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Gay and lesbian seasonal • Winter 2008



Manny Mochado
tells us It's a Small Space After All

Daniela Newman
drops by THE Palais Royale

Jeff Harrison
finds The Heart of Mexico
and

Miss Conception
looks back at Drag Families

**We also welcome Judith Crane our new *from the heart* columnist
and Ricky Boudreau our new tour guide to *things to do this winter*.**

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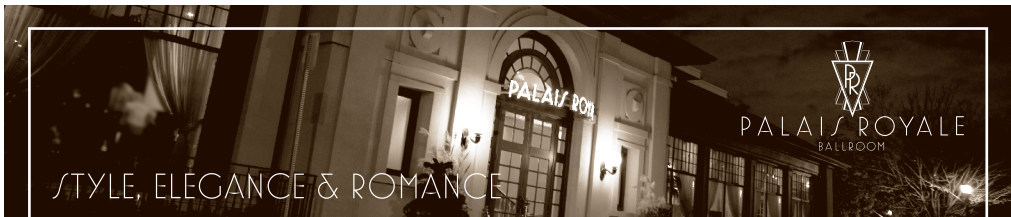
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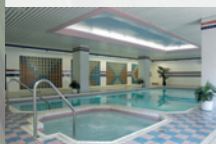
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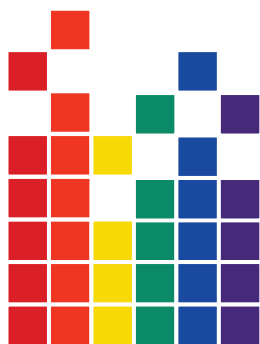
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From the Publisher



Four year old Jamal is celebrating his first Christmas with his two dads Chris and Dan. The tree is beautiful and underneath there are many gifts. Jamal's told there will be snow and he has never seen snow; he's

never celebrated Christmas. Across town four friends are celebrating their friendship and a non denominational holiday with an annual potluck dinner. Everything is perfect. The scent of Kibbe and Tandori mingle with the turkey fresh from the oven. At Pearson the flights are delayed. Carol is flying to Saskatoon to meet Chan's family for the first time. She's nervous yet looking forward to celebrating with her new chosen family.

What makes the holidays special and who do you spend the holidays with? That's yours to decide. Celebrate what makes you feel good. Be with those you love and make your own traditions. For me personally this happens to be one of my favourite times of the year.

So it's been a year since we re-launched this winter/holiday seasonal publication after we became the publishers of The Pink Pages Directory. It's been two issues since we expanded the brand into what is now called Pink Play Mags (winetrplay!, springplay!, summerplay!, and autumnplay!) and decided to go quarterly. Your encouragement helped in our decision to grow. Thank you for your great reception to our publications.

I will not take a lot of your time with a long letter; I have a lot of shopping still to catch up on (actually I slacked off and left writing this piece to the last moment and now my schedule is overloaded) but I would like to take a moment to thank the team who work so hard on making these publications stand out, the readers and the wonderful people in the community who tell us how much they love what we are doing, and of course our fantastic advertisers who's support make producing those magazines possible.

Happy Holidays and a safe and warm winter to everyone...

Antoine Elhashem



winterplay!

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Free • Winter 2008

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Cover: A Family with a TWIST!



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From the Editor



A little over a month ago, two lesbian moms were attacked while picking their son up from school. At an elementary school. Right in front of their

son. By another parent, who punched the one of the mothers in the face. Twice. In front of his own child and in front of all the other children being picked up from school.

This story filled me with such rage and at the same time a profound sadness. I'm not a parent myself, but enough of my friends have kids now whose lives I'm involved with, that I've come to believe the greatest things you can teach your child are love, compassion and respect. How tragic then, that this unfortunate excuse for a father saw fit to teach his child, and all the other impressionable children around him, anger, hate and violence.

A lot of us growing up gay were faced with daily schoolyard bullying. That two grown adults in the middle of a schoolyard full of children should face those ghosts from the past—from another parent no less—is completely unacceptable. Canada is renowned for being an open and accepting country and this type of behaviour goes against everything we stand for.

This is why family, especially those we have created for ourselves, is so vitally important for us. Sure, families don't always get along, but when we are still faced with the small-minded Neanderthals, too afraid to act civilized in today's modern thinking world, they're the only defense we have.

They say you can't pick your family, yet a lot of queer people have been faced with moving on from their toxic biological kin. Fortunately they have been blessed by creating their own circle of support within the community. Scott talks to three organizations that specialize in that kind of outreach, something I think is an amazing advantage we have and something I'm very proud of.

We're adding to our own family as well this issue: Manny is moving on from doing our listings and headlining our newest column, "Urban Spaces," where he'll tackle solving the design challenges of living in today's often cramped dwellings. Ricky Boudreau is our new man on the scene as he takes over "In the City" and I'm very thrilled to welcome an old friend, Judith Crane, as she speaks to us "From the Heart."

So cozy up with your favourite beverage to warm your insides and take a moment out to appreciate the family you have. They may drive you crazy at times, but when it comes right down to it, these are the people who love and support you no matter what. That's a really wonderful feeling, isn't it?

Happy Holidays!

Jeff Harrison

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It's a small space After All

by Manny Machado

We all have our own take on the holidays; those of us living downtown have the added challenge of celebrating in style and comfort amidst our finite dwellings.

As an Urban Space Stylist living in a 575 sq. ft two- storey loft with my partner and 2 cats, I'm all too familiar with the ups and downs of living in a condo and can assure you that with some resourceful imagination anyone can learn to accept and love their own modest living quarters. The determining factors when creating your own personal space is that is must benefit your lifestyle, be esthetically pleasing and yet remain functional. By following some simple design guidelines that you can apply all year round, as well as during the holiday season, you can create just about any style or theme in virtually any room.

Take advantage of all your spatial opportunities like high ceilings, big windows, open concept living areas, stairs and any architectural features that are prominent or unique within your home. Choose modular and adaptable furnishings and accessories that can be tailored to suit your needs and your space as you grow and change.

During the holiday season display items that have meaning to you, while creating an

inviting home for you and your friends that is in proportion to the amount of elbowroom you have. Try to keep your choices simple, yet still satisfying for your decorating diva.

The Christmas tree stands alone for any holiday aficionado as the one element that must be included. However, for us small space dwellers the problem arises when you don't have room on the floor for a tree that is as big as your holiday spirit. Look not to the floor for answers, but rather look up and around you to see what other available areas you have, specifically ceiling and walls. Hanging Christmas trees upside down is not a new concept, it actually stems all the way back to the 12th Century Europeans (who incidentally also lived in tiny dwellings) and in recent years has become a welcomed addition to the holiday décor of savvy urbanites not wanting to sacrifice the beauty of a full size Christmas tree in lieu of their current living situations.

The application is really simple—the artificial tree (lighter than a real tree) is either mounted to an existing light fixture bracket, anchored to the ceiling or upside down on a stand. There's more than one option depending on the retailer or supplier you source and you can have anything from a pre-lit full Douglas Fir, to a more simple

twiggy Pine for your home. The hanging options require you to have a light mounting bracket in the area you choose to dangle your tree, something any "D.I.Y'er" has undoubtedly already tackled. If not, any professional handyman can assist you in installing the proper hardware to suspend the tree. When mounting the tree to a pre-existing light fixture, all you have to do is flip the light switch to turn on the Xmas tree lights and voila, instant glamour!

The easier option is the floor mount upside down tree, which condenses the majority of the tree denseness to the upper half of the tree, freeing up your immediate floor space; most models have a 24" to 30" tree stem allowing you to clear the height of most sofas, tables and chairs. Displaying your ornaments on these unique trees is also a delight as they will be perceived differently, hanging away from the base of the tree allowing them to be seen clearly rather than nestled amidst the branches.

Tinsel and other light reflecting decorations will look marvelous as they twinkle in the light of the upside down tree. For those wanting to take things one step further and create an unforgettable holiday treat friends and family will be talking about, and emulating

for years to come- create your very own suspended tree. You will need some flexible wire, fishing line and garland.

Make different size circles with the wire then wrap the flexible garland around the circles, allow 5" intervals between your

circles, to ensure they are evenly spaced and as horizontal

as you can make them. Once you have your structure completed, you can make it as lush or sparse as you desire. Tie your fishing line to several points on the base or top of the tree (depending on whether you want it upside down or right side up) and affix the wire to a hook in the ceiling. The final step is to hang your favorite holiday ornaments. Garland is now available in a variety of species, everything from

Douglas fir to Alaskan or Canadian Pine, with or without pinecones, so check online for your favorite sources and prices.

Your walls can also be a great venue to display your holiday



After



Before



Before

greetings. Again, garlands and tinsel are flexible enough to arrange into your favorite iconic holiday images, like trees, ornaments, candy canes and even ole Saint Nick himself. To add a nice designer touch to the look, hang repetitive images along one wall—several gorgeous large wreaths hung in a continuous line, makes a dramatic statement in any room. Want to try something truly innovative? Large printed vinyl decals and wallpapers are available in a variety of styles and images with everything from graphic or whimsical Christmas trees, to realistic visual prints displaying stock images of the season, or even your very own personal memories blown up to life size proportions. These vinyl decals can be as temporary as you'd like them to be, coming off easily when the season is over; wallpapered images, however, require a little more effort to put up, like a basic wallpaper adhesive, but come down quite easily with a steam iron to be re-hung next season.

When choosing an image, pick something that inspires your holiday spirit, like a fantastic oversized Christmas tree, or perhaps a landscape



After

featuring a winter wonderland or images portraying the holiday you've always dreamed about!

Wood and paper trees, in 3 dimensional forms or flat cut-outs are a fantastic blend of urban style and celebratory holiday icons that will compliment any modern décor. Their whimsical forms are a breath of fresh air in the sometimes too serious and angular lines of some contemporary spaces. Design lovers will appreciate their ingenuity, some even calling it avant-garde; meanwhile we'll just call it fun! Add some mini LED lights to complete the look of your new holiday tree. Miss the fragrant aroma of a freshly chopped tree? Try burning seasonal candles or incense—most retailers merchandise woody scented oils or room sprays. If allergens are a concern, source from your favorite natural health retailer.

For the ultimate in eco-friendly holiday décor, cultivate your own tree. A potted spruce or



Storing your Holiday Decorations

A large variety of storing options exist. Everything from plastic bins to their more stylish counterparts covered in fabric or leather can be placed high on a shelf in virtually any room until you need to access them again.

Garment bags are great for decorations like wreaths, garlands and other wall décor. Use pant/skirt hangers with clips to hold your treasured holiday accessories; the trick is to not overstuff the garment bags so they'll disappear in the back of your closet until next year.

Vacuum seal bags are perfect for compressing the more flexible items like tinsel and plastic ornaments into manageable sizes. The standard convenience sized bags take up way less space and make it easier to stack into storage boxes

Manny's Sources and Retailers

Retail Tip:

My source for beautiful Christmas decorations is Canadian Tire. Their current collection is at par with some of the chic urban designer boutiques, at a quarter of the prices.

Gift Tip:

A vintage piece from the year the giftee was born would be an unexpected surprise. Atomic Design at 965 Queen St. West (www.atomicdesign.ca) has a collection of refurbished furniture that would fit into any design scheme.

Vinyl Decals

Subhuti Designs: www.subhutidesigns.com
Works on Whatever: worksonwhatever.com/fulltreekit.aspx
Dvider: store.dvider.com
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Corner trees: 7' Bavarian half tree:
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fir tree will survive indoors for 10 days, and then you can take it back outside post holidays and enjoy the tree all year long. You'll enjoy watching your tree grow from year to year and when it gets too big to be moved around, give back to Mother Nature and plant your old friend permanently in your favorite park or reserve and start over with a new adoptee. Kids will learn to appreciate the environment as they grow up with their own tree, especially if they are involved with the nurturing themselves.

A typical holiday conundrum for urban dwellers wanting to share a meal with their friends and families is where to sit everyone comfortably. The standard TV trays and buffet style Christmas dinners come to mind, however those are not the only options you have. Condo living means you must perceive your home as you intend to use it, and shape it to those means. Most lofts have a designated seating area that can be transformed into a unique dining area for larger groups. Products like convertible console/dining tables are excellent space savers that add extra counter surface when required and an extra dining area when the need arises. Console tables will seat 2-4 people, while their convertible counter-parts and those with insert able leaves can sit 6-8 people. Paired with a kitchen island or standard bar counter and you'll have room for a miniature crowd this season.

To go all out, create an unforgettable holiday dining experience, by transforming your modest seating area into your very own chic bistro. Set up multiple seating arrangements around your room, each laid out with gorgeous holiday themed linens and pretty centerpieces, mood lighting and intimate groups of 2 - 4 per table. (Don't forget that parents and grandparents may not enjoy floor seating as much as the younger generations).

Round tables are a better bet in tighter



spaces, as there are no angular corners to bump into and allow you to be more creative with your seating arrangements. Your standard bistro tables are typically 24" diameter and paired with folding chairs, your current sofas, benches and ottomans can easily be arranged about the room. Throw large inviting pillows around your coffee and end tables and you suddenly have a very welcoming room to indulge in digestion with good friends.

However you choose to spend your holidays, make the decision to do it in style. Lavish budget

or modest, the options available in the city make it easy to find the right décor to match your holiday spirit and take away your Bah-humbugs for the festive season.

Manny Machado, after a momentous year as the design chair for Fashion Cares 2008, is thrilled to join Pink Play Mags as the new design columnist. Being an Urban Space Stylist has afforded Manny the opportunity to work on many interiors both locally and abroad, transforming some of the smallest areas into home environments through unique perspectives and solutions that relate to the homeowners lifestyle. Write Manny at urbanspaces@pinkplaymags.com with your own design concerns and questions.



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When Family Fails



*An ever-increasing
array of services
is helping gay
and lesbian youth
redefine the family*

by Scott Dagostino

If there was ever one surefire phrase guaranteed to raise the hackles of gay men and lesbians over the last couple decades, it's "family values." No matter the ongoing campaign for same-sex marriage rights in the US (and its success in Canada) and despite the tens of thousands of children adopted by gay couples, right-wing rhetoric still treats "gay" and "family" as two diametrically opposed concepts. "Family values" became a stick to beat us with and, within that environment, many parents have proved unable (or unwilling) to reconcile their faith or politics with the reality of having a gay or lesbian child. Queer youth have grown up feeling estranged or, in the worst scenarios, cast out of their homes by people who have the gall to call them "anti-family."

"I was at the lowest point of my life," says 23-year-old Jared Lalach. Originally from Saskatoon, he came out to his parents but it went very badly. A friend in Toronto asked his own mother if Lalach could come and stay with them. "Of course I said yes," says Irene Miller, who was astonished by the situation: "His mother went ballistic and just wouldn't discuss it with him," she says. Miller was surprised because her own son had come out at 18 in 2000 and she just shrugged. "He was nervous about telling us," she says, "but it was a non-issue." Miller jokes that she and her husband had been to a gay pride march in San Francisco in 1978: "We were meant to have a gay son," she laughs. "She's an amazing woman," says the grateful Lalach, who's now lived with his "new

replacement family" for two years. "Coming from Saskatoon, I had no idea where to turn or where to go."

"We're very privileged to live in Toronto," says Leah Campbell, also 23. She came out at 16



Leah Campbell

thanks to a youth group she started attending with a friend at the 519 Community Centre.

"I met so many good friends there," she says, "People I spend holidays with and talk to every day. I would not be here if not for them." Like Lalach, Campbell's relationship with her family is strained but "for other reasons," she says, having no desire to come out to them at all. "I know their beliefs," she sighs, "There wouldn't be dialogue."

With the "chosen family" she's assembled by her side, Campbell eventually ran that 519 youth group and also volunteered with the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line, a toll-free peer-support phone line that was established in May 1994. "When I was on the phone line, I would talk to youth all over Ontario," she says, "They were in high school, still dependent on their parents financially." Though the Youth Line was a vital link between isolated queer youth and a larger community, Campbell could see the limitations of peer support. "The Youth Line is anonymous, the calls no longer than half an hour—it's not a

counseling service."

That's where Central Toronto Youth Services comes in, says 24-year-old Matthew Cutler, Community and Partnership Development Coordinator. "I was leading a queer advocacy group in my teens," he says, "My period of pretending to be straight was very short!" Cutler explains how CTYS created its first LGBT program in 1985: "Our program started as research and community development, predominantly. We wrote handbooks for other social service providers to serve queer youth and we went around and did training on how to work with queer and trans youth. We realized that there was a real need for counseling and then started to develop our own counseling programs."

Despite the confidence of being an advocate early on, Cutler's coming out was as difficult as most. "There was a bit of isolation and distance so it was within that period of awkwardness that I began to create my own traditions." He adapted well, he says, because, "I've always been someone who prefers the people I picked to be in my life over the people who just happen to be in my life by means of biology."

It's a philosophy that Jared Lalach has come around to after being hurt by his parents' homophobia. "I keep in touch with them," he says, "but it's definitely a huge elephant in the



Matthew Cutler

room. You always hear 'blood is thicker than water' but it can be diluted...I can go weeks without talking to my folks, just an email full of small talk. After a while, you just kind of give up and build your own family outside of the one you're blood-related to."

Campbell says that even well-meaning parents can harm their children if they're unwilling to discuss homosexuality: "If your family won't talk about what's going on—if you come out to them and they say, 'Don't mention this again'—you're not going to come to them for help, for instance, if you're getting bullied or beat up at school. You don't have a support system and I think that's more destabilizing."

As manager of Family Service Toronto's David Kelley Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (LGBTQ) Counseling Program, Laurie Chesley has seen this effect firsthand. "Growing up gay usually means developing some poor self-esteem. You feel bad about yourself because society's telling you you're bad and it's pretty hard not to take that in." Though FST primarily works with adults, Chesley knows from experience what a lack of support can do to queer youth: "The age cohort we see here are adults who were brought up during a period when coming out was more difficult. They may have experienced a lot more homophobia, even in big urban centers. There are, at least, some resources now, like the Youth Line or SOY. That's a significant shift from my age group where we were really hidden."

SOY stands for Supporting Our Youth, a project that originated from Central Toronto Youth Services in April 1998. Despite the success of their programs, 519 support groups and the Youth Line, CTYS counselors recognized that queer youth would still be unable to create such chosen families without more opportunities for socializing. "Our community is very bar-oriented," says Cutler, "We needed a grassroots

social organization for youth. Most of our staff are counselors and therapists; we're a therapeutic organization and our boundaries expect us to stop at a certain point."

Clare Nobbs is SOY's Program Coordinator (Community Programs) and explains that unlike the other counseling-based services, "Most of our work here is prevention. It's about building healthy relationships—with one's self, with others, between communities." The aim, she says, is to find someone in a situation like what Lalach went through and "jump in there... If a young person is 'couch-surfing' or in a home where there is abuse, it's going to escalate." SOY's goal, says Nobbs, is to connect youth around art, culture, sport and mentoring—"creating opportunities for young people to be more wholly themselves and find out what that is so that hopefully they can then negotiate those relationships in their lives that are tricky—parents, partners, friends—and manage to come out healthy and still whole. I can name people now who are out there in the community who are really thriving," she beams.

Campbell is impressed that, after her now-defunct 519 group, "There's no longer a youth group you can go to, there's a youth group for whatever you want to go to. Whether it's based on ethnic identity or religion or singing or 'Star Trek,' there's a group in the city that can combine your sexuality with your interests." She points to youth nights at nightclubs, notes the queer youth immigrant program at Culturelink and is particularly excited by the creative youth initiatives from the Inside Out film festival and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. "All these avenues of creative expression are ways for youth to connect and also to process—if you watch a lot of the films that come out of the creative video project, a lot of them are about their relationships with their families. It's a kind



of self-therapy almost, to have that outlet.”

It's important, says Campbell, because as exciting as these new developments are for gay and lesbian youth, “Things are still just as scary. The fact that there are so many services doesn't mean that kids still aren't beaten up in schools or shut down by their parents.” Nobbs says that even as an adult, she still deals with homophobia in her family. When she and her partner decided to have a child of their own, “My father said, ‘I think you're being really selfish—you know that any child with lesbians for mothers is going to have a really hard time.’” Nobbs was taken aback: “Would you tell a mixed-race couple that? Do you let the oppression guide the future of your life or do you resist the oppression?”

Campbell has her back: “Who says every family has to be a father, a mother, two kids and a dog? Personally, I can't honestly think of a family I know that fits that nuclear model.” According to the 2006 Census, of the 12.4 million households in Canada, only 3.9 million were comprised of couples with children and, of those, roughly a quarter of them were unmarried common-law families. Basically, the “traditional family” is merely one in five. “My kids have never been the only ones in their classes with queer parents,” says Nobbs, “and it's not a downtown school either.”

69-year-old Martien Coffeng is hardly



Clare Nobbs (© Bill Puszta 2005)

surprised. He works with what is arguably the most beloved gay service organization: PFLAG. “The climate in Toronto that we serve has changed dramatically,” he says, laughing that his job has gotten easier over the years. PFLAG Canada has more than 70 chapters and contacts across the country and Coffeng says, “Our primary purpose is to provide support to parents who are having difficulty with their child coming out. The majority of the cases resolve



with acceptance and often much quicker than the parents expect." Coffeng tends to speak about his own gay son but will turn to CTYS for research: "We often have dialogue with them and refer to them because we're not trained counselors. We're not trained anything!" he laughs. "We're just parents who love our kids."

In accepting her gay son and then taking in Jared Lalach, Irene Miller hadn't really noticed nor needed PFLAG. All she knew, she laughs, she learned from 'Queer as Folk': "It was the mom with the buttons, always going to rallies and handing out leaflets." Appalled by how Lalach had been treated by his family, however, she started reading up on the group and became a volunteer. "I wanted to help families who perhaps weren't handling it as well," she says.

"I think it's very sad," says Clare Nobbs, "when the people who talk about the importance of family are actually the ones destroying their own families through their so-called values. They espouse a value so much that they're rejecting the people in their own family, the queer kids." The services that have helped these young people form new families will continue to do so, even as they find that estranged families don't have to stay that way.

The pull of family values—true family values—are strong. Even the independent-minded Cutler

admits, "I've been going through the process lately of bringing my partner to family things...I didn't really care if they accepted me or not but it obviously mattered a great deal to him so I put in the effort." Cutler's family invited his partner along to a cottage weekend but, during a game, accidentally hit their guest in the face with a rubber ball...twice. "My father entered the room at the exact moment Andrew blurted out, 'What's with you Cutlers hitting me in the face with balls?' That moment broke the ice—there was laughter, there was awkwardness but it set the tone for the weekend and everything was fine."

It's exactly what Miller hopes for queer youth: "I have a son and a daughter and I want them both to be happy and, one day, God willing, to get married in my church! I want other families to tell people, 'My daughter's met a really nice girl,' and have them say, 'Oh, how nice!'" By that point, all the organizations we've built will be useless—but will we mind?

Scott Dagostino is a Toronto-based freelance writer who adores the city that Canada loves to hate. Scott is the new Editor-in-Chief of "the LOCAL BIZ magazine", a new community magazine for the Durham Region from the publishers of Pink Play Mags. Scott is the former managing editor of fab, he also writes for Xtra! and spent his youth working in three of Toronto's best bookstores. He rambles on at www.scottdagostino.com



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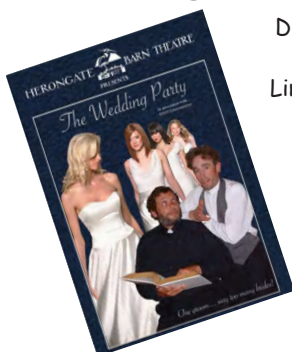
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Hot Artist: Hunter Valentine

by Jeff Harrison

Kiyomi McCloskey and Laura Petracca first met during a long debauchorous night at the Matador. "The first thing we talked about was music," the down-to-earth Petracca remembers.

"It was so rare to run into a female drummer," remembers McCloskey of Petracca. They immediately hit it off and traded numbers, then promptly lost them, as so often happens. But the artistic collaboration was meant to be because a few months later they stumbled upon one another again and immediately clicked. Thus was Hunter Valentine born, a band with a reckless sound ready to break hearts.

Adrienne Lloyd was a lucky last minute addition weeks before their sold out 2004 Pride show at the El Mocambo. "I'd heard that Kiyomi was a great singer through Parachute Club's Lorraine Segato, who I was working with at the time, and actually went looking for them." Classically trained on upright bass at the Royal Conservatory and Western University, Lloyd fell in love with the simple chord structure of rock at first strum.

With little more than two weeks rehearsal together, the girls took to the stage and after pulling

off a cover of Crimson and Clover that no one believed they could, discovered a chemistry that spelled success. Another gig at the NXNE music festival soon had managers approaching.

"When we were first contacted by Gordon Stairs we weren't really sure we needed any help," says Petracca. But the grind of holding down day jobs in addition to an increasing number of music gigs was starting to wear on them. So the three put their ambition to the test at an arts camp in Connecticut that summer and by the time they returned in the fall were ready to sign with True North Records. The Impatient Romantic, the band's first full length album was released in April 2007.

"Making a record kind of blows your mind," brightly admits Lloyd. "What you hope for in the studio is to be able to really catch those moments. I mean this performance is going down for all time and to feel part of that is pretty special."

"Adrienne and I only had 4 days to lay down bed tracks (drums and bass); you're dealing with a timeline, budget..." adds Petracca.

"We needed to strip our songs down and figure out exactly what we were doing, whether or not



From left to right: Adrienne Lloyd, Kiyomi McCloskey, Laura Petracca

we were going to totally commit to everything," continues Lloyd.

"Being in the studio is personal and you can really dig deep, it was a great chance to expand on our ideas," says McCloskey.

"I really felt I became a better musician," finishes Petracca. It's easy to see how effortlessly the three jam.

Petracca grew up listening to classic rock like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and The Who, admitting her mom was "one of those screaming girls Beatles fans;" whereas McCloskey's roots were originally a little more folkie, with Neil Young and Lucinda Williams, until she later moved into more aggressive punk.

"Our differing tastes in music are a huge part of what makes our sound, we're forced to blend our styles and that comes out when we play," says McCloskey. "Writing for each song is different. Before, I would write large chunks in my bedroom then bring them to rehearsal to give them that HV sound. Now more often I just bring ideas and we go from there."

"Kiyomi will come with an idea, a melody and then we Hunter Valentine it," adds Petracca. "Kiyomi handles lyrics and Adrienne is the bridge queen."

And yet the rocket ride to success hasn't seemed to faze them much at all. "We're really happy to be able to be working on our music full time, but we have a lot more we want to accomplish," says McCloskey. Even though their album has been out for well over a year it's still new to a lot of people they feel they can reach by continuing to tour, even as they prepare new material for their upcoming album.

"We're still relatively new in the states," continues Lloyd. "An entire market hasn't heard us live yet."

It's clear that their fan base is what's really important to them. "Our involvement with the gay community remains a really strong core for us," adds Lloyd. "When you music appeals to such a huge range regardless of age or gender, that's a really special feeling."

"All our shows are mixed ages," notes McCloskey.

"Anywhere from 19 year-old girls to 45 year-old guys," adds Petracca.

"I really love our all ages shows," continues McCloskey. "The kids can be so enthusiastic, sometimes I can't hear my own voice singing over them."

HV has played everything from your typical concert to being the band of choice at weddings. "Doing different kinds of shows really keeps it interesting for us," says McCloskey, fondly remembering a gig the band did as part of a celebration at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. "My 92 year-old grandmother was in the audience," McCloskey says, pride evident in her voice. "She still talks about that gig and it was ages ago."

"We want to be known as one of those hard working bands that's always touring," says Lloyd. "It can be a really tough industry and we feel very lucky for the recognition we've gotten, but we've been working really hard and keep pushing farther."

"Belief in ourselves is what gave us the confidence to do what we're doing now," says McCloskey. "We're all best friends and I can see us doing this for a long time." And with that kind of belief in themselves, you know Hunter Valentine will hold true to that.



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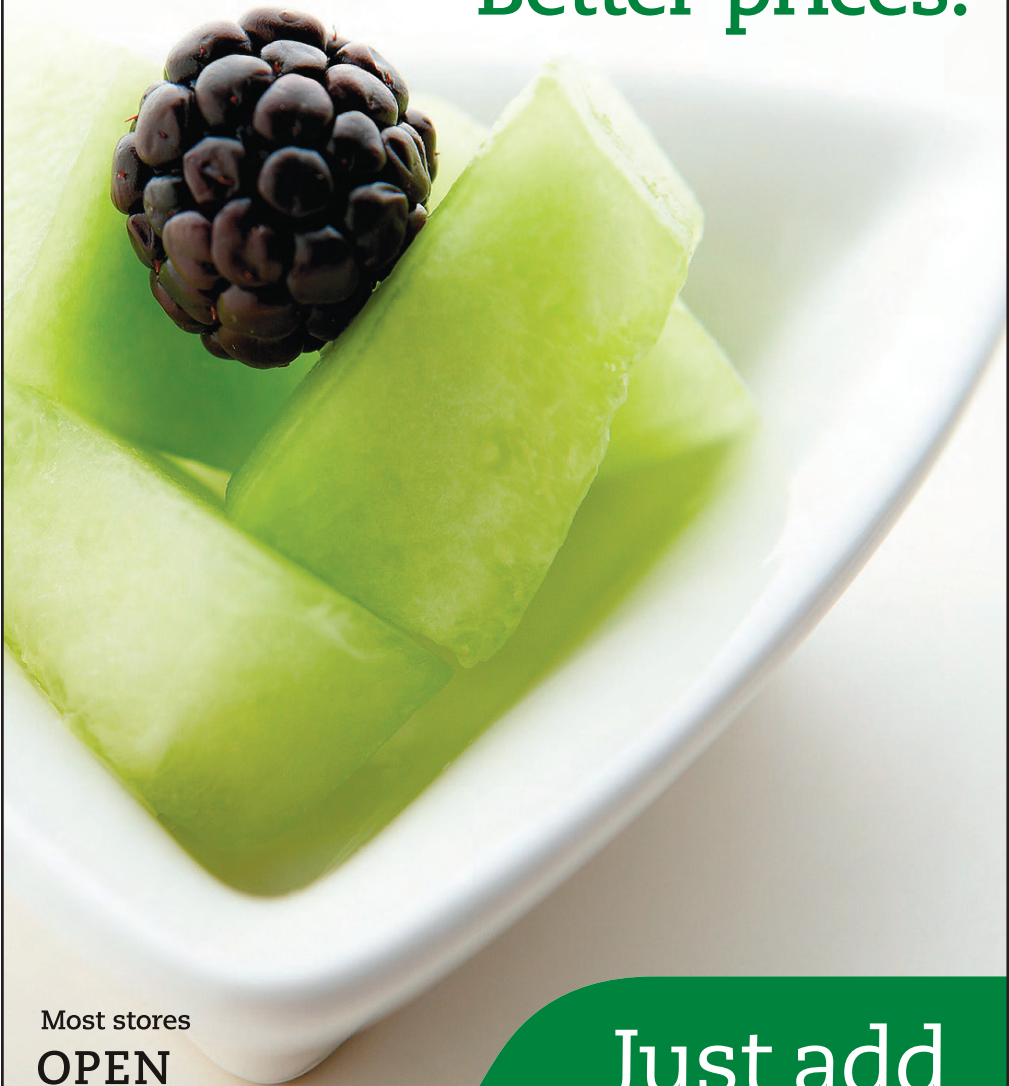
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THE Palais Royale

by Daniela Newman

Junior high dance: the boys stand to the one side, the girls loiter on the other side of the hall, and everyone's guarding their bit of wall. Years later these very same kids become guardians of glow sticks, confusing packaged ecstasy for emotion—a generation that loves to dance alone en masse. That is until marriage age or corporate age or just curious age entices them to seek out the sort of dance that begs a partner. Their parents and grandparents, however, are of a generation that fought for floor space, not wall space, and boy, what a floor it was. What a floor it is, as The Palais Royale, vintage dance hall, vamps it up anew, catering to novice and practiced enthusiasts alike.

"Yesterday a ninety-four-year-old man walked in and told a whole bunch of stories," says Mary Lou Borg, part owner of the new Palais Royale. "Girls got in for free; guys had to pay 75 cents plus 10 cents a dance. Ten cents got you a ticket, but you could only ask one girl at a time. 'You never danced with the same girl twice!' he said." She laughs, "so I asked him why wouldn't you dance with the same girl twice? 'Well, when you come to dance why would you want to dance with the same girl twice?!'"

"A lot of people met their spouses here," remembers Borg. "My parents met here. This place is held dear by a lot of hearts in the city." She threw her parent's fortieth anniversary party here in 1994, long before

From the recipe file of Executive Chef Steffan Howard

Rack of Lamb

Rack of lamb is delicious with legumes and root vegetables; I would recommend serving this lamb with flageolets and white beans cooked in vegetable stock with an essence of lemon and some nicely caramelized baby carrots and parsnips. A nice simple jus natural with a mint julienne will finish this dish nicely.

Ask your butcher for a frenched Lamb rack with the fat intact on the bone next to the red meat. I like to keep most of the fat as the texture and flavour of your finished product will be much better. "Food with out Fat is Like Life with out Love" a Quote from a cool farmer!!!!

Ingredients

½ cup pureed Mango
1 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary plus rosemary sprigs
Salt and Cracked Black Pepper
3 tablespoons Grape Seed Oil
1 1½ pound rack of Ontario lamb

Method of preparation

Fine chop rosemary; combine with mango puree, set aside.

Position rack in center of oven and preheat to 400 degrees.

Season (with salt and pepper) then sear lamb rack in cast iron pan at medium heat with grape seed oil. Sear until Golden brown. Remove from pan and let cool.

Place lamb on small rimmed baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Spread all mango puree over rounded side of lamb. Roast 8 minutes in pre heated oven. Reduce oven temperature to 300°F and roast to desired doneness, about 14 minutes longer for medium-rare.

Let rest out oven for 5 minutes before slicing.



becoming part owner. Borg goes on to explain the dynamics of dances that her parents, aunt, and uncle attended.

"You would dance with a girl, then two people would rope off that group of dancers and the spectator group would come on to dance." This corralling system ensured that no couple stayed on for back-to-back songs without paying. While they may not have been able to smuggle in consecutive dances, people still managed to smuggle in their mickeys. At its height the Palais held up to 1,000 people, all there to dance and listen to big band music. Its floor has been well worn.

This is not the first time the space has been gussied-up. It started out as a boat yard in 1913, but by 1922 coinciding with the Sunnyside Amusement Park opening, the boat business was moved to the basement of the building with two show rooms above on either side of a dancehall, thus ushering in its heyday. The 30's and 40's brought the crowds for jazz notables such as Count Basie, Louise Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald and Artie Shaw. With the CBC hosting live broadcasts from the hall, the place was hopping.

By the mid '50s Lakeshore Blvd. begun construction and in '56 Sunnyside Amusement Park was ripped down. The



two sole surviving structures—the Palais and Sunnyside Pool—held their ground, but just barely. The following decades saw a steady decline in usage and maintenance as the Palais was passed from hand-to-hand and it wasn't until '74 that it was designated a landmark by the Toronto Historical Board.

"On that first day it was raining heavily outside. Inside too," says Borg. "That's how beat up it was. We had to redo everything." That day was the first time she'd laid eyes on The Palais Royale in a long time. That was in 2005, when she along with her three brothers, became part owners as Borg Entertainment. Along with the Pegasus Group and the Dagonas Family the Palais was re-launched. "It was originally built for \$80,000. Now, that's just the price of the drapery," she laughs. The three partnering enterprises privately invested over \$3.5 million to get the building up to par.

Under city title and labeled heritage the rules for renovation were precise; the Palais Royale was to be placed back in public use as an entertainment venue. It had to be a historical replication or reconstruction, not a free rule renovation. The historical society, the city, and the operating lease groups rebuilt for a year-and-a-half and did so together amicably—a rarity in heritage

Cut lamb between bones into chops. Divide chops between 2 plates; garnish with rosemary sprigs.

Try this dressing on a simple mixed greens salad before your lamb main, there is a good marriage of flavours from this salad into the lamb main.

Pistachio Vinaigrette

Ingredients

¼ cup Maple Syrup
1 teaspoon minced shallots
1/8 cup Balsamic Vinegar
½ cup Pistachio Oil (roast shelled pistachios for ½ hour in veg oil at medium low heat and strain)
¾ cup dry roasted pistachio kernels (to make oil)
Salt and Pepper

Method of preparation

Combine shallot, maple syrup, and vinegar. Pour room temperature Pistachio Oil to emulsify in robo coupe or with whisk until desired consistency. Toss with salad mix and serve.

Bon Appetite

Calendar of Events

December 14th:

Palais Royale's Christmas Brunch.

December 31st:

CHIC presents the first New Years' Eve at the Palais with special performance by Elvira Kurt. Two tiered tickets – one for a 3 course dinner, show and dancing, second for show and dancing only.

February:

Winterlicious "a nine course meal with fab-fantastic food"

February 13th:

the next CHIC event.

And, of course, plan for this year's upcoming Pride.



sites. "With various departments, it can be challenging, but 3 years later it's a good working venture," Borg explains.

In 2006, pre the grand re-opening, the city urged Borg to offer a free viewing of the Palais as part of the Doors Open initiative, where all sorts of heritage buildings and homes are opened to the public. She wasn't expecting much. In the first three hours 2,300 people visited, flooding the place with nostalgia. The guest book shows over twenty pages filled with anecdotes and war time memories.

The frontage maintains all its historical features. The raised stage for big bands is higher, and at 4,000 square feet, the back patio is much larger. The old fireplace remains and the ceiling with its intricately weaving beams and rafters, is the original from 1922. The bars and kitchen, capable of serving up to 400 are new, as are the private rooms below where the boat business once operated.

Behind the stage hides the Red Room. While most of the Palais is outfitted in neutrals, crèmes and tawny hues, the Red Room is the off center debonair lounge one hopes to find in such a swinging venue. It offers a spectacular behind-the-scene vantage point of the stage on one side and a windowed view out onto the lake on the other. Creamy red leather sofas complement the stained maple wood floors and art deco steel railings designate the stage area, while the breezy front parlor features white textile couches and tall green palms. Shiny modern hot spots may boast newness in design and evocation of mood, but this venue oozes a familiar comfortable sexiness. The whole of it makes one feel like they've just stepped into a Fitzgerald novel. Then, there's that inviting emblemed dance floor, just enticing you to dance.

The first official event was appropriately The Toronto All Star Big Band. "I felt—WOW—that's what the Palais Royale is all about!" exclaims Borg. "We had twenty year olds in zoot suits and the ninety year olds were looking at them and saying it's really good that these kids know how to dance and commenting on their style." She carries the same sentiment for the dance competition, The Dancing Classrooms Project, with the Canadian branch—Join the Dance Canada—holding its yearly at the Palais.

You may have seen Antonio Banderas play a smoldering dance teacher in the movie *Take the Lead*. Well Pierre Dulaine is the real deal whose struggle to bring dance to New York inner city schools was documented in the film *Mad Hot Ballroom*. When Borg saw the doc she called Mr. Dulaine to inquire about launching his program in Toronto.



To her amazement she discovered Join the Dance Canada had already been running since 2006 across approximately 25 schools. So she stepped it up and offered the Palais as the location for their final competition.

"We've been sponsoring grades 5-6 and mostly inner city. At the beginning the kids they don't even want to touch, they start out so shy. But by the end of 10 weeks to see them so excited about dancing, learning manners, and finding their confidence is amazing. You have them staring into each others eyes, smiling, sometimes you see them mouthing 1, 2, 3, 4 to each other," she says. To be a spectator at this dance evokes a certain kind of warmth.

Borg carries the same élan when it comes to her CHIC parties and the now yearly Pride dances. "I thought if I ever had a space I would do events for the community—to give back—because they always gave to me and protected me. I wanted to create a place that catered to women that gave them a safe place." With that in mind, the CHIC parties cater mostly to a 35 plus age group. The unifying theme may be said to be classiness, yet each party varies in atmosphere from silk aerialists, to samba

squad, to burlesque. "It's a wonderful crowd and the staff just loves them," she enthuses. Most notably with TD as a sponsor last year, the proceeds of \$9,500 went to funding a new initiative towards lesbian women's health at the Women's College Hospital.

From the front interior walls, portraits of the jazz greats that have graced the stage before now look on to some of the current mover and shakers. Borg's favorite concert remains the very first one for the re-opening. A quick second would be The Toronto All Star Big Band, who Mary Lou praises for their solid old band sound.

"The Palais' done really well, partly because of the history behind it, but also because there just aren't a lot of places like it," she says. Not on the waterfront, nor really anywhere within the city. "We're bringing back history here and also making it. We've got the kids dancing and a same sex marriage coming up. We're bringing back the dancing and the big band sound to the Palais. We've got all kinds of things planned," she sums up.

Daniella Newman is a Toronto based freelance writer who's been here written about this, been there written about that and is now off to somewhere new to write about that too.

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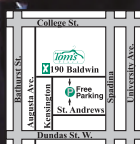
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GUANAJUATO:

The Heart of Mexico

by Jeff Harrison

*"Viva la independence
Viva la Americas"*

--Father Hidalgo

As dawn broke on the morning of September 16th, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo gave his legendary Cry for Independence from the steps of Our Lady of Sorrows Parish Church and rallied the people of Dolores Hidalgo to gather arms and join him in his march to free the Mexican people from their Spanish overlords.

Father Hidalgo was captured within the year, but not before his people reclaimed the city of Guanajuato from Spanish occupation. Martyred after his execution, Hidalgo inspired the people of Mexico to fight 11 more years before being recognized as an independent nation. The beautiful colonial cities of Guanajuato, San Miguel de Allende and Dolores Hidalgo sit sparkling in the heart of Mexico and figure prominently in the country's fight for freedom.

Guanajuato with its Baroque churches and romantic plazas is nestled in a picturesque ravine the natives once called *Qanaxjuanito*, the old

Chupicuaro Indian name for "city surrounded by mountains in the shape of frogs." Carved out by the river that used to flow underground ancient medieval tunnels of stone wind beneath the downtown and now serve as the city's two main roads. Considered by many to be the most beautiful colonial city in the Americas, it was declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1988.

Originally established as a mining town in 1557, Guanajuato is still a major producer of the world's silver and has grown to become an artistic and cultural mecca. You immediately feel welcomed by the friendly people that gather around the many intimate plazas. A monument to the local hero, El Pipila, stands guard high over the main courtyard, *Jardin Union*. The lush triangular plaza with box-cut laurel trees surrounded by outdoor cafes and inviting hotels, serves as the social heart of the city. Get swept up in the colourful Mexican life as you

watch the vendors hawk their wares, while sipping the local popular drinks of *horchada* or *jamaica* (made from hibiscus flowers) as the fountains trickle in the background.

Across the street is the stunning *Teatro Juarez* with its Doric-Roman façade, French lobby, and Moorish interior. No less impressive alongside is *Templo de San Diego* with ornately carved Baroque doors. This is where the traveling *estudiantina*—wandering minstrels in period garb—gather for their nightly performance before leading you on a strolling tour of the downtown accompanied by traditional Spanish songs.

Up the street in the *Plaza de la Paz* (Peace Plaza) you'll discover the *Basilica of Our Lady of Guanajuato*, one of city's most important churches where festivals culminate in colourful religious celebrations. Visit *Casa de Diego Rivera*, the house of one of Mexico's most renowned muralists who married the no less famous *Frida*. *Museo de las Momies*, contains 108 mummies over a century old perfectly preserved to the point where some still have tongues that seem to lick dried lips in search of a cerveza. Filled with works of art by such masters as Picasso, Dali and Rafael, *Museo Iconografica Quijote*, is dedicated to another local hero, Don Quixote. Every October Guanajuato plays host to the world with its *Festival Internacional Cervantino*, a month long cultural extravaganza showcasing international talent in dance, theatre, opera, cinema, music and literature.

After the Cry of Independence, Hidalgo led his followers to the granary at the centre of town where the Spanish had fortified. *Alhondiga de Granaditas Museum* tells the story via murals of the first battle for independence, which culminated in the courageous act of El Pipila—who strapped a huge stone to his back to shield him from the arrows of the Spanish archers. He set fire to the blockaded front doors allowing the resistance to storm the building and vanquish the enemy.

Around the corner shop at *Mercado Hidalgo*

where you will find traditional Mayólica pottery, toffee shaped mummies and great deals on quality leather. In most other Mexican cities it's traditional to barter for lower prices, but you will find that your bartering can be kept to a minimum here because the prices are already so incredibly low!

With the airport in nearby Leon, this gorgeous city is a perfect hub from which to rent a car

and explore the entire "Route of Independence."

Neighbouring **San Miguel de Allende**, declared a National Monument by the Mexican Government, is like an exotic bazaar. This cosmopolitan city with its Churrigueresque cathedrals and phenomenal shopping is a place of year round festivals and the permanent residence to many national and international artists and writers. It is also the birthplace of General Ignacio Allende, another important man in Mexico's fight for independence.

Nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Madre mountains and overlooking the waters of the Rio Laja, the city is surrounded by over 800 miles of trails ideal for exploration via mountain bike, horseback or ATV. Wind through arid deserts filled with cactus and wildflowers, visit small shrines and enjoy hot spring spas.

The downtown with its cobblestone streets, antique carved wooden doors and wrought iron balconies, begs to be explored by those with a passion for life. Take your time because things here move at a slower pace. *La Parroquia* parish church, originally built in 1683, was given a facelift in 1880 by local artisan, Zeferino Guitierrez who modeled the façade on cathedrals he had seen on postcards. Inside, nestled among soaring buttresses, is the patron saint of Miguel. With delicate wings of shining silver and a breastplate of gold leaf he is considered one of the city's most precious artifacts. You will also discover a 924 pipe organ that only one man in the entire city knows how to play—luckily he is teaching an apprentice.

Centro Cultural Ignacio Ramirez "El Nigromante," a prestigious arts institute, houses one of the most



important pieces of art in San Miguel. Painted upon the walls of a quiet cave-like room is a stylized mural depicting General Ignacio Allende's life by renowned artist David Siqueiros. It was never completed after the artist and the government had an argument over its execution, which ended with Siqueiros being kicked out of the city.

The neoclassic opera house, *Teatro Angela Peralta*, has been in use for 132 years and further up the street is the yellow stuccoed *Biblioteca Publica*. Tucked among the 700,000 books of the public library is David Leonardo's breathtaking mural "Quetzalcouatl el Sol Eterno." Vibrant and alive, this brilliantly colourful mosaic-like work depicts Mexico's various gods.

Grab lunch at one of the traditional tortillerias and stuff your fresh made *gorditas* with oh-so-good delicacies. Or try the traditional dish *Chili Nogada* (green peppers stuffed with beef, raisins and apples in a walnut cream sauce, topped with grenadine) at one of the restaurants surrounding the main plaza like *Dolphy*. Once the house of Ignacio Allende's older brother, here the revolutionaries held their clandestine meetings in the basement while Spanish officials were dancing on the upper balconies.

Dolores Hidalgo is called the Cradle of Independence because this is where freedom was forged. There is no better place to enjoy the week long Festival for Independence in September than here, where it all began.

It may be easy to overlook the quiet charm of this hospitable town in lieu of its two splendid colonial sisters, decked out in their fine architecture and cosmopolitan grace, but here among the smiling faces you will discover the people are quietly proud of their town, which serves as a monument to one of the most important movements in Mexican history.

The man who would lead his people was born and buried in the city he helped liberate and a statue is erected in his honour in the main plaza facing the rose coloured *Parroquia de Nuestra Senora de los Dolores*—Our Lady of Sorrows Parish Church from the steps of which he gave his Cry for Independence. The main doors detail the passion of Christ, with Dolores, the patron saint of unity, standing below him. Inside are three exquisite *retablos* (intricately



Guanajuato Festivals:

March to Sept: Vive la Magia – live the Magic with Juarez Theatre's multicultural Season

Sept 28: Dia de la Toma de la Alhondiga de Granaditas – celebration of the Day of the Seige on the Alhondiga de Granaditas and El Pipila's heroism

Oct: Festival Internacional Cervantino – International Cervantes Festival, one of Latin America's most famous celebrations

End of Oct to beginning of Nov: Feria del Alfeñique – delicious miniature Sugar Figurines are made to commemorate All Soul's Day

Nov: Las Iluminaciones – traditional religious celebrations are held all over the city leading up to Christmas

San Miguel de Allende Festivals:

July: Festival de Cortometraje "Expresion en Corto" – International Short Film Festival

Aug 1 to 15: Festival de Musica de Camara – Chamber Music Festival

3rd Sat in Sept: Sanmiguelada – the running of the bulls, like in Pamplona, Spain, bulls are set free to run in the streets to be joined by anyone brave enough

Sept 29th: Fiesta de San Miguel Arcangel – Festival of the Arch Angel of San Miguel

Last two weeks in Nov: Feria Nacional de la Lana y el Laton – Brass & Wool Fair where local and international artisans come to showcase their wares

Last week of Nov: Festival Internacional de Jazz – International Jazz Festival

Dec 16 until Christmas: Fiesta de Navidad – the city's famous Christmas celebrations

Dolores Hidalgo Festivals:

Week leading up to Easter weekend: *Semana Santa* – Holy Week celebrating the Virgin Doloros, the city's patron Sainte

April, July, Sept, Dec: Expo-Artesanal – handicraft expo showcasing local and international arts and crafts

Sept 1 to 15: *Fiestas de Septiembre* – Festivals celebrating the various Mexican Independence holidays

Nov 28 to Dec 8: *Purísima Concepcion* – festivals to celebrate the Holy Conception and leading up to Christmas

Guanajuato Tourism

www.vamosaguanajuato.com/index.php/english/home.html

www.visitmexico.com/wb/Visitmexico/Visi_Home?show=regions



carved walls). Two were kept free of the traditional gold leafing found in other Mexican churches so that the beautiful wood carving could be fully appreciated.

Nearby is *Museo y Casa de Don Miguel Hidalgo*, the house Hidalgo lived in. Originally a church granary, Hidalgo converted it into his residence while he was the parish priest and it now stands preserved, filled with his belongings and much of the correspondence from the revolution. A few blocks away is *Museo de la Independencia*, once a prison used by the Spanish it now contains historical objects and art depicting the Mexican people's struggle for freedom. Also within is an homage to Jose Alfredo Jimenez, "one of the most outstanding exponents of Mexican mariachi music." Be sure to visit his phenomenal mosaic mausoleum in the shape of a sombrero a few minutes outside the city.

City Hall boasts an incredible stained glass ceiling by Ignacio Aguilar depicting Hidalgo's heroic struggle to free his people. The crown jewel of the entire building is a stained glass door, leading from the mayor's office onto his terrace, of Hidalgo himself. For every decision the mayor is faced with he can ask Hidalgo, "What would you do?"

While taking a break ask you *meseros* (waiter) for a dish made from the local *nopal* cactus and order a refreshing *Michelada*—beer with lime juice and spices. During the after dinner entertainment request the song "La Fleur de la Caneta," which describes a lover as romantic and passionate as a cinnamon flower.

Dolores Hidalgo is renowned for two things above all else: the colourfully painted *Talavera* pottery and the country's most delicious ice cream. Try flavours like the rich chocolate of traditional *mole*, or exotic tequila or shrimp...yes shrimp!

With perfect summer weather all year long, kick back with a margarita in a tranquil courtyard filled with the purple sprays of flowering jacaranda trees. As your eyelids droop and you nod off into a *siesta* you'll understand why life here seems so tranquil—tomorrow will be just as beautiful as today, so let the world drift by and just bask in it. This is paradise in the heart of Mexico.

Jeff Harrison is the Editor-in-Chief of our Pink Play Mags. He is also a Toronto based freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Eye Weekly*, *Gay Guide Toronto.com*, *fab magazine*, *Xtra!*, and *Instinct*. He's decided to stop running around like a maniac meeting deadlines this winter. Instead, he's thinking of dusting off his novel and diving back in. See you in the spring!

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Is This The Cap You Did Bespeak?

by Kevin Sheard

“**O**h my God, you’ll never believe it, the next one’s a boy!” the nervous and excitable Stage Manager told the Director.

The Boy was about thirteen, had never auditioned before and didn’t even have a photo and resume. His androgynous face was at odds with his tall, lanky frame and his clothing seemed inspired by a Catholic seminary and the X-Men movies. He was with the youth coming out group and had heard there were auditions for a queer Taming of the Shrew. The Boy saw this as an opportunity to help define his coming out process. The Director had never encountered such a situation before, but was impressed with the child’s courage and tenacity.

“He’ll want to go back in the closet once I’m through with him. Send him in!” the Director jokingly remarked.

Nervously, the Boy entered the audition room and blurted, “I’m going to do ‘Like a Virgin’ by Madonna.” He removed his long sleeved black shirt and revealed a cut-off Che Guevara tee, proudly advertising his Cuban heritage.

He sat and enacted the song as if in close-up for a music video, at one point even slightly elevating from the chair and gently rotating his hips, eventually concluding by standing with his arms outstretched as if channeling Patti Lupone in *Evita*.

“Well, that was very gay. Do your parents know you’re here?” asked the Director.

“They weel as soon as I come out... and...they see me een a play!” the Boy confidently boasted.

Well, we’ve got the small part of the Haberdasher, who presents a beautiful cap to the shrew. Can you recite ‘Here is the cap your worship did bespeak,’” asked the Director.

“Eeths theeth thee cap you deed bee-speak?” the Boy slowly responded in his thick Latino accent.

“Close enough,” the Director mused.

“Am I een the play?” The Boy exclaimed, unable to contain his excitement. “Oh my God, Oh Meester Deerector, thank you so much, Oh my God!”

The Stage Manager outlined the rehearsal process and the responsibilities of being in the production. Euphoric the Boy quickly provided his theatrical credentials, "My Grandmother, who leeves in Manhattan ees working as an usher at the Imperial Theatre for Les Miserables. She weel be so happy that I am now also een the theatre bees-ness."

Rehearsals began the following week.

The Director, however, still needed permission from the parents, since his youngest cast member was only thirteen. When he called to the Boy's home, it was the Boy who answered.

"Hello, can I speak to one of your parents?"

"They are Spanish and speak English poorly," the Boy hesitantly responded.

"Well I need either your mother or father's permission for you to be in the play," the Director firmly told him.

The phone was put down and moments later a "female" voice came to the phone. "Eet would be our great pleasure for our son to be een your play." Her voice was strangely high pitched and delivered with an unusual artificial accent that sometimes sounded like a Queen Elizabeth parody, then at other times like zany "hoochie-koochie" patter. "We would be proud and honoured. Thees would be an opportunity of a lifetime and a great beegenning for hees career. Eef you can let him een-to movies and television and make heem famous and lots of money, weel let him do that too! Thank you, Sir, and goodbye."

The Director was dumbfounded when the telephone connection was abruptly terminated, then burst into hysterical laughter—the Boy had been trying to

impersonate his mother. Later the same day he managed to track down the Boy's father at a construction company and in spite of a huge language difficulty, permission was fully granted.

Rehearsals began and the Boy was clearly the youngest in an eclectic cast full of diverse sexuality and Shakespearean knowledge. The shrew was played as a gay man who identified as female and dressed in drag, while the smaller comedic role of Tranio was actually a transvestite. The Boy, however, was the most vocal and brazen, unashamedly announcing that he thought the actor playing Petruchio, the male lead, was cute! This puppy love became a great source of amusement for the entire cast and a huge embarrassment for the so designated lead actor.

The costumes were the real spectacle of the production though, featuring an abundance of sequins, plumes, rhinestones, chiffon and tulle. The cross-dressed characters were bold, brassy and shocking. Hats sported brims that were at least six feet wide and the colours were vibrant and deliberately outrageous. The Boy was absolutely in awe of them and would stare, mesmerized by the ornate fashion statements they all made.

The Director encouraged actor input and asked all to explore and develop new ideas, so many were realizing extraordinary artistic and creative discoveries. Impressed and amazed by the abilities of his fellow performers the Boy felt pressured to follow suit. Launching into a sequence of twirls, curtsies and something akin to extreme kick boxing, he delivered his single line in a very shrill and abrasive falsetto, sounding more like an extinct prehistoric bird than any human.

The Director was aghast! "What the hell was THAT?"

"I'm just acting gay" the Boy nervously answered.

"Don't be GAY and don't ACT!" the Director firmly instructed.

The Boy began to wonder if an actor's life was for him. But he'd chosen opening night to boldly come out to his family so he persevered.

The big night finally came and the family planned a grand outing—dinner at MacDonald's with all seven children. Even Broadway Grandma came, arriving via Greyhound Bus. This unexpected and supportive gesture only further excited the Boy and his focus intensified for completing his mission. He was going to come out to his family over dinner, even though the entire cast had strongly advised a more gentle approach.

Arriving straight from dinner the Boy grandly led the conservatively dressed procession of his nine family members. On his arm was Broadway Grandma, dressed in a strict black blouse and skirt, her gold crucifix necklace gleaming in the setting sun, her gray hair elegantly styled in a do reminiscent of 1950's Hollywood.

His six-year old sister, eating an ice cream cone clung onto granny's other hand. Periodically the girl would release grandma's hand and feed her ice cream to the younger children.

The Father followed with four children in his care. He was breathtaking! His classic, dark features and construction-fit physique turned nearly every head as he made his way through the crowd with two babies in a stroller and another two toddlers obediently holding on firmly to his side.

The Mother, a sultry beauty with a shapely body that defied the fact that she had given birth to seven children, followed with a newborn infant in her arms.

Victoriously the Boy announced to the anxiously waiting Director and company that all had gone well at dinner. Not only had his family understood but they accepted and embraced the dramatic announcement of his sexuality. Further, the Boy later confided, he was somewhat perturbed that this family wasn't particularly surprised to hear he was gay.

The Boy's sense of pride was boosted when he introduced Broadway Grandma to the Director. They talked for awhile about her ushering job in New York and when she noticed the posting of a suggested minimum admission donation of five dollars she insisted on being the one to pay. She proudly presented her single American five dollar bill as a gesture of support and a treat for her entire family, not understanding the donation was intended for each individual attending. The family moved into the park and made themselves comfortable on the grass near the front of the stage.

Next, a group of participants from the Centre's youth coming-out program arrived and this really got the better of the Boy's emotions. They presented him an overly large stuffed animal as a gift. Then they hugged, laughed and cried together. This was a significant developmental moment for most of them. These still closeted kids were nervous just to be in attendance at a gay themed event.

"Now remember," the Director instructed the Boy as he headed backstage, "none of your previous antics and no acting GAY."

The Boy nodded as he went to the dressing area to get costumed for the performance.

Heading back to the park, The Director noticed that a patron had kindly provided a lawn chair for Broadway Grandma. The old lady sat perched above the crowd absolutely radiant as she beamed with love and pride. The Mother, Madonna-like, sat at the old woman's feet and nursed two small children, a baby blanket modestly draped across her chest.

Moments before the play was soon to start the Stage Manager, in a state of panic rushed out to the Director. "You must come backstage immediately!"

The Boy was in uncontrollable hysterics, on the floor sobbing and crying out loudly, "I cannot go onstage wearing that! I want to die!"

Overwhelmed with the cast's elaborate clothing, the costumer had left the servant characters to the last minute. The Haberdasher was presented with a simple worker's uniform—utilitarian, basic brown cotton. This was the source of the Boy's anguish. It seemed he had a much more spectacular vision of his character's attire. He thrashed from side to side, dramatically collapsing and struggling for air whenever an opportunity presented. The concerned cast gathered around watching.

"This behaviour is not like that of an actor," the Director stated, clearly annoyed.

"You told me 'not - to - act!'" The Boy harshly responded.

"Well then," the Director firmly announced, "the play will have to go on without the Haberdasher. We'll have the Tailor bring on the cap and say the line."

Immediately upon hearing this, the Boy relented and defiantly put on his costume and from that moment wore it with newly discovered pride. He had suddenly found some clear purpose for his character and no longer saw himself as a bit player. The play began.

When Act IV, scene III began Broadway Grandma sat up in her chair watching the entrance of her grandson, the Haberdasher, as he approached the stage from the back of the park. The Mother still nursing two children also sat upright. Noticing the Mother's reaction, Broadway Grandma divided her attention between her daughter and her grandson.

As soon as he reached his assigned mark, the Boy presented a spectacularly jeweled tam and on cue calmly delivered his line "Here ees thee cap your worsheep deed bespeak."

Tears quickly filled the Mother's eyes and as Broadway Grandma noticed the young woman's emotion, she too began to quietly weep. Caught up in the intensity of this beautiful, yet personal and private moment, the Director discreetly wiped a tear from his face. His mission was complete.

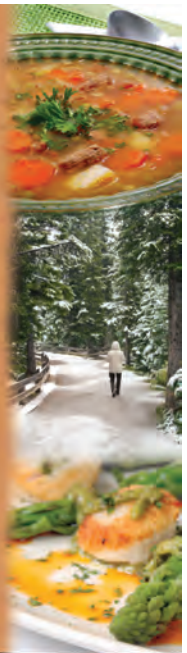
The Boy's mission was complete. He had come out and his family was proud!

Kevin Sheard is an arts professional working as a playwright, director, producer, actor and entertainer.



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Winter in the City

by Ricky Boudreau

I'm not apologizing if these "listings" are a bit all over the place. It is exactly who I am—a complex and diverse gay man of today, with many interests. You see I'm a Gemini and get bored easily and variety is indeed the spice of life. Why not have a fabulous winter and do some fabulous things! (Not a typo).

The leaves have fallen, the snow has come and the wardrobe has gotten heavier. Yay, boot season! And don't forget about all the fantastic Autumnal accessories!

I've have tried to put together a list of things that suit a lot of facets of my personality and hopefully yours. If you don't find anything interesting, it's perhaps because you've never tried it, so clearly you need to get out more.

TIP: Sometimes, the best things in life are free and completely unexpected. Keep an open mind...and grow.

Until next issue...

Oh, go on!

Life Drawing

519 Church Street Community Centre

Thursdays, 8pm-10pm

416.392.6874

www.the519.org

Newcomers welcome, whatever your drawing/artistic level. This is a self-directed learning experience, with a live model.

TIP: The model can be anyone you want them to be!

Canada's National Ballet School

400 Jarvis St.

Sept. 08 through June 09

416.964.3780

www.nbs-enb.ca

Become the prima ballerina, you've always dreamed of, try an adult ballet class for \$20.

TIP: Wear fitted clothing so you can see your bodylines more clearly, in the mirror.



Casey House Hospice

9 Huntley St.

416.962.7600

www.caseyhouse.com

Why not give back to the community and try volunteering at Casey house, or anywhere else, for that matter? You can help out in the kitchen, at reception or be part of support care.

TIP: Not only will you make someone feel better, you will feel better for helping those in need.

Opera and Orchestra

The Nutcracker

The National Ballet of Canada

Dec. 6-Dec 28, 2008

Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts

227 Front St. East

416.363.8231

www.fourseasonscentre.ca

Enjoy a breathtaking version by James Kudelka. Take the whole family to one of Toronto's favourite holiday traditions.

TIP: Bring Opera glasses, so you can see everything up close!



A Tribute to Benny Goodman

Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008

Roy Thomson Hall – 60 Simcoe St.

416.872.4255

www.roythomson.com

A joyous celebration of Benny Goodman's famous Carnegie Hall concert.

TIP: Listen to some Benny Goodman before you go, so the songs will be more familiar.

Opera 101

The Drake Hotel

Sept. 24, 08–Mar. 31, 09

1150 Queen St. W.

416.531.5042

www.thedrakehotel.ca

The Canadian Opera Company hosts Opera 101, a FREE event at the Drake Hotel. Outstanding! Cocktails, live performance and singing, oh my! Call the Drake to find out more on these sporadic but exciting nights. Also coming soon—the Drake's Sky Yard! A ski chalet inspired roof-top patio.

TIP: Put an effort in to what you are wearing...and look fabulous!

Movies & Stage

It's a Wonderful Life

Nov 24-Dec 20, 2008

The Canadian Stage Company

Bluma Appel Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre

27 Front St. East

416.368.3110

www.canstage.com

The five time, Oscar nominated, iconic holiday classic story of George Bailey, recreated as a live radio play.

TIP: It was chosen as the "Top Inspirational Film" of all time.

Cinderella: The Sillylicious Family Musical

Nov. 28-Jan. 4, 2009

The Elgin Theatre

189 Yonge St.

www.rosspetty.com

Ross Petty is up to his usual holiday antics, creating classic kid's pantomime with a splash of modern humour.

TIP: Something the entire family can enjoy!

Imax Films

Sept. 2-Dec. 19, 2008

Imax Films

Ontario Science Centre

770 Don Mills Rd.

www.OntarioScienceCentre.ca

Three films: Mysteries of the Great Lakes, Roving Mars & Deep Sea. Imax films are spectacular!

TIP: If you don't own a car, treat a friend to the movie who does!

Free Film Night

FREE

West Side Stories Video

1499 Dundas St. W.

416.916.8357

www.myspace.com/westsidestoriesvideo

This is Toronto's first video rental store catering to Lesbians and Queer Women and the LGBT community.

TIP: Films show at both West Side Stories Video and "Cock & Tail". Posted every month.

Out and About

The Nature of Diamonds

Oct. 25, 2008 to Mar. 22, 2009

Royal Ontario Museum

100 Queen's Park

416.586.8000

www.rom.on.ca

This blockbuster exhibit has dazzled audiences from New York to Tokyo, now it's Toronto's turn to get to know a girl's best friend.

TIP: A perfect opportunity to experience the stunning Michael Lee Chin crystal expansion to the ROM.



Skating

The Natrel Skating Rink

Harbourfront Centre

416.973.4093

Nov. 17-Dec. 7, 2008

www.harbourfrontcentre.com

Skate on Canada's largest artificially cooled outdoor rink. All levels welcome and classes are available.

TIP: Don't forget your long underwear!

Moss Park Arena

Sept. 12, 2008-Apr. 19, 2009

140 Sherbourne St.

416-367-3826

www.centraletorontoskating.com

Ever dreamed of becoming a figure skater? All those tight buns in spandex, fantastic! Now you can with adult classes and lessons.

TIP: Ice rinks are cold, bring Kleenex for runny noses.

Nathan Phillips Square

10am to 10 pm

416.338.RINK (7465)

Weather permitting

The rink is usually open daily. Skate rentals and indoor change rooms are available to visitors.

TIP: All children under age 6 need a CSA approved helmet before going on the ice.

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235 Queens Quay West

416.973.4951

www.harbourfrontcentre.com/learn/courses

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TIP: Don't inhale!

Ceramics Classes

Evenings, 8 Weeks, 3 hrs/wk, year round

Harbourfront Centre

235 Queens Quay West

416.973.4994

www.harbourfrontcentre.com

Make your own Christmas gifts or simply create something unique for you and your home.

TIP: Wear clothes you don't mind getting dirty in.

Gay, Bi, Trans Men's Self Defence Course

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5-week course

416.392.6874

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TIP: A great stress reliever.

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Downsview Park

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416.935.0037

www.torontocircus.com

We all know how boring the gym can



get, so why not change your routine? The Toronto Circus School offers all kinds of classes. Let your inner child out and explore. Go out on a limb and try the trapeze. Call ahead to confirm classes and times.

TIP: Live out your fantasy and run away to join the circus, if only for an afternoon.

Sights & Shopping

PATH

416.392.1005

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, PATH is the world's largest underground shopping complex. Keep warm and cozy while you shop this winter. Retail therapy helps a girl feel better, especially when she can no longer wear her favourite footwear!

TIP: Make it a day out/in with the girls and throw in lunch.

Casa Loma

1 Austin Terrace

Open daily, 9:30am-5pm

Last admission, 4pm.

Gardens open May-October

416.923.1171

www.casaloma.org

Who knew that Toronto had its very own castle. This is the former estate of Canadian financier, Sir Henry Pellatt.

TIP: Can you imagine hosting a party in this place? You can rent it out, just make sure that I'm invited!



Scotiabank presents Cavalcade of Lights

Nathan Phillips Square

7 – 10 pm

Free

The final Saturday Night Concert and Fireworks will take place on December 20.

TIP: To keep warm, bring a flask with your favourite elixir!

Spas & Pampering

There is nothing like pampering yourself! We all deserve it. We get mani's and pedi's to don open toe shoes for summer, so why not treat yourself to a spa day? What better way to get rid of the bone chilling cold.

Hamam Spa

602 King Street West

416.366.4772

www.hamamspa.ca

Hamam Spa is an 8000 sq ft. holistic day spa, offering a wide range of services and treatments which are unique in concept, including a 500 sq ft Turkish Steam Room.

TIP: Try to do this once a month nad you'll be a changed person.

Absolute Beauty by Nancy Penny

1517 Bayview Ave.

416.932.3970

You must go see my dear friends 'cause they know how to take care of you. Nancy, Jessica and Amber will no doubt expel the toxins from your skin as well as perform non-surgical facelifts or a paraffin treatment.

TIP: These gals are popular, so book your appointments early.

Super Fun

TNT classes

www.tre-lystikz.com

416.237.9155

So here it is, the ultra original class that you've all been waiting for. TNT stands for Tippin' N Tre. Tippin' is what models do, down the runway and Tre, the permanent judge on "So you Think You Can Dance Canada," will help you and your friends, learn how to walk in heels! No more stumbling down the street, embarrassing yourself. This class is not just for Drag Queens and Mary's, it's also for ladies who are awkward in heels and don't know how to work 'em. You know you're out there, I've seen you!

TIP: Get a gaggle of gals and friends together for this one. You will be so glad you did.

Makeup Party

MAC PRO

363 Queen St. W

416.979.2171

Gather the girls and plan a fabulous night out. What better way to start off than a specialized makeup party! Groups of 8-15 can book the store and a few of its very own "glam squad" to stay after hours and teach you all how to put on makeup. You'll all be looking brilliant for the big night out and learning something at the same time. All you need are the girls and a \$65 gift card that can be purchased ahead of time. Not a bad idea for you men out there as well, concealer can do wonders, so why not learn how to use it?

TIP: A perfect gift idea with the Holidays around the corner!

Grand Prix Kartways

75 Carl Hall Road

Bay 3, Unit #9

Parc Downsview Park

416-638-KART(5278)

www.gpkartways.com

How much fun would it be to pretend you are an Andretti or Schumacher? 47,000 square feet of indoor go-karting are waiting for you speed demons out there.

TIP: Bring your camera.

—

This is Ricky's first published writing gig. Blossoming as a true social butterfly while traveling the world as a professional figure skater for 15 years, he loves the gift of gab and discovering great parties in the city. With a deep love for culture, great food and beauty, Ricky spends his time very creatively as a professional makeup artist for Mac PRO Cosmetics and has helped artists like Deborah Cox and Dame Shirley Bassey look gorgeous. He looks forward to helping you feel better as well as our new listings guru. Heard of a new hot spot? Email him at intheCity@pinkplaymags.com



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FROM THE HEART

By Judith Crane

A Comfortable Fit

At year end I ponder the big issues – personal growth, world peace and why advertising seems to be setting the benchmark for twenty-first century family life. It's the same all year-round, but seems so much more pervasive as we near the 'festive' season. Add to that the fact that this has been an election year in both Canada and the US. Every retailer and every candidate – left, right, up, down, north, south and sideways – bludgeons us with the word family in an effort to get our dollars and votes. If anybody can make me understand what they mean by the phrase 'family values' I'll give you ten bucks. Oh sure, I know what image advertisers and politicians want me to see when they say those magic words, but what does the phrase

itself mean? Is it what we value in a family or as a family? I sincerely don't know. Chances are, every family values something different and beyond "killing bad; kindness good," no two families – like snowflakes and tuna casseroles – are alike. So what does a family look like when you meet it in real life?

We each have an ideal concept of what constitutes the perfect family, and we measure the one we have against this paragon. A big part of the problem is the emotionally loaded word family. The word mother evokes different images for you than for me. To you, sister may mean confidante and mentor. For me it suggests a third cousin twice removed. You and your brother probably have conflicting ideas on the same childhood. You share DNA with at least one individual you can't stand. We seek that mythological ideal, but our experience is with the dysfunctionally real. I think it's safe to say that most of us recognize the importance of having more than one family. Our extended families fill in the gaps that appear even in a well adjusted life. We are all human and imperfect, but each of us also has some things at which we absolutely excel. So the key here is to think of each family member as a part of a wardrobe.



Just as with clothing, family members do not come in one size fits all, nor are all family members suited for all functions. Change the look of your family with updated members and mothball the members you've outgrown or who are beyond repair. Simple.

Let's start with mothers, because really, what doesn't? Mothers are the foundation of any good family/wardrobe. Mothers are that little black dress, a crisp shirt, a comfortable bra, or lucky socks. In short, all the things that help you to feel good on the inside. You can have a mother who is the perfect confidence boosting suit, a mamma who helps you sparkle in social settings and a mommy like soft pyjamas who makes you feel as warm and safe as a little child. Gender is not an issue here; we're talking about the people in your life who give you that unconditional support that helps you feel good about yourself.

Patriarchs are another item best owned in multiples. Fathers (dads, daddies and sugar daddies) are the coats, hats, shoes, ties and umbrellas of our family wardrobe. They give you an understanding of yourself in the outside world. Fathers are sounding boards when you need advice. The bank of Dad rescues many of us and when it comes to protection from the elements, a father is a good bet. You can have a baseball jacket dad, a top hat and tails sugar daddy, plus a flannel shirt and jeans old man. You can have a leather daddy, a pinstripe father and a cross dressing papa while still hanging on to that cozy frayed vintage father in the back of your closet.

Siblings can show up in any guise because you seldom have any say in their selection. They are the cashmere sweater you'll never wear because it itches and the boots that fit like they were made for you; the earrings you only wear at Halloween and the shirt you wish you had six of. As an adult you will find shopping for new



siblings is one of the most enjoyable things you will ever do, and when you say of someone that she/he is just like a sister/brother to you, you should mean in the "makes you look skinny and was on sale" kind of way. After all, you picked them out.

I like to think of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents as the promise of wardrobe items, sort of like gift certificates for your favourite clothing supplier or a receipt to return something—you may not control the amount, but you get to choose what you buy. Got a grandmother who is rubber boots? Maybe with you she could be red stilettos. Your uncle leather jacket could become a sweater vest. If a cousin refuses to be anything but an "I'm with Stupid" t-shirt, you can always re-gift.

Hey, family wardrobe makes as much sense as family values. So I wish you much joy of both the family you were handed and the one you've built. May they fit your life like the perfect pair of blue jeans.

Some of you may know Judith as Gypsy Judy; she is a writer, artist, astrologer, tarot card reader and all around seeker of wisdom and fulfillment. For her, writing is like a good conversation—it has two sides, contains some laughter, maybe some shouting, but mostly offers a chance to get to know one another better.

You can write *From the Heart* with your life concerns, to share thoughts, and for advice at fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com



Winter Horoscopes

By Judith Crane

Aries



Be wary of giving yourself to just one person. You have more choices and that charismatic admirer you're hot for is only trying to interest you in a networking opportunity. Remember, that's 21st century speak for pyramid scheme. You are not desperate.

Taurus



They don't give out medals for what you do and that's a darn shame. If anyone deserves a reward, it's you. Giving selflessly automatically disqualifies you for any sort of reward, you do it just because it's the right thing to do. Build yourself a trophy.

Gemini



Congratulations, you will finally get all of the lint out of your navel. This project has been on the back burner for a while so it's a real accomplishment. But you really should keep it private. Stop talking about it and for heaven sake don't take it out of the house.

Cancer



You strongly believe that you are always the one who puts a couple of extra bucks on the tab and it's starting to piss you off. Things won't change while you pretend it doesn't bother you. If you want it to stop, just come out and say something about it.

Leo



If you keep this up your friends will be staging an intervention in about 9 weeks time. There's nothing wrong with what you're doing – remember that when they ambush you wearing their solemn faces. There's a clear eight weeks to give it all you have got.

Virgo



House arrest is not that bad. Everything you need is there, you're not spending money you don't have in places you don't like, and you don't have to put up with all the annoyingly useless people. Plus you'll discover entirely new ways to amuse yourself.

Libra



You just may have a chance to see your "system" finally begin to pay off. I never had a whole lot of faith in it but by gosh the odds are now firmly stacked in your favour. You could use a big payout but you still need to plan for your future not just place bets on it.

Scorpio



It's interesting to take a new route home from work – you see new sights and revisit old haunts – unless you're just trying to avoid going home. Why pretend you're trying to expand your mind when you're really only hiding? Take a new route to somewhere else.

Sagittarius



You'll need lots of cardio and a new sound system before you start your world tour. Think Britney and whip your bod – and your reputation – into performance shape super fast. Singing while you're dancing is a lot harder than it looks.

Capricorn



There's a real skill to dodging good luck. You haven't mastered it yet, but keep running and it will take the hint and leave you alone. You can't keep blaming it on S.A.D. – you were pretty gloomy in July. Buck up little buddy, things are about to get way better.

Aquarius



You still believe that it's possible to live on love. Obviously you have some short term memory problems. Shall we reminisce about those chosen few you dreamed of spending your life with? Maybe it's just low blood sugar – have a sandwich.

Pisces



You're at the far end of your orbit and your ears are crackling with static. You are bravely going where no one has gone before and it's a little frightening. Consider constructing one of those tinfoil hats – for your whole body. Just a protective measure.

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Looking Back

by Miss Conception

Back in 2000, my best friend Ben Ward and I used to go to “Industry night with Felicia and JJ Murray” Mondays at Zippers. During one of the performances Ben looked at me and said, “You should do drag—you always know the songs and you’re always dancing along...”

NO! I couldn’t...but it got me thinking.

The following week I went up to Felicia and asked her if I could come in and do a number, just for fun. I was surprised when she said sure, why not?

I only had one week to prepare, but I already knew my song—because I’m gay!

I went out and bought a wig, some eyelashes, a dress from the \$20 store—it was funny and weird at the same time. I got my shoes from Walk on the Wild Side. They were size 12 white silk wedding shoes—AWFUL! No one should wear white silk wedding shoes, if you need a drag mother for no other reason, it’s to tell you what not to wear.

Knowing people from the bar led me to getting my wig styled and in the end I probably spent close to \$300 getting ready for just one number. Once I was basically ready to go, all I needed was my face painted. I absolutely loved Lena Over at the time, I thought she was a goddess—she was so fabulous. So one night I was back at her place telling her about the number I was going to do and she said she’d do my face.

When the night of the show arrived, I went to Lena’s freshly shaved and ready to be painted, it was such an exhilarating feeling. I’ve been told the first person to paint you will become your drag mother. Well...Lena’s running around like a freak trying like mad to get ready and when she sees me she blurts out—“I don’t have time

to paint you.” Oh no! What the hell was I going to do?

Ricky Raunch, another queen who’d been sitting back watching all the chaos piped up and offered to do my face. When it was done and I looked into the mirror, I was totally shocked—I looked good! I felt so comfortable and loved it. I had about 50 people coming to the show, so this was a big deal.

I got up on stage and sang “Declaration of Love” by Celine Dion, yes I’ve always loved Celine. There were so many queens in the audience watching me and I remember Felicia saying, “Oh god, we’ve got to watch this girl, she’s good!”

I felt great, made a fortune in tips and was suddenly thinking—gosh this could become a career.

While my drag mother left me in the lurch to be rescued by another, I’ve now got two daughters of my own, Dusty Balfour, who’s just won Miss Trillium at TICOT, and Heroine Marks, who ended up coming in 3rd for Drag Idol 2008.

I’ve also opened a store, Miss C’s Closet (Behind Alibi in the Laneway), to help all those queens who don’t have a drag mother of their own. I wanted to fill the store with everything that a drag queen, transsexual or cross-dresser needs. A lot of first timers are shy and want to become a different person. You learn from your drag family, how to present yourself in public.

Kevin Levesque has been performing as Miss Conception for 9 years now in Toronto and all around the United States. Known unofficially as Miss Congeniality, he loves his shows at Woody’s, feeling he’s found a place where the crowd really enjoys his good humoured antics



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