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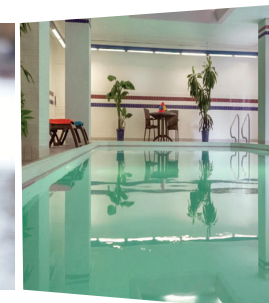
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From the Publisher

Dear Reader,

As we arrive at the final chapter of our *Queer Around the World in 365 Days* theme, it feels fitting — and deeply personal — to land in Europe.

Europe has been part of my story for as long as I can remember. I was born in Kuwait (as I have shared with you lovely readers in the past) and lived there; but, my teenage years were shaped by long summers spent travelling — often nearly three months at a time — between Greece, England, and our home country, Lebanon. Those summers opened my world. In England, we stayed in the countryside before heading into London for culture and creativity. In Greece, we lived in the mountains, then made our way down to cities and islands where life felt sun-soaked, communal, and alive.

Without fully realizing it at the time, Europe also became the backdrop to my earliest moments of self-discovery as a gay person — all while being very much with family (yes, that kind of irony). What I was absorbing, quietly and deeply, was the understanding that there were many ways to live, love, and exist in the world. Those experiences shaped my worldview in lasting ways. Being exposed so young to different cultures, languages, and rhythms taught me something essential: wherever we are in the world, we want the same things — safety, dignity, belonging, and the freedom to be ourselves.

That belief sits at the heart of this Europe issue. Europe's queer history is rich, complex,



and often contradictory. In this issue of *PinkPlayMags*, we explore queer life across Europe through history, human rights, culture, and everyday lived experience. We celebrate visibility and resilience, while staying honest about the work that remains. Because progress is never guaranteed — anywhere — and it must be protected. As this year draws to a close, returning to Europe through these pages feels like closing a circle for me, personally. It is a reminder of how formative places can shape who we become, and why global queer connection matters more than ever.

Thank you for travelling with us around the world. Wherever you are reading from, know this: you belong, and your story matters. I would like to also wish you the best for the season and happy new year, and we'll catch up with you soon in our spring issue.

With love,

Antoine Elhashem
Publisher

publisher@pinkplaymags.com

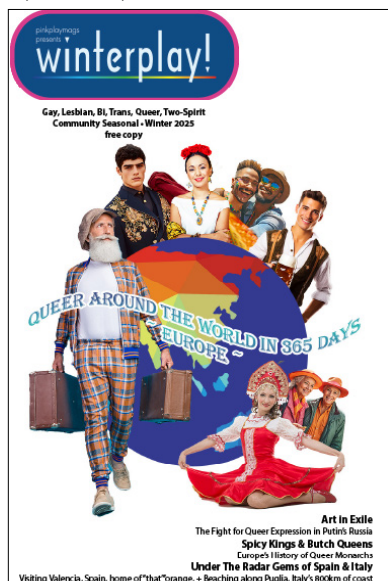
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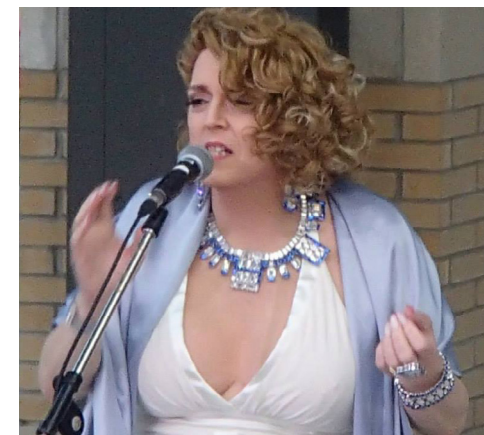
In this issue

- 12 **Art in Exile: The Fight For Queer Expression In Putin's Russia**
– Menaka Skrypnik
- 19 **Spicy Kings & Butch Queens: The History of Europe's Hidden Queer Monarchs** – Rolyn Chambers
- 24 **Russia Complicate Queer Journey**
– Rolyn Chambers
- 38 **Fiction: Queer European Authors**
– Sherry Sylvain

Regular features

- 28 **Travel: Out and About in Queer Italy & Spain** – Bryen Dunn
- 36 **Hot Artist: Beatriz Victoria Albina**
– Sean Ban Beaton
- 40 **Community Cornerstone: The Winding Down of AIDS Committee of Toronto** – Sherry Sylvain
- 43 **Winter In the City**
– Sherry Sylvain
- 50 **From the Heart** – Mychol Scully
- 51 **Winter Horoscopes**

From the Editor



Greetings to all of our readers!
You may recognize my name from my history of writing Community Cornerstone, and the events listings in many past issues of PinkPlayMags; if not, please allow me to introduce myself to you – I am Sherry Sylvain, a transwoman with decades of involvement in the 2SLGBTQ+ communities of Toronto, the GTHA, and beyond.

This is the first of what I hope will be a long and enjoyable string of issues of PinkPlayMags wherein I will act as the editor-in-chief, as well as continuing writing Community Cornerstone, and providing a list of interesting events. I already know that we have a strong and exciting group of staff writers, and I hope we will be able to add to this roster as we head into the new year.

In this issue, we culminate our theme of Queer Around The World In 365 Days, with our look at Europe and Russia. This is a significant portion of the earth's land mass, and a significant representation of its population. This extensive geographic area contains far too many diverse populations and communities to allow for a close scrutiny of all of it, so we have chosen a few topics and regions we hope you will find interesting and thought provoking

Our first feature, Art In Exile, by Menaka Skrypnik, looks at the Queer resistance in Russia since the advent of Putin. Our second feature, Queer Royalty, by Rolyn Chambers, looks at the

rumours, innuendos, and facts of those who have held power throughout Europe and Russia through the “Divine Right of Kings”, not to mention Queens. In our third feature, also by Rolyn Chambers, we look at the history of Queer individuals in Russian history to the present.

In our *Travel* section, Bryen Dunn takes a look at some of Europe's most Queer friendly environments, in Spain and Italy. With resources for nightlife, tours, history, and beach fun, this column may provides some great vacation ideas while the winter weather is being very Canadian.

Finally, I have created a *Listing* of events going on in Toronto, as well as a little farther afield, which I hope will help entice you to brave the chilly weather. And, I have also written a little something in *Community Cornerstone*, looking at the story of ACT (AIDS Committee of Toronto), who recently announced that, after more than 40 years of serving our community, they will be discontinuing their activities.

I hope that our readers will continue to find PinkPlayMags to be a valuable and pleasurable resource, providing information and opinions you want and need.

Sherry Sylvain
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ART IN EXILE: The Fight for Queer Expression

By Menaka Skrypnyk



In her article, **Queer, Feminist Art is Still a Crime**, writer **Ksenia Soboleva** reminds us that **Pride celebrations are banned in Moscow until the year 2112 and that the country has operated under an anti-LGBTQ “propaganda law” since 2013**. She reminds us of the murder of Yelena Grigoryeva in July 2019, an activist who gained prominence for fighting for LGBTQ rights. She also mentions Yulia Tsvetkova, another LGBTQ activist, women’s rights activist, and queer artist, who was arrested for sharing body-positive illustrations of the female body—images authorities labelled “pornography.” Although acquitted in 2022, Tsvetkova fled the country soon after. She is only one among hundreds, perhaps thousands, of queer artists and

activists who have left Russia in fear of persecution under increasingly homophobic policies.

For queer artists who remain, creation itself has become an act of rebellion. After the 2013 “LGBT propaganda” law was passed, it was further expanded in 2022 to ban all public expressions of queer identity. In Russia, queer expression has often survived in the shadows, pushed there by hate crimes and state-driven homophobia. Still, queer artists keep creating and celebrating who they are—a quiet but enduring defiance against erasure.

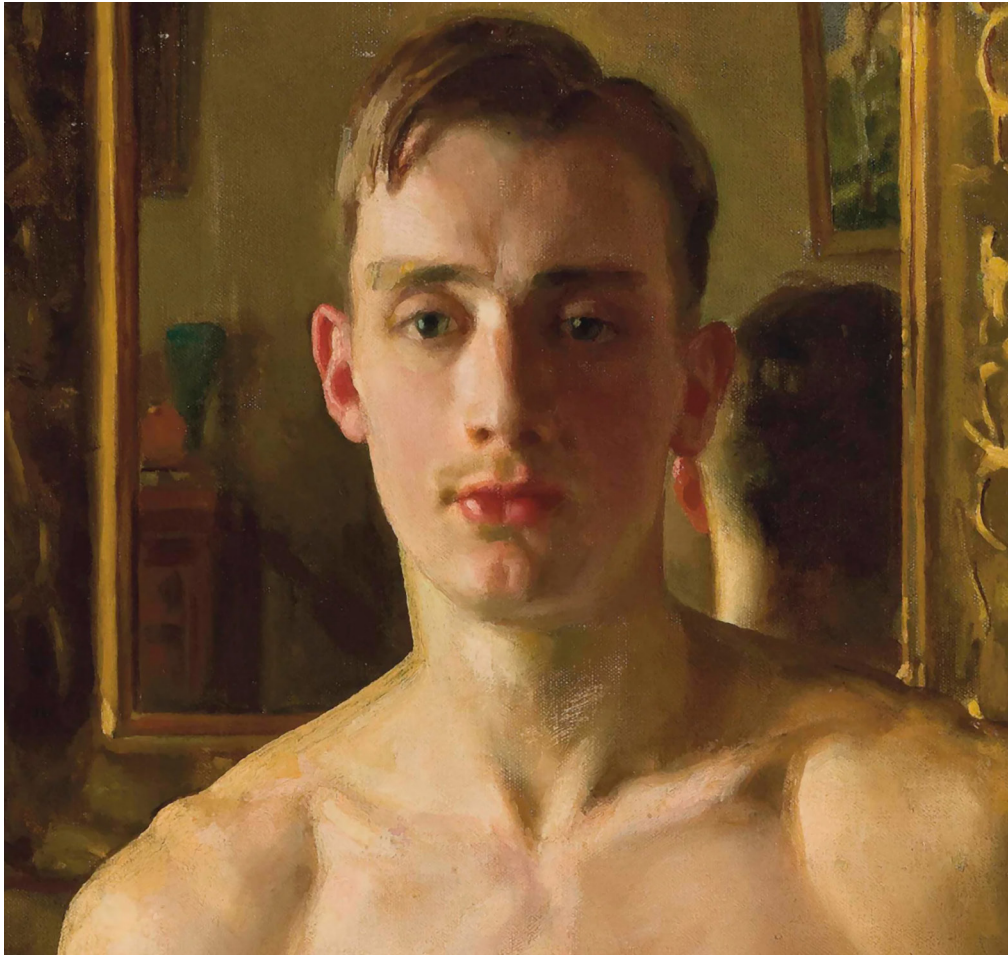
Queer Expression Under Censorship in Russia

Queer artists from the late Russian Empire helped shape the early twentieth-century avant-garde. As we continue to see today, many fled to Europe and America amid revolution, civil war, and the collapse of imperial rule. Their explorations of gender, desire, and identity left an unmistakable mark on modernism.

One such figure, Konstantin Somov, an openly gay artist from the Russian Empire, used his paintings to explore queer desire and gender discomfort. His work was admired in Europe before World War I but could not be openly celebrated due to the criminalization of homosexuality across both Russia and much of Europe.



Yulia Tsvetkova * Photo by Julie Flower/Vkontakte



While queer artists abroad found space to experiment, Soviet Russia moved sharply toward repression. After a brief period in which homosexuality was decriminalized following the 1917 Revolution, Stalin reintroduced criminal penalties in 1934, imposing a rigidly conservative social order. The law remained in place until the Soviet Union collapsed, and its legacy continues in several post-Soviet states. That fleeting moment of freedom left a cultural residue: proof that visibility had once been possible.

What is “LGBT Propaganda”

When the “gay propaganda” law passed in 2013 under President Vladimir Putin, the new repression was not only political but aesthetic. It was an attempt to control what could be imagined, framed as defense of “traditional” family values. What it did was open allowance for anti-gay violence across Russia, many parts of the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe and expanded the state’s capacity for censorship. In a country that once celebrated avant-garde experimentation, queerness became the ultimate taboo.

Writer and artist, Slava Mogutin, one of Russia’s few openly gay journalists in the 1990s, recalls being criminally prosecuted for reporting on state-



Photo- PBS

backed homophobia in his article, *The Censored Canvas: Queer Art in the Age of Online Censorship*. Charged with “insulting morality” and “inciting social and religious division,” he fled to the United States, where he continues to document Russian censorship and queer resistance.

The crackdown deepened in November 2023 when Russia’s Supreme Court banned what they called the “international LGBT movement” citing it an extremist organization, effectively outlawing activism entirely. Under this ruling, queer Russians risk prosecution for acts as simple as posting supportive messages online or having dating profiles. In 2024 alone, authorities recorded 221 misdemeanor cases involving accusations

of promoting “non-traditional sexual relations,” gender nonconformity, or “propaganda”—many tied to images, films, or online art.

Queer people have been living in Russia under these laws, seen as criminals simply for existing. And yet, queer art and culture persist, and artists make themselves visible, even if only in hushed tones.

The Russian Queer Revolution

One effort to preserve and celebrate queer creativity is the Russian Queer Revolution, a project and movement launched in 2020 by writer



and curator Anastasiia Fedorova. The initiative displays Russia's underground queer culture to a global audience, amplifying artists, musicians, and activists working under threat. Speaking to *Dazed*, a digital magazine, Fedorova describes the project as "a search for a Russian queer family [she] never had [...] proof of our defiant existence [and] a hand extended to all the lost and exiled immigrant queers."

Fedorova also mentioned an independent queer publication *O-Zine*, which was founded in Moscow in 2018, as it became another crucial archive. "O" for "open," its name symbolized giving voice to Russia's queer community in a country that means to suppress them.

Where Expression Becomes Resistance

To make queer art in Russia today is to live in contradiction — visible yet unseen, silenced yet still speaking. Each image, each brushstroke, becomes both protest and petition. Even in secrecy, this art refuses despair. It insists on tenderness, on joy, on complexity. It transforms repression into an aesthetic of endurance, proving that neither

queerness nor creativity can be legislated out of existence.

Beneath the weight of censorship, a parallel world endures. In hidden studios, in exile communities, and in the digital ether — even from countries far away — queer Russian artists continue to create. Their defiance may be quiet, but it is unwavering.

Across Europe and beyond, audiences, institutions, and fellow artists are recognizing these voices not as distant echoes, but as part of a shared cultural and political struggle. As Fedorova reminds us, "overall, what we all should do is to be more curious and more empathetic of different LGBTQI+ experiences in different countries — to learn about our community beyond where we

Menaka Skrypnik is a Sri Lankan-Canadian Communications professional with an innate passion for writing and exploring the unfamiliar. She enjoys spending her free time with her husband and adorable Sheepadoodle, Oscar.





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SPICEY KINGS & BUTCH QUEENS



THE HISTORY OF EUROPE'S "HIDDEN" QUEER MONARCHS

By Rolyn Chambers

The pomp and pageantry of monarchies has long fascinated many in the queer community. From Halloween costumes to Drag Race challenges, to leatherman titles, some of us don crowns and sashes as if we really ruled, regally, for real. Some cities even have their own international royal court systems, complete with imperial titles and hierarchal family trees. But, one wonders, has a sassy king or a butch queen ever sat on a real throne? In other words, throughout history, has an actual queer monarch ever ruled a European nation? The answer is a fabulous, yes. We are but amused.

Take Roman Emperor Hadrian (117 CE – 138 CE). Hadrian's most famous gay lover, was the Greek, Antinous. Making no secret of his deep passion for his youthful male consort, their relationship came to a tragic end when the beautiful Antinous drowned while sailing with the Emperor on the Nile. It is said that Hadrian "wept like a woman" over his departed love and decreed that Antinous be regarded as a literal god. As a result,

a cult grew around the young man, and the city of Antinoopolis was built in his name.

As **King of Macedonia, Alexander the Great (356 BCE-323 BCE)**. In his short life he had three wives, while also finding time to have affairs with men. The most famous was Hephaestion, a general in his army. Their relationship was so intense that it was compared to the bond between legendary Greek heroes Achilles and Patroclus. Despite a lack of concrete evidence, it is widely speculated they were lovers. Paul Cartledge – a historian of Ancient Greece – wrote that, "rumour had it – and rumour was for once surely correct – that [Hephaestion] and Alexander had once been more than just good friends."

Emperor Galba (3 BCE to 69 CE) ruled Rome for less than seven months. Though he married Aemilia Lepida, out of duty, and fathered two sons, many historical sources indicate that Emperor Galba was gay. His wife and two sons unfortunately died young, and he never remarried. He was known to be sweet on males who were "hard-bodied and



King Richard I United Englad, And Men

not past their prime, when it came to matters of sex.” Was he perhaps the first circuit party gym queen?

Never marrying, and without children, William II of England (1056 to 1100) was known to fill his colourful court with attractive young men. Willie dressed his courtiers in pointed shoes and made them grow out their hair. It is said that he promoted based on performance in bed rather than talent, and his favourite, Ranulf Flambard, was appointed Bishop of Durham. After being assassinated (perhaps because he flaunted his sexuality too much), his successor, Henry I forced the courtiers to trim their hair.

Despite spending just six months of his ten-year reign in his country, **Richard I of England, The Lionheart (1157 to 1199)** was one of England’s most iconic kings. When he was Duke of Aquitaine, he revolted against his father, Henry II. For the sake of diplomacy (and possibly penis), he allied with Philip II of France. Of their relationship that united more than just two nations,



“King Edward II, The Flrst Gay Wedding”

Roger of Hovden, a chronicler who knew Richard personally wrote that the two “ate every day at the same table and from the same dish, and at night, their beds did not separate them.” The ultimate gay power couple.

In the Hollywood movie Braveheart, **Edward II of England (1284 to 1327)** was portrayed as camp and incompetent. While not the most pro-LGBTQ+ depiction, Edward II is one of the most famous gay monarchs. He was “wedded brothers” with Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall. The “friendship agreement” has often been seen as a Church-approved same sex partnership. The earl was often given special access to the king, much to the anger of his nobles.

Like Catherine The Great and her own father, rumours surrounded the sexuality of the powerful new queen of England, **Elizabeth I (1533 to 1603)** for centuries. Some historians say the “Virgin Queen” was a lesbian. However, though she never married, the queen had a series of male suitors and



“ The Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I”

would insist, when asked, that she was married to her kingdom and her subjects.

James I and James VI (1566-1625) were the same wonderfully queer person. He was given different names when Scotland united with England, and he also became their king. When he took the throne in 1603 CE, after the death of Elizabeth I, he had big pointy shoes to fill. England loved Lizzie and they remained uncertain of the Scottish ruler with a glorious reputation for homosexual affairs. In his early years, his new subjects circulated a Latin phrase, which meant “Elizabeth was king, now James is queen.” It was also said that as he rode through the streets of London, people yelled, “Long live Queen James.” James loved men throughout his life and bestowed power and titles on his favourite fellows and powerful families who would send their sons to court to gain favour with him. James was just 13 when he met his first favourite, Esmé Stewart, who was 37. Stewart became a mentor to the young king. When James was older, he formed relationships with handsome, younger man who he would “mentor.” In 1607 CE,



“Long Live Queen James I, IV”

James fell for the blonde athlete, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, at a joust. However, an ill-advised marriage, imprisonment at the Tower of London, and a sensational murder trial, saw Carr fall from the king’s favour. In a speech to his council, James defended his right to love men. “I, James am neither a god nor angel, but a man like any other. Therefore, I act like a man, and confess to loving those dear to me more than other men. You may be sure that I love the Earl of Buckingham, more than anyone else, and more than you who are here assembled. I wish to speak in my own behalf, and not to have it thought to be a defect, for Jesus Christ did the same and therefore I cannot be blamed. Christ had a John and I have George.” Lordy, he even outed Jesus!

Though he didn’t rule, France’s King Louis XIV’s younger brother, **Phillip I, Duke of Orléans (1640 to 1701)** was not only openly gay, but enjoyed dressing in women’s clothes. As well as two wives (out of duty), he had several male lovers, most famously Philippe de Lorraine. The pair were the focus of the historical TV drama, “Versailles”.

Known for England and Scotland formally uniting during her reign, **Anne of Great Britain (1655 to 1714)** was involved in a wild love affair with Sarah Churchill, wife of the Duke of Marlborough. The two were very opposite. Sarah was beautiful and assertive, while Anne was plain and reserved. The two fell in and out of love until Anne, who many historians believe was bi-sexual, dumped Sarah due to her argumentative attitude, often disagreeing with Queen.

The last Medici to be **Grand Duke of Tuscany, Gian Gastone, (1671 -1737)**, knew that if he didn't produce a male heir, his domain would go to the Bourbon rulers of Spain. Gastone's sisters arranged his marriage to a German princess, but she refused to move to Florence. Gastone instead moved to her small village, but ignored her and spent all his time with "male groom," Giuliano Dami, who became his lover. Gastone also allegedly paid young male prostitutes, who became known as "The Ruspanti," after the coins (Ruspi) that Gastone gave them for sex. Not able to produce an heir, the Spanish seized Tuscany when he died.

Charles I of Württemberg (1823 to 1891) was king of Württemberg (Germany) from 1864 until his death in 1891 CE. His most notorious affair was with the American, Charles Woodcock. The pair would even appear in public dressed identically.

Never marrying, **Ludwig II Of Bavaria (1845 to 1866)**, also never had any known mistresses. It was later revealed from his diary, private letters, and other surviving personal documents, that he had strong homosexual desires. He struggled all his life to suppress his sexual desires and remain true to the Roman Catholic faith. Sadly, Ludwig would most likely have tried conversion therapy, if he had ruled today.

Which brings us to the present. Though he was not a ruler, **Lord Ivar Mountbatten (1963 to present)**, Queen Elizabeth's cousin became the first modern member of the British royal family to officially come out as gay. After revealing he was dating James Coyle, the two later married. Lord Mountbatten had been previously married and had three children with Penelope Thomp



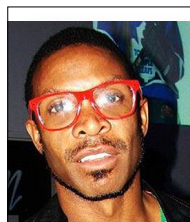
Lord Ivar Mountbatten & James Coyle

Image: Instagram @ivar_mountbatten

History has shown that not only have queer European monarchs ruled, but in most cases they have ruled well. From celebrated Roman emperors who led manly armies while roughing it in the sheets with their chosen soldiers, to powerful queens who bore heirs while also being pleased by Ladies-in-Waiting, queer people have always been on or around the throne. While monarchies today are sometimes seen as relics of the past (many no longer exist for this reason), within the queer community their regal glamour and historic pageantry still rule the imagination. As singer Beyoncé, our modern-day Queen B, once sang, "Bow down, bitches," and apparently, many of us still do. •

Rolyn Chambers

Jamaican-born Rolyn Chambers grew up in Mississauga and studied at OCAD. His book, *The Boy Who Brought Down A Bathhouse*, is available on Amazon.



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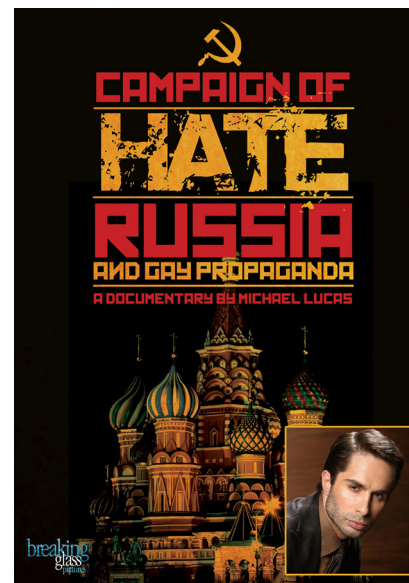
Joseph Stalin received a letter from journalist Harry Whyte in 1934. The letter opened with the question, “can a homosexual be considered a worthy member of the Communist Party?”

In 2010, I flew Russian-born US-citizen, Michael Lucas, porn star, producer, and founder of Lucas Films, to Toronto to perform for his fans at an event I had created at the now closed St. Marc Spa bathhouse. He was humble, charismatic and from my short night hosting him, I could tell he was a man of integrity. Three years later, in 2013, Lucas would fly to Russia, to interview LGBTQ+ advocates, drilling them on homophobia, gay bashing, Russian LGBTQ+ propaganda law, and Vladimir Putin’s administration. But well before 1934, and sadly well after 2013, the question of

whether a homosexual can exist in communist Russia is still a question being asked.

Medieval Russia, for instance, was very tolerant. The 19th century historian Sergei Soloviev noted that “nowhere, either in the Orient or in the West, was this vile, unnatural sin taken as lightly as in Russia.”

The first laws against homosexual acts appeared early in the 18th century, but these were military rules that applied to soldiers. It was not until 1832 that their criminal code included Article 995, which made *muzhelozhstvo* (men lying with men) as a criminal act punishable by exile to Siberia for up to five years. This was applied rarely, and prominent intellectuals, like the composer, Peter Tchaikovsky, led relatively open homosexual or bisexual lives.



Michael Lucas and his film, “Campaign Of Hate”

The turn of the 20th century saw a relaxation of the laws, and an increase in tolerance and visibility. Between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, Russia was something of a golden age for homosexuals. Many important figures led open gay lives, including several members of the Imperial Court, members of the World of Art movement, and the Russian ballet.

The sexual liberation that accompanied the Revolution was to be short-lived and by the early 1930s, pro-family Stalinist policies took over. With tensions rising with Germany, homosexuality was connected with Nazism, because Germany’s queer culture was flourishing. The head of the Soviet OGPU (secret police, later known as the NKVD, then eventually the KGB), wrote to Stalin in September 1933 warning that groups of gay men were a dangerous weak point for Nazi espionage. He encouraged Stalin to reintroduce the Tsarist sodomy law, and six months later Stalin did. The Nazis themselves criminalized homosexuality a half year later.

Harry Whyte, the Scotsman who penned the letter Stalin mentioned above, had moved to the Soviet Union in 1932 to escape Scotland’s own

anti-sodomy laws. At that time Russia had removed all homophobic laws, allowing gay people to live, and love, openly. Whyte, employed as a journalist, fell in love with a man named Ivan. Then, one day in 1934, Ivan disappeared. Most likely sent to Siberia.

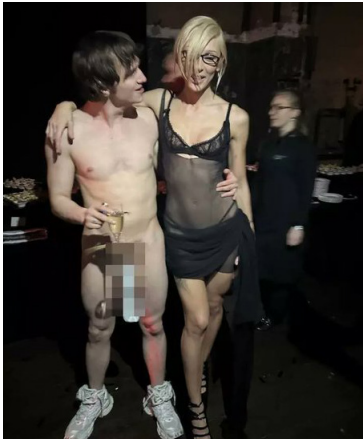
The new Article 121, which punished *muzhelozhstvo* with imprisonment, was followed by raids and arrests. By the 1980s there were about 1000 every year. Some estimate that over 38,000 men were sentenced under article 121. The threat of prosecution was also used to blackmail homosexuals into informing for the police and the KGB. Because of this gay men began restricting their activities to small circles of trusted friends. Those daring, or desperate for connections resorted to public cruising areas, nicknamed “*pleshki*.”

But with a relatively lax Communist Party in the mid 1980s, and pressure from a young international gay movement, things began to change. Organizations like *The Moscow Gay & Lesbian Alliance* was created which launched gay newspapers and queer magazines like *Tema*, *Argot*, and *RISK*. These groups established connections with Scandinavia, Western Europe, and America. Brave activists, like Masha Gessen (who Michael Lucas would later interview for his documentary), now a famous anti-Putin writer and columnist for the *New Yorker*, started building networks and increasing their activity, demanding reform. In 1991 the first international conference, film festival, and demonstrations for gay rights were held in Moscow and Leningrad.

The collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated the gay movement. In 1993 Boris Yeltsin



Russian President Putin with Philipp Kirkorov



Rusian rapper, Vacio at a "Nearlt Naked Party"

decriminalised homosexuality. Men who had been imprisoned under the article began to be released. Capitalism not only brought American brands like McDonald's and Coca-Cola, but the first gay businesses – bars, discos, saunas, and even a travel agency. The 1990s saw the slow process of Russia's gay community building itself up again, developing a culture similar to Western European nations. But President Vladimir Putin, who took office in 1999 watched all of this unfold, and has since vilified and attacked the country's queer community.

This was the Russia into which Michael Lucas, who would later become one of the world's most successful producers of gay porn, was born. And, having renounced his Russian citizenship, left. But in 2013, Lucas returned because he felt he had a duty. Shot over the course of a month, *Campaign of Hate: Russia and Gay Propaganda* (available on Netflix), is an inside look at the lives of queer people suppressed into invisibility at that time. Lucas interviews people from all walks of life, including journalist Masha Gessen, a lesbian mother who fled Russia after she was singled out as an unfit parent. Lucas even sits down with politician Vitaly Milonov who, during the interview, became angry and walked out.

Since Lucas released his documentary, now in Russia, "queerness equals terrorism and it is hard to figure out what constitutes LGBT propaganda or extremism," said Valeria Vetoshkina, a lawyer for *OVD-Info*, Russia's leading independent human rights watchdog.

In November 2023, Russia labeled the entire "international LGBT movement", as a banned extremist organization. Russia now ranks as one of Europe's most dangerous places for LGBTQ+ people, with police regularly raiding gay bars..

Today, LGBTQ+ culture and activism has been forced underground. Many queer people with money and connections have left the country. Those who remain are increasingly demoralized. But like the 1930s, it seems some queer people of means are able to exist above the radar. Take influencer Alexei Zhidkovsky, who appears on Russian talk shows in full makeup and high heels. Or, Filipp Kirkorov, a Russian pop star who performs in flamboyant outfits made of feathers and rhinestones, in defiance of official state policy.

But queer people are pushing back. At a "nearly naked party" hosted by blogger Nastya Ivleeva in 2023, rapper Vacio narrowly escaped a criminal case for "LGBT propaganda" for wearing nothing but a Balenciaga sock on his penis. Fined 200,000 rubles and sentenced to 25 days of administrative arrest, he was then handed a military draft summons upon his release. He fled the country.

Russia today is very different than Muscovite Russia of the 16th century, where open displays of homosexual affection "among men of every class" was not unusual. Russia today is very different than the Russia of the mid 1980s, when queer organizations and publications like *RISK* fought back. Russia today is even very different than in the Russia of early 2000s, when Russian pop culture saw a boom in gay culture, gender-bending personalities flourished, gay clubs reappeared, and glossy queer magazines were readily readable. Russia today has again swung back toward conservatism, guided by the Kremlin's heavy-handed promotion of "traditional" values. But, what will Russia be like tomorrow? Will a queer person, as asked by journalist Harry Whyte in

Jamaican-born Rolyn Chambers grew up in Mississauga and studied at OCAD. His book, *The Boy Who Brought Down A Bathhouse*, is available on Amazon.



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Europe is one of the world's most amazingly diverse continents, from the Highlands of Scotland to the sun-drenched islands of Greece, there's no shortage of culture, heritage, architecture, and history. Comprised of over 40 separate countries, the entire continent is equivalent to the size of Canada, yet the population mass is comprised of 740 million, compared to the 40 million who live in Canada. All of this combined is what makes Europe a great travel destination, especially for those who might want to visit multiple countries on one trip, which is very doable..

We're putting the spotlight on Spain and Italy, with two of Southern Europe's under-the-radar destinations that compare to some of the larger European city offerings, but without the crowds. Both are very gay-friendly, while the region of Puglia in Spain makes for a quaint getaway as a beach holiday with unique experiences.

Valencia • Let The Gay Games Begin

When one thinks of Spain, most often the larger cities of Madrid and Barcelona come to mind. However, **Valencia** is a very welcoming and queer friendly coastal city with a lively queer community, progressive laws, and numerous gay-friendly bars and clubs. It is the third largest city in Spain, located directly on the Mediterranean Sea, about 350 km south of Barcelona. It's also going to be hosting *Gay Games* 2026 in June of next year, celebrating queer sports, cultural events, and special ceremonies.

The city has just under a million inhabitants, and is comprised of a variety of architectural styles that are a mix of *Modernismo* *Art Nouveau* with *Mediterranean Gothic*. The historic centre welcomes visitors through two massive gates that remain from the previously walled enclosure. The *Torres de Quart* entrance offers great views of the old city and the new riverbed park, while the other gate



tower, *Torres de Serranos*, was previously used to hide and protect art during the Spanish Civil War.

The city's motto is *Vivir Sin Dormir* (live without sleep), and with many bars and clubs staying open until sunrise, it certainly encourages that mindset. The main neighbourhoods for the LGBTQ+ community include *Ruzafa* and *El Carmen*, with specific venues like *Planet Valencia*, *Deseo 54*, *Via Canal Street*, and *Pub Bubu* catering to a diverse crowd. Some of the other more popular gay/friendly bars include *La Bella de Cádiz*, *Franky Four Fingers*, *Comics*, *La Boba* y *El Gato Rancio*, *Homens*, *El Cafetín*, *The Muse*, and *Trapezzio* in *El Carmen*. The main street of *Gran Vía* also hosts larger disco dance spaces.

El Botànic is another very queer-friendly neighbourhood with several queer bars. While there isn't one official gay district, these areas are central hubs, and the city is considered one of the safest in Europe for LGBTQ+ people. There are several city beaches to easily explore, with the more popular one located along the northern end of the *Playa de*

la Malvarrosa. The main gay beach, *Playa de l'Arbre del Gos*, is south of Valencia in the *La Albufera* region, between *El Saler* and *Pinedo* beaches. It is clothing optional and frequented by all genders.

The Gay Games in June will certainly be an exciting time to visit, and to ensure everyone is welcome, the *Federation of Gay Games* firmly stipulated that all sporting events would be trans-inclusive, despite the new right leaning governments proposed laws. AVEGAL was officially appointed as the local LGBTQ+ community partner for the 2026 games, which involves managing cultural activities, promotions, and registrations throughout the duration of the event taking place June 27 to July 4, 2026 at various venues across Valencia. The event will feature 37 different sports, cultural events, and Pride celebrations, with several disciplines designed to be accessible to athletes with disabilities. The *Gay Games Village*, located within the *City of Arts and Sciences*, is the central hub for participants, offering a space for social gatherings, cultural events, and community building.



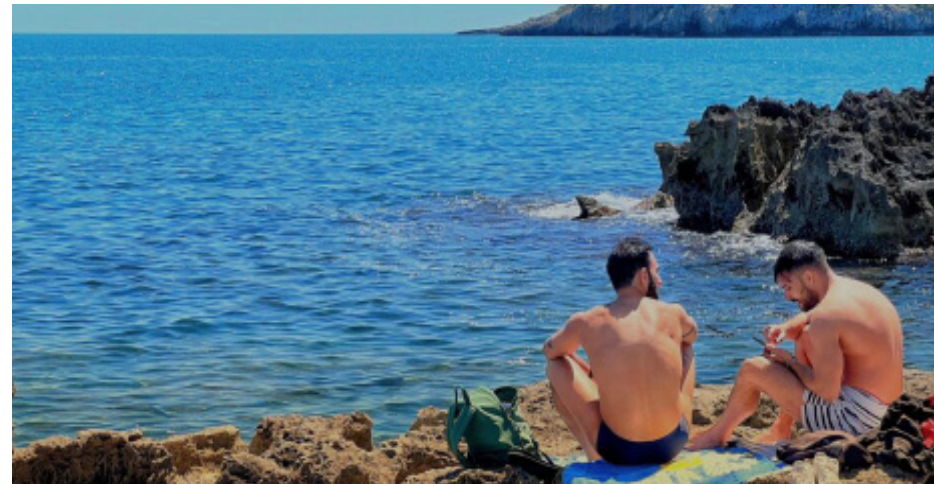
authentic Italian home cooking, which has gained itself worldwide recognition.

With over 800 km of coastline on both the Ionian and Adriatic Seas, there's never a beach too far away, while inland offers a plethora of ancient olive trees and sumptuous vineyards, along with stone churches, medieval castles, Baroque cathedrals, and Roman amphitheatres. Puglia also has 3 UNESCO sites - *Castel del Monte*, the mysterious fortress of Emperor Frederick II, near Andria, along with the *Trulli of Alberobello*, comprised of magical dry stone buildings, and finally, the *Sanctuary of St. Michael the Archangel* in Monte Sant'Angelo, a medieval masterpiece of art and international pilgrimage.

Gallipoli has been voted the country's top gay summer destination in several polls. The region offers gay-friendly beaches like *Punta della Suina*, along with gay-friendly accommodation options. In addition, **Ostuni** has also become a popular destination for gay visitors, partly due to its proximity to the gay beach, *Torre Guaceto*. Other noted gay-friendly destinations include, **San Cataldo**, which has a beach with a nudist area where all are welcome, as well as, **Polignano a Mare**, a small coastal town known for its stunning cliffs and swimming spots.

Bari, the capital of Puglia, is a city rich in history and culture, located on the Adriatic coast, where traditions and intense flavours flourish in their most genuine expression. Its old town, known as *Bari Vecchia*, is a maze of narrow medieval streets, featuring monuments such as the *Basilica of Saint Nicholas* and the *Norman-Swabian Castle*. Bari also boasts lively squares like *Piazza del Ferrarese* and *Piazza Mercantile*. There's also an accessible waterfront with city beaches. The city makes for a great starting point for exploring the lesser-known areas of the region.

Giovinazzo is an ancient seaside village embellished with Romanesque architecture and historic buildings. This is an easy day excursion, and while there you can book a privately owned *Gozzo* fishing vessel to get a first-hand experience



of the sea. **Margherita di Savoia** is a small town located halfway between the Adriatic coast, and is home to the sea of salt crystals of the **Saline**, which are among the largest in Europe. The salt flats have been a nature reserve since 1977, and it has become a natural habitat for flamingos, herons, and hawks, making it a paradise for birdwatchers. Nearby, the *Terme di Margherita* resort and spa is known for its healing waters rich in bromide and sodium.

In *Vieste*, it's highly recommended to book one of the many Turkish yachts, such as *Trabucco da Mimi*, for a half-day excursion along the Adriatic coast with an opportunity for swimming, along with a full lunch served onboard. **Peschici** is also another ancient village perched on the sea that is worth stopping for, as is the small town of **Rodi Garganico**, known for its expansive marina and compact historic centre. It's also where *Oasi Agrumaria* is located, a land area spanning about 1,000 hectares with the only citrus grove along the entire Adriatic coast. Here you'll find the production of Duretta del Gargano oranges, Bionda del Gargano oranges, and Femminello lemons.

Nearby is Italy's largest nature reserve, *Gargano National Park*, home to a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, as well as the coastal lakes of *Lesina* and *Varano*, where a kayak can be rented. Finally, **Trani** is considered the jewel of the Adriatic coast, with

its stunning Cathedral by the sea, known as the Queen of Apulian Romanesque architecture. Along your journeys, be sure to try local hand-made specialities like orecchiette, burrata, and of course the many fine local wines.

More Information

[Puglia Tourism](#) • [Italy Tourism](#) • [Italy Gay Travels](#)

Bari Pride happens toward the end of June, and the Shiooko Festival is an inclusive LGBTQ+ festival in Southern Italy held in September that aims to empower trans and non-binary individuals.

Accommodations

[Hotel HI Bari](#) • [Gattarella Resort Bari](#) [Hotel Parco dei Principi Bari](#)

Queer Events

Pride Valencia happens the last week of June, with both the *Snerfalla Circuit Festival* and *Mad Bear Valencia* both being held in March. As well, check out local promoter, *Churros Con Chocolate*, who frequently puts on events throughout the city.

More Information



[Valencia Tourism](#) • [Gay Games Valencia](#)

Puglia / Apulia

Puglia is a popular Italian destination known for its vibrant lifestyle scene and beautiful beaches. Located in the Southeastern tip of the Mediterranean, Puglia is the positioned within the heel of Italy's boot, dramatically combining fairytale farmhouses, Baroque architecture, and beautiful sandy shorelines. The region is a treasure trove of art, history and nature, and the cuisine is a combination of top-quality local produce and

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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- 8) One Life to Live

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by Sean Ban Beaton

Hot Artist



Have you ever felt that your sense of value was tied to your ability to please others - to impress, to mitigate discomfort, and anticipate others' needs, while swallowing your own? You're not alone.

Author and feminist trailblazer Beatriz Victoria Albina (NP, MPH, SEP) has been helping people return to their authentic selves with her recently released mental health & wellness bestseller, *End Emotional Outsourcing™: Your Guide to Overcoming Codependent, Perfectionist and People-Pleasing Habits*.

She coined the term 'Emotional Outsourcing' to describe the system of codependency that people socialized as women often develop around external validation - a concept not only supported by her extensive training, but through her own lived experience navigating through it, which she generously shares throughout the book. "I learned very early that being useful was safer than being real", she recalls. "I didn't hate disappointing people because I was kind. I hated disappointing people because I didn't have a sturdy sense of self that existed outside of their good opinion."

Frustration with the limited resources available on the topic drove her to begin writing her own book. In hindsight, she says that putting her journey down on paper made her life's arc feel

'coherent', but notes that the process of living it was 'messy and ungraceful'. "A lot of trial and error. Boundaries that came out stressed and shaky. Apologies I didn't actually need to give. Practicing saying 'no' like a baby deer trying to stand up. Discovering that most things did not, in fact, combust when I stopped over functioning."

She admits that witnessing those still in the depths of perfectionist and people-pleasing behaviour now evokes a strong sense of compassion. "I can see the wiring, the compensation strategies, the bids for safety, the self-abandonment offerings disguised as generosity. But it doesn't make me judge people. It makes me ache tenderly for the brilliant, survivalist parts of them that never got thanked, only exploited."

It can be a hard cycle to break, but Albina assures us that we are not 'broken', and that this work isn't about 'fixing' ourselves, "It's about locating yourself again after a lifetime of disappearing in the direction of other people's needs."

Something that sets the book apart is its somatic approach to healing - rather than focusing solely on the mind, she helps us recognize how cues from our nervous system can be used to rewire our behaviours. Her ability to break down the complex neurobiological science at play while extracting relatable lessons and actionable solutions makes for a very practical resource. Her words come from the heart, and it's reassuring to be led through such personal work by a politically conscious queer narrator who is so passionate about elevating others.

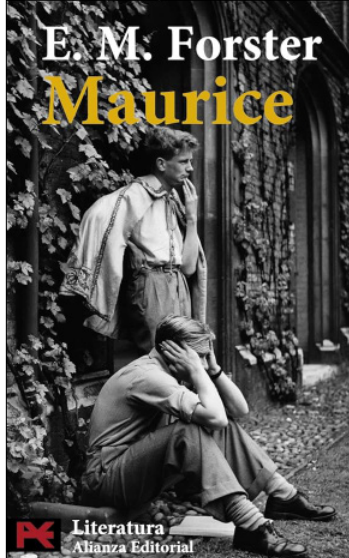
"I know this work is possible for other people, not in theory, but in the very real, very unglamorous, very daily practice of it." •

For more about Beatriz Victoria Albina, her coaching workshops, and The Feminist Wellness Podcast, head to www.beatrizalbina.com



E. M. Forster Maurice

When we think of Queer authors from Europe, Oscar Wilde comes quickly to mind.



Wilde was notorious for his homosexuality, particularly due to his gross indecency conviction in 1895. However, there are a number of other, prominent Queer fiction writers who bear notice.

Chronologically, a good starting place would be French author, George Sand (1804-1876). Although she had many relationships with men, was known to wear male attire, having obtained a “transvestite pass”, in 1880, which allowed her to do so legally. And, although there is no proof of sexual activity in her relationship with actress Marie Dorval, they were said to be “very close”, and she was publicly condemned as “that damned lesbian”.

In the same era as Sand, was Russian, Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852). While not overtly queer, the intense descriptions of male physicality and relationships, particularly in works like “Dead Souls”, suggest queer undertones. Credit must also be paid to Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936), for his ground-breaking, though controversial novel centring on a pederast, and the teenage boy enamoured of him.

Moving along, we discover the French Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), and Russian Dostoevsky (1821-1881). Although Flaubert was not noted as Queer, he wrote to a friend of his liaisons with male prostitutes in Lebanon and Egypt, while Dostoevsky, in novels like, “The Eternal Husband”, explored complex male relationships and homoerotic tensions.

Next, consider Frenchman, Emile Zola (1840-1902), who “experimented” with same-sex activities,

by Sherry Sylvain

Fiction

despite long-term heterosexual relationships, and fathering two children. He is also noted for his open discussions of same-sex attraction in some of his works.

In the later half of the nineteenth century, we can consider three prominent lesbian authors. First, Russian Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal (1866-1907), whose “Thirty-three Abominations” was one of the first to openly discuss lesbianism. Then, French writer, Colette (1873-1954), best known for “Gigi”, who, though twice married to men, was known to have many notable affairs with women. Finally, British author Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943), whose “The Well of Loneliness” was a groundbreaking work in lesbian literature, was known to consistently present in male attire.

We now move to some authors who came to prominence in the beginning of the twentieth century. E.M. Forster’s (1879-1970) 1914 “Maurice”, not published until 1971, was a tale of homosexual love contemporary to its writing. Forster was also nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in each of twenty-two different years.

And contemporary to Forster was noted member of The Bloomsbury Group, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), whose exceptional work “Orlando” is a pioneering exploration of gender and sexuality.

To close out this very brief, and far from extensive exploration of classic Queer fiction authors, we cannot forget Englishman Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986), who moved to the U.S.A. in 1939, just two years after writing his 1937 novella, “Sally Bowles”, spawned the well-known musical, “Cabaret”. Isherwood was notorious for his two significant relationships with significantly younger men, though the 30-year age gap with Don Bachardy did not stop them from staying together over 30 years, until Isherwood’s death.

Hopefully this short list through two centuries inspires you to read a few Queer classics, this century. •



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by Sherry Sylvain

Community Cornerstone



The Winding Down of ACT

2023 marked 40 years since the discovery and naming of HIV/AIDS. ACT was formed by a small group of community activists during the summer of 1983 as the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT). AIDS

had first entered public consciousness two years earlier when a “rare cancer” was found in 41 gay men in New York and San Francisco. The first Canadian case was reported nine months later, in March, 1982. Little was known of the disease, Fear, hysteria, and stigma surrounded it. A diagnosis of HIV/AIDS was a death sentence, with the average life expectancy being just nine months. That was nine lonely months as many relatives and friends turned their backs – as well as members of the medical profession.

On September 12, 2025, ACT announced that, after more than 40 years of dedicated service, the organization will begin the process of winding down by ACT’s year-end of March 31, 2026. This bittersweet yet difficult decision comes after years of financial challenges, declining service user numbers, and significant changes in both the HIV landscape and the broader health care system.

“ACT is extremely proud of the contribution it has made in the fight against HIV and AIDS,” said Ryan Lisk, Executive Director. “For more than four decades, we have been honoured to stand alongside thousands of people living with and affected by HIV, providing support, education,

advocacy, and care. This decision was not made lightly; but, it is the best course forward to ensure that our staff are supported, and our service users continue to receive the resources they need through other organizations. ACT began with the hope that at some point in the future it wouldn’t be needed anymore, which is why its bittersweet, and we are grateful to our community partners who are able to continue to serve the needs of people living with and at risk of HIV.”

Like many HIV service organizations, and charities, ACT has faced a combination of government funding challenges and steadily declining philanthropic support, especially since COVID. In 2003, ACT raised \$3.6 million through donations and fundraising; in 2025, projected philanthropy revenue is less than \$300,000. With rising costs and less revenue, ACT’s current structure is no longer financially sustainable.

Few members of the 2SLGBTQ community, who gained adulthood in the 80s and 90s, can claim immunity to the grief and loss of too many friends and chosen family. For too many of us, hospital and hospice visits, funerals, memorials, and celebrations of life became a regular occurrence in our lives. It is a wonderful thing for our community to discover our HIV/AIDS survivors can look forward to greater and ongoing survival after the devastation we witnessed and endured over the past 4 decades. The disease is not gone – it has just become manageable and survivable. Education and awareness still matter. Safe practices still matter. And, support and remembrance still matter. Sadly, it is likely that all of these things will always matter. •

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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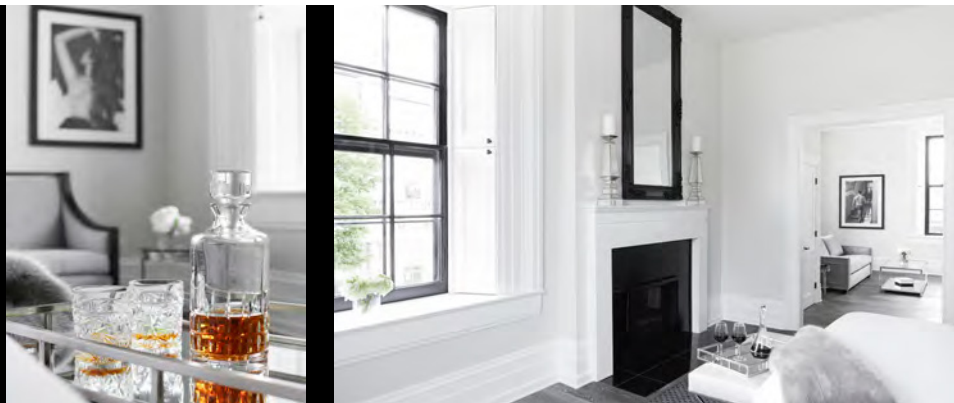


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WINTER IN THE CITY

by Sherry Sylvain

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Sundays • from 6PM

Hilarious host Georgie Girl welcomes a selection of guest performers every Sunday evening serving up your favourite hits of stage and screen, and more.

Woody's, 467 Church St., Toronto

<http://woodystoronto.com>

Looking For Local, Queer Fun Outside The Village?

Forte's Annual Holiday Concert

December 20 • 7:30PM

Forte's annual holiday concert is an event not to be missed. Ticket and programme details can be found through their website, listed below.

Trinity-St. Paul's United Church Centre, 427 Bloor St. W., TO
<https://fortechorus.com>

Kali's Boxing Day Special

December 26 • 9PM

It's the post-Christmas party you actually want to go to.

Hosted by Kali, the Holidays are still going, so is Club 717.

Club 717, 717 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa

<https://www.club717.com>



Spiritual Circle

December 28 • 2PM to 4PM

The last Sunday of each month, In partnership with Durham Alliance Outreach, Pride Durham, and Club 717. Hosted by Glenn. A monthly spiritual circle where all are welcome to explore faith in an inclusive environment.

Club 717, 717 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa

<https://www.club717.com>

Sunday Gayme Brew

February 8 • 3PM to 6PM

This is an opportunity to meet up for some LGBTQ2IA-flavoured gaming and socializing—allies also welcome. Come for the gaming, socializing, not to mention the draft and grub! Be sure to invite friends and such, too.

Steadfast Brewing Co., 234 Lansdowne Ave., Toronto

<https://www.torontogaymers.com>

War On The Catwalk

March 6 • 8PM

Get ready for your favorite queens performing live on stage. We've got Jewels Sparkles, Lexi, Lydia B. Kollins, Bosco, Suzie Toot and Daya Betty. Hosted by Alyssa Edwards.

Elgin and Wintergarden Theatre, 189 Yonge St., Toronto

<https://www.ticketmaster.ca>



Looking For Fun With The Queer-Adjacent Crowd?

Choir! Choir! Choir! - "Un-silent Night" - Holiday Sing-along

December 20 • 2PM and 8PM

Sing along with an unforgettable mix of holiday classics and seasonal pop gems. Grab your friends and family, and get ready to feel the glow of togetherness at a fully interactive holiday sing-along show like no other.

Massey Hall, 178 Victoria St., Toronto

<https://masseyhall.mhrth.com/tickets/choir-choir-choir>

The Bazaar of the Bizarre: Frostbite

December 20 • 11AM to 7PM

The Bazaar of the Bizarre: FROSTBITE, not your typical holiday market. Shop an eclectic blend of unique, weird, bizarre, and fabulous artisans and crafters. Free admission

The Parkdale Hall, 1605 Queen St. W., Toronto

<https://www.instagram.com/thebazaarofthebizarre>



Broadway - The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year... Maybe

December 21 • 2PM

Four of Canada's finest musical theatre, jazz, and cabaret artists doing the music of Broadway - and the Holidays - their way, and delighting audiences in the process.

Meadowdale Theatre, 6315 Montevideo Rd., Mississauga

<https://www.ticketmaster.ca>

Rent in Concert

February 23; 8:00 p.m.

An ensemble of stellar vocalists and instrumentalists come together to share the iconic music of RENT like never before. Set in the East Village of New York City, Rent is about falling in love, finding your voice, and living for today.

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

<https://roythomsonhall.mhrth.com/tickets/rent-in-concert>



How About Hanging Out With TheStr8 peoples?

VOCES8

December 21 • 3PM

VOCES8 performs an extensive repertoire both in its a cappella concerts and in collaborations with leading musicians, orchestras, conductors, and soloists.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto

<https://www.rcmusic.com>

Sohrab Pakzad

January 16 • 8PM

Sohrab Pakzad is one of the most renowned and beloved figures in Iranian pop music. This tour promises to bring a new wave of energy, excitement, and love for Iranian music to audiences around the world.

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto

<https://www.ticketmaster.ca>

The Fellowship of the Ring - In Concert

January 23 • 7:30PM

Join the FILMharmonic Orchestra and Choir for a thrilling journey back to Middle-earth and experience Academy Award-winning Composer Howard Shore's epic score performed live to the motion picture in HD.

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto

<https://www.ticketmaster.ca>

Blue Rodeo "Lost Together" 40th Anniversary Tour

January 23 and 24 • 8PM

Blue Rodeo's "Lost Together - The 40th Anniversary Tour" is a 2025-2026 Canadian tour celebrating four decades of music, with dates scheduled across Canada through early 2026.

Massey Hall, 178 Victoria St., Toronto

<https://www.ticketmaster.ca>



Toronto Golf and Travel Show

January 30 to February 1

Tee off at the Toronto Golf & Travel Show, with a number of exhibitors featuring golf equipment, golf courses, all-inclusive golf vacations and travel options, top manufactures on the demo range and onsite lessons.

International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

<https://www.torontogolfshow.com/tickets>

Searching For Goya

January 31 • 8PM

Choreographed by Bessie Award-winning principal dancer Soledad Barrio and artistic director Martín Santangelo, the extraordinary paintings of Francisco de Goya are brought to life through the language of flamenco dance, vocals, guitar.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto

<https://www.rcmusic.com>

The Motorcycle and Powersport Show

February 20 to 22

Canada's premier powersport event is back and set to deliver plenty of excitement, fun, information, and new discoveries for riders of all styles, ages, and experience levels.

Enercare Centre, 100 Princes' Blvd., Toronto

<https://motocanada.com/shows/toronto>

Classic Albums Live: Supertramp, Breakfast In America

March 6 • 8PM

Experience rock's greatest albums like never before with Classic Albums Live! Featuring a powerhouse lineup of A-list musicians from across the country, these unforgettable classics are brought to life exactly as you remember them — note for note, cut for cut.

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

<https://roythomsonhall.mhrth.com/tickets/cal-supertramp-breakfast-in-america>

What About A Road Trip?

A Very Charlie Brown Concert

December 21 • 2:00PM

Celebrate the season with Vince Guaraldi's beloved soundtrack of the 1965 Emmy Award-winning film. This heartwarming performance features music from the album performed by a jazz trio accompanied by a children's choir.

River Run Centre, 35 Woolwich St., Guelph

<https://riverrun.ca/whats-on/a-very-charlie-brown-concert25>



Jully Black

February 20 • 7:30PM

A platinum-selling recording artist, Jully has achieved multiple Top 10 hits across pop, R&B, and dance charts, and has been honoured with Juno and Gemini Awards, as well as induction into Canada's Walk of Fame.

Maxwell's Concerts and Events, 35 University Ave. E., Waterloo

<https://ticketscene.ca/events/56882>

Reelout Queer Film Festival

January 29 to February 7

Strap on your moon boots the Festival is "exploring space", holding space for Queer visionaries past and present, looking at Queer spaces and disabilities, and featuring a 4D screening of, "The Eyes of Laura Mars" (1978).

The Screening Room, 120 Princess Street, Kingston

<https://reelout2026.eventive.org/schedule>

Bravo Niagara: Stanley Clarke N-4Ever

March 14 • 7:30PM

Legendary 4x GRAMMY-winning bassist and NEA Jazz Master Stanley Clarke makes a rare Canadian appearance with his newest band 4EVER. Originally formed out of a desire to pay tribute to Clarke's longtime friend and collaborator Chick Corea, 4EVER has quickly become a fusion force all its own.

Central Niagara Community Church, 680 York Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake

<https://www.bravoniagara.org/stanley-clarke>



Chris de Burgh 50lo

March 14 • 7:30PM

This show celebrates the 50th career anniversary of legendary singer/songwriter Chris de Burgh, and will be offering his fans a unique solo performance of all his hits, including "Spanish Train", "Don't Pay the Ferryman", "A Spaceman Came Travelling", "Patricia" and "Lady in Red".

FirstOntario Concert Hall, 10 McNab St. S., Hamilton

<https://www.ticketmaster.ca>



Sloan

March 20 • 7:30PM

Get ready for an unforgettable evening with one of Canada's most beloved rock bands delivering their signature blend of power-pop, catchy hooks, and over 30 years of musical legacy.

Maxwell's Concerts and Events, 35 University Ave. E., Waterloo

<https://ticketscene.ca/events/56283>

Events Editor, 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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From The Heart



As North Americans, we often assume that all of “Europe” is an LGBTQ+ inclusive, all-welcoming society. The reality is quite different. The European continent includes 44 to 50 countries/states, depending on the source. Of those, only 27 are members of the European Union, which enforces “enlightened” laws and norms supporting LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations.

At the extreme anti-LGBTQ+ spectrum, there’s Russia, accounting for 40% of Europe’s total land mass and 15% of Europe’s total population. Although being LGBTQ+ isn’t illegal there, many aspects of living queer are.

While same-sex sexual activity is legal, LGBTQ+ people in Russia face severe legal and social restrictions, including no constitutional protections against discrimination, a ban on same-sex marriage, and the outlawing of LGBTQ+ activism by the Supreme Court. Russia has also passed laws restricting the “promotion” of LGBTQ+ identities, and there are significant concerns about violence, discrimination, and a crackdown on activism and public expression.

At the other end of the spectrum, Malta has consistently been the frontrunner in supporting LGBTQ+ rights for more than ten years. In nearly every aspect of support for queer individuals

and organizations, Malta ranks among the top European countries, both legally and socially. Same-sex marriage has been legal in Malta since September 1, 2017. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression has been banned nationwide since 2004. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people have been allowed to serve openly in the military since 2002. Transgender and intersex rights in Malta are of the highest standard in the world under the Gender Identity, Gender Expression And Sex Characteristics Act, which permits transgender people to change their legal gender without medical interventions and bans surgeries on intersex infants.

To explore LGBTQ+ attitudes across Europe, be sure to check out RAINBOWMAP at <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org> for a detailed analysis of the legal and social aspects of every country. •

Mychol Scully was Senior Art Director for INspired Media publications and The Pink Pages Directory. Mychol is available for thoughtful conversation or lascivious teasing any time at mychol@mychol.com



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Winter Horoscopes

Winter invites us inward — toward rest, reflection, and the quietness that wraps around us when the world slows down. For us queers especially, this season can hold both tenderness and resilience: chosen family gathered close, boundaries reinforced, and identities affirmed in the stillness. These winter horoscopes are less about prediction and more about intention — a gentle check-in as the year closes and a new one begins. Do this: take what resonates, leave what doesn't, and just move through the season in a way that feels warm, grounded, and true to you.

Libra (Sept 23 – Oct 22)

Balance returns when you choose what feels true. This season supports honest connections and cleaner boundaries as the year turns.

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

Depth suits you now. Let endings be intentional, intimacy be real, and transformation feel grounding instead of dramatic.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

The adventure shifts inward. Dream, plan, and realign — the freedom you crave is already forming beneath the surface. Inspiration is everywhere.

Capricorn (Dec 22 – Jan 19)

You've carried a lot. Winter asks you to acknowledge your growth and redefine success to include joy, rest, and love.

Aquarius (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

Your perspective becomes clearer in the quiet. Follow the ideas that won't leave you alone — they're pointing toward what's next.

Pisces (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

The year closes with intuition turned up. Trust what's emerging, honour your feelings, and step into the new year gently but boldly.

Aries (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

Winter sharpens your instincts. Slow the rush just enough to aim with intention — what you choose now sets the tone for your year ahead.

Taurus (Apr 20 – May 20)

This season invites comfort with meaning. Create warmth around you, protect your energy, and let pleasure be restorative, not indulgent.

Gemini (May 21 – Jun 20)

Conversations sparkle in the quiet months. Reach out, reconnect, and let unexpected exchanges guide you into the new year.

Cancer (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

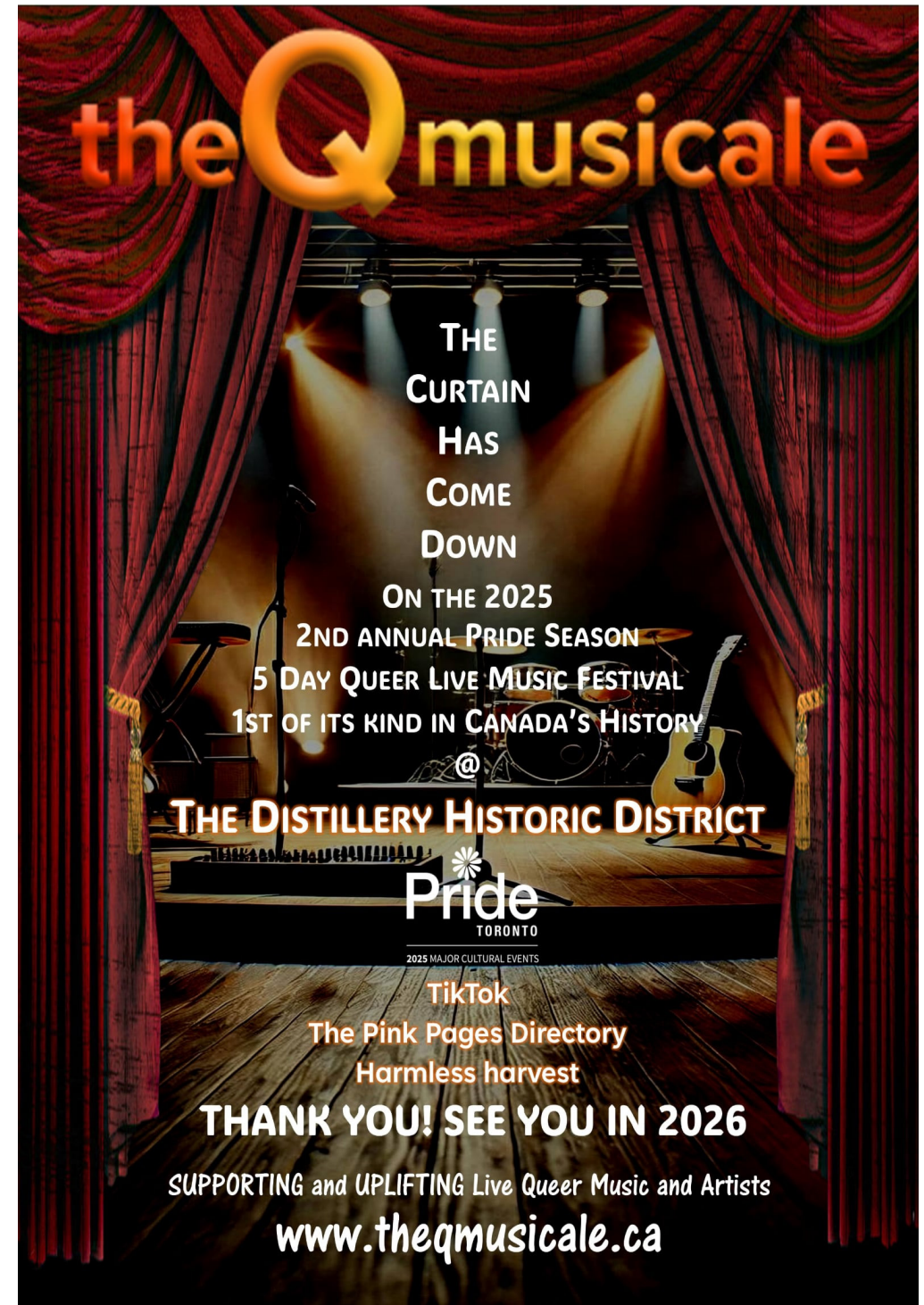
Home becomes a powerful anchor. Nurture chosen family, honour your emotions, and trust that softness is strength right now.

Leo (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

You don't need the spotlight to glow. Winter reminds you that rest, intimacy, and authenticity are part of your magic.

Virgo (Aug 23 – Sept 22)

Release the need to fix everything before the year ends. Reflection brings clarity — your next chapter doesn't need perfection to begin.



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