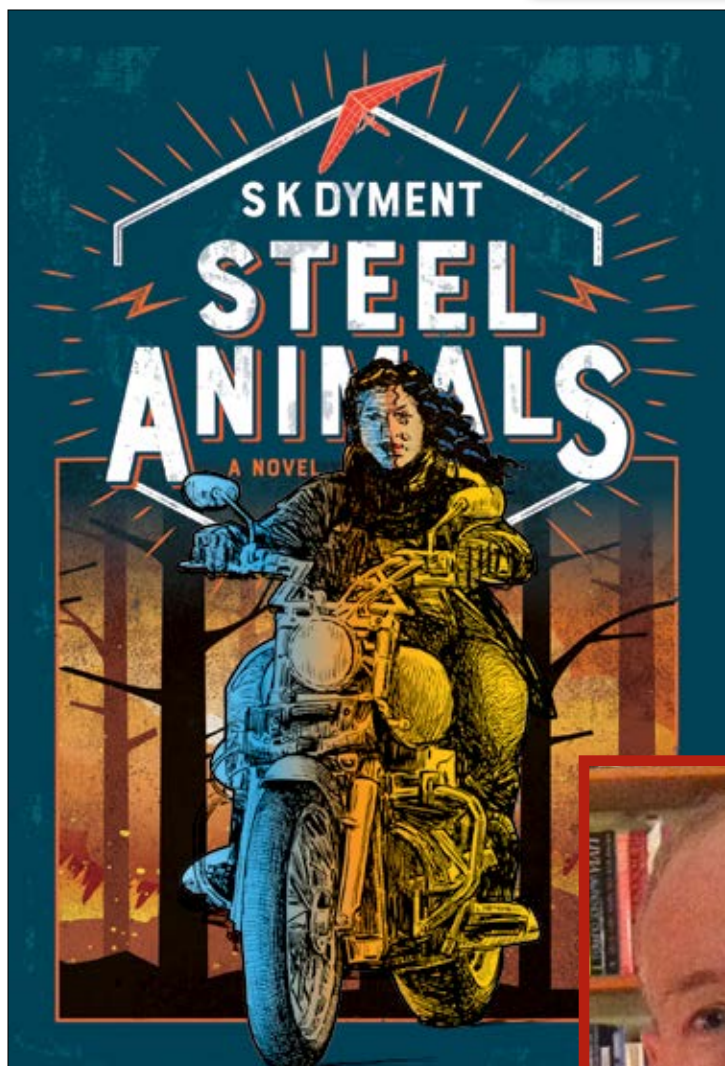
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Hilarity and queer magic realism twist the throttle when Jackie, a loner with a secret bank-robbing persona, meets Vespa: sexy, sculpture-welding artist and collector of vintage motorbikes. Still planning elaborate revenge on a New York ex-lover, Jackie tests both her new relationship and the loyalties of her friends, a rag-tag gang of post-punk eccentrics, realizing how love changes hatred only after her scheme runs out of control. An innocent misstep and an encrypted mystery swings the romance into the dangerous orbit of Rudy, a construction mogul intent on subverting corporate money at any cost.

Steel Animals Excerpt from Chapter 20

Natalia, Rudy's New York girlfriend, is sitting in her apartment on West 108th Street, staring at her long, and according to Rudy, expensive legs. She can't help but feel as if her whole world is sliding from her. First, she lost her African violets. And now, the women above her, who ignore her in the lobby, have started a campaign. First it was to get the woman who was accidentally struck with Natalia's violet out of prison. But the woman had every reason to be there as the television news showed. Before pausing underneath Natalia's building, she had robbed a bank downtown. Now, the woman was on a hunger strike and talking on the news with more airtime than the killer whale. It was as if the killer whale, the issue Natalia really did care about, was only able to come up for air for a few seconds and then was pushed back under the surface by the debate of this woman's actions. As if everyone was forgetting that she had robbed a bank, as if appearances did not matter anymore. Rudy, in the midst of all this, had asked her to fib for him, to say that they had played in New York for four days instead of two. Rudy had said that he would have a private investigator follow Natalia and make sure that she pursued the dance studies he had paid for, tossing it off as a sort of paternalistic joke. So, the man who may or may not be following her, may be doing it for her safety because she knows that she has been seen with Rudy. Or he may be doing it to ensure that she does not tell the police she was only with Rudy for two days before the day that B.F. went missing. But Natalia is not afraid of assassination. She is afraid of losing Rudy. Via a deep-woods radio and satellite system, Rudy has sent her a poem a week often with mysterious quotes.

Natalia, who is feeling paranoid as a result and stops smoking cannabis to put herself to sleep at night, stays up late reading until she happens upon Rudy's quote in Oedipus Tyrannus, which is being shown at a theatre in the Bowery district. When she goes to see it, she realizes that it is a play about a man who kills his father. Also that the actors are all wearing recycled plastic packing material and automotive parts as costumes. Despite the nudity and the endless minor notes of a collection of keyboard pieces squawking from three different tape players placed around the room, she is able to understand what Rudy is saying. She sees that he intimates foul play in the death of Turner. Whether it is a reasonable fear is not important. She sees now that he related

the old man Turner to his own father, a man who died early in Rudy's life. In Oedipus Tyrannus, the death of the father by the son results in a curse. In the Bowery version there is the classic tearing at eyes demonstrated with paint filled-sponges and hand-held paintballs that squirt out. Natalia leaves intensely grateful, invigorated, and grossed-out. Fortunately, Rudy is not sleeping with his mother.

She calls his mother in Etobicoke, intending to tell her Rudy is in danger. Instead, she asks her about Rudy's father, the one who had died when he was young.

"It was a very hard time for our family, Natalia. All I wanted was to protect my son and keep him from a life of crime. Rudy did act like a boy who was in mourning as I thought he should. He would sit at his father's place at meals, insisted on keeping favourite articles of his things. And the other things I wanted to throw away ... Rudy was too fast."

"What other things of his father's did he keep before you could throw them away?"

"You know what sort of things. His father was his model, but he was a criminal. Rudy," his mother told her, "is by comparison a very honest boy. It was a great pleasure talking to you, dear. I hope he marries you if he has told you he will."

"He's on a retreat right now," said Natalia.

"Oh, they run away, but he'll be back. You seem like a very nice girl!"

"I mean, he's gone off to the woods for a while to collect his thoughts about life."

"The death of the Chairman. He told me all about that on the phone. He's been put into a position with a lot of responsibility now."

"Yes, he has, and he's running it by remote control. I'll have him phone you when he is out of the mountains. I'll have him call you as soon as I can," says Natalia. Her phone chimes. Another Rudy poem. "Where we are, / There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, / the nearer bloody."

This time, Natalia knows the last bit is a quote from the death of Macbeth. There is a production in the East Side with vocalists projecting the words of the play from behind screens, while the actual parts are acted out by power tools, concluding in the death of a reciprocating saw at the hands of a twelve-amp grinder and a five-foot orbital sanding machine. Despite the promise that sparks will fly, Natalia chooses not to go. She studies Macbeth instead, looking for clues in the conspired death of a king. There may be several assassins, and if Rudy is in danger, she certainly wants to be in the know.

Empowered by the talk with his mother, she writes to Rudy's secretary Camelia, using the encryption device Rudy has installed into Natalia's computer and told her no one else could understand.

"Hey? Emergency, answer back!" she writes Camelia. She writes it a second time with a new encryption to scramble the words, then a third. Camelia will have the technology to unscramble it, she tells herself, then retires with a book about the assassination of Abe Lincoln. She has settled in with his prophetic words: "Corporations have been enthroned ... an era of corruption ... working on the prejudices of the people..." when a gong on her computer notifies her that another email has arrived.

It's Camelia, pissed as hell, wondering what Natalia meant by, "Askance? Scenery, enemy herb!" not to mention, "Keen? Hymen, brace necessary!" and, "Wench? Beg, sneaky creamery!"

It has just made Natalia sound like a whore, which technically she is. She rambles around her apartment, then lights up her "enemy herb" and stares out at the city. It's the encryption. It does not take her much longer to realize that the letters from "Hey? Emergency, answer back!" have convoluted into those three anagrammed and unsolicited insults she then sent off to a woman she has never met. Which means that not only was she unable to communicate with Camelia, except in the form of an apology from an unhacked-with computer, but that Camelia was also not able to read or translate her communications with Rudy. So, Camelia would have no inkling of any assassination talk or premeditated murders that may be in the works. Natalia put the roach out. She had told herself to quit, and paranoia is the last thing she needs if there was a threat

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Founded in 1978, Inanna is the proud publisher of one of Canada's oldest feminist journals, Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme. Inanna Publications and Education Inc. is one of only a very few independent feminist presses in Canada committed to publishing fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction, by and about women. Happy 40th Anniversary!

SK Dymont is a writer and visual artist with a love of political cartooning. SK likes to take to the stage at open mic events to perform poetry, short prose, and stand-up work, and they have written several plays which were produced at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre. Their illustrations were most recently published in Ursula Pflug's flash fiction novel, *Motion Sickness*, which was longlisted for the ReLit Award. Their humour and cartooning work has appeared in a number of magazines including, *Peace Magazine*, *This Magazine*, *Open Road Magazine*, *Healthsharing*, *Herizons*, *Kinesis*, *The Activist Magazine*, *Kick It Over Magazine*, and *Fireweed*. *Steel Animals* is their debut novel.



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Community Cornerstone

by Kelly Wilk

Helen Kennedy, Executive Director of **Egale**, describes the work that they do as, “an effort to change hearts and minds.” It’s a small sentence to encompass the vast reach of the work that *Egale* does. The organization has been a strong rallying cry for LGBTQI2S rights. It is, as she says, their mission “to inform public policy, inspire cultural change and promote human rights and inclusion through research, education, and community engagement.”

Although *Egale* has recently expanded their work into frontline services, they are still strong in their advocacy projects. Recently Kennedy said, “We put a call out to the Canadian Government for intersex rights because Canada is not meeting International Treaty obligations.” She adds, “The way we treat intersex people in Canada is considered torture according to international standards of human rights as set out by the *United Nations*.”

Egale has existed for over thirty years, with its origin stemming from the fight for inclusion of sexual orientation in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The organization has since won many legal cases at the Supreme Court level to advance LGBTQI2S rights in Canada, including marriage equality. However, they are much more than a legal advocacy organization. Considered Canada’s national LGBTQI2S organization, *Egale* works to advance research, create educational resources, drive awareness, deliver safer space training, and operate frontline services – all in an effort to improve the lives of LGBTQI2S people. They support many facets of the community from students and educators, homeless youth and seniors, to refugees, athletes, and more.

What I admire about *Egale* is not just that they create alliances with other organizations in the community, but that they are involved with education and creating the tools for change. “We work with businesses, schools, organizations and governments across Canada to help create safer and more inclusive spaces for LGBTQI2S people,” says Kennedy. “There is a lot of stigma out there that we continue to see, especially for trans and non-binary people.”

“We are a charity and as such rely on funding to drive our programs and develop resources, like our **Safer**

Schools program which includes an LGBTQI2S 101 training.” Adding, “we also rely intricately on the community for their knowledge and guidance to help us navigate areas of greatest need.” *Egale* has a **National Seniors Advisory Council** (NSAC) made up of older and aging LGBTQI2S people from across Canada who guide the initiatives they undertake to improve the quality of life for LGBTQI2S seniors who face continued difficulties, especially when accessing long-term care.

In 2014, **Egale** opened **Egale Youth OUTreach (EYO)**, a mental health counselling and drop-in centre for LGBTQI2S youth. Since 2016, new intakes at EYO have increased by more than 100% and therapeutic interventions by over 400%. One youth participant states, “EYO has changed my life immensely and I’m extremely grateful, and probably alive because of it.”

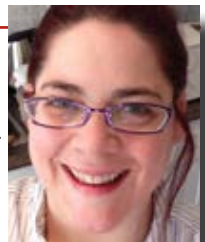
“Since opening *Egale Youth OUTreach*, we have seen that there is a huge need to support LGBTQI2S youth, and with generous funding we have been able to expand these services to build **Egale Centre**, which is soon to be Canada’s first LGBTQI2S youth transitional housing facility,” remarked Kennedy.

It’s a winning formula to really understand what a community needs and come up with practical initiatives and hands-on support, such as supporting queer youth find housing. The new *Egale Centre* is scheduled to open in Toronto, summer 2019.

It is clear however, that it is not just knowledge that *Egale* is mobilizing, it’s the opportunity to connect with community, to actively create change, and inspire the current and new generations to be of service to each other in fundamental ways.

www.egale.ca

Kelly Wilk is a freelance writer and single mom to a six-year-old, red-headed, Irish, Aries boy who is growing up way too fast. Follow “The Ginger Gent” on PinkPlayMags blog page, and Brave. Creative. Me at www.kellywilk.ca.





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WINTER IN THE CITY

by Sherry Sylvain

Natalie MacMaster & Donnell Leahy: A Celtic Family Christmas

December 20, 8:00 p.m.

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

These award-winning fiddle virtuosos will perform their intimate and unique Christmas album and put on a show you will never forget! With the duo accompanied by an incredible array of talented musicians – and their children – A Celtic Family Christmas will guide you into the wonderful world of a true MacMaster-Leahy Christmas celebration.

www.roythomsonhall.com

Tip: Take friends and family of all ages to this universally appealing show.

Toronto International Ballet Theatre: The Nutcracker

December 22, 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Sony Centre for the Performing Arts, 1 Front St. E., Toronto

Guest stars from the world-renowned Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet Theatre, principal dancers Vyacheslav Lopatin and Anastasia Stashkevich, showcase their aerial and spirited dancing, supported by enchanting tapestry with custom made costumes and set designs adorning the stage.

www.sonycentre.ca

Tip: Get your hands on some opera glasses to really enjoy the details of, not only the dance, but the costumes and sets.



Mughal Magnificence 2019: A New Year's Eve Celebration

December 31, 7:00 p.m.

Aga Khan Museum, 77 Wynford Dr., Toronto

Lavish Mughal décor sets the backdrop for live entertainment and a DJ playing an East meets West mix of Top 40 tracks. Appetizers and a formal dinner will be served, featuring a sumptuous South Asian buffet that will take your senses on a culinary journey through the Mughal region. You'll also have the chance to explore the Museum's two special exhibitions — Emperors & Jewels, and Transforming Traditions: The Arts of 19th-Century Iran.

www.agakhanmuseum.org

Tip: *Wear your dancing shoes and your most elegant attire, and maybe fast all day in preparation for the mouth-watering buffet.*

Las Vegas New Year's Eve Bash

December 31, 9:00 p.m.

Gladstone Hotel, 1214 Queen St. W., Toronto

Inspired by the immutable Sin City, they're putting together a destination party like no other to ring in 2019. Can't afford that vacation package to the Bellagio this year? Fear (and Loathing) not! They're bringing the magic of the infamous Strip right to your own backyard with another classic Gladstone NYE bash.

www.gladstonehotel.com

Tip: *Uber, Lyft, cab, carpool, designated driver, shanks' mare, or even TTC – ring in the new year safely.*

Toronto New Year's Eve

December 31, 10:00 p.m.

Nathan Phillips Square, 100 Queen St. W., Toronto

Be part of the celebrations to ring in 2019 with music, skating and fireworks on December 31, 2018! Admission is FREE to this perennially favourite alcohol-free event.

www.toronto.ca/nps

Tip: *Dress warmly, although there should be some hot beverages and other goodies available.*

Classic Albums Live: Supertramp Breakfast in America

February 1, 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

Breakfast in America is arguably the most successful Supertramp album, the winner of two Grammy Awards, and is the band's best-selling album. Released in 1979 it contains U.S. Billboard hit singles The Logical Song, Take The Long Way Home and the title track, among others. Classic Albums Live and its roster of A-list musicians from across the country perform rock favourites exactly as you remember hearing them, note for note, cut for cut.

www.roythomsonhall.com

Tip: *Brush up on the lyrics; you don't want to be the only one not singing along.*

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

February 1 & 2

Sony Centre for the Performing Arts, 1 Front St. E., Toronto

Heralded as America's Cultural Ambassador to the World, the company comes to the Sony Centre to showcase the vision of Artistic Director Robert Battle with programming that embraces the tradition of such beloved classics as Revelations and extends the legacy in dynamic new directions.

www.sonycentre.ca

Tip: *The only expectations one should have on arrival at this event is for tremendous, diverse dance and musical entertainment.*

Torque: Post No Bills

February 8 & 9

Harbourfront Centre, 235 Queens Quay W., Toronto

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We have to scrap the fiction of reality. It is at this point we meet the broken and disillusioned human with empty hands. Precise and controlled, Johnson's performance will ask you to go back to square one and reinvent the beginning.

www.harbourfrontcentre.com

Tip: *Yes, the description of this show is vague and temporal; so is the show. Be prepared to think.*

Toronto Golf and Travel Show

February 8 to 10

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

Get into the game as the Show tees off its 29th year! With a number of exhibitors featuring golf equipment, golf courses, travel options, demonstrations and onsite lessons, the Golf Show is the pre-season destination for lovers of the game.

www.torontogolfshow.com

Tip: *Does one leave the credit card at home? Depends on whether you are an impulse shopper or one who can strategically take advantage of a deal.*

Amadeus Live

February 22, 7:30 p.m.

Sony Centre for the Performing Arts, 1 Front St. E., Toronto

Experience the return of the multi-Academy Award winning 1984 motion picture, Amadeus on a vast HD screen while Mozart's most celebrated works are performed live in-synch by a full orchestra and choir.

www.sonycentre.ca

Tip: *Don't dress retro – neither 1984 nor late-18th century.*



Toronto Woodworking Show

February 22 to 24

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

The show features woodworking tools & machinery, on-going seminars and demonstrations, a carving competition and a woodworking competition.

www.woodshows.com

Tip: *Wear comfy shoes, not only for the benefit of your feet; but because anything else might stand out.*

The Outdoor Adventure Show

February 22 to 24

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

The popular adventure show includes Seminar Theatres, Special Guest Appearances, International Travel Theatre, The Best of Canada Adventures Stage, Junior Outdoor Adventurers, Climbing Wall, White Water Demo, Adventures in Paddling, Underwater Adventures.

www.outdooradventureshow.ca/toronto

Tip: *Maybe carpool with your favourite woodworker as the two shows are adjacent.*

Orchestra Toronto: Come Together: 40 Years After Abbey Road

February 24, 3:00 p.m.

Toronto Centre For The Arts, 5040 Yonge St., Toronto

Rock meets Orchestra in this tribute to great British-inspired rock by Queen and the Beatles, as well as a new piano concerto by Richard Harriott, inspired by Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. Programme: "An Electric Organ, A Ladder and a Persian Rug" Rock concerto for Piano and Orchestra by Richard Harriott. Abbey Road Tribute, with Jeans n' Classics. www.ticketmaster.com

Tip: *After this afternoon concert, you will still have time for dinner out followed by a cocktail or three at your favourite retro bar.*

Toronto Spring Camping & RV Show

March 1 to 3

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

The only RV Show produced by the Canadian RV Manufacturers Association (CRVA) who have teamed up with the largest RV Dealers in Ontario to offer consumers the best deals on your new RV. This exciting one of a kind show will showcase the largest display of RVs from respected Ontario retailers of every model and type of RV and for every budget. www.torontospringcampingrvshow.com

Tip: *Get together with all your Cedars or similar friends and take the day to shop for that new home-away-from-home.*

Free From & Allergy Friendly Expo

March 2 & 3

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

No matter if you live "free from" milk, eggs, nuts, soy, gluten, chemicals, dust mites, latex... they've got you covered. Two fun filled days out where you will find brand new exciting choices for delicious food drink, natural skin care, ground-breaking home products and health solutions to help improve the 'free from' life you choose to live.

www.freefromexpo.ca

Tip: *So many people suffer from so many different allergies and sensitivities due to our industrial development, you may find it difficult to limit the number of friends with whom you attend.*

Celebrate Toronto - City's 185th Anniversary Festival

March 9 & 10, 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Nathan Phillips Square, 100 Queen St. W., Toronto

Come by the market, shop from local vendors, feast upon the diverse cuisines from Toronto based Food Trucks. Live music, DJ skate parties, and interactive activities honouring Toronto's 185th Anniversary all weekend long. Food trucks and shopping vendors will be open until 10:00pm, and skates can be rented on site.

www.celebratetoronto.ca

Tip: *Dress warmly, in layers; you'll heat up as you skate, then need to bundle up as you relax afterward.*

Toronto Sportsmen's Show

March 13 to 17

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

Boasting over 350,000 square feet of exhibit space, all under one roof, The Toronto Sportsmen's Show attracts over 300 exhibitors displaying a diverse range of products and services all promoting the great outdoors. Major segments of the show include: fishing, hunting, boating, camping, travel, outdoor adventure and much more. The Toronto Sportsmen's Show is renowned for its crowd-attracting and crowd-pleasing features.

www.torontosportshow.ca

Tip: *Forget about the gender stereotyping of the name – this is a sportsPERSON's show – for all ages and interests.*

Sherry Sylvain is a transgender woman who has been working in the LGBTQ community for too many years to count (or admit to).





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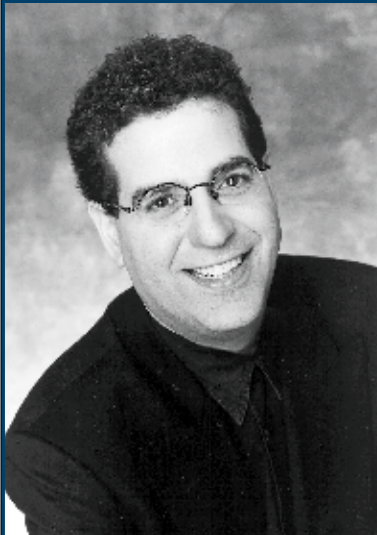


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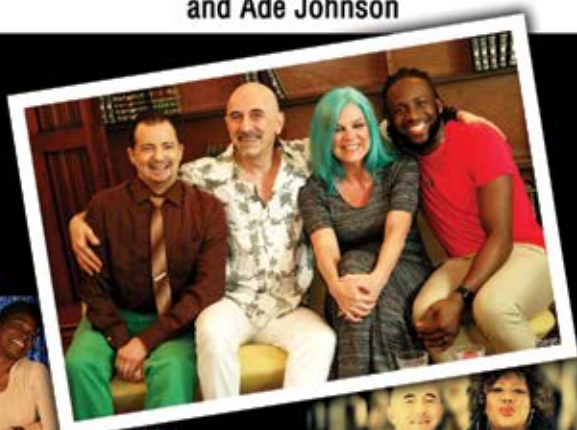
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From The Heart

By Mychol Scully

For the last instalment of this exploration of “Community Heroes,” I want to propose the notion of “constellation” as a tool for recognizing and developing connection with our humanity.

When the ancients looked up at the night sky, a basic component of sentience came into play. A defining feature of our sentient humanity is our propensity to find (or impose) pattern in the world around us. It’s driven by an intense desire to “make sense” of what are sometimes chaotic or apparently meaningless events or structures in our lives.

The night sky, with its complex and chaotic array of stars and other celestial bodies, was a fertile field for this “patterning” exercise. Connecting random dots to imagine centaurs, water bearers or scorpions was a way to illustrate the myths and legends we employed to explain natural phenomena and shared experience.

I believe there’s a similar mental exercise at work when we attempt to perceive organized

groupings among the complex and chaotic array of persons around us. Beyond the binary “us and them” approach to “the other” is a bright web of interconnections that help us make sense of the world around us and the social constructs that we must navigate on a daily basis. Each of us is a shining star and the constellations of which we perceive ourselves to be a part are many and varied. We are part of families, extended families, chosen families, teams, cultural groupings, and a variety of other connective assemblies.

The stories we tell ourselves and each other about how the dots are connected form an important part of our identities. The narrative thread that “people like us” do “things like this” is a reassuring bulwark against a seemingly uncaring universe. The terrifying “unknowing” beyond the security of the tribe’s shared campfire is kept at bay by the sense of solidarity and defensive connection we cultivate through our repetition of cultural memes.

In the context of the current conversation, these constructed social groupings help us to maintain our individual identities while simultaneously buttressing our communities against chaos and our innate profound aloneness.



There really ARE monsters under the bed but we feel safer if we're not sleeping alone.

In order to maintain our mental and emotional health, it benefits us to explore and understand how these constellations are formed. At the risk of stretching the metaphor, we move in social orbits like planetary systems, with certain core concepts at the centre, binding us to them and keeping us from spinning off into the void on our own.

Beyond our immediate “planetary” connections are the stellar neighbourhoods with which our core concepts connect. Those stellar neighbourhoods, in turn, orbit in grand assemblies around the arms of a galaxy. Like a cosmic ballet, our lives whirl and leap and dance as we move through our days.

Beyond the *pas de deux* is the *pas de grand nombre*; more than a dance with two dancers is the dance of many. Swing your partners doh-see-doh!

Our lives are often a challenging struggle between our solitary experience, triggering feelings of aloneness, and the connection we crave that will reassure us that we matter, that we are NOT alone, that there IS a purpose to existence. So many of our most dysfunctional behaviours are simply a kind of temporary blindness that keeps us locked inside our heads, disallowing the interconnections that is our birthright. It's how we're made. It's what we're for.

Find your tribe. Embrace your connections. Identify your constellations.

Learn the stories and repeat them to yourself and others. Know that we are, all of us, engaged in the most wondrous creative dance, if only we would allow ourselves to feel it.

Mychol Scully is Senior Art Director for INspired Media Inc. publications PinkPlayMags, theBUZZ, The Local Biz Magazine, and The Pink Pages Directory. Mychol is available for thoughtful conversation or lascivious teasing anytime at mychol@mychol.com.





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Winter Horoscopes

by Julie Antoinette

Aries (March 21 – April 20)

The heavens are teaching you about the true meaning of abundance. The means to accomplish your goals are always at your disposal. Beware of thinking of abundance in terms of money only, as it also can appear disguised in many unlikely resources. One definition of abundance is, "The ability to do what you need to do when you need to do it." The universe is fulfilling its desires through you.

Taurus (April 21 – May 21)

You've been exceptionally bored and in a mood to get into some mischief. Not necessarily bad mischief, just something to break up the daily monotony and to feel young again. A childhood friend you know is just the partner with which to carry out your mischievous endeavors. These are times you will reminisce on later.

Gemini (May 22 – June 21)

Conversations around you have become regurgitations of spewings from mass media. Nothing of quality is being provoked to discuss. What is needed are thinkers of the right questions to spark new ideas and thoughts. The questions you've been asking yourself lately want to be shared and they will spread ideas like wildfire. Bruce Springsteen says, "You can't start a fire without a spark."

Cancer (June 22 – July 22)

Something in your life is in dire need of an upgrade. A version 2.0 is needed to suit your current needs. You have many options before you so you must fully research each one to ensure your choice matches your current needs perfectly. Get ready for an overhaul of obsolete systems and an increase in productivity following this improvement.

Leo (July 23 – August 22)

You are part of a society of decision-makers in your career or family situation. Currently, an issue is on the table for discussion to decide the next best step to be taken in a project or issue. Your input will be immeasurable as part of this process. Prepare yourself to present your ideas clearly and calmly.

Virgo (August 23 – September 23)

A surge of new ideas and concepts flood your consciousness. You find this overwhelming – and so do the people in your life when you share these ideas with them. To avoid this, try writing them down for your own objective review rather than bouncing them off others who may not know how to handle them. Remember, the pen is patient, and mightier than the sword.

Libra (September 24 – October 23)

Librans are the sign of partnership and collaboration. Lately, you've been itching to be an integral collaborative component within a cause or group project. The subject of this group must be something that you're passionate about, or it won't soothe that itch! Select carefully. Try browsing through Meetup groups in your area. Trust that what you are seeking is also seeking you.

Scorpio (October 24 – November 22)

Sometimes, you can get a bit obsessive, Scorpio. The brooding quality of the scorpion lends that to you. Something has entered your mind and won't leave! Most importantly, it won't leave you in peace. It is said that whatever costs you your peace is too expensive and not worth it. Call in the Truth Brigade to the rescue and send those pesky obsessions packing. The thoughts you've been entertaining have not been entertaining you!

Sagittarius (November 23 - December 21)

That one thing you've been wanting and desiring to have has not left your mind. You've thought that it's unrealistic that you should have it, but true to the nature of desire, it will not relent. There is a way to make this happen for yourself. Besides, Christmas is coming!

Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

Ever productive Capricorn, you feel that the year is almost over and so many projects left incomplete! It's so important that you get these done before the beginning of next year. There are timeline sensitivities and contingencies at stake! Take some time to re-order your schedule and employ some organizational tricks. You can make this happen and start 2019 off fresh!

Aquarius (January 20 – February 19)

You've always had a knack for connecting different groups of people with each other because you are very socially versatile. However, the time has come to connect yourself to a new group. You've become bored and have outgrown the one you're with! You'll handle this with flare, if you dare.

Pisces (February 20 – March 20)

You probably were a Bard in a past life, or have kissed the Blarney stone at least once in this life! If there's anyone who can weave a storyline and execute it with each word dripping intricacy and oozing suspense, it's you, Pisces. You have the ability to hold captive the attention of an entire room and lead them like the pied piper off into the forest. Have some fun entertaining your friends and loved ones this season.

Julie is a Sociology and Psychology graduate, a Psychotherapy Intern and a lifelong student of the psyche. She seeks to relay intuitive messages of guidance from the collective astrological archetypes. As above, so below.



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Looking Back

by Vince Ciarlo

In this chaotic world we live in, it always helps to stop and reflect on where we are in life, how we got here and those who took time to guide us along on our journey. On the verge of turning 87, Russell Alldread a.k.a. **Michelle DuBarry** took the time to share with me some reflections on those who were influential.

He feels that as a gay man and being a drag queen, it is impossible to get into a relationship with a man. "Most men don't want to live with a drag queen and I've had several men in my time," he said. Russell has many friends and admirers but no one whom he can call "that special someone." But Michelle lives a rich life and keeps active in her community and is highly considered a leader and a hero. But what was it like for her in the early days, behind the scenes, as the icon's reputation was building to where it is today?

A performer's life is active. It can be lonely but include short term connections.

"While on the road in the 70s when I had a travelling drag show with The Imposters, we performed in hotels and had primarily a hetero audience and certain men who saw us perform liked to be with us after our performances."

If we're lucky, we meet that someone special to be with and have a rich relationship of companionship.

"There was a teacher in Oshawa who met me at Traxx and we got to be friends. He liked me just as much as Russell. So, when I would visit him in Oshawa, I was Russell. He collected crystal and linens and had a spot in a local marketplace where he would display his collection. Whenever we were together we would wear our dressing gowns, cook, and then listen to and dance to Patsy Cline records."

"The late community leader, George Hislop, was a very good friend of mine. He introduced me to Stanley St. John, in the 50s. He was the orchestra leader at the Royal York Hotel. I was working at the time as a women's shoe salesman and Stanley and I travelled to



Photo: Russell Alldread a.k.a. Michelle DuBarry by Vince Ciarlo

New York where he took me to the top of the Empire State Building and to Broadway shows."

An important organization in Michelle's life is The Imperial Court of Toronto, where she was a two-time Empress. She's been a member since its founding and even has the title of Grand Ma Mere of Canada, given to her by Nicole the Great at a Hamilton Coronation Ball. Michelle has spent countless hours attending Court events across Canada and fundraising for the organization's charities of choice. She shared with me how her friend Bob Tone worked for Air Canada and assisted in bringing Jose I, the founding empress of the Imperial Court System, to Toronto on several occasions.

"I met Jose I a number of times and he was a big influence on me amade me want to stay with the Court until the very end. He was so inspiring. Finding love has its challenges in our lifetime but from Michelle, I've learned that no matter what, we'll always have friends to share our journey, cherish those memories and be grateful for them."

Happy 87th Birthday Michelle DuBarry!

Vince Ciarlo is President of Ciarlo Communications, a boutique public relations company in Toronto. He specializes in PR for the entertainment industry, performing artists and not-for-profit organizations.



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