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Winterplay!

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Gay and lesbian seasonal • Winter 2009



In this issue we honour the divine feminine, our divas, and female archetypes

Maggie Cassella looks back at her brush with three strong women

Plus we take you away to Cuba...and much much more



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From the Publisher

Among the many hobbies I had as a teen, I used to spend hours sketching beautiful females on big huge canvases. My women were elegant, with long flowing hair, thick beautiful lashes, and sexy lips. They were my goddesses; earth mothers with a lot of warmth.

I have always loved women (mind you, I have never been with one; is this the proper place for a confessional?). My mother, my sister, and all my girl friends would tell you how much I love spending time with them. Women, in my opinion, make great and caring friends.

One of the sweetest posts I saw on Facebook lately was of a friend of mine who was talking about his mother, sister and grandma. My friend finished his post with "the women in my life make me a better man." You have no idea how much more I respect and admire him after seeing this.

I worship the ground my mother walks on. If this edition of *winterplay!* serves any purpose, I hope it serves at least as a gift and a tribute to the most amazing woman in my life. For the woman who made me, nursed me when I was sick, gave me her shoulder to cry on when I was upset, and took care of me every day of my life, thank you. Even now, as a grown up, I know that the world is safe because I can turn to her when things are chaotic or the days are difficult.

I come from a Catholic upbringing, but Catholics in Lebanon (where my father is from) put high emphasis on worshiping and praying to the Virgin Mary, even considering her in the league of Christ. She is, after all, the one who carried the "Son of God." Without the female there would never have been the male. And thus, She should be honoured and worshiped. Even

today, years after I got away from the misinformed teachings of religion to growing into a more of spiritual person, I still sleep with a picture of the Virgin under my mattress. Last week, as I was telling a friend of mine that little story, she asked me "why?" I couldn't tell her then. I think it probably has to do with feeling protected, as "the mother" is there with me, watching over me while I sleep.

Having said all this though, I have to say I am gender blind. I have to like you based on your deeds and qualities, not based on your sex. When it came to our publications, I insisted from day one that we work our hardest to be a publication for humans and not for a particular gender. It was difficult sometimes to strike a balance and be equally fair in featuring men, women and trans people. But I really don't want to have to worry about that, or think about it a lot, because here at Pink Play Mags that is not the place from where we are coming to you. We come from a place where we are all the same, in spite of our different sexes. Our readers keep reminding us that we have successfully achieved this and it encourages

us to continue on this path

This, however, is our tribute to the feminine: to the sister, mother, and goddess. Enjoy.

Antoine Elhashem



winterplay!

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In This Issue

- 12 Let the Divine Feminine Shine Her Light
 - Shelley A. Harrison
- 18 Viva la Diva!
 - Scott Dagostino
- 23 Femme
 - Karen Fulcher
- 29 A Love Letter to Cuba
 - Kevin Slack
- **44** Hunting Ferret
 - Kristyn Dunion

Regular features

- 34 Our Opinion
 - Deb Pearce & Steven Bereznai
- 37 Hot Artist: Sonja Scharf
 - Scott MacDonald
- 40 Urban Spaces
 - Manny Machado
- 51 Winter in the City
 - Ricky Boudreau
- 57 From the Heart
 - Shelley A. Harrison
- 60 Winter Horoscope
 - Judith Crane
- 62 Looking Back:
 - Maggie Cassella

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From the Editor

When I lost my mom suddenly to cancer over 10 years ago, I was devastated. I was still trying to wrap my head around the fact that she was sick, so when it was all over a mere 3 months later, I was in complete shock. She was my shoulder to cry on, my go-to person for practical worldly and dating advice, my pep squad for pursuing my dreams and she shared my whacky sense of humour.

I honestly believe that our mom is the single most important person in the world; after all she's the one that brought us into it and depending on how that went we're sure to hear about the joy (and pain) of that for the rest of our lives. Now don't get me wrong, I love my dad too, but my relationship with him while growing up a confused gay boy was tough at times, as I'm sure many of you can identify with. They say moms always know when their kids are "that way" and once they get past the guilt of feeling like they've somehow failed as a parent, they just want their kids to be happy.

I was blessed to have a fantastic relationship with mine, but not all mothers are the cookie baking, apple pie smiles, supportive confidants many of us gush about. As you'll read from Shelley, our new "From the Heart" columnist and cover girl, all the strong role-model archetypes in our lives have a shadow side and Mom is no exception. Even those of us who may have antagonistic relationships with our moms, I'm sure can pick out certain strengths we owe to her presence in our lives if we look hard enough in the mirror. Really, moms want what's best for us, even if we don't agree with them on what that might be.

And what about the other feminine energy in our lives: sisters, grandmothers, daughters, girlfriends? The drag queens fiercely embrace it, often becoming a drag mother to the next generation of performers. The gay boys call each other "girl" and we all know that "sisters" have always been doing it for themselves for a long time now. The lipstick lezzies flaunt it and the

trans male-to-females bravely embody it, sometimes at great personal risk.

Yet, the rest of us seem at times intimidated by this warm, fuzzy, caring energy, often clinging desperately to the male mystique Toronto seems to embody. I think in our male dominated world it's easy to forget how vital this womanly energy is to our lives. We live on Mother Earth, whose moods are expressed by Mother Nature and most religions, if they are not outright worshipping her, then they are worshipping her son, who would never have existed without her to give him birth. Maybe that's why we live in such a male dominated world because everything about it is so completely feminine–must be intimidating to all those powerful male leaders.

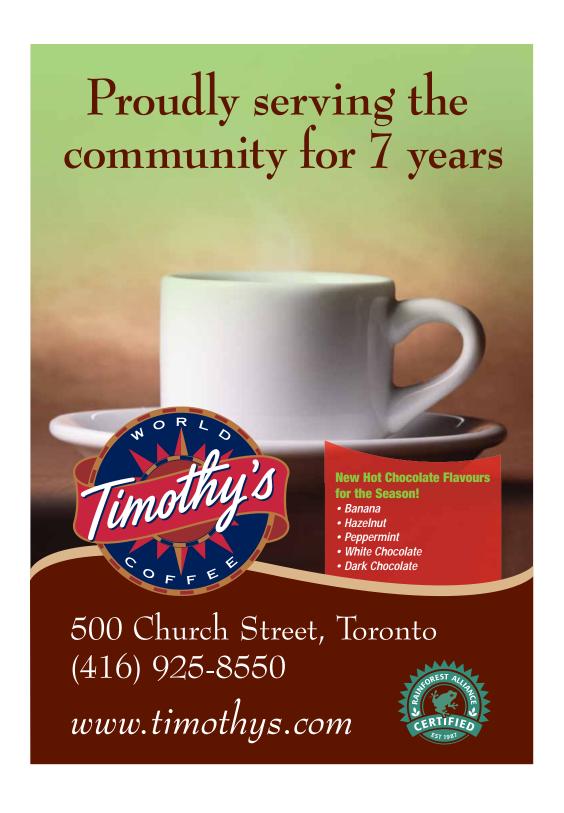
Luckily I didn't have any issues, unfinished business or regrets when it came to my time with my mom. I certainly milked all I could out of those last few visits. It makes me sad she'll never meet the guy I finally settle down with and it makes me sad that my sister's kids won't have her for a grandmother. Every so often, especially around Mother's Day, I still miss her so much it takes my breath away. She left me with one hell of a legacy though. My ability to care deeply for others comes from her, as does my open heart and my refusal to judge people. My fearlessness to be myself is also thanks to her. Since she left I've become inseparable from my sister and I've gained a more

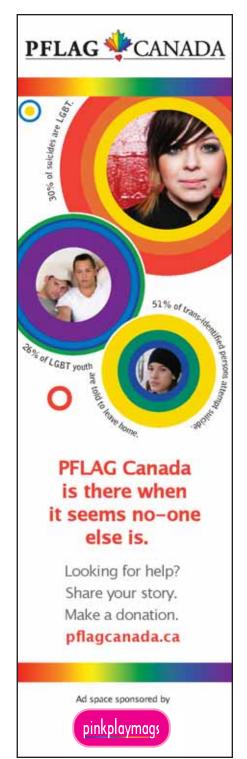
open and loving relationship with my dad.

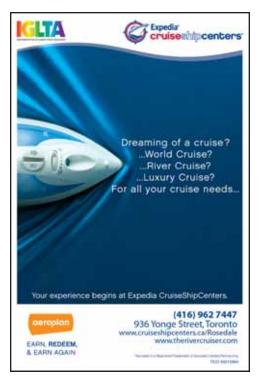
This issue's for you Mom.

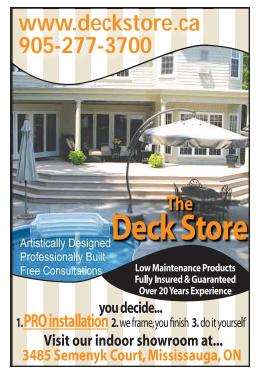
Jeff Harrison

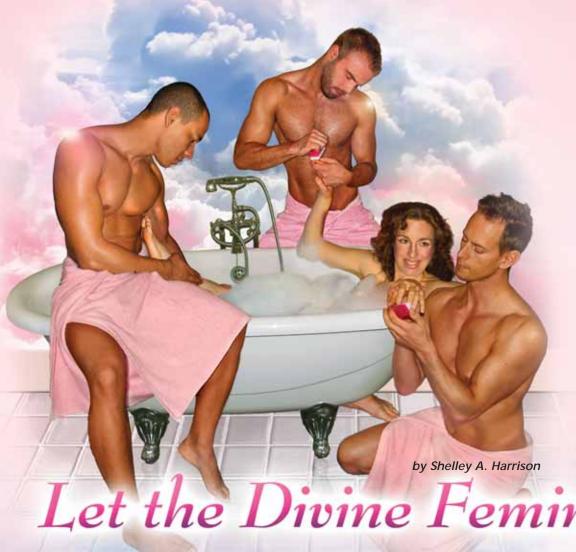












Although many people find comfort and connection through religion, for those of us in the GLBT community, organized religion often represents oppression and rejection. With its Christian associations quite a few of us just can't be bothered with this holiday. Even if we set aside the association with Christ, the vulgar commercialization of Christmas often turns the rest of us away. But we may be able to salvage the magic of the holiday season, if we strip back our layers of modernity and go back to our roots. A holiday is, after all, a Holy-day.

Most of us have created our own meaningful celebrations for this time, but what is the original significance of this time of the year? It is the time of the rebirth of the Son....or Sun. If you have rejected this holiday because the Christian reference to baby Jesus' birth curls your toes, allow me to enlighten you about its archetypal roots.

In ancient times the Goddess was always portrayed and honoured in her triple aspect of Maiden, Mother, and Crone. In the spring, as life rose once again, nubile, carefree and full of blossoms, she was the Maiden. During summer and early autumn, the seasons of growth, ripening and harvest, she was the nourishing Mother. In late fall, when plants fell to earth decaying over the long dead of winter, she was the Crone, the Hag of Death.

These seasonal tides are guided by the Sun, giver of life to the sustaining plants. These cyclical rhythms of light and dark, guide us through our year. We all know the joy and expansiveness that comes with long hot summer nights, and early sunrises. Most of us in Canada dread the darkening days, where the sun appears late, making it hard to get out of bed, and sets early, cutting our days short. Some of us need the Sun's rays so much we suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of mood disorder typified by sleeping too much, having little energy, craving sweets and carbs, and depression. Of course, the treatment for SAD is bright light therapy and outdoor exercise in the sunlight!

Summer Solstice-or Midsummer-is the day of longest sunlight and shortest night. It falls somewhere around the 21st of July, in the astrological sign of Leo, ruled by the Sun. It is a celebration of solar power at its pinnacle of life giving expression. In the old mythologies, this was personified as the Summer King winning his battle over the Winter King at this high festival. The Summer King was literally "sunny-boy." Wearing golden clothes and riding a white horse, both symbols of his solar radiance.

Conversely, Winter Solstice-or Midwinter-is the day of longest night and shortest sunlight. It falls near December 21st in the sign of Capricorn, ruled by the very serious planet of Saturn. It is a time of turning deeply inward and facing the fear of

winter was a life or death matter. By December, our ancestors were entering the harshest part of the frigid season. They would have been out of fresh food and relying on what rations they were able to store. If the harvest or hunt was bad, many would die of cold and starvation. It was a time when hope and trust in the Earth Mother's provision was quite literally food for the human spirit.

During Solstice celebrations, trees were adorned with fruits and flowers as a reminder to bring forth abundance again with the lengthening days born at Midwinter. This was the origin of the Christmas tree. Candles and fires were lit on the darkest night to hold the dark at bay and call back in the light. The Sun which rose the next morning was reborn after the longest night, marking the victory of light over dark. The Sun was personified as a young god of light, born to the world at this time. He was the Divine Child of the Divine Mother.

The iconic motif of the Blue Madonna giving birth to the Christ Child is a syncreatic superimposition over the archetype of Mother and Son, which is as old as humans themselves. The earlier gods and goddesses of the original pagan peoples of Europe are what lie beneath the Christian icons. There are many examples of this in pre-Christian Europe and the Middle-East: the Egyptians had Horus son of Isis, in Sumeria they worshiped Attis son of Innana, for Greeks it was

ine Shine her Light.

winter survival. The Winter King got to kick the Summer King's butt at this time and lord it over the world until his rival grew strong enough again to take his throne back. The Winter King usually rode a black horse and came from the Underworld. Legends of jousts between the dark (k)night, and the white (k)night persisted into Medieval tales as remnants of these old pagan seasonal rituals.

Winter Solstice is that precise moment when the darkness reaches its swallowing depth on the longest night, then turns, and the Sun begins its ascent again. Although it takes until February for us to really begin to notice the longer days and the stronger sun, it is this moment of the return of the sun, which was cause for much feasting and revelry. Back in the low-tech days of hunting and gathering, and later agriculture, surviving the

Dionysus son of Semele, in Syria Baal son of Astarte, and Mabon son of Modron were the Mother/Son duo in Wales. This archetypal pairing is universal. Mom had the occasional daughter too, but she usually got sent to the underworld to hang out and dust cobwebs, but that is another story...

As stated by Barbara G. Walker in her book, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets:*

"Most pagan Mysteries celebrated the birth of the Divine Child at the winter solstice. Norsemen celebrated the birthday of their god Frey, at the nadir of the sun in the darkest days of winter, known to them as Yule. The night of birth, Christmas Eve, was called Modranect...the Night of the Mother-originally a festival greater than Christmas Day...Trappings such as Yule logs, gifts, lights, mistletoe, holly, carols, feasts, and processions were altogether pagan. They were drawn from worship of the Goddess as mother of the Divine Child."

In today's world it figures that Sonny-boy gets all the fame and glory, and poor old Mom sits at home washing diapers. Living in the city, it's easy to take Nature for granted. Although she is the sumptuous canvas that all the rhythms of life are playing out upon, we easily forget that everything we have, from food to clothing, comes from Her abundant gifts. Let's pull our denigrated mother goddess out of the dark and illuminate her a little more.

Caroline Myss, a medical intuitive and author who is an expert at interpreting archetypal energies, describes the qualities of the Divine Mother thus: "The oldest religious tradition on earth may well be Goddess worship, which some archaeologists trace back further than thirty thousand years. It was certainly natural to worship the archetype of woman as the Source of all life, especially in the age before male warriors replaced her with their combative sky gods." Her famous Son may get to be all shiny and bright like the star on your Christmas tree, but Mom is the true power behind the throne or the manger, as the Source of All Life. She is the womb from which all life is born, both nature and human, and the tomb to which all life returns at death.

So what of her Son who is reborn at Winter Solstice? Let me use the myth of Mabon ap Modron from Wales to illuminate him. Mabon ap Modron, translates as Youth Son of Mother, in Welsh. Mabon was a living god among the tribes of Britain before the Roman invasion.

The story goes that his mother was a queen, the sovereign Goddess of the Land, in fact. He is stolen from her while she is asleep, when he is but three days old, and imprisoned in a cave. A hero goes in search of Mabon, releases him from his prison and restores him to his bereft mother.

The tale follows the progress of the Sun over its year long journey. The Son/Sun is born at Winter Solstice to his joyful mother. He is stolen away and imprisoned in the underworld of darkness for a time. This is a time of initiation for the young god, and though his mother mourns, we suspect she wisely senses the purpose in this ritual separation as she has often set up mentors or foster parents for him. There is a search for Mabon, and then he is restored to the world of light, shining with even more glory after his time of initiation. And the cycle repeats.

So who is this kid dressed up for a Christmas pageant in the clothes of Jesus (or Mabon, or Horus depending on where he is taking his winter

vacation)? He is the archetypal Divine Child and the woman holding him is the Goddess or Divine Mother.

Each of us carries the Divine Child within our own psyche. He is our inner God, our highest potential. He is active in the world, or emergent, and thus masculine, and he is connected to the most exalted in life-the Divine. He is the inner light we can reach for when we are in our darkest moments of our human journey. And thus, the Divine Child's symbolic journey across the heavens as the Sun, includes a time of emergence, and a time of enclosure. The enclosure is experienced as a death or a loss by his mother, but is in fact purposeful. A time of incubation is good and necessary, a time of residing away from the world.

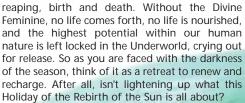
For many in the LGBT community, time in the closet can be viewed as a similar initiatory enclosure where you are questioning and forming your identity, without yet having to navigate the negative repressive forces in society. Coming out can be seen as the light of your divine potential shining forth with self-affirmation. Though I imagine for most it didn't feel as lofty as all this, it was a necessary part of your personal growth and empowerment.

In the smaller, day-to-day rhythms of our psyche, we require both the enclosure and the emergence. We need time to go inward and soul search, or tap into our creativity, as well as time to be extroverted, and bring forth the fruits of our introspection into our work and relationships. If we only go inward, we become brooding and dark. If we are always outward, we burn out or become superficial, with no roots in the fertile darkness of our interior.

In our modern urban lives, it is harder to feel and experience our dependence upon the cycle of life and death in nature. We eat veggies from California and even further abroad. We feel we have conquered the Death Hag of Winter with our cleverness. But deeper in our psyche it is not so easy to trick death. In the biology of our heart and soul, we require a balance of the light and the dark, of enclosure and exposure. We need to go inward and face the darkness to be initiated into our full potential.

So when you light your Christmas tree, Menorah candles, or a Yuletide fire this season, think of your own potential to give birth to the highest within yourself. The Goddess as Mother is your own creative and regenerative capacity. Just as your physical mother birthed you into this life, your inner mother births the best within you. Mother Nature teaches us that growth happens in cycles of dark and light, ebb and flow, sowing and





Pink Play Mags would like to welcome Shelley A. Harrison as our new "From the Heart" columnist.

PHOTOGRAPHY by Kevin Slack MODELS: Shelley A. Harrison, Danilo, Portela, Sterling Richard, Chad Simon.



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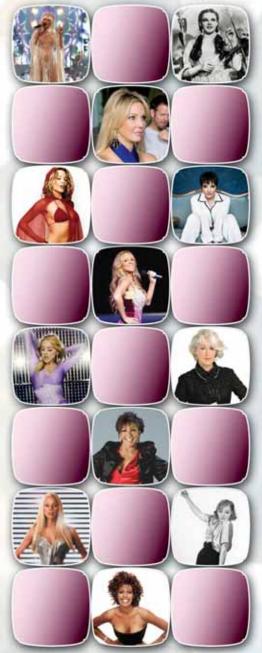
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Viva la Diva!



Strong women and the gay men who love them

by Scott Dagostino

Diva! For such a small word, it's a complicated one. It's both a noun and an adjective; both an ironic label and a sincere validation: both the ultimate compliment and a condescending putdown. A woman labeled a diva can be hero or villain, saint or sinner, but either way, generations of gay men have loved their divas and drawn strength from their inspiration.

Perhaps the quintessential diva story comes from Toronto DJ and producer Andrew Awesome, who says, "When I was a wee Awesome, I saw Tina Turner's 'Live in Rio' concert on TV and fell immediately and entirely in love. She was so totally in control, all sweaty and raunchy. Her hair was huge, she wore leather dresses and bright lipstick and people LOVED her. It was so over the top, but tough too. Then I found out about her past, with the abuse she went through at the hands of that bastard lke and how no matter what she came up against, she came out on top." Turner's famous '80s comeback following years of abuse was a tremendous inspiration to him: "A lot of kids made fun of me as a child, called me a fag and asked me if I was a girl. I just figured I would turn out like Tina one day and that pulled me through."

That story is echoed by many gay men. Comedian Gavin Crawford, co-host of CBC's This Hour Has 22 Minutes, says, "Growing up, I was taught to try and hide my gayer tendencies, to try not to be so 'different.' To see a huge woman like Jennifer Holiday, or Barbra Streisand with her giant nose, or even Liza Minnelli with that unfortunate hair, belting out a tune basically screaming to the world, 'Hey! I'm Different and I'm



Fabulous!' was just really empowering for me. It helped me to realize that even though I may not fit in, people should still applaud me wildly."

The true definition of diva, of course, originally applied to opera singers-it was a title bestowed on classically trained artists possessed of great talent, career longevity and perhaps more than a small sense of entitlement-but the term has evolved (or devolved?) to include powerful women of all stripes. Is homemaker guru Martha Stewart a diva? How about feminist author and critic Camille Paglia? She spoke in Toronto last summer and told the Walrus magazine how the style of "grand opera" has been preserved by generations of film-loving gay men: "Gay men used to be conservators of the extreme, extravagant gesture. You can see Gloria Swanson doing it in Sunset Boulevard, and Bette Davis in All About Eve."

Toronto jazz singer Vincent Wolfe, currently performing on a cruise ship in the Caribbean, notes that, "Tallulah Bankhead, he famous actress, was absolutely a gay icon during her time, mostly because she just was outrageous, a desperate attention seeker. Bisexual, outspoken, drunk, trashy and totally fabulous. A LOT of men wanted to be her or be with her."

Music columnist Daniel Paquette, who's tossed around the word "diva" more than most, agrees that, "Gay men are interested in strong women because they are the women we would want to be if we were women." But why women and not our fellow men? Why love Barbara Streisand and not Harvey Fierstein? Why identify with Susan Sarandon and not George Clooney? If the word "survivor" comes up so often, as it does with our divas, then why not model ourselves on Lance Armstrong?

With his *Encyclopedia Madonnica*, Matthew Rettenmund literally wrote the book on arguably our greatest diva, the pop star who continues to thrill two generations of gay men. "I think gay men tend to relate to women as idols," he explains, "because when we're young, we divine that they want what we want-namely, the love of a man-and are allowed to pursue that openly."

Montréal film writer Matthew Hays says, "We all see ourselves as tough, sexy chicks (or wish we did). There's a vicarious thrill when Cher kicks a boyfriend out in one of her trashy videos."

Publicity consultant Jefferson Darrell agrees that, growing up gay, "to openly look at a man, to sexualize him, was taboo, but a diva would do it!"

Darrell had to address the diva question in a professional capacity when he worked on a show featuring three powerful black singers. To gay men, he says, 3 Mo' Divas had an immediate hook but, to the culture at large, it was tricky to promote. "I think in today's vernacular, diva is a very negative word," he says, "People see it as a license to be a bitch." Darrell notes that the character of Amanda on the TV soap Melrose Place is typically called a bitch, even though "she adds a level of interest and we like her because she just tells it like it is." He's also a fan of talk show host Wendy Williams, who will say something outrageous, then look at the camera and declare, "Oh, like you weren't thinking it!" A diva is a truth-teller, Darrell says: "It's a sign of inner strength and that's what appeals to gay men. They look at her and think, 'This person is not taking any shit. Why should I?"

Strong women rebel against a sexist culture and gay activists like Andrew Brett and musician John Caffery cheer them on. "If I was to pick a diva," says Caffery, "Nina Simone would be mine. Her anger came through at a time in jazz music when anger wasn't being expressed." He admires "the strength and tenderness in her music," while Brett says, "The lyrics of any diva song can basically be boiled down to: 'Don't tell me how to



live my life.' That's why gay men love divas. We want the power to control our own lives and no patriarchal bullshit is going to get in our way."

The paradox of the diva is that, in a heterosexual-male-dominated society, she is both powerful figure and an oppressed one-dismissed as a bitch for merely standing up for herself. Darrell looks past the adorable Maria in The Sound of Music and says, "As a child, I remember hating the Baroness. You're all, 'Boo, hiss!' because she's evil and wicked but it's funny how, watching the movie again as an adult, she no longer seems evil but a diva. She's just protecting her interests and she's totally misjudged for it." Any gay man who's ever been called "militant" can relate.

"We may look up to divas as superwomen," says Paquette, "but we only truly relate to them when they falter, when they show their human side. We see ourselves in Whitney Houston's drug battle or Oprah fighting with her weight."

Perhaps the most legendary gay diva, even more than Madonna, was Judy Garland, who possessed both a glorious singing voice and a heartbreaking appetite for self-destruction. "She had that vulnerability that just jumped out at you," says Wolfe. Gay men instantly identified with her, and more so later on, because she was indeed a survivor, who kept rising from the ashes and continuing to sing, kind of like a bird flying against a hurricane force wind. It's wild to watch videos of her in concert in the 60s–crowds would just rush to the stage en masse, reaching up to just touch her, as if she was offering some kind of salvation."

Wolfe notes a number of other singers who shared that mix of phenomenal talent and dismal

Howard Kane

personal life–Edith Piaf, Maria Callas, Patsy Cline, even Garland's daughter Liza Minnelli–all of them beloved by gay men. "When these ladies sing," he says, "you are HEARING their lives. You know you're getting a chunk of their soul, and THAT is why we adore and relate to them on that whole other level."

Self-described "show queen" Howard Kane laughs at how, at the age of 12, he confused a movie theatre box office attendant by asking for a ticket to Minnelli's New York, New York show, instead of The Bad News Bears, the movie every other kid his age saw that summer. "I was dazzled by Liza's high energy, presence and uniqueness," he raves. "She was different form any other performer I ever saw."

Wolfe says he loves Liza for being honest, charismatic and yes, a survivor-noting that Whitney Houston's recent comeback from drug addiction adds her to that pantheon.

"Gay icons, there's a lot of tragedy in their lives," mused singer Kylie Minogue a few years ago. "There's been no tragedy in my life, only tragic outfits." Ironically, she said that before being diagnosed with and surviving breast cancer. Drag performer Kevin "Miss Conception" Levesque disagrees. "It's all ABOUT the costumes," he says. "Gay men-and certainly drag queens-love costumes and it's all about putting on a show." Levesque is a fan of Celine Dion but says, despite her powerful voice, she didn't really become a diva until "she's learned to step it up with dancers and spectacle."

"It really is a big factor," says Hays, one of a great number of gay men who loved Joan Collins on *Dynasty*: "She seemed like a parody of divadom, genetically engineered (and wardrobed)



for a gay target demographic. She wasn't just over the top, she was ludicrous: the outfits, the dialogue, the rivalry with her blonde nemesis, the gay son, the scene where she actually fucks one of her husbands to death-it was glorious. My proudest moment as a journalist-ever-was sitting on a park bench and interviewing that woman. Now there's a role model!"

Divas who can combine a timeless talent with a knack for staying in current fashion by reinventing their style are the most beloved. "Gay men reinvent themselves all the time," says Levesque, "It's kind of wrong in that we should just be who we are but we do."

Even old-school fan Wolfe enthuses that Madonna, Cher and Annie Lennox have displayed remarkable chameleon qualities, but still, he says, "I think real talent survives above all else. You are NOT going to see Britney doing one-woman 'concerts in the round' in 20 or 30 years, you know?"

Todd Klinck just shrugs. All this pop-culture talk leaves the Goodhandy's co-owner a bit cold. "I'm not fond of Whitney Houston's music, though I certainly can appreciate her crackhead-turned-spiritual-comeback journey. MY divas are local queer business owners, who taught me everything I know about the nightclub business." Renda Abdo, owner of 7 West Cafe and Straight, gave Klinck his "very first real downtown job as a young queer and her unconventional self-taught way of doing business inspired me and still inspires me to this day."

Moving on to a job at El Convento Rico, Klinck worked for owner Maritza Yumbla, "a diva with a capital D," and he credits her for providing a space for drag performance back when there was

little. It's a philosophy he sees in his "final diva," his business partner and best friend Mandy Goodhandy. "A lot of people don't know this," Klinck says, "but Mandy (as her male persona) put Club Colby's on the map, then opened the revolutionary and legendary nightclub and afterhours den the Playground." Goodhandy, says Klinck, is "a true diva because she is strong, original, talented, feisty, and sometimes brutal, but always honest."

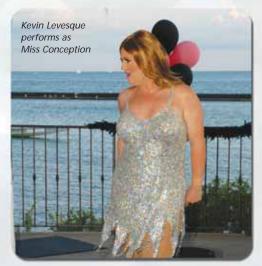
"We're in a time now, in the post-Stonewall age, where gay men no longer need that kind of culture as an identity marker," says Camille Paglia.

Perhaps without gay celebrities like Adam Lambert, Neil Patrick Harris and John Barrowman, our need for divas may pass, but Levesque says the reaction to diva-in-training Lady Gaga proves otherwise.

As long as gay men crave fabulousness, gay men will look up to great women. "It's a wish that we could embody their forcefulness, their magic," Wolfe says. "They seem to do what they want when they want, hypnotize audiences, act up in public, run through airports straight onto first class. They're bowed to, fawned over, written up, criticized, facelifted and idolized." And who doesn't want to live like that?

Scott Dagostino is a Toronto-based freelance writer who adores the city that Canada loves to hate. 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

PHOTOS courtesy of G. Crawford, M. Hays, H. Kane, T. Klinck, D. Paquette and Wolf Witzgall



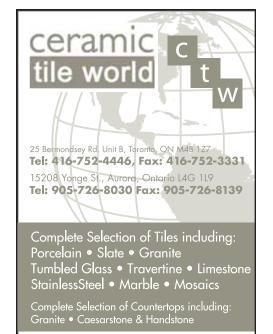




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Femme by Karen Fulcher

Oh dear. The feminine. Opposite of masculine. A subject that, along with religion or politics, can make or break a dinner party. Gender is a sensitive issue. Gender is not a simple equation and nor is judging where another is along a masculine/feminine continuum, especially if you are one of the "floating numbers."

It's not a simple testosterone/estrogen element, either. Females and males have both of these hormones in varying levels. Science shows that our sex drive increases the more testosterone is in our system, but does that mean a high sex drive is predominately male or masculine? Look at world champion runner, Caster Semenya. The International Association of Athletics Federations asked her to submit to psychological, gynecological and endocrinological examinations to determine her gender (even though she has lived her life as a female).

Is the feminine really as easy as the right answers to a set of questions, the right junk in the trunk, the right cocktail of chemicals? The kind of questions on that psychological test anyone of us in the community would abhoranswering.

In fact, the World Health Organization uses the word "gender" to refer to the "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women." So, if you are fully socialized into a binary gender ideology, then you would pass the psychological test that Semenya would be subjected to. Of course, if we were to queerify the tests, the questions would be different, now wouldn't they?

Let's look at the typical characteristics related to femininity: innocence, nurturing,

belonging, sustaining, mothering, mysterious, alluring, engaging, entertaining ...nice?

And the physical manifestations of the feminine mystique: curves, sways, lipstick, flutteringly long eyelashes, perky calves atop petite feet strapped into heels, stockings, skirts, long hair, soft perfume, painted fingernails, a breathless voice... the colour pink?

Speaking of pink, it has long been associated with the feminine, right? Actually, the colour wasn't related to a gender until the 1920s and for twenty years, it was more suitable for boys because it was considered an exciting tone with lots of energy. During Nazi rule, the pink triangle was used to identify prisoners accused of homosexuality. In Japan, pink is related to a woman's sexual organs, thus porn films are dubbed pink movies. And "pink money" refers to our community's consumer power.

When I envision delicious femininity, singer Lily Allen comes to mind. She is naughty, irreverent, sassy and subversive. She sings her song, "F**k You" in a skipping, mellifluous, innocent voice. This song is a sign of a different time for nice, quiet and pretty women.

Popular culture is full of examples of this

new woman. No more will you find the cloyingly desperate, passive aggressive femme depending only on her sexual presence as her power. Power that men give (and can take away from) her.

Look at True Blood's femme characters: Sookie an innocent but very powerful (and unapologetically sexual) young woman. She demonstrates courage and sensitivity, fierce loyalty and nurturing instincts, even in taking care of her lover's stead, a newly turned teen girl vampire. The Vampires' Queen, a drop dead gorgeous bisexual-ruthless yet witty-attacks a ferocious male vamp and immediately after, cheerfully chastises him for playing Yahtzee badly. Lafayette is flamboyant and femme but nobody would ever call him weak. We watch him wrap his head in silk scarves, apply makeup and sashay around the bar, but unabashedly reveal his decidedly masculine muscles and fierce strength when threatened.

And dear Joan in *Mad Men:* savvy, voluptuous and smart-the mother of all the secretaries-and who always makes me swoon (along with a lesbian roommate character who professes her love for Joan). Even Joan expresses a violent side, smashing a vase over the head of her disappointing husband and yet purrs support to her former lover over the phone in an incredibly mature manner.

Bitch Magazine writer, Sady Doyle suggests, "women have always been roped into performing other people's fantasies" and



honours Lady Gaga as a breath of fresh air. Doyle likes Lady Gaga because "we're used to pop stars with ridiculous feminine roles... but we're not used to someone who so clearly knows they're being ridiculous and for whom the goal is taking the inherent absurdity of being a 'sex symbol' or any sort of ideal to a new level of goofiness: a persona that points to its own fakeness."

Just this year in Wesson, Mississippi, openly gay, 17-year-old Ceara Sturgis decided she would like to wear a tux for her school yearbook picture. She was denied a spot because a rule dictated that only boys could wear tuxedos. In Dunnellon, Florida, a 16-year-old boy was sent home because he was wearing makeup, high-heeled boots and a bra and students must dress "in keeping with their gender." There is a lot of pressure for binary gender expression in our culture. The good thing is that it's being reported in the news and the legality of these rules are being challenged.

Can we celebrate the feminine without mandating it for women and punishing it in men? I am not known for wearing a skirt but on the occasion I do, the social reinforcement is undeniable. I receive shocked and pleased comments and compliments. I suspect that this is a deep-seated socially conditioned response. I am out at work. A woman. And I rarely wear a dress, so when I do, it is something to be celebrated so I will continue to follow the rules... and show a little leg? If it were just about looking good, then why am I not getting the same reaction when I wear a tie to work? I know I look great in a tie!

It is difficult to look at this subject devoid of the politics involved, especially in the LGBTTQ community. The binary gender benders are the interesting people and the brave people.

It can be quite brave to be a femme in the queer women's community as well. The signals that other lesbians recognize can be obscured (especially in Toronto) rendering one invisible where often the masculine is esteemed. A friend of mine has told me many stories about attending clubs and being stopped at the door, the doorperson explaining that it was a queer event; or of the times her sexuality has been questioned by potential lovers.

There is a celebration of the masculine here in the Toronto lesbian community. The femmes are often invisible. Perhaps this is our own simplistic attempts at social signals: I'm queer and available. Maybe it's time to get more sophisticated. Now don't get me wrong, I know many women who enjoy masculine clothing because it is more comfortable, because it sends an unquestionably nonsexual message to the heterosexual males and an easy signal to potential female lovers (and defines how they walk in the world).

I challenge us to read the head tilt, glance, body position from a feminine woman as a queer signal, or do we write them off as a socially conditioned straight woman? Do we really need to be hit over the head, so to speak? Is it even possible to move so far from the mainstream that we can reclaim femininity but from a totally revolutionary perspective?

What of the aging feminine? She has the papery thin skin, the wise eyes, the best and warmest hugs, the tomes of knowledge and understanding of how this old world works. She knows what truly motivates people and just how to do the right thing.

The youthful feminine, too, is being reinvented. Young women are refashioning the old arts: knitting, canning, sewing, quilting... while reinventing concepts of being a woman: purple and blue hair, tattoos, cleavage, piercings, wearing skirts with boots all while making



their own art and telling their own stories through zines and blogs.

Let's look at those typical feminine descriptions and see them a little differently. This list is by no means complete but a small taste of what we value about the feminine.

The Nurturer. Before she died, June Callwood not only founded and co-founded a number of organizations dedicated to nurturing others, she most recently co-hosted a TV series about the challenges faced by people providing care for their parents, spouse or others.

The Peace-Keeper. For her intense and committed involvement in the Voice of Women (VOW), Muriel Duckworth is perhaps best known. The VOW was founded in Toronto as an organized response to the failure of the Paris Peace talks in 1960 and the subsequent concern for world peace. Living to 100, her life boasted of numerous honours recognizing her contributions to the peace movement.





The Care-Taker. Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Inuit leader, activist and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee. She has been called a green hero for her work to ensure the health and cultural survival of the Inuit and other Arctic Indigenous people.

The Supporter. Madeleine Parent, a founding member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. She developed union activity to protect the rights of workers, she actively worked for the rights of Aboriginal women and sat on a number of committees such as Women's March Against Poverty.

The Entertainer. Trey Anthony, a Canadian comedian, playwright and a lesbian who brought *Da Kink in my Hair* to the stage and has founded creative space for people to come together, learn, celebrate and have fun.

In fact, celebrating the feminine doesn't only mean celebrating women. Seeing our city



reflect masculine and feminine characteristics is an interesting exercise. Toronto has a masculine feel. Straight edges, sharp lines, an aggressive, competitive air with a sense of power and sexual tension. Whereas Montréal has a fluid feel, sensual curves and places where you can settle in comfortably to indulge and relate. Are there ways we can create more feminine-like spaces in Toronto?

It isn't a bad thing to look at the positive feminine qualities and invite them into our lives whether we are men, women, queer, straight or somewhere in between. We could all use a little more feminine energy, especially this season. When we can't quite replicate that recipe the way that mom made it, it's because we can't quite replicate the feeling we had when eating it—the nurturing, the safety, the memories stirred into that bowl or sprinkled on that plate. It will never taste quite the same. We need to start adding the feminine ourselves to our cooking and to begin building those spaces, those friends and families that help us feel fully accepted, known and taken care of.

This season, create feelings of comfort and sustenance: the dinner parties, the gatherings, the sharing of resources and information. Host a "family orphan" (people who have nobody to share the holidays with) dinner party. Take care of others, in our community and out.

Finally, think about how we can transform our community. We're young compared to our other more established queer communities. The feminine is required to balance and help nurture growth: an integration of the many genders and the integration and respect of difference–youth, aged, race and creed–all learning and helping each other.

Share the Love and Happy Holidays!

Karen Fulcher works as a corporate communications professional and a freelance writer. She prefers being free to explore and write about things beyond policy and procedure and nearer possibilities and play.

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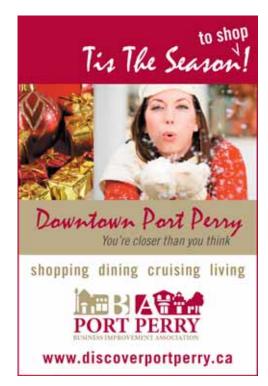
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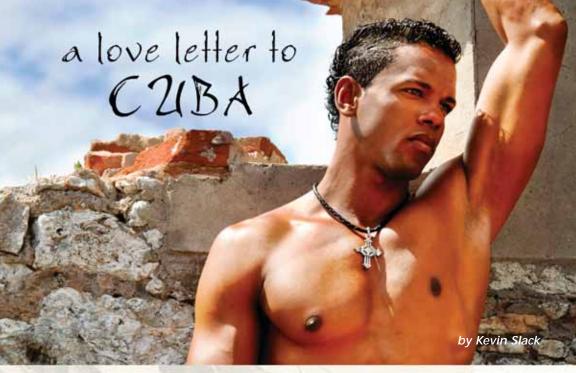
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There's nothing wrong with a resort Vacation-if you want to get away from everything and worry about nothing. The first time I travelled to Cuba, that's what I thought I wanted to do. We, my partner and I, went to Varadero, but by the second day, I was bored out of my mind. Bored of the baking-sugar sand, of the drinking, of our swan-folded bed sheets, of meeting kind-hearted jolly folk-mainly from Ottawa and Montreal-who also wanted to worry about nothing. By the third day, we were on a bus to Havana, getting the heck out of our pre-paid, three-starred paradise.

Fellow travelers, clearly accustomed to the trip, had closed the little bus window curtains. Some were snoozing; some were watching the movie Dante's Peak in English with Spanish subtitles. After a little more than three hours, the Varadero-Havana bus slowed and descended through a tunnel. There's that moment in The Wizard of Oz where Dorothy lands, her sepia-coloured house askew. "Oooh," she declares after the jarring thump. She walks to the weathered door and pushes it open, and in floods MGM's most saturated Technicolor. In the tunnel, overcome with inexplicable anticipation, I opened wide the little curtain. Presently, the bus angled up and out into the light of day. In my memory, I declared "Oooh" for everyone to hear.

In poured the heart of Havana: the crumbling Spanish architecture, the Technicolor façades, the cracked colonnades, the buttressed balconies, the fortress on the water, the vintage cars on the streets, the mad bustle, the tropical lust. In the middle of a dream place, I awoke, lucid.

Here's the set: The smell of diesel and the salt air pushed in by the trade winds pervades the labyrinthine streets. A mash-up of colonial and neo-classical art-deco and architecture homogenized in stooping elegance, where cut shutters hang off glassless windows and layers of pastel paint reject flaking façades. Wooden struts or cement blocks preserve flaring but failing seaside balconies, and formerly noble Corinthian columns crack like old bones. Squads of balustrades are almost always missing a soldier or two, while the roads run with yank tanks (those postcard-ready vintage cars), motorcycles with side cars, and horse-drawn carriages. The dusty streets teem with ladies on their balconies, the men are on the curb at dominoes or repairing their cars, and the shirtless boys are playing soccer. Ah, the talkers and gossipers and singers and lovers and drinkers and smokers and trumpet players-the wonderful clamouring cacophony. Havana is a beautiful disaster, an open theatre. Walk right through.

I get carried away, I know. How could I not? I cannot resist the cracking grace, the samba seduction. As with all of the seduced everywhere, I don't want to resist.

And, oh the people. It's excruciating, really, like staring into the midday sun, to see the people.

Over the years and my many forays back into Cuba, it became a hobby-cum-obsession to photograph these fierce souls: at handball, at soccer, strutting down the street. A photographer's dream too-confidence and self-possession without self-awareness or a vexing sense of entitlement.

I am often asked if a particular Cuban model is gay. For the most part, sexuality is so much more fluid there-and also, incidental. From my experience, Cubans-the boys and the girls-don't need or want labels and names and categories. That is our preoccupation, not theirs. Maybe in our culture the names of things distinguish and separate us too much. I find Cubans' freedom from this to be altogether enviable.

What turns me on to Cuba so much is the people. The people of Cuba are so thoroughly generous in spirit. Listen, it's a helluva thing to romanticize poverty and I don't want to. My Cuban friends have been trained their entire lives in resilience, in something called *resolviendo*—out of necessity, yes, but necessity is the best way to know something. Socialism is the grandmother of Cuban invention, and out of this has grown a sense of anticipation, a fierce and motivated *resolviendo*, and a bright and burning joy of life I would be surprised to discover anywhere else on God's earth.

And so, that first time, we stayed nearly all the rest of our vacation in Havana. We returned on Saturday to our disused room in Varadero and to a wilted bed-sheet swan that must have been made on Tuesday or Wednesday. And since then, we have had the good fortune and single-minded doggedness to return nearly twice a year. We stay in a particular house ("casa particular") in Vedado. And every time I leave-yes, still-I wake from a dream I don't want to lose. Every time, it feels like a brand new love.

Where and how to meet people

Stay at a particular house in Vedado if you can. Google "casa particular Vedado." A casa particular should cost about 30CUC (\$45 CDN)/night. Commit to one and if you don't like it after you have arrived, search the neighbourhood. You will find others. Don't expect a hotel experience. You might have to share a bathroom. You might have to suffer a cold shower. But there might also be a kitchen where you can cook. Stay at a legal casa particular-if you found it online, you're good.

Wear a cheap watch. Many Cubans will approach you to ask you the time-even if they are wearing watches, since so many of my Cuban friends wear dead watches.



"Hola" and a smile almost always work.

Where to eat

Monguito - Calle 23 y Calle L, Vedado, across the street from Habana Libre.

I have never had such whopping portions of chicken or fish, so tasty (especially the grilled fish), and so preposterously cheap. It does not look like it has any right to be a restaurant, but you should go anyway.

Aries - Calle 27 de Noviembre y Calle K, Vedado.

A charming, secreted place-if you've ever wanted to have an illicit affair in your grandmother's sitting room while eating good food, this is the place for you. If the place looks closed, still knock on the door.





Paladar La Guarida, Concordia No. 481.

This place might suffer a little for its fame and it's relatively expensive. But it has tremendous food, perhaps the best I've had in Cuba. Formerly the apartment in the movie "Strawberry and Chocolate," it has been re-furbished into a restaurant. You have to walk up three floors past tight Cuban apartments to get to the restaurant. A great place for a special romantic lunch or dinner-you might need a reservation for dinner.

Café de Paris - San Ignacio and Obispo, Havana Vieja.

When on Obispo, this is my preferred place for a beer or a mojito. I also recommend their pizza, especially their shrimp pizza. Tasty, satisfying, and relatively inexpensive. On a good day, you can enjoy spectacularly good music by a local group. On a great day, the management cycles through multiple groups who perform two or three song each.

Where to drink

Hotel Nacional - Calles 0 and 21, Vedado.

Walk through the hotel to an entirely artificial but thoroughly pleasant courtyard high above the boardwalk, with a beautiful vista of the sea and Havana Vieja. I usually take my last mojito here before coming home. Comes with a money exchange in the hotel.

La Bodeguita del Medio - Plaza de la Catedral, Havana Vieja.

It is considered a rite of passage to have a mojito at the Bodeguita-where they are said to have been invented-and write your name in the scrawl of graffiti covering the place. One of the haunts of Hemingway, it's required to go once.

Where to party

Intrepid rotating gay parties - various.

As far as I know, there are no official gay clubs

in Havana. But what Cuba can offer instead is an adventure. Friday and Saturday nights, covert organizers, trying to avoid the policia, arrange and rotate the gay club experience. There is one in Boyeros where I always have a good time. I have been assured that if you go to 23 and L, you can ask any taxi driver for the "fiesta gai" and you're good to go, but I would not have been so brave the first time. Instead, make a Cuban friend before the weekend and ask if they will play escort; expect to buy his or her beer for the night. Cubans don't typically have social money, but it's a small price to pay.

La Zorra y el Cuervo - Calle 23, between Calles N y O, Vedado.

This area of Vedado, affectionately called La Rampa, is a great place to walk around–especially Thursday through Sunday nights and especially in pairs–to find a place to drink and a muchacho (guy) or muchacha (girl). The Fox and the Crow is a famously good jazz club. \$10 CUC will get you admission and two drinks.

Casa de La Música de Havana Miramar - Calle 20, corner of Calle 35.

This version is older, more well-known (there are two Casas; the other one is called Casa de La Música de Havana Centro). Early evening shows with more Cubans than tourists at 6pm. Nighttime shows with typically more tourists than Cubans at 10pm every day of the week. If you've just taken a salsa class and want to show it off, this is the place to do it. Don't dance? Don't worry. The infectious, lusty energy and the music will not let you sit this one out.

What to see

La Rampa - Calle 23 and Calle L.

Grab a hamburger at La Rampita or a drink at Sofia. This place bustles with friendly Cubans all day and night. Go for an ice cream at Coppelia-if you can handle the tragically long queue. The only officially gay bar I know of is at 23 and P streets-a fish bowl cafeteria with harsh lighting and a perpetual blue haze of cigarette smoke.

Calle San Rafael - the street between the Hotel Inglaterra and the Gran Teatro, Havana Vieja

The closest thing Havana has to Yorkville. A street of shops and outdoor drinking and eating.

Calle Obispo - Calle Obispo y Avenida del Misiones, Havana Vieja.

This is really required. Calle Obispo is the front the government maintains for the tourists. A long cobbled street closed to vehicle traffic, with restored buildings, restaurants, shops, bars, banks and industrious Cuban posers who dress up in



Tropicana regalia and charge to be photographed. When you get tired of the glassy-eyed throngs, you only need to get a block or two away to see what Havana Vieja really looks like. My favourite place in the world to get lost, this glorious maze of narrow passageways and sea air, with the domino-players and the curbside mechanics and the joyous street kids on home-made wagons and what always feels like a mad rush of sweet, whispering history.

El Morro. The lighthouse fortress.

Take a cab. If you have time, wander down to the small fishing town of Casablanca below the Jesus sculpture. It's another world from La Habana just across the bay.

La Plaza de la Revolucion.

See the sparkling white Jose Martí monument, the chilly obelisk tower, and the famous Che billboard on the Ministry of the Interior Building. This is the spot where Fidel raised most of his tireless, compelling, and country-rousing rhetoric. Try to hit the space between bus tours. Nothing kills an authentic experience like a crowd of gawkers.

Calle 23 y Avenida de Los Presidentes.

Young Cubans with no privacy and no club money-boys in tight jeans and knock-off Dolce and Gabbana shirts, girls in tight skirts-hang out under the manicured, bell-shaped trees Friday and Saturday nights. Boys bring guitars and serenade their lovers. In the shadows on one side of the tree, in the night air, an earnest looking boy holding hands with his girl, and on the other side of the tree, two boys fiercely enchanted with each other, and I was entirely charmed that everybody saw but nobody watched.

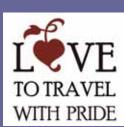
This New Year marks the 50th anniversary of the Revolution-and whatever their very complicated feelings about Fidel, the Cubans will party. However Cuba chooses to celebrate, I expect very much that the 60th anniversary will



look altogether different. Winter will come at last for their patriarch, Fidel. And Raul has not got the same sort of presence, the charisma, the vision or the fervent, gesticulating loyalty. Fidel (faith) might be God, and Che Ernesto (earnest) the martyred son, but no holy spirit is Raul. Not consumerism, nor Hollywood, neither greed nor corruption, not even long-standing star-spangled strong-arming will squash socialism. No, nothing foils socialist ambitions so much as hunger. It's already happening. Out of necessity, Cuba has started joint business ventures with Canada and America among others. American travelers, American investors, American money will refine Cuba quicker than Adam's exile. It will start with restoration and then building and then, on the way to South-Beaching Havana, it will likely bring Starbucks, McDonalds, blockbuster billboards, and celebrity entertainment television. Listen, I cannot argue that my Cuban friends do not deserve access and opportunity. But how will that fierce mad spirit, that iron-willed conviction, that burning joy of life, that thoroughly engrained resolviendo, survive? Whatever comes, it's already coming-Cuba is at the end of an era. Go now.

Kevin Slack, our resident photographer for this publication, shows much of his Cuban portfolio online at www.snappedshots.com. A selection of his photography of Cuban boys is featured in Bruno Gmünder's Beautiful Vision - The Men of BeauitfulMag.eu, available this winter.

PHOTOGRAPHY by Kevin Slack



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OUR OPINION

This Issue's Topic:

The Divine Feminine



Steven: When I think of the Divine Feminine, the first person who comes to my mind is my Mom (I know a lot of other fags would say Madonna, but I bet mom would still be in their top three). Growing up I always knew she was in my corner, so one of the weird things I experienced when I came out to her was a sense that I still had to protect her from my gay life. She was very accepting of the idea that I'd fall in love with a man, but what about the bad dates, being stood up, and partying? I felt she needed to be sheltered, and I'd go home for visits and find I had nothing to say because I didn't think I could talk about my life. Years later she read my book [Gay and

single...Foverver?] which has WAY too much intimate info on all the above, and I found out I can talk about a lot more than I thought. We're now closer, and I think she's more divine than ever.

Deb: Hmmm...The Divine Feminine...Well Steven, I would have to echo that the first person that comes to my mind is also my mother. Betty Pearce has been and continues to be an incredible support system to me. My life can take many different twists and turns and my mom has always been there for me, to give advice and support. To me, she absolutely personifies all of the positive attributes of the word 'mother.' I don't share EVERYTHING about my life with her and I rarely invite her to my shows because I'm nervous that I will be too 'over the top' for her. Deep down I think she would be fine and I'm not actually too vulgar on stage, but some of my humour can involve sex and I just couldn't talk about that if my mom was around...

Steven: You are so right about the gory details, and not divulging everything to Mom. That's what I find my girlfriends so useful for. Obviously I have my brunch gossip fests with my gay bros (I know, I am totally coopting straight terms, but screw em!), but my female friends bring a very different perspective to things. As it turns out they often won't have sex with a guy they are dating for MONTHS. First of all, I feel sorry for the straight guys, but it also gives me a different perspective on dating and sex in general.

Deb: Well I have to say I've never waited months to have sex with someone I'm dating...but I digress... I have a few close friends that I bounce my life and relationship questions off of. My mom, on the other

and we have one!

by Deb Pearce and Steven Bereznai

hand, I usually reserve for my work questions. I find her honesty and unconditional love and support assuring when life gets tough and I feel a little down in the dumps. The way she encourages me and assures me that I can do anything I set my mind to has always helped to push me through tougher times.

Steven: Well I'm glad we agree that waiting months for sex is TOO long! Phew. And I hear you about moms helping with tough times. I find my Dad is also great in that department, but in a different way. He is more about the practical solutions, the nuts and bolts of fixing the problem. Make no mistake, my Mom ALWAYS has suggestions, many, many,



many of them about how to make my life better, but I'm also more likely to tell her about the emotional fall out of a situation, of being angry, depressed, or just plain freaked out.

Deb: Isn't that interesting about moms and dads?! I completely agree with the way they both tackle and approach problems and situations. Growing up, I was able to gauge which parent I would go to when I had a question. My mom would always say yes when I asked her if I could borrow the car or go to a party. However, as my parents age, my dad is getting a little softer in the way he deals with things I tell him.

Steven: It's almost as if dads tap into their own divine feminine as they get older. I've noticed my dad is much more comfortable asking about the guys I date. He always tried, but he's been able to go from awkward avoidance to saying "your special friend" to saying the guy's actual name, even if I just had a couple of dates with him.

Deb: My parents have always spoken openly about the people I've introduced them to but I must agree, my father has become more comfortable with talking about emotional things and consequently, I think the divine feminine has rubbed off on him slightly too.

Deb Pearce is a dynamic on-air host at Proud FM 103.9 weekday mornings from 6-10. She is also fabulously opinionated.

Steven Bereznai is the author of the super hero novel Queeroes, and the dating bible Gay and Single...Forever?. His anthology contributions include Second Person Queer, I Like It Like That, and Best Gay Love Stories 2010. He can be reached online through his website www.stevenbereznai.com.







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There's an old cliché that life is a journey, and not about the destination but the road traveled to it. If in fact life is a journey, then Sonja Scharf is the picture of how an artist travels along it. It's not always easy and there are unexpected turns, but eventually you find where you're supposed to be.

Born in Darmstadt Germany, Scharf is a selfprofessed jack-of-all-trades. In addition to being a fine art photographer, she is the proprietor of the newly opened Akasha Art Projects (511 Church St), which she co-owns with her partner Kelly Kyle.

"The work that I do now," says Scharf, "which is basically picture framing, art installation and photography all together-the fact that I am immersed in photo art, or art of some type everyday-is a huge influence on my work. My everyday existence is steeped in art. Working with it, hanging it, and making it, that keeps it all going for me."

As a young girl Scharf split her time between her native land of Darmstadt and her adopted home in Winnipeg, Manitoba. "My parents were homesick for Germany when they were in Canada, so we'd go back, and homesick for Canada when they were in Germany," says Scharf, laughing. "So we went back and forth three times. I went to a

lot of schools over my life, so I'm fluent in German and English. I think my European background is very prevalent in my life; it really has shaped me."

"Photography is one of the most important things in my life. I'm so grateful for what I do; I just love it so much," says Scharf. "Yesterday, I was in the dark room for four hours and I was just in heaven. It's a feeling of such happiness because you're doing what you really want to be doing. It's this joy in you that's hard to get from anything else. It's a great feeling."







Scharf, who creates all the costumes and sets required for her images, spends a great deal of her spare time working on her photographic projects. "My biggest fear," says Scharf, "is not producing. When life gets in the way, it's really easy to not produce work. Creating art is as important to me as my fitness and health."

Scharf's work is heavily influenced by Pre-Raphaelite paintings and, more recently, art of the Elizabethan period. She draws heavily from the old masters with images steeped in spirituality and mythology. "My first series, 'Divine Light,' was really based on a spiritual journey that I took myself. Going within-religious, she says.

"Divine Light, to me, means going into the darkness and coming out through the light," adds Scharf. "Leonard Cohen has a great line from the song 'Anthem' that goes, 'There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.' I love that line. That is exactly what a spiritual journey is about. We all are going to have lessons, and the lessons are going to come sooner or later. Usually, the lessons are accompanied by a major crisis in your life. It's a terrible place to be, but you come through. I think a lot of artists go to that place, or have just come out of that place, and then they start making art. Coming through the darkness and coming out the other side to the light."

Scharf is currently working on a new series entitled 'Beloved,' which will premiere in 2010. Based on unrequited love, it includes, in Scharf's words, "a bit of sadness, a bit of detachment, and lots of drama."

She's been working on the new series of photographs for five years, designing Elizabethan costumes from scratch, and hand sewing the

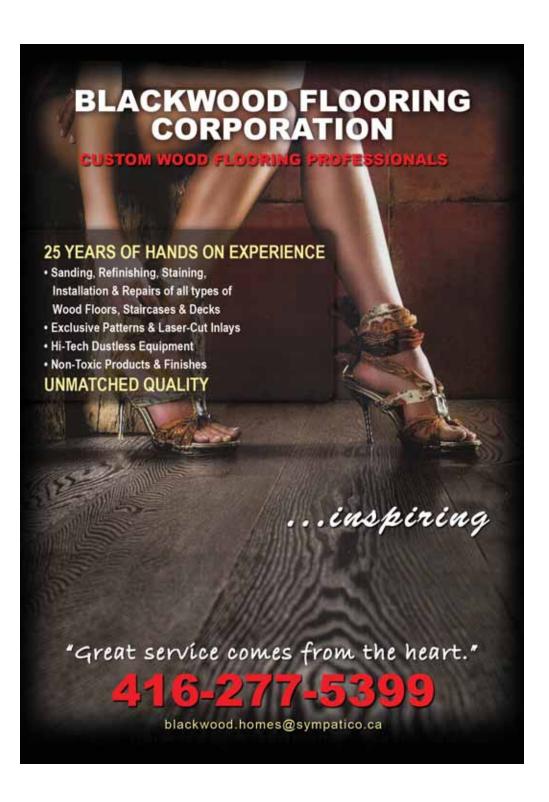
elaborate collars during her evenings. "I work on a series at a time. It does seem like a very long time, five years, but it takes a long time," says Scharf, without apology. "If I was an artist working full time and only making my art I could probably create a series every year, but not when I'm working and trying to maintain a living. Lucky for me, because we are art installers we are always very immersed in art. I feel like I'm working as an artist even when I'm not working my own projects."

And that's important to her. "I used to be really freaked out about a crisis in my life. 'My life is over!'" mimics Scharf. "But now I realize every time something comes to me in a crisis it's opening me up to something else. Another chance to grow, or another reason to make art." And so Scharf continues along her journey, camera in hand, ready to tackle her next great series along the road to a destination still unknown. (Sonja Scharf is represented in Toronto by Edward Day Gallery at 952 Queen St. W, and Gallery Gora at 279 Sherbrooke Ouest in Montreal.)

[Sonja Scharf is represented in Toronto by Edward Day Gallery at 952 Queen St. W, and Gallery Gora at 279 Sherbrooke Ouest in Montreal.]

Scott MacDonald has an Advanced Diploma in Graphic Design from George Brown College and has studied acting with The Studio on The Drive in Vancouver and is presently studying with Second City Toronto. This is his first foray into professional writing and hopefully not his last.

PHOTOS Courtesy of Sonja Scharf



URBANSPACES Lets just lay it out on the table: by Manny Machado by Manny Machado

Lets just lay it out on the table: it's winter and the below-zero temperatures are anything but pleasing. For as long as I can remember, winter has always been the bane of my Canadian existence. I hibernate. Slaloms and slushing are not part of my vocabulary, and most of my time is spent indoors. Therefore, I want to ensure that these long winter months are not only cozy but stimulating and comfortably invigorating.

Good décor starts off with a solid foundation that includes a strong layout defining the different zones of your home, such as a living area, dining space, den or office and, most importantly, bedroom. Creating a balance in your home through a well considered design can help to bring the sense of harmony and warmth needed to get over the winter blues. When decorating your home, always start with a plan. This also applies to decking the halls for the holidays, as haphazardly plucking items from retail shelves and placing them on your mantle or walls does not ring tidings of harmony and joy; it just looks like a big, chaotic mess. And that is not going to help you enjoy relaxing indoors.

If you are dealing with a room or a home that is dominated by masculine design elements such as doors, trim, windows, tall ceilings and other angular features or lines, I would suggest balancing the room with a warm colour (cooler colours will heighten the severity of the angles). Unifying the walls, doors and trim will visually remove the divisions in the walls and start to bring some harmony to the room. Repeat the main tone in some form of pattern or texture as this will downplay the impact of a bold colour.

Look at the room or home as one whole space. Reflective surfaces, and circular and organic shapes by way of lampshades or mirrors, will add much needed feminine harmony to a room that may be overbearingly masculine by its very construction. The comfort of cradling in a mother's arms is a very basic human desire, and if your home has a stronger feminine vibe, via organic or round shapes, flowing draperies and

fabrics in florals and damasks, your room will offer you some of this much-needed warmth and comfort.

Colour is always the easiest and most dramatic change to make to any space, instantly affecting the way most people react to interiors; a warmer colour scheme indoors is always very welcoming, especially in sub-zero temperatures. Figuring out which colours belong to the warm family vs. the cool is quite easy: reds, yellows, oranges and redpurples, are definitive warm colours, while their cooler counterparts consist of greens, blues and indigos. Choosing a primary wall colour can be challenging, even for the best of professionals, so it's best to take your time with your choices and pick a few options to swatch on your walls. Generally, a large block of colour on the wall will give you a much better idea of what the colour will look like in the room. Allow a couple of days



to adjust to it as well-see how it changes depending on the time of day, and how it interacts with your existing furnishings. Once you've settled on a colour, decide how you want to accent it in the room, such as repeating the same tones in your fabrics, or selecting complementary accessories and prints.

In the inspiration bedroom the walls and doors are harmonized with a red by Benjamin Moore and accented with a floral print wallpaper in order to counterbalance the strong masculinity of the room's structure. By adding an oval framed mirror, the pattern on the wall is visually interrupted while light is reflected into the room, helping to accentuate the softness on the walls. The dark charcoal bedding ties in with the dark leaf print on the walls and balances the feminine lines of the bed-posts. The finishing touches are the accent pillows on the bed. A strong feminine element in your décor can be achieved in a variety of ways (and men, doing it right won't undermine your manhood or make the space feel too "girly"). Choose furniture with less angular lines, such as oval or round coffee tables, sofas with curved backs and arms, subtle design elements like tapered or slim furniture legs, and glass or mirrored furniture. All exude a certain flair that will not seem imposing but will definitely bring a sense of comfort.

Draperies are another easy and effective way of bringing more softness into your space. Condos, town homes and even apartment suites all benefit from having luxurious window coverings. Remember that the more voluminous the pleats, the softer the space will feel.

Never underestimate the power of a throw pillow. The punch of colour, texture and interest they bring to any room can make or break the space. Layer your new pillows by size, shape and colour. Do as the designers do-pick a spot at your favorite home retailer and start sampling away. Makes for a fun afternoon out!

Area rugs don't just keep your feet warm; they also add texture and personality to your living spaces. Always try to get the biggest rug you can afford, and if you have to downsize due to budget, then the rule of thumb is as follows: everything on the rug. All furniture in the grouping is at least touching the surface of the rug. As long as some portion of the item is sitting on the rug, it's considered part of that group. Or conversely, everything off the rug.

In the living room, the furniture grouping is sitting on a large patterned wool rug. The original sofas were reupholstered in a fabric with a strong linear pattern, to offset the classic round lines and make the pieces feel less vintage and more up to date. Placing a glass oval coffee table between



them allows for easy maneuvering around the sofas and does not disturb the view of the fireplace, which also received an update with the new stone facade added to the upper portion of the mantel. The custom shelving adds visual depth to the space and allows the homeowners to have a display area for cherished mementos.

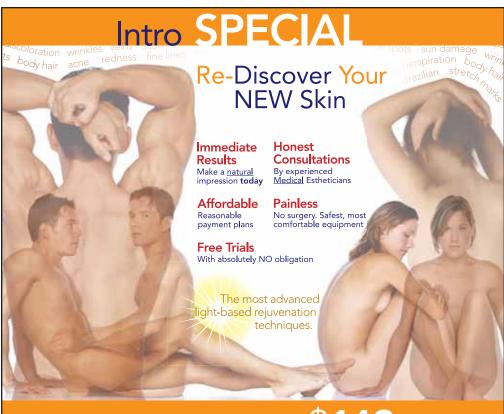
The warmth of your home is not just based on the heat emanating from your radiators or vents, but also on how welcoming and comforting it is. A feminine touch can be that extra step to take any space from dull to divine. Male or female, we all need the presence of a strong woman in our lives and the same is true for our homes. Don't be afraid of letting your feminine side shine, and if she turns out to be your own Sasha Fierce, then you're one of the lucky ones!

revamping of Fashion Cares 2008, finds that being an Urban Space Stylist affords him the opportunity to work on many interiors both locally and abroad. Transforming some of the city's smallest areas into home environments through unique perspectives and solutions that relate directly to the homeowners lifestyle, is his passion. Feel free to write to him at urbanspaces@pinkplaymags.com.

Manny Machado, the Design Chair behind the fantastic with your own design concerns and questions. PHOTOGRAPHY by Robert Foster







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Oreo and Cricket's current assets convened on the dumpster-dived table: one stolen toaster oven, one portable CD player, one bottle of vodka. A tarnished mirror leaned against the wall. Their pockets produced cosmetics, a bus ticket, two glasses liberated from the bar last night, keys to the rooming house, an unopened condom, some phone number. They piled it all beside the toaster. The room, rented for a week-cash only, was dingy; cobwebs hung from the ceiling. The sole window was wrenched open and a brick held it in place. A breeze gusted in once in a while, bringing shouts and traffic sounds from Gerrard Street.

Bollywood music erupted from downstairs restaurant every time customers opened its front door. Each musical blast was accompanied by strong smells of deep fryer and curry, which wafted through the open window. The scent reminded Oreo of better times, of cooking and eating large meals with friends back in their Parkdale squat. Back before the pigs raided, tasering and arresting their friends, closing down the squat for good. Before Oreo's girlfriend had gone missing in the chaos, and not turned up in jail or hiding out in the Don Valley like the others. The smell of those spices gently reminded Oreo she was safe for the moment, hidden in Toronto's east end-far from the depressing aftermath of the raid, from news of their scattered friends, and from the cops who continued to hunt them. The King, that dirty cop who'd started it all, would never think to look for them here. The room wasn't much to look at, but right now it was their life line.

Oreo rolled stockings over her smooth legs. She struggled with the little metal clips that

dangled from her shoplifted panties. Oreo could pop the panel from an ignition tumbler, sort through the mess, and hotwire a car in four minutes or less, but she was fighting this lacey garter like it was an alligator.

"Oh, honey," purred Cricket. "That's just wrong. Let me help." He swished across the room and knelt at her feet. His blue Mohawk poked her crotch as he went to work on the lingerie. "Lickety split, Barba-trick." He looked up-the new bra was working. Her muscular brown body was ripe and firm. "You know if I was even remotely bisexual..."

"Thanks." Oreo stuffed her fishnetted feet into the second-hand stilettos and stood up. She took a step and faltered. "Ugh. How am I supposed to dance if I can't even walk?"

"Like a Pro, ho." Cricket put his hand on her back and pressed lightly. "Shoulders back. Spread your feet wider. You have to find your new centre of balance. You have to find your inner Divine. Pretend you're RuPaul."

Oreo tried to cross the room without stumbling. "I suck. What a stupid idea."

"If they'd hire my boy queen ass, I'd be there in a heartbeat. Sadly, this particular club does not pimp my species. Yet." Cricket studied Oreo's pretty, painted face. She was hurting, and not just from the shoes. He poured two glasses of vodka.

"Wish you could come with me," she said.

"I'd blow your cover like a hand grenade. Here, drink."

Oreo took a swig. "Do you really think I'll find Ferret?"

Cricket sighed. He leaned against the table; it creaked a warning. "I hope so. Ray-Ray and Lil' Brat heard she was working the upper lounge. That's where The King dumps all his fresh meat for the International buyers. Dopes them up, whores them out."

Oreo moaned.

"Sorry," said Cricket.

"I'll get that pig, once Ferret is safe. I'll send him to Hell myself."

Cricket sucked his teeth. "You've got to keep your cool or this will all end badly."

"How would you feel if it was your lover?"

"If Ferret is there, it'll be hard to get her out. That V.I.P. lounge is members only. Locked,



guarded. Cameras all over. Don't do anything stupid. Maybe the other girls have heard something. Ask around but don't be too obvious, okay? Tonight you're just casing the joint."

Oreo slumped forward, her hands covering her face. "I just hope we're not too late." Her shoulders shook. She gasped and blinked back tears.

Cricket said, "I spent forty minutes on those eyes. No crying."

Oreo finished her drink and stood up.

"That's right. Ferret needs us. So get in there, get some dancer cred, look around, and we'll figure something out tomorrow. This is an official undercover operation, Oreo. You make your brotha-from-anotha-motha proud!" Cricket snapped his painted fingers and sashayed to the CD player. "One more time-with music!"

"No Britney."

"Fergie?" He pushed play.

Oreo tried again. She walked purposefully, copying Cricket. He stood, arms crossed, assessing her progress. "Chin down, honey. That's right. Smize like Ms Tyra herself. Work it like you own it, like you're rentin' all night long."

Hours later, Oreo lurched onto Fillies' unlit stage. She still wobbled in the shoes. The second drink had helped loosen her limbs, but it was Cricket's pill that gave her the courage to get up in front of everyone. Bottles and glasses clinked through the din of voices. High-pitched laughter erupted in one corner. Her music hadn't started—the strung out DJ was missing another sound cue. Her leg started to shake. She inhaled deeply, held the air in her lungs, released it slowly. Catcalls from the audience made her stomach knot.

Get it together, she told herself sternly. She tried to block out the heckling.

The other girls attacked the stage like it was a pummel horse in gym class. They pulled fancy tricks, slid into splits; they humped the pole and bounced their dimpled bums in customers' faces. Oreo was not playing that game.

I'm doing this for Ferret, she reminded herself. I'm dancing for Ferret.

Finally her song started. The droney doom metal matched her oxy groove. Lights came onshe felt their heat warm her back. She moved slowly, her arm snaked above her head; she

rolled her neck, letting her long dreads tickle the bare skin on her back. Her body undulated. She felt eyes burning her flesh. She rolled her shoulder and peered over it toward the crowd, lashes lowered. It was impossible to see anything past the row of bright lights. There were shadows. In some places figures leaned forward past the edge of the stage, but that was all. She turned her face to the back wall again, toward the cheap curtain that covered the drywall, and shifted her hips smoothly. Painstakingly, she lowered her arms.

She closed her eyes and let the music tell her when and how to move. She pictured Ferret out there in the dark, watching. Oreo used her body to tell Ferret what she wanted. Each step, each gesture brought her closer to the images embedded in her brain: memories flooded in–of kissing Ferret, of touching her soft skin. Oreo was on stage and, at the same time, she was far away from this terrible place. She was back at the squat they loved, before the raid. She was curled in a corner, in their nest of a bed. Back in the only home they'd ever known.

Oreo lay on the stage touching herself. She arched her back. The song was ending. She hardly noticed the flutter of bills at the edge of the stage. A blond dancer, the nice one who'd shown her around earlier, leaned into the light and pointed to the small pile. Oreo rolled over and collected her money. The stage floor felt cool on her skin. Part of her wanted to sink into it, just melt through it and disappear. The other part wanted to count this money and buy another drink.

A man leaned forward with a fifty dollar bill in his outstretched hand. Half a week at the rooming house. He looked lonely. Oreo froze, crouched, both hands filled with money. She was an animal on the road, a car bearing down upon her, sad eyes for headlights, soft hands for a grill. The next dancer, an athletic blond, was already cleaning the pole with antibacterial wipes. Oreo grabbed the bill and retreated across the stage, down the rickety stairs to the change room.

"Song's too long," said the manager as she toweled off and checked her makeup in the mirror above the sink. "Don't get weird on stage. This ain't an art bar."

She nodded and applied more lip gloss.

Later, Oreo found herself alone in a corner of the bar. She was no good at approaching



straight men. She hated small talk and didn't know how to flirt. She'd already made more money than she'd seen in a very long time. Her feet hurt. She wanted to leave.

"Hey, kiddo." It was that blond again, Carly, sidling up with two drinks.

Oreo smiled and shook her head, no.

"Relax, it's just water. That bozo over there," she said, "Thinks he bought us gin tonics." Carly raised a drink, blew a kiss to the bald lump of a man who pumped his arm feverishly in return.

"Thanks." They sipped water while Bon Jovi crooned and a young woman twirled around the stage pole.

"I don't mean to pry," said Carly in her gravel-and-whisky voice. "Lord knows we all have our reasons, but this doesn't seem like your kind of place."

Oreo looked at Carly. She saw fake tan, streaked hair, boob job, glow-in-the-dark booty shorts; she saw manicured hands with a couple



of age spots. Foundation caked in tiny crow's feet at the edge of mascara-framed eyes. This was a woman with experience.

"I'm looking for my girlfriend," said Oreo. "I think she's upstairs."

Carly moved in closer, all smiles gone now. "This a joke?"

"No."

"We don't know half of what goes on up there," she said, "but none of it is good."

Oreo said, "Is it the blue door to the right of the stage?" Oreo had noticed one bouncer going in and out during the night. She'd tried to open it herself and been reamed out by the dude.

Carly scanned the bar, saw the manager yelling at a new bartender, noted the bouncers at the entrance. "This is serious shit, kiddo."

Oreo nodded.

"That's the one. Camera's right there. Door's usually locked. Be hard to get up there without half the bar noticing."

The blue door remained well lit during performances. The spotlight followed a girl doing cartwheels and landing in a bridge with her legs spread wide.

"You sure about this?" asked Carly. "No good'll come of it."

Oreo simply said, "I have to."

Carly finished her water. "If I were you, I'd try tomorrow. One less bartender"—she pointed to the one getting fired right now—"means busier waitresses. Customers'll be fighting for drinks. I'll do some crotch shots by the DJ booth in my first routine, draw the light. Not sure how you'll get through. You better hustle. Manager finds out, you're done for. And I don't mean fired."

It was four a.m. when Oreo got in. Cricket was wired-pacing and chain smoking. "Ohmygodyou'refinallyhome," he exhaled. Cricket counted money while Oreo rubbed her swollen feet. "You're rich."

"This girly stuff is hard work," she said.

"You're gonna make lots of cash if you get it right."

"I'm gonna find Ferret if I get it right," she said, more determined than she'd felt in a long time. "Tell Ray-Ray and Lil' Brat we've got a big job tomorrow. And it's your turn to do drag." She imagined coaching the three boys to swagger like men, which made her smile in spite of everything-right in Cricket's surprised face.

Kristyn Dunion is creating a queer punk story collection called Dirt; this is a sample excerpt. She is the author of novels Big Big Sky (2008), Mosh Pit (2004), and Missing Matthew (2003). Her short fiction is anthologized widely, including Fist of the Spider Woman (2009), Periphery: Erotic Lesbian Futures (2008), With a Rough Tongue: Femmes Write Porn (2005) and Geeks, Misfits, and Outlaws (2003). Kristyn is also the trash talking performance artist Miss Kitty Galore and plays bass for dykemetal sensation Heavy Filth. Visit her at www.kristyndunnion.com

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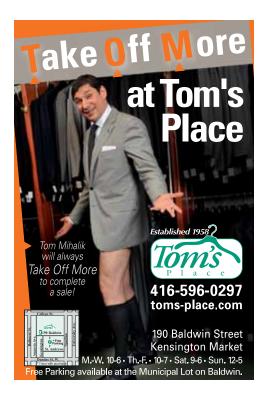
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sister mother goddess











by Ricky Boudreau

So, yet another winter season is upon us.

As time keeps ticking on, I am realizing how important it is to really live life to the fullest. Time is flying by and there is still so much to do. I was having a conversation with a friend of mine regarding winter, wondering if

Scandinavian people deal with winter better than we do here in Toronto, or Canada more broadly for that matter. I think they do. I feel like they embrace it. Perhaps that's the secret. We just need to accept winter and welcome it, 'cause let's face it, our winters are long. If we just dress and have fun with it, it won't be so bad! Winter has a lot to offer: outdoor sports, tobogganing, beautiful evening walks in the snow with a loved one, hot cocoa, outdoor skating. The list goes on and on. We are Canadian, thick-skinned and strong. Let's [omit 'all'] be grateful for the seasons we have. On that note, here are some great things that our wonderful city has to offer this winter-so get out there and do something. Live your life to the fullest!

Festivals

Wintercity Festival

January 30 to February 12 www.toronto.ca/special events

Toronto's WinterCity Festival returns for a 6th year. It's three festivals in one: Winterlicious, an exciting food extravaganza; the WOW! Series at Nathan Phillips Square; and the Warm Up series at some of Toronto's hottest tourist and cultural attractions.

Tip: Explore the tastes and creativity of our awesome city.

Winterlicious

January 30 to February 12 150 Restaurants around the city www.toronto.ca/special_events

We are blessed to have some really fantastic restaurants throughout our great city. What better way to enjoy them than during Winterlicious? The menus are offered at a prix fixe, so lunch can be had for \$15, \$20 or \$30, and dinner for \$25, \$35 or \$45. This is for an appetizer, entrée and dessert! Take advantage of this, kids, it's awesome.

Tip: Eat your way through the wintercheaply!

wow!

Nathan Phillips Square January 30 to February 12 Every Festival weekend (2) www.toronto.ca/special_events

We are talking about free concerts here, and amazing skating parties with DJs Deko-ze and Gene King, as well as some outstanding entertainment by The Stills and by Close-Act, a Dutch street theatre troupe who will transform Nathan Phillips Square into an amazing underwater world! Tip: Dress properly and you'll be fine... If you have kids, bring them along.

Warm Up

January 30 to February 12 Various venues

www.toronto.ca/special_events

Try out an art workshop or poetry readings and even a tea tasting. Kids will be able to meet the Wonder Pets and Dora the Explorer at the CN Tower, or head off to a treasure hunt at Casa Loma. The festival offers discounted admission to some of the city's best destinations.

Tip: Coupons are available at... wx.toronto.ca/inter/se/coupons.nsf/coupons? openform



Skating

A Canadian winter just wouldn't be complete without a great skate, either indoors or outdoors. The latter is much prettier and will bring you back to your childhood. There's nothing more Canadian than skating outside with friends and family and enjoying a steaming mug of hot cocoa. There are a few places I recommend:

Moss Park Arena Until April 18

140 Sherbourne St. 416-367-3826

www.centraltorontoskating.com

Moss Park Arena is the home of the Central Toronto Figure Skating Club. This is a definite must for those who always dreamed of becoming that amazing [omit comma] skater with the best buns. Now you can, by taking adult classes! All levels are welcome. I know there must be some old showpoodles out there who should really think about getting back on the ice, even for just one session a week. Come on-it's fun!

Tip: Skaters must be registered before stepping on the ice and coaches are available for lessons.

Nathan Phillips Square

Weather permitting 10am-10pm 416-338-RINK (7465)

Grab that thermos of your fave hot drink and don your skates. Don't have any? Rent some for a nominal fee. Indoor change rooms are available as well. The rink is usually open daily and is an invigorating experience. Invite a bunch of friends and come on down. Dress appropriately; layers are always a good idea.

Tip: All children under age 6 need a CSAapproved helmet before stepping on the ice.

The Natrel Skating Rink

Harbourfront Centre Weather permitting 416-973-4093

www.habourfrontcentre.com

What a great way to spend quality time with friends and family on a glorious winter day. It's even better when it's snowing! All levels are welcome and helmets are recommended for the kids. Classes are available.

Tip: Long underwear is a must and don't forget some Kleenex too!

Arts & Culture

Omnimax Theatre/Cinema

Ontario Science Centre 770 Don Mills Road (at the corner of Eglinton Ave. E) 416-696-1000 www.ontariosciencecentre.ca \$12

Check out a movie in the Omnimax theatre at the Ontario Science Centre. We are talking about a screen that is 4500 times bigger than an average TV screen. The movies are really bright, thanks to a 15,000 watt xenon projector lamp that you can see from the moon! The projector itself weighs 900kg, or 2000 lbs. Then there are the 44 speakers that wrap around you. There are some great movies playing for the coming few months, including The Human Body, Grand Canyon Adventure and Under the Sea.

Tip: You can catch a double bill on a Friday or Saturday night for only \$18. Parking is an additional \$8.



Portraits by Nigel Dickson

ROM Institute for Contemporary Culture Until March 21 100 Queen's Park 416.586.8000

\$15 - \$22

International award-winning photographer Nigel Dickson has been published over the last 30 years in magazines such as Saturday Night, Esquire, Fortune, Newsweek and Rolling Stone. This exhibition of his work highlights portraits of such Canadian luminaries as Margaret Atwood, Jean Chrétien, Doug Gilmour and Oscar Peterson, just to name a few.

TIP: Bask in our Canadian celebs.

AGO-Art Gallery of Ontario

Until Spring 317 Dundas Street West 416 979 6648 www.ago.net

Here's something fun and exciting: if you are into classical music, then check out the AGO on a Sunday. With your admission, you have access to concerts from now until spring 2010. You will get to hear students from the Royal Conservatory of Music talk about art and culture at the same time...

Tip: Concerts are held in Walker court from 1:30-2:15pm.





Bound for Glory: Cutting-Edge Winter Sports Footwear

The Bata Shoe Museum Until March 21, 2010 327 Bloor Street West 416.979.7799

www.batashoemuseum.ca

During this Olympic year, get all warmed up to cheer on our Canadian Athletes by visiting the Bata Shoe Museum's exhibit about winter sports footwear. It focuses on milestones in the history of winter sports. You will also get a chance to see what some of the world's best athletes have used and to experience their stories of triumph.

Tip: Free admission on Thursday nights.

Buddies in Bad Times Theatre The 31st Rhubarb Festival

February 10 - 28 12 Alexander Street 416.975.8555 www.artsexy.ca

Toronto artists have a venue in which to be experimental in a critic- free environment. Buddies in Bad Times encourages both established and emerging artists to take risks. Buddies will open its stage once again for a three-week period and will feature more than two dozen contemporary theatrical experiments. Here you will catch amazingly outrageous acts and one-of-a-kind performances that won't be seen anywhere else. How's that for special?

Tip: Buy a three-night pass for only \$60 and experience the full gamut of what's being offered.

Super Fun

Playtime Bowl

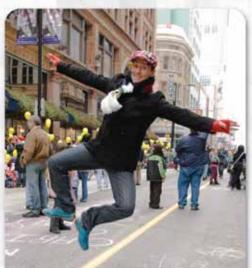
33 Samor Rd. 416.787.4533

www.playtimebowl.com

So here it is, Toronto's biggest state-of-the-art bowling centre. It's only minutes away from the Yorkdale shopping centre just across the street on Dufferin. Rates vary depending on the time of day and day of the week. Let me say it's cheap-just what we all like, cheap and cheerful. You can get a lane for \$27.99 per hour from Monday to Thursday, 5pm to midnight. Shoe rental is only an additional \$3.81. Not bad at all. But if you want even cheaper, then plan on 9pm to midnight from Sunday to Thursday. You will pay \$8 per person for bottomless bowling-that's right, I said bottomless, and that doesn't mean you have to leave your other half at home! Shoe rentals at these times are only \$1. You can't go wrong with that! You can cram a lot of games into 3 hours. Want something special? Bowl in the "back alley" side. I didn't even make that one up. Lots of mood lighting over there, and fun, flashing lights as well as projections-all that for \$13 per person plus \$1 shoe rental, plus tax, \$14.88, all in. Tip: There is a maximum of 6 people allowed per lane, and they apparently have great food, including sushi, and are licensed. Wheeeeee...

Ricky Boudreau blossomed as a true social butterfly while traveling the world as a professional figure skater for 15 years. He loves the gift of the gab and discovering great parties in the city. With a love for culture, great food and beauty, Ricky spends his time very creatively as a professional makeup artist for MAC Pro cosmetics. He has helped artists like Deborah Cox sand Dame Shirley Bassey look gorgeous. Heard of a new hot spot? Email him as inthecity@pinkplaymags.com

PHOTOGRAPHY by Robert Foster



Chasing Away the Winter Blahs...

This winter take some time out for yourself. Time out to thaw and relax... Escape to Hammam Spa (602 King St. W, 416.366.4772, www.hammamspa.ca) an 8000-square-foot oasis at King and Portland. Here, time slips away, peaceful and unhurried. Hammam stands for Turkish bath, or, for the lay person, steam room oasis. You will immediately begin to unwind as you enter and descend the stairs below street level, the sound of trickling water dancing in your ears. Then, it's into the change room, where you can wrap yourself in an über-plush robe found in your locker and don complimentary shower shoes. Next, walk along corridors filled with ambient music, past 10 treatment rooms, until you reach your destination. The 500-square-foot steam grotto is dimly lit. Soothing music coupled with aromatherapy, and you are in heaven. This coed, steam-filled escape is perfect for chasing away the winter blahs.

Needing something a little more Ayurvedic? Check out Body and Spine on the Danforth (358 Danforth Ave., 416.778.7779, www.bodyandspine.ca). You are in good hands here with Dr. Ismail and Dr. Ali. Chiropractic is a great way to realign oneself, but what I really love about this place are the acupuncture treatments. Whether you have a specific ailment or need, or just want to enhance your chi and overall health, these experts can help. A great idea is to follow up your acupuncture treatment with a full-body massage by one of the certified massage therapists on hand. You really can't go wrong.

Feel free to check out Absolute Beauty, with Nancy Penny (1517 Bayview Ave., 416.932.3970). She is also on to something really great. Located a little north of the village at Bayview and Eglinton, Nancy, Jessica and Amber have what it takes to whisk you away. Offering everything from paraffin treatments to non-surgical face lifts, these gals not only help you chase away the winter blahs, but expel the toxins that you've been ingesting. I always love going there to hear about Jessica's stories. Here, there is never a dull moment and you will never be disappointed.

So this winter, when it seems like the cold is never going to end, get away from the cold and soothe yourself. Maybe we should invest in ourselves a little more and indulge ourselves in the world of pampering. Aren't we worth it? Whether it's through aromatherapy and hammam or rebooting your chi with acupuncture and massage, beat those winter blahs! Na maste.



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From the Heart

by Shelley A. Harrison

There's nothing like a good bit of girl talk. If all this Divine Feminine folly has got you wanting to throw on the feather boa, or crank up Madonna tunes, then let's get into the groove! Whether you are in a girl body or a boy body, each of us has feminine and masculine qualities within us. What form of the feminine is hiding out in your psyche? Let's take a tour of some feminine archetypes in their light and shadow forms.

First off, what is an archetype? We all have patterns of behaviour and themes that run through our lives, whether positive or negative. If you look at events and relationships from a symbolic point of view, you can see that there is a story playing itself out. Who is that cute guy or girl you are hankering after? Are you the Beggar and she the Queen? Are you the Prince and he the God? Do you just want to smother your honey with love like a Mother, or are you out at the clubs every night feeding your Hedonist? Are you constantly undermining your own success because you are afraid of what becoming more will demand of you? Hello Saboteur.

We all respond to life's situations in similar ways.

An archetype is a pattern of energy expressed through our soul and psyche into the people, places, and situations we interact with. It can be defined symbolically or literally with set behaviours and associations. The archetypes each of us have chosen to work with in this life, shape the way we show up in our relationships and respond to life. They have a positive manifestation, or light side, which is the empowered part of their nature. They also have a shadow side, which is the disempowered or distorted expression of the same energy. Let's start with the two grand dames' of womanliness:



Goddess

Marilyn Monroe and Madonna. Need I say more? I mean don't we just love them in this community? I swear we all belonged to Goddess worshiping cults in past lives. If you resonate with the Goddess, read up on various ones and see whose story and powers speak the most to your psyche. When she gets out of control she can get a bit like Kali-the Indian Goddess of Death-voracious, and demanding. "If they don't give me proper credit, I just walk away-yeah..."

Mother

Mom's fortes are nurturance, patience and unconditional love-oh yeah, and chocolate chip cookies. If you fold your partner's clothes just so, and make them chicken soup when they're sick, we just love you. When you get nasty, you become "Mommy Dearest," showing up as the abandoning, smothering, or guilt inflicting matriarch. If yer guiltin' yer honey because he won't come home for Sunday dinner all the time, deal with your empty nest, honey.

Here are four archetypes we may associate with sexual energy at first glance.

Prostitute

At first we think of this character as someone who sells her body, or sleeps around. But really this is any part of our spirit we would sell or negotiate in order to feel safe. It's an archetype of survival. Do you sell out when you are scared? Do you stay in relationships you know have gone bad because you are too afraid to go it alone? Do you stay in a job that is killing you out of fear? Then you are placing material considerations above your own empowerment. When you learn to shine the light on the Prostitute, she becomes your guardian of faith, the power of your spirit that is stronger than your survival fear.

Dirgin

The virgin, we automatically think of as female and associate with sex, or the lack thereof! Some people may express this physically, but they're probably not hanging out on Church Street. She is really about maintaining symbolic purity of mind and heart. If you are a purist about something, whether it is fresh untouched ideas, or an immaculately clean living space, you are virginal. (Having a cell phone from the company by the same name does not count!) Her shadow aspect is the fear of intimate union or obsessive compulsive cleanliness of body, mind or spirit.

You are afraid to be contaminated and need to allow yourself to be part of the messiness of life while keeping your symbolic integrity.

Nun

There can't possibly be anyone carrying the Nun archetype in this community unless it is Halloween, right? There is something indeed hallowed about this aspect of our soul. The Nun has a devotion and single minded dedication to spirit. If you have given yourself so wholly to something that you feel the need to cloister yourself in your meditation room, she may be hiding in your psyche. Her bad "habit" is excess piety, negative judgements and shunning of the physical world. If you act a bit like a Sister teaching at a catholic school, with a ruler in your hand and the word "sin" on your lips, condemning others to hell about any subject that has become your personal bible, then shame on you. Lighten up!

Femme Fatale

This sexy mama knows how to twist you around her little finger and get what she wants and it's not always sex she is after. She wants control in any form, whether financial or by always being on top. Watch out for inappropriate use of sensuality, or attachment to money and power. If you master the erotic energy of this archetype it becomes a divine ally that knows how to handle power, and can use her seductive influence to magnetize positive outcomes.



Then of course we have the royal family of women parading down the red velvet carpet of our soul:

Queen

Everybody notices when this one walks into the room, whether you are in drag or just by the way you hold yourself. This archetype radiates the regal feminine, especially if she can wear 4 inch stiletto heels without falling over. She has innate leadership ability and uses benevolent authority to protect others. Or she is demanding to be the centre of attention and ordering everyone around like they are servants in her court. Beware the Drama Queen. If you're using melodrama to manipulate others, you are alienating the people you are meant to serve and will lose your tiara!

Princess

This clever little well-dressed woman uses her wit to negotiate her initiatory journey into self-empowered rule of her domain. But most of the time she is at the mall spoiling herself silly and sometimes needs to be spanked! Paris Hilton alert! If you are trapped in the castle waiting for Prince charming to fulfill you, you'd be better off venturing into the woods outside the palace to face your fear of doing it yourself and breaking a fingernail in the process.

Damsel

The damsel is much like the princess. On the up side she understands the nature of healthy romance. Its okay to let the big guy (or gal) with the biceps and the power drill fix your kitchen counter for you while flirting with him as he does it. On the down side you always want to be rescued and are forever waving your scarf out the window of the tower enticingly, hoping to catch the knight's eye so he will carry you off. Yer pretty, but your helplessness is not. Let her inspire you to rely on yourself.

Well, I don't know about you, but after all this frolicking around in the feminine side of my soul, I need a hot bubble bath with candlespink ones (Princess); or perhaps I'll invite some



friends over for a lovely home cooked meal (Mother). However the divine feminine expresses itself through you, welcome her and enjoy her. Celebrate the fact that in the LGBT community, your unique expression of the balance of male and female is part of the liberation and rebalancing of these energies on our planet, our greatest mother: Earth.

[To learn more about your archetypes, I highly recommend picking up a copy of *Sacred Contracts*, by Medical Intuitive Caroline Myss or checking out any of her excellent CD lectures on the subject. My inspiration for this article was drawn from my learning through Caroline's work.]

Shelley A. Harrison is an Energy Healer in Ottawa.

She graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing 4-year professional training and has been working in private practice for 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine. You can write Shelley at art@pinkplaymags.com or visit her at www.doveheart.ca.



winter Horoscopes

Aries: Mar 21 - Apr 19

You do know that if the escalator stops you can still get to the top right? Funny commercials aside, the reason no one is rushing to offer help, is that you don't need it. The only way to get where you're going is one step at a time. The only one who can do it is you.

Taurus: Apr 20 - May 20

This could go one of two ways: either you're entering hibernation (in which case stock up on food, books and DVDs), or you'll go to a solstice party and wake up in February wondering about that beard. Don't worry you won't have missed a thing.

Gemini: May 21 - Jun 20

Three months from now all your dreams come true. At first it will feel as though you've lost your purpose and been deserted by those who love you but in reality you've cleared the decks for a re-birth of spectacular proportion.

Cancer: Jun 21 - Jul 22

Caribbean vacation or witness protection program—in some fashion you manage to avoid the usual drama of the holidays and that in itself is reason to celebrate. The real payoff comes when you realize that this will work all year round

Leo: Jul 23 - Aug 22

You've been working hard to pay off a debt that was never yours—and maybe you did it for love. You're about to stumble on a shockingly easy way to discharge the whole thing with ease and honour. After that, I think you deserve a nap.

Virgo: Aug 23 - Sept 22

Tired of feeling that disaster follows you everywhere, breathing down your neck and waiting for you to slip up? OK, so then don't slip up—easy. And don't kid yourself that you don't know what I mean; time to do the right thing, even if it sucks.

Libra: Sept 23 - Oct 22

You should hang a "closed for renovations" sign on all your relationships. OK, maybe not with the guy at the coffee shop or your dentist, but definitely rethink the dynamic between you and your lover; you and your hair dresser; you and yourself.

Scorpio: Oct 23 - Nov21

Is found money yours to keep? Ooh tricky-how much money, where was it, how did you find it and what do you intend to use it for? In the end, when life hands you a bonus all you need is a clear conscience and a good tax lawyer.

Sagittarius: Nov 23 - Dec 21

You remind me a bit of Santa. No you're not fat, but you're flying through the air trailing a huge sack of stuff behind you. Unlike the big elf, everyone can see you-and all the baggage you're dragging. It's time to let it go.

Capricorn: Dec 24 - Jan 19

It's great when you have a breakthrough just before your therapy session and you can talk it all out with the shrink. If the breakthrough is Wednesday but your appointment's not until Tuesday, try to hold it in-for your own sake.

Aquarius: Jan 20 - Feb 18

For several months there has been a rare astrological event happening in your sign and it portends joy, wealth and healing. Why then do you still feel like painting your bedroom black? Maybe that's part of the event. Who says black isn't healing?

Pisces: Feb 19 - Mar 20

The bad news is that you're fighting dragons-sometimes several all at the same time. The good news is that you're armed with a lightsabre. You still have to wade right in and you'll still get icky shit on your clothes, but a win for you is inevitable. A dragon is no match for a lightsabre

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Okay, so to say I've been very lucky in morphing a career as a lawyer into a career as an entertainer would be an understatement. Not just because I got to leave a job that woke me up in the middle of the night worrying about forgetting something critical, but because I got to move to a job that gave me opportunities to meet, interview, and even have dinner with, some extraordinary women.

I think I was twelve years old when I met Janet Reno. Okay not twelve, but I know she was still Attorney General of the United States of America when I met her. And as a lawyer who once had my own firm, somehow, I felt technically, that made her my big boss. Don't ask me to explain that because I can't. I also can't explain how when I came to meet her at a gala in Washington D.C. (I was hosting, she was receiving an award), and she asked me a simple question—"Maggie, I understand you used to be a lawyer and now you're a stand-up comic, how did you quit?"—I became a sputtering idiot.

"I just did," I replied. "But how did you quit," she pressed. Now pretty much in tears all I could say was, "I just did. You have to go now."

No joke. That pretty much summed it up. Please. What was I supposed to do? She was an Amazon of a woman with a crusher handshake looking me in the eyes asking about ME? I caved.

Years later, I'm interviewing comedy legend Phyllis Diller. By now, I've had more than my share of celebrity interviews under my belt, so nerves don't enter the equation–UNLESS, I got a legend. Enter the legend Ms. Diller–who inadvertently gave me the best advice on comedy I never asked for.

A lot of people don't know that Phyllis Diller is a concert pianist. So I asked her about the connection between that and comedy.

"Do you play, honey?" she asked me.

When I told her I've played since I was five, she went on to name a bunch of comics who played

including David Hyde Pierce, punctuating her list with, "It's timing, honey. It's all about timing."

Now, fast forward to me struggling with an audience in Provincetown that summer, I'm doing a show I did three times before that week that killed. This time, not so much. Then I remembered what Ms. Diller said about timing and I realized, "Shit, I'm out of sync with my audience." So I adjusted my delivery and damn if that didn't fix that.

Of course, I'd love to tell you all about my dinner with Bea Arthur, but I can't talk about it here because it was too full of filthy words-hers, not mine! Holy crapoli she could string them together.

What I can tell you is how, over lunch, she leaned into me and asked my age. When I told her, she put her hand on mine–I guess in an effort to reassure me that my career was in fact not dead cuz I'd hit 40–and said, "You're gonna be fine honey, I didn't get Maude until I was 47." I think my eyes teared up at that point. Not because I felt reassured, but because I was now SURE my career was over as I think Norman Lear called her personally to do Maude, and well, she had won a Tony prior that. Okay I'm kidding. It was an incredibly sweet and touching moment. Bea freaking Arthur, one woman to another, saying "It's gonna be fine kid," made me think it was gonna be fine.

Each one of these women made an imprint on my life that I'll never forget. Their strength emanated from them in a way that was clear, but not overpowering. It wasn't forced. It didn't feel thrust upon me. I suppose that's what makes them special, possessing the ability to impact people's lives even when they weren't really trying. So, thank you Mses. Reno, Diller, and Arthur for writing on the wall of my mind with your indelible ink.

Maggie Cassella is a current events commentator, actor, writer, producer, and founder of the We're Funny That Way™ queer comedy festival, now in its 14th year.

PHOTOS courtesy of Maggie Cassella



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