

SEATTLE & THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST'S LGBTQIA+ NEWS & ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE SINCE 1974



2024 General Election endorsements

Early voting in Washington begins on October 18

BY THE SGN EDITORIAL BOARD

KAMALA HARRIS AND MARIA CANTWELL
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CANDIDATES
BACKGROUND BY TIM MOSSHOLDER / UNSPLASH

As with all elections, the SGN believes it is vital to uplift the voices of marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed people across the nation. The best way to ensure that Queer and Trans rights are preserved in Washington and throughout the country is to elect strong LGBTQ+ leaders and allies.

US President

The choice is easy: **Kamala Harris**. As the ACLU says, "The Biden-Harris admin-

istration has a strong record of protecting and expanding the freedom of LGBTQ people at a time when those freedoms have faced an unprecedented assault... For four years, President Trump and his administration left no stone unturned in their effort to attack the right of LGBTQ people to live and work as who we are. We fully expect a second Trump administration to go further, weaponizing federal law to override state level protections and mandate discrimination by schools and health care providers

nationwide... While there remains work to be done to protect the LGBTQ community, we have seen significant progress under the Biden-Harris administration in undoing the anti-Trans and anti-LGBTQ policies of Donald Trump's administration."

US Senate

The *Seattle Gay News* is proud to endorse **Sen. Maria Cantwell** for her fifth term in the US Senate. Since 2000, Cantwell has been a firm ally of the LGBTQ+ commu-

nity. In 2010, she supported the repeal of the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy, and in 2012 she was influential in getting the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act Passed in Congress. Cantwell is running on a platform of defending human rights and combating prejudice. If reelected, she has committed to supporting measures to expand federal nondiscrimination protections, ban federal

SEE ENDORSEMENTS PAGE 6



The Stranger names its first Nonbinary editor-in-chief

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

PHOTO COURTESY OF
THE STRANGER

The Stranger is known for shaking things up with its pointed takes on local stories, but this summer, the paper made history for shaking things up on the inside. Hannah Murphy Winter started their new job as *The Stranger's* editor-in-chief, becoming the first Nonbinary person to hold the role.

"I'm under the impression that I'm the first Queer, Genderqueer, 'them-ish' person in this role," they said in an interview with SGN.

Winter feels at home working at a publication whose roots lie deeply entangled in Queer culture. "It's awesome. I have always worked at places that have a robust history and lineage, a robust institutional

memory, and a lot of those places have also been very counterculture and very progressive, but this is the first one where queerness has felt like such a part of that thread. That's special."

Before working at *The Stranger*, Winter was a freelance writer for *Rolling Stone*, a news assistant at the *New York Times* international desk, and an intern and freelance writer for *The Nation*. Although they have built their career working for progressive institutions, they have never experienced anything like the Queer culture that lingers in the air at *The Stranger*, influencing the tongue-in-cheek paper like a sassy ghost.

SEE STRANGER PAGE 7



Who is Craig Coogan? A chat with Seattle Choruses' seasoned new executive director

BY KYLIN BROWN

PHOTO COURTESY OF
SEATTLE CHORUSES

A new leaf has turned for the Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus, who together announced interim director Craig Coogan's shift to permanent executive director in mid-September. Following significant financial losses in recent seasons and a slow return of audiences to prepandemic levels, Coogan has entered this role at a critical time for the organization, and just in time to prepare for the 2024 holiday season.

A veteran in the LGBTQ+ choral movement

Coogan brings over 30 years of experience to this position, after previous leadership roles in Boston, Los Angeles, and St.

Paul. His impact has been marked by an ability to build lasting operational infrastructure while remaining grounded in organizational and community values.

As executive director of the Boston Gay Men's Chorus, Coogan oversaw prepandemic increases in annual ticket sales, nearly doubled the singing membership, and grew individual, government, and foundation giving. Coogan's leadership also deepened the organization's commitment to racial and gender diversity by growing BIPOC membership by 28% and audiences by 15%, while welcoming gender-diverse choral members to the organization.

SEE CHORUS PAGE 16

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SEATTLE NEWS	3
SPORTS	7
OP-ED	8
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT	9
FILM	20
BOOKS	21

SEATTLE NEWS



Summer Taylor found not at fault for their death during Black Lives Matter protest

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

SUMMER TAYLOR (CENTER)
COURTESY OF STRIMATTER LAW FIRM

Summer Taylor, a Nonbinary Capitol Hill resident and veterinary assistant at Urban Animal, was found not at fault for their own death during a Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest along I-5 on July 4, 2020. After a two-and-a-half-week trial, 12 King County jurors found the 24-year-old was not in violation of the law or engaged in any illegal activity that day.

Full responsibility of Taylor's death was placed on Dawit Kelete, who pleaded guilty to vehicular homicide and reckless vehicular assault (both felonies), as well as wreckless driving (a misdemeanor). Kelete is serving a six-and-half year sentence, which will be followed by 18 months of probation, and was found liable for \$6 million in damages payable to Taylor's estate.

"The State attempted to paint our child a criminal...the jury disagreed," Dalia Taylor, Summer Taylor's mother, said in a statement. "Let us all honor Summer's memory by living with compassion, moving forward without fear, and boldly rejecting beliefs and practices that harm and hold us back. Today is another step toward a more perfect union."

Background

Taylor was one of tens of thousands of people who gathered downtown and in the Capitol Hill neighborhood for weeks after Minneapolis cops murdered George Floyd. On the day they were killed, Taylor was part of the Black Femme March against police brutality in solidarity with the BLM movement. Another Nonbinary protestor, Diaz Love, was hit by Kelete's vehicle and transported to a hospital in serious condition.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, Taylor's death was believed to be the 21st violent death of a gender-noncon-

forming or Transgender person in the US that year.

Although the Washington State Patrol sealed off sections of I-5 for protests that day, Kelete drove wrongfully up an offramp while impaired. According to the *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog*, Kelete underwent a breathalyzer test following the accident and passed. Prosecutors claimed he was experiencing withdrawal from painkillers and addiction challenges during his admission to jail.

Lawsuits

The case brought by the estate of Summer Taylor claimed that the state failed to fully and properly close the freeway and allowed Kelete to enter the roadway. Out of the 12 jurors, 10 voted in the state's favor and found it not liable.

Kelete has been referred to King County's Legal Financial Obligations program, through which restitution costs are imposed by the court on a consistent

monthly-payment basis.

The Strimatter Kessler Koehler Moore law firm's trial attorneys Karen Koehler, Mo Hamoudi, and Shannon Kilpatrick represented the estate.

In an earlier major lawsuit against the City of Seattle, the Strimatter firm assisted 50 plaintiffs in winning a \$10 million settlement for harm caused by Seattle Police Department officers during the 2020 BLM and CHOP protests. Leading the department at the time was Chief Carmen Best, who allowed the use of aggressive techniques to decluster crowds, like blast balls that explode and emit pepper gas, flash-bang grenades, and foam-tipped projectiles.

US District Judge Richard Jones ordered the department to cease the use of "chemical irritants or projectiles of any kind," as he determined they were indiscriminately used against peaceful demonstrators, including journalists.

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Seattle activist Aysenur Ezgi Eygi killed in West Bank by Israeli soldiers

Memorial for Aysenur Ezgi Eygi using US Tax money

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

ALL PHOTOS BY LINDSEY ANDERSON

On Friday, September 6, Israeli soldiers shot and killed Aysenur Ezgi Eygi while she was protesting against Israeli occupation in the West Bank.

Eygi was a recent University of Washington graduate and Seattle resident. She was not Palestinian but felt compelled to travel to the region with the International Solidarity Movement to show her support after hearing the endless news cycle of civilian death, hunger, and disease. She was only 26.

Video shows that Eygi was shot in the head by Israeli soldiers at a planned weekly protest held by Palestinians and international activists. Protesters had allegedly clashed with the soldiers, who used tear gas on them earlier in the afternoon, but at the time of Eygi's killing, a witness reported "a moment of calm." Another witness, Israeli citizen Jonathan Pollak, reported that the shooting occurred after Palestinians and the international activists held a group prayer. She was found lying under an olive tree and rushed to a hospital, where she later succumbed to her wounds.

Eygi held dual citizenship in the United States and Turkey, whose president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan released a statement following news of her death, saying, "I condemn Israel's barbaric intervention against peaceful anti-occupation protest in West Bank and ask Allah's mercy upon our citizen Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, who lost her life in the attack." Another statement released by the Turkish Foreign Ministry called for the Israeli government to be held responsible before international courts and those responsible for Eygi's murder "brought to justice."

Eygi was not the only casualty in the region on Friday. Palestinian health officials also reported Bana Laboom, a

13-year-old girl, was shot and killed in her village in the West Bank.

Investigations

The White House released an official statement following news of Eygi's death, requesting an investigation. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the killing as "unprovoked and unjustified." He called for the IDF to make "fundamental changes to the way that they operate in the West Bank, including changes to their rules of engagement."

"It's not acceptable," said Blinken. "It has to change. And we will be making that clear to the seniormost members of the Israeli government."

An Israeli Defense Forces probe found that "indirect and unintended IDF fire" was aimed toward a "main instigator" who had thrown rocks at them and "posed a threat," adding that it "expresses its deepest regret over the death." The Military Police has also launched an investigation into the killing.

Eygi's family said an Israeli investigation into her murder would not be sufficient and have requested the Biden administration hold an independent investigation. "We welcome the White House's statement of condolences, but given the circumstances of Aysenur's killing, an Israeli investigation is not adequate," they said in a statement. "We call on President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Secretary of State Blinken to order an independent investigation into the unlawful killing of a US citizen and to ensure full accountability for the guilty parties."

Local reaction

Friends, family, teachers, and acquaintances who only briefly encountered Eygi

had kind words to say about a remarkable young woman, remembering her as a kind-hearted soul brimming with empathy.

"Aysenur was a peer mentor in psychology who helped welcome new students to the department and provided a positive influence in their lives." University of Washington President Ana Mari Cauce said in a statement. "I again join with our government and so many who are working and calling for a ceasefire and resolution to the crisis," she added.

"She was gentle, brave, silly, supportive, and a ray of sunshine," Eygi's family said. "She wore her heart on her sleeves. She felt a deep responsibility to serve others and lived a life of caring for those in need with action. She was a fiercely passionate human rights activist her whole life — a steadfast and staunch advocate of justice."

On Saturday, the Seattle organization Shut It Down for Palestine held a march to call for justice for Eygi and commemorate nearly one year of war. "Today is the 11-month anniversary of the genocide, but it's not just that," organizer Taylor Young said. "We also saw a beloved community member assassinated in cold blood by Israeli forces with US diplomacy as a backing, as well as US arms to make it possible. We're here to demand an end to the genocide. A ceasefire is the bare minimum. We want an end to the occupation, release [of] all the Palestinian prisoners, justice for Aysenur, and [a] free Palestine."

Shut It Down for Palestine is planning to hold a march on October 5. "We want to make this big and loud and show that the movement has continued strongly for over a year and that we're not backing down," Young said. "The tide is rolling for a free Palestine in our lifetimes, and we're not going to stop until we see that."

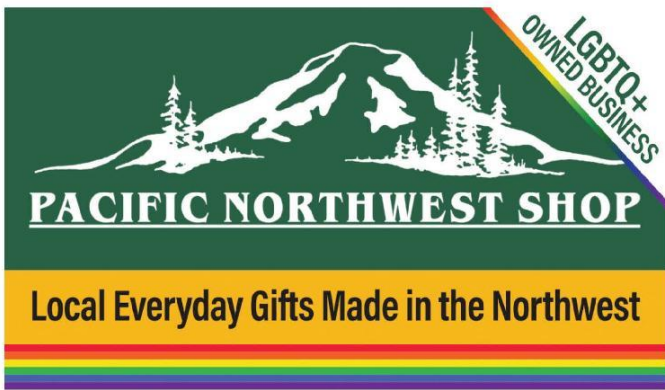
Members of the LGBTQ+ community also turned out on Saturday's march to call for a ceasefire. One protester, Mikus, who asked not to share their last name, attended the event in a shirt that read, "Queer as in Free Palestine."

When asked what that meant, Mikus explained, "Israel has tried to pinkwash by using the LGBTQIA community to justify [its] attacks against Palestinians. My liberation as a Queer individual is not to be above anybody else's liberation who is suffering at the hands of occupation and apartheid."

Many of the protesters who showed up at Saturday's event were not Palestinian-American but felt great empathy for the suffering of Palestinians. "I am here today in support of the Palestinian people, those that have been facing 76 years of brutal ethnic cleansing, occupation of the Zionist entity known as the Israeli state," Mikus said. "I am here in solidarity and in grief over our nearly 200,000 Palestinians who have been lost [since 1948], in the genocide in Gaza, and those attacked in the West Bank. I am here in solidarity for the lives of Americans lost in standing up for Palestinian lives, for Aysenur, who was killed brutally after being in the West Bank for three days protesting peacefully and killed by Israeli occupation forces. We are not free until we're all free."

According to NPR, 40,000 Palestinians (both civilians and Hamas combatants) have died during the Israeli retaliation for the Hamas-led terror attack on Israel last October 7, in which 1,200 people were killed (including 364 at a music festival) and 251 taken hostage (about 63 are said to remain alive), amid acts of brutality, including sexual assault. As of April 30, the UN reported that 254 aid workers had been killed in Gaza since the war broke out.





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ENDORSEMENTS

continued from cover

contractors from engaging in employment discrimination, and law enforcement's use of racial and religious profiling, and secure programs and positions that advance the rights of LGBTQ people around the world.



BOB FERGUSON

Washington Governor

Bob Ferguson is running to become Washington's next governor. As attorney general, he has worked relentlessly to protect the civil rights of Washington's citizens. He also formed the Wing Luke Civil Rights Division, which has become the strongest such division in the country. He stood in front of the Washington State Supreme Court to argue for the rights of same-sex couples during the *Arlene Flowers v. Washington State* case in 2022 and was essential in securing a victory for the LGBTQ+ community as free-market consumers. The *Seattle Gay News* is thrilled to endorse Ferguson as the next governor of Washington State.



DAVE UPTHEGROVE

Washington State Lands Commissioner

Dave Upthegrove is a staunch advocate for conservation. Before his political career, he was a student environmental activist at the University of Colorado. As a representative in the state House and chair of the House Environment Committee, Upthegrove fought to reduce carbon emissions and toxins, and to effectively clean up oil spills throughout the state. He has also worked to double funding for salmon recovery and reforms to restore the region's many rivers. If elected, Upthegrove will be the first LGBTQ+ statewide executive officeholder in the state of Washington.



CHRIS REYKDAL

Superintendent of Public Instruction

Over the last four years, we have watched as LGBTQ+ issues have become central to culture wars perpetuated by the far right. It is disheartening to see some of the most contentious battles over LGBTQ+ rights spring up in schools across the country. Now, more than ever, it is vital to support candidates who support the rights of students to learn about the world around them, to see themselves reflected in their literature, and most importantly to feel safe when they go to school.

Therefore, the *SGN* is proud to endorse **Chris Reykdal**, a candidate who is committed to protecting Queer and Trans students in Washington state. Reykdal will fight for the right of students to use their chosen names and pronouns in the classroom, and to include LGBTQ+ history and gender-affirming sexual education. Reykdal is also a strong advocate for Title IX laws, which protect gender-inclusive bathroom access.

Additionally, his platform is dedicated to protecting all students from gun violence by calling the issue out as a public health crisis and working with the Department

of Health to educate students and families about safe storage and age-appropriate access to firearms.



JOHN LINBOE

Pierce County Council District 3

A candidate running for the Pierce County Council is using hateful rhetoric and dangerous assumptions about the LGBTQ+ community. Incumbent Pierce County Councilmember Amy Cruver refused to attend any meetings in person during July as part of her protest of the Pride flag, which hung in the council chambers.

"Life is full of distractions and disruptions, and it's also full of memories and experiences that can deter emotions or feelings associated with tangible items," she said to *FOX 13 News* in July. "I just found myself at odds with my responsibility to focus on the people's business while in chambers, and being distracted with the memories and thoughts that the flag creates in my mind."

Cruver explained that though she did not understand the deep meaning behind the flag flown in the chambers, she had no intent on educating herself, even though many of those she represents identify with the flag. "The one that is being used in chambers is the ... Intersex Progress Pride, and I don't even know what that is. I don't feel compelled to learn that," she said.

Concentration and critical thinking are essential skills for any council member who represents their constituents. For this reason, the *Seattle Gay News* is proudly endorsing **John Linboe** for Pierce County Council District 3.



RYAN MELLO

Pierce County Executive

Ryan Mello is a Tacoma resident who has used his influence to aid conservation efforts in our beautiful state. As executive director of the Pierce Conservation District, Mello helped to improve water quality and habitat restoration, which in turn expanded sustainable agricultural practices in the county. Mello served for nearly 10 years as the first openly Gay man on the Tacoma City Council and now works as chair of the Pierce County Council for District 4. As Pierce County Executive, he plans on increasing jobs in Pierce County by keeping property taxes low for families on fixed incomes and investing city resources in improvements to infrastructure. He also plans to address safety concerns by providing law enforcement and safety officers with holistic resources to better assess situations they are called to address.

A civic duty and honor

Voting is a civic duty and an honor. Many of our rights as LGBTQ+ people have been secured through legislative votes, and through the representatives at all levels we elect into office. We highly recommend voters do their research, choose the candidate that they believe is best to lead their community — be it city, county, or state — and take part in what is surely to be another historic election. Your vote is your voice — don't let it be silenced.

The *SGN* editorial board members include *Renee Raketty* (publisher), *Matt Nagle* (editor), *Lindsey Anderson* (staff writer), and rotating members of the *SGN* staff.



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Highlight skydiving team brings allyship to new heights with celebration for Megan Rapinoe

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

PHOTO COURTESY OF
HIGHLIGHT SKYDIVING TEAM

Melanie Curtis believes that allyship goes beyond empty words and using a rainbow filter in June. “It’s one thing to put up a square that says, ‘I’m an ally,’ but then how do you do that?” Curtis said in an interview with the SGN. “How do you show up in real life, and what is that grassroots, rubber-meets-the-road action you’re taking?”

The answer for Curtis may not be a common one. She shows her allyship by jumping out of planes. As a professional skydiver and co-founder of the Highlight Pro Skydiving Team, Curtis uses her sport to celebrate the accomplishments of women and advocate for the rights of all people.

Supporting the LGBTQ+ community is a foundational pillar of the organization, which has performed dives holding the Progress Pride flag and the Transgender Pride flag, barreling toward the earth through clouds of rainbow-colored and pink, blue, and white smoke, respectively, and celebrated some of the biggest LGBTQ+ heroes.

Honoring Megan Rapinoe

The latest one honored by Highlight was Megan Rapinoe, a fierce advocate for the LGBTQ+ community and a professional soccer player, who began her professional career as the second overall WPS draft pick in the inaugural year of the Women’s Professional Soccer League, playing for the Chicago Red Stars.

In 2012, Rapinoe joined the Seattle Sounders women’s team as she trained for the 2012 Olympics — her first time competing for Team USA. After a brief stint in France, Rapinoe announced her plans to transfer to Seattle’s newly formed OL Reign for the 2013–14 season.

Rapinoe stepped onto the turf at just the right time. OL Reign was struggling, with a 0-9-1 record. Thanks to her tenacity, Rapinoe turned the team around and became its highest goal scorer. Over the next decade, Rapinoe used her leadership to inspire a generation of women to rise to greatness. She played in four World Cups and two Olympics.

Off the field, Rapinoe is an activist. She

has proudly spoken out about her identity as a lesbian and encouraged LGBTQ+ youth to find pride and community through sports. She has never hidden her queer identity, and through her visibility inspired other LGBTQ+ athletes to come out during their careers.

Rapinoe doesn’t sing the national anthem, and in 2016, she made headlines when she knelt ahead of an international match, in solidarity with Black victims of police brutality. She was also one of 27 female soccer players who sued the United States Soccer Federation because they were paid significantly less than their male counterparts. She has also worked as an ambassador for GLSEN and Athlete Ally.

Following her retirement, OL Reign retired Rapinoe’s jersey. Recently, the organization reached out to Highlight to make a special jump to celebrate her. “She’s such an inspiration to us, using her sport and platform to uplift other people, to champion the underrepresented and the underserved, and it’s a real honor to be able to [jump for her],” Curtis said. The jump occurred on August 25.

Pioneers

Like Rapinoe, Curtis is a pioneering athlete in a male-dominated industry. “I didn’t even realize that I was in a male-dominated space, I just grew up around it,” she recalled. “I just didn’t have this awareness of misogyny and these exclusionary ideas, and this idea that I was an underrepresented group. ... In recent years, doing more healing work of my own and doing more learning about how to be in service to people that have fewer rights, it’s been a cool thing to go, ‘Oh, we can do more here.’”

Influenced by Rapinoe, Curtis helped form Highlight, an organization that inspires women and girls to push the limits of where they can go. “Skydiving is a male-dominated sport. Women represent only 14% of skydivers, so part of our goal is to inspire women and girls to join us in skydiving, but in a broader sense, it is to inspire women and girls to live bold lives of their design, and to show up in these spaces where we’ve been historically underrepresented to open up doors of opportunity for all of us.”

Though she has done over 12,000 jumps in her 30-year career, Curtis still gets nervous ahead of an event, especially one honoring her hero. “I don’t think vast experience means you never get nervous,” she said. “We can liken this to showing up in different spaces. We’re going to feel that when we step into these spaces where we feel underrepresented and like we don’t belong, but we feel this calling inside us to show up in a certain way or champion a certain idea or activity or way in the world. If you are an edge-pusher, a person who wants to be bold, who cares about that kind of leadership and modeling, you’re going to feel that fear, and that nervousness percolates pretty much in everything you do. That’s okay. That’s normal.”

Even though doubts and nerves can creep up ahead of a jump, Curtis knows what’s waiting on the other side is the same sense of freedom that compels women in all spaces, like Rapinoe, to continue their quests for greatness.

“For me, it is the physical manifestation of freedom,” Curtis said. “It radically brings you into the present moment. Worries and fears and things your monkey mind is wrapped around — you get a break from that, even if only for a short time, but you also get access to the idea that anything is possible.”

STRANGER

continued from cover

“You feel the history of queerness in this space and in this role,” Winter explained. “I think there are few [such] positions of leadership in this industry, especially in a space that isn’t a queer publication. You should feel that if you’re leading *The Advocate*, but it feels uniquely special to be in this role and feel this queer history and this queer lineage in it.”

Self-discovery

Winter knew they were a journalist long before they knew they were queer. They moved across the country to study journalism and sociology at NYU at 17 years old. “I loved the craft of journalism, but when I was 17, I don’t think I understood the work we do. I just think I got lucky that I had a good guess that this was going to be something I love,” they said.

In their mid-twenties, Winter experienced a quarter-life crisis. They left the New York news desk behind in a search for self-discovery in Mexico. “I figured out I was gay [and] had a somewhat existential panic,” Winter said. “I was going through a breakup, which makes a lot of sense knowing the context that I was gay, and I ran away to Mexico for six months.”

Like many young queer people, Winter needed time to process their identity and found comfort in the distance and space

Mexico provided. “The first time I said that I was gay was in Spanish, not in English, which did make it a little easier,” they said with a laugh.

Changes

After their sojourn, they returned to New York to write for *Rolling Stone*. Now, Winter is back in their hometown and ready to incorporate the lessons they learned into “Seattle’s Only Newspaper” as it undergoes a modern puberty.

“We’re kind of just starting to come back into the office, which has been fun,” they said. “Right now, our team isn’t huge. Our editorial team is as small as it looks on the masthead, but there’s so much energy in this building.”

Under Winter’s leadership, the team is growing. *The Stranger* brought in an all-star list of columnists to contribute fresh perspectives. “The idea is to bring consistent, more diverse voices into the paper. Some of them will be more political commentary, but some are arts, culture, and food,” Winter said. “I’m excited about that. I think it will help us. Everything is under the banner of *The Stranger* and *The Stranger*’s tone, but expanding the tent of what *The Stranger* is is an amazing thing.”

Inspired by their work with *Rolling Stone*, Winter will also bring in more photographers to brighten up the paper. “Half of our mission is a culture paper, and being able to document that is something we are entirely capable of doing,” they said. “We want to be a paper that people are excited about.”

Back to print

While the pandemic hit *The Stranger* hard, Winter is helping bring back more print issues. Their projected goal for 2025 is 11 physical issues a year. “I think there is starting to be a little more of a romanticization of holding a physical paper again,” Winter said.

The Stranger has crept its way back onto the streets of Seattle over the last two and half years with print issues — the latest is a guide to the local primary elections. Winters hopes monthly physical copies will help satisfy Seattle’s hunger for analog news, as many dedicated readers still don’t know the paper has returned to print.

Another change under Winter’s reign is allocating more resources toward their “deep love” — thorough features. “Starting in October, we should be able to publish one good deep feature a week,” Winter said. These pieces will include “a lot of visual investment and a lot of deep reporting.” Readers can expect these in-depth features spread throughout the paper, not just in politics.

Humor

One thing that won’t change is *The Stranger*’s propensity for humor. “I think [humor] is a tool that can be wielded to enter subjects that can be impossible to broach or to pull something off a pedestal that has been unfairly put on a pedestal. If we can use it for that, we’re doing our job right, and if we can make you laugh, we’re doing our job right. Both of those things

are our job,” Winter said, although they also admitted sometimes humor is just for giggles. “Some things are just fun to read, and that’s good, that’s okay. Our readers shouldn’t always be walloped over the head with a policy argument. Sometimes we can just be fun and silly.”

Winter doesn’t take themselves too seriously, which bodes well for their new position. “In my personal life, my wife and I virtually don’t speak English in our house. We have this series of in-jokes that create the fabric of our household, and they become so dense that I don’t think we even speak an intelligible language,” they said with a smile.

The Stranger, which has quickly become Winter’s second home, tends to also revel in cheeky humor, though the writers still take incredible pride in their work, which is one of the reasons Winter is so excited to lead the team.

“There’s so much pride in *The Stranger* in owning your beat and knowing it well. Being able to have that pride while still [poking] fun at it requires such a unique personality... You have to be able to take your work seriously without taking yourself too seriously,” they said. “It’s a cool balance of people here, and that crosses outside of editorial. It’s in the DNA of this place. It’s been fun.”

Winter sees journalism as a team sport. “It’s best when we’re working on it together. Being able to get into the work with everybody has been a cool experience,” they said.



The hidden discrimination in Washington's progressive gender-affirming care

BY MATTIE MOONEY



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATTIE MOONEY

In the progressive narrative surrounding Transgender healthcare, significant strides seem to have been made toward inclusivity and access. However, a critical barrier remains entrenched in the system, disproportionately impacting the most marginalized within the Transgender and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) community: the reliance on body mass index (BMI) as a qualifier for surgery.

In Washington State, a glaring dispar-

ity exists between those with private or employer-provided insurance and those on state-funded programs like Medicaid or Medicare. Patients with private insurance are more likely to find surgical providers willing to perform gender-affirming surgeries on people with a BMI over 35. In contrast, those relying on state insurance face significant hurdles, not only in finding providers who accept their insurance but also in meeting restrictive BMI thresholds

that many surgeons and healthcare facilities impose.

This disparity underscores a critical flaw in our healthcare system: while access to gender-affirming care has ostensibly expanded, it remains inaccessible to those who do not meet arbitrary health metrics such as BMI. This measure, long debunked as a valid indicator of health or surgical risk, continues to gate-keep essential, lifesaving care. The persistence of BMI as a criterion starkly illustrates how deeply ingrained misconceptions about weight and health can influence medical practice, to the detriment of those it serves.

The lack of advocacy and legislative attention to this issue in Washington is troubling. The state's Transgender healthcare advocates and lawmakers have not yet recognized the importance of BMI-related barriers in discussions about healthcare access for TGNC people. Despite increased access to gender-affirming care for some, many of us must meet unrealistic body weight standards, which can drive harmful behaviors like eating disorders, just to receive treatment. This not only undermines the advancements made but also highlights the inequities that persist within the system, even in advocacy and organizing spaces.

Fatmisia — systemic discrimination against fat people — remains pervasive, and unchallenged not just in broader societal contexts but deeply embedded within LGBTQIA+ and healthcare spaces. This discrimination often commodifies fatness when it is a source of Queer entertainment yet also paints it as a moral failure outside of that context, questioning people's abil-

ity to manage their health based on their weight. However, the factors contributing to a person's weight are complex and multifaceted, ranging from genetics to the very stress of experiencing marginalization.

Studies have shown that belonging to marginalized groups and facing systemic oppression can adversely affect health, leading to higher rates of obesity and eating disorders among TGNC people. This is particularly acute for those with intersecting identities of race, disability, and socioeconomic hardship. In the face of such challenges, the continued use of BMI as a gatekeeping tool is not only scientifically unsupported but also ethically questionable.

The disparity in care based on BMI in Washington serves as a stark reminder that our healthcare systems still harbor biases that need to be addressed. It's time for the state's healthcare advocates and legislative bodies to prioritize the needs of all TGNC people, regardless of their body size. Medical institutions and providers must reevaluate their practices and biases, ensuring they do not perpetuate harm but rather support the health, needs, and dignity of every patient.

This call to action is not just about healthcare access; it's about recognizing and affirming the humanity of fat TGNC people, ensuring they receive the care they deserve without bias or discrimination. Washington has made strides, but the journey toward true inclusivity and equity in healthcare is far from complete.

Mattie Mooney is a Trans health educator.

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Scary Halloween prices: Seattle's Queer nightlife goes "boo-jee!"

BY ALAN MOTLEY

Halloween has always held a special place in LGBTQ+ culture: a night to break free, dress up, and get a little wild. It's the ultimate Queer celebration, a night when people pull out all the stops, with campy costumes, daring drag, and just the right amount of scandal.

Historically, Gay bars were the epicenter of the holiday's magic, offering a space to explore identity and gender in ways that weren't always possible year-round.

But in recent years, as Halloween has grown in popularity and the costumes get bigger and better, the prices have crept up too. These days, your wallet might be the only thing truly scared on Halloween weekend.

This year, Halloween falls on a Thursday, meaning most of Seattle's top Gay bars are seizing the chance to stretch the fun — and the fees — by throwing their spooky soirées over the weekend before That's a whole weekend of wallet-weeping parties instead of just one night of fun. What was once a one-night event has morphed into a full three-day financial commitment. When did Halloween become so... *boo-jee*?

Let's dive into the numbers and see if the Queer community is getting tricked or treated this holiday.

Queer/Bar is serving looks... and price hikes

Queer/Bar is pulling out all the stops with its Halloween lineup: *RPDR* season 16's *Mirage Amuro* on Friday, October 25, followed by *RPDR Canada's* Brooke Lynn Hyles on Saturday. Drag royalty? Absolutely. Pricey? You bet.

General admission starts at \$23, but when you tack on the service and facility fees, you're looking at almost \$30. Reserved seating hits \$45, and if you want to get fancy with a high-top table (for up to four people, including VIP table service, a photo opportunity with the featured star, and seating along the runway), prepare to drop \$225 — and that's before all those pesky fees. It's like they're charging us to breathe in the same air as these queens.

Then there's *Jimbo's Halloween Haunt* the next week. General admission creeps up to \$25, with reserved seating at \$50. And yes, that \$225 high-top table option

still looms large. The only thing scarier than Jimbo might be your credit card statement the morning after.

The Cuff Complex: A reckoning (for your wallet)

Meanwhile, over at the Cuff Complex, it's a *Night of Reckoning* on Saturday, October 26. I.A.'s Tokyo and Kitty Glitter are hosting a night of debauchery — and it'll cost you \$30 just to get through the door. For the full weekend pass, including Friday's *Bookakke* event, you're shelling out \$40 (plus those inevitable fees).

Sure, they're sweetening the deal with a \$2,500 costume contest, but you might start wondering if it's just a way to distract you from your drained bank account.

Massive Halloween: Bigger, badder... but at what cost?

Massive, Seattle's underground party central, is serving up two full nights of Halloween madness. On Friday, October 25, it's *I'm Screaming* with Boris and Tommy Hart, and on Saturday, *I'm Dead* delivers cosmic Italo-disco vibes. General admission will cost you \$35 per night, but the premium pass? \$60. If you want to go all in with the Premium Weekend Pass, it's a whopping \$105.

Between the costume, drinks, and that inevitable post-party Uber, you might be left wondering: what's scarier, the party or your total tab?

What are we actually paying for?

In the last few years, many Seattle Gay bars have adopted weekend event passes for their Halloween celebrations, promising access to multiple nights of drag shows, DJs, and costume contests. But as we dig deeper, it raises a bigger question: are we really getting our money's worth?

Sure, the concept of a weekend pass sounds convenient. Pay once, party all weekend. But when ticket prices range from \$40 to \$105, you can't help but wonder: what are we paying for? Are these weekend passes just a way for bars to maximize profits? Halloween is already a cash cow for the nightlife scene, but by stretching it into a multi-night affair, bars can double or even triple their revenue. It's smart

business, but for attendees, it can feel like a cash grab.

DJ lineups: Who are these people?

One of the most baffling parts of these weekend passes is the DJ lineups. Massive's bringing in Boris and Tommy Hart, while Queer/Bar is sticking to its formula of big-name drag headliners. But for the average partygoer, some of these DJs might as well be ghosts: no one knows who they are, and their niche subgenres of techno and Italo-disco might only appeal to a small segment of the crowd.

Are bars booking these DJs to cater to a select few club-goers? Or are they just filling slots on a weekend packed with overpriced tickets? While it's cool to diversify the music scene, the average Halloween partygoer might just want to dance to the hits.

Most of us hit the bars on Halloween for familiar beats — whether it's pop, house, or a solid remix of the year's biggest numbers. But too often, we're met with DJs spinning obscure underground tracks, leaving the crowd more confused than entertained. It's a harsh reminder that you can pay for the party, but not necessarily the vibe.

When the music doesn't hit and you've forked over cash for a weekend pass, it feels like the ultimate letdown.

A night out for everyone... or just the few?

Ask anyone who's been around for a while, and they'll tell you: Halloween didn't always come with these sky-high prices. Bars used to rely on word-of-mouth, pack the venue, and throw a good time without draining your wallet. Now, with event passes, VIP packages, and premium seating, it feels like a far cry from the inclusive and spontaneous Halloween nights of old.

As prices rise, it's worth asking: who's getting left behind? Younger Queer people, students, and those from lower-income backgrounds are finding themselves priced out of the very celebrations that were once pillars of community connection.

Luckily, there are still options for those who want to enjoy Halloween without going broke. The Wildrose is stepping in with its own free event: *Scaryoke*. Since

Halloween falls on a Thursday, the bar is turning its regular karaoke night into a spooky costume contest extravaganza. The best part? It's free.

For anyone feeling priced out of the bigger events, *Scaryoke* might be the best way to enjoy a true community celebration without the scary price tag.

Conclusion: Halloween doesn't have to be pricey to be fun

Despite the rising prices and inflated weekend passes, there are still ways to enjoy Halloween without draining your bank account. Whether it's embracing smaller events like *Scaryoke* or opting for DIY parties, there's still room for an affordable holiday experience.

So, while some bars might be going a bit *boo-jee* this year, remember that the best parts of Halloween are about community, creativity, and fun — not how much you spend.

Story impact

Back in July, I wrote about the lack of diversity in Seattle's LGBTQ+ nightlife in my piece, "Breaking the Monotony: A Call for True Inclusivity in Seattle's LGBTQ+ Nightlife." The response was eye-opening, and it seems like some people have taken note.

Massive, known for its techno parties, recently launched *Sunday Service*, a new event created by Black promoter Keith J. He promises more Black Queer representation on Capitol Hill, with a lineup featuring hip-hop, R&B, trap, funk, disco, and throwbacks — a welcome change. The event will also feature go-go dancers and pop-up performances every Sunday from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.

In a chat with Keith J., he told me, "I read your piece about the death of diversity on Cap Hill right after I created this event, and it makes me so happy to be part of the change." It's moments like this that remind me why I write — because sometimes, stories spark real change.

I'll be checking out *Sunday Service* myself, and I'll report back on how this new night is making waves. If this is the future of Seattle's Queer nightlife, it's looking a whole lot more inclusive.

Unexpected Productions' scary comedy improv this October

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN STAFF WRITER



POE UNEXPECTED
PHOTO COURTESY OF UNEXPECTED PRODUCTIONS

Unexpected Productions (UP), Seattle's oldest improv theater, will present three Halloween-themed shows during the spooky season, which is right around the corner. Fans of *Rocky Horror*, *Up in the Woods*, and Edgar Allan Poe should look forward to attending one of these one-of-a-kind productions.

Jay Hitt, the managing director, told the SGN that "Poe Unexpected: Edgar Allan Poe Improvised" is a favorite of the theater has been running for over a decade.

"It was super popular, so it graduated up to Fridays and Saturdays just last year," Hitt said. "As far as planning, we only do about four rehearsals to get into the mood of Poe, and the format of the show," during which, one of UP's improv performers will dress up as Poe while the other actors re-create scenes in his style without retelling his stories.

"It's all based on the audience's experiences, and they give us some dark stuff sometimes," Hitt said.

"Poe Unexpected" will run every Friday and Saturday from October 4 to October 26 at 7:30 p.m.

Another October-long production, "Up in the Woods: A Spooky Improv Comedy," will feature improvisers stranded in

different areas, like an abandoned hospital or haunted house. Audience members choose an object to kick off the show, like a wooden stake or an odd doll, and then an aggressor, like a demon or vampire, to hunt those stranded on stage. Hitt described this production as a "slasher type."

"Up in the Woods" will run on Sundays (a first) from October 6 to October 27 at 7:00 p.m.

"We're trying a little experiment this year. We're doing a take of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*," Hitt said. "It's going to be a big campy, musical horror show... This is the first time we're doing this one. We're very good. People, a lot of the times, don't believe we're improvising — they think it's scripted."

The "Rocky Horror Improv Show" will only run for three nights: October 19 and 26 at 11:30 p.m. and Halloween at 9:00 p.m.

For those who may be new to improv, Hitt recommends attending the Poe show, but all of the productions are never-before-seen — and will never be seen again, as they are created by audience suggestions the night of.

For more information visit <https://www.unexpectedproductions.org>.



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THE TIMES ARE RACING
McCaw Hall
September 20, 2024

Opening night at PNB's triple bill, *The Times Are Racing*, displayed the talents of three American choreographers who are pushing the boundaries of classical ballet with exciting new works. Justin Peck, the New York City Ballet wunderkind, has matured into an impressive choreographer with an international career, while Edwaard Liang is a Taiwanese American with an international career who is presenting at PNB for the first time. As terrific as these two dancemakers are, it was Jessica Lang — the resident choreographer at PNB for the next three years — who carried away the laurels on opening night with her world premiere of *Black Wave*, made especially for the wonderful PNB performers.

The evening began with Liang's quietly gorgeous *The Veil Between Worlds*, first premiered by PNB online in 2021 but seen on stage for the first time on opening night. The ten dancers, dressed in modernistic tank suits, formed an array of elegant and intimate variations separated by billowing silk sails that served to divide and extend time and space. Elle Macy and Dylan Wald led the ensemble to Oliver Davis's swelling music, which featured violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim, who was alternately playful,

pensive, and dramatic. This elegant dance drew the audience into an imaginary world of tranquility, frolic, and strength — the perfect antidote to our stressful historical moment. Given the excitement and drama of the two pieces that followed, *The Veil Between Two Worlds* set just the right tone of joyful expectation.

Lang's *Black Wave* was the second dance of the evening, one of intense clarity and delicate power for 11 people, who appear beneath the single limb of a mighty tree (designed by Libby Stadstad) that slowly moves and changes as the dancers themselves do likewise during a work by New Zealand composer Salina Fisher called *Kintsugi*. Lang mentions in the program that she was influenced by the Japanese concept of the same name: the practice of mending broken pottery with seams of gold, transforming flaws into objects of great beauty. As the dancers interweaved with fascinating, sculptural drama, the metaphor of the changing tree mirrored the flaws that remake themselves into something new. This metaphor of life was performed by principals Leta Biasucci, Dylan Wald, and Sarah-Gabrielle Ryan, joined by soloists Kuu Sakuragi, Lea Terada, and Luther DeMeyer (who was promoted to this position on opening night).

One could attempt to describe this dance in terms of steps, movement, music,

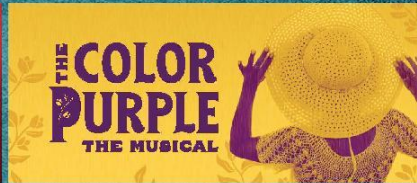
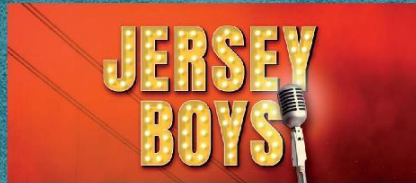
mood, and colors — but it would fall short of the impact it had on the audience. My only regret about seeing a premiere is that there are no clips or videos of it online yet. I have only my memory and impressions to relate: *Black Wave* was beautiful, intricate, and thrilling — truly, a home run. It received a well-deserved roar of approval from the audience at curtain calls. It's wonderful to anticipate what Lang will do as the new resident choreographer at PNB.

The finale on opening night was the piece that gave the evening its name, *The Times Are Racing* by Justin Peck, the clever young New York City Ballet dancer who has developed into an equally clever young (not yet 40) choreographer. Best known for choreographing the 2021 Steven Spielberg version of *West Side Story*, Peck is bringing the "sneaker ballet" (no bare feet or ballet shoes) to traditional companies ready to branch out into the exciting middle ground between classical and modern dance. *The Times Are Racing* uses electronic music by Dan Deacon from the album *America* to create relaxed, intricate, and fascinating movements. Peck is great at finding patterns for any number of performers, whether they're a dozen who link themselves into a shifting line like a bridge in a storm, or use their legs to make unfolding fans, bringing to mind the three muses in Balanchine's *Apollo*.

An interesting aspect of *The Times Are Racing* is that the roles are not gender specific. Dancers mix and match depending on what evening you go, tempting the viewer to come see the piece more than once. On opening night, the 20-person cast was led by Kyle Davis, Christopher D'Ariano, Sarah-Gabrielle Ryan, Lucien Postlewaite, Jonathan Batista, Cecilia Iliescu, Amanda Morgan, and Lily Wills. In the other two opening weekend performances, the principals are almost entirely different — a casting style throughout the run that gives both dancers and audiences a chance to experience a less gendered approach to what matters in the genre. I was struck by the relaxed movements the sneakers allowed, even as the steps were as challenging, in their way, as traditional ballet. One section, in which four women dance with one man, was so sculptural and varied that it was as if they were living inside a kaleidoscope. Because of Peck's style of casting, I can imagine it with four men and one woman, or three women and two men — or any combo of humans. It's a great way to see the dance and the world.

The Times Are Racing is at PNB through September 29, 2024. Find out more at Pacific Northwest Ballet <https://www.pnb.org>.

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The 29th annual Seattle Queer Film Festival (SQFF), presented by Three Dollar Bill Cinema, is ready to make a “Q-thartic” imprint on the city’s moviegoing landscape. With an in-person component of four days — kicking off on Thursday, October 10 with a gala screening of director Esteban Arango and writer-star River Gallo’s award-winning drama *Ponyboy* at the SIFF Cinema Egyptian — and a virtual-only slate that will be available to stream for an additional seven, this year’s event is jam-packed with LGBTQ+-focused stories from all around the globe.

I sat down with new SQFF festival director Trent Farrington to discuss this year’s exciting lineup of features, documentaries, and shorts. Here are the edited transcripts of what they had to say:

Sara Michelle Fetters: How does it feel to be gearing up for another Seattle Queer Film Festival, especially considering this is your first go-around as director?

Trent Farrington: This is a dream come true. It’s inspiring, it’s exciting, it’s really thrilling, it’s challenging. More importantly, I think it’s super fulfilling. It’s an honor to be here catering to the Seattle community. It’s such an important time in the world around us, obviously, to be sharing these stories, showcasing these filmmakers, and championing these narratives.

SMF: What’s it like to put together an LGBTQ+ film festival in the middle of a presidential election year, in the middle of a climate where the community’s issues are on the forefront of every discussion, especially those related to the Trans community? Of all years, planning and programming for 2024 had to have come with unique hardships and maybe even more unique pressures.

TF: I think you hit it on the spot. This was the year, right? There’s so much on the line as we speak about what our future holds. When we talk about the kind of the stories and the narratives and the conversations in the media that reflect our political climate [and] policies that affect us all — especially our Trans community, especially our Black and Latinx communities, our immigrant communities — there’s a lot on the line. I really wanted to make sure that these communities were heard authentically. I wanted to make sure that these [fiction and nonfiction] narratives and these stories... are real, are connectable, and are approachable.

With everything changing every minute in this election year, I definitely made sure that I double-checked, triple-checked my math and triple-checked the conversations we were having [while] building our program and making sure that cohesively we were putting together something memorable, something important that the entire community could champion and rally behind.

SMF: Maybe this is just coincidence, maybe this is just a sign of the times, but your opening night film *Ponyboy* seems to hit all of those targets all at once. You’ve got an Intersex main character. You’ve got a movie about a sex worker. You’ve got a movie dealing with immigration issues, drug issues, and police accountability in this current climate. How did



2024 Seattle Queer Film Festival Preview

Getting Q-thartic! with new SQFF festival director Trent Farrington

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

PHOTO COURTESY OF
TRENT FARRINGTON

that work out?

TF: *Ponyboy*, our opening night film, is just a jam-packed collaboration. What’s very interesting about this film is that River Galloway, the writer and star, actually won the Best Short Film prize here in Seattle in 2019. So it’s come full circle.

This project is something that gives me goosebumps, a film that we’ve never seen before. It’s not all the time that Intersex people... get films about themselves and have themselves accurately represented, especially on a topic of drugs, crime, police, brutality, murder, etc.

But it also really represents our festival’s 2024 theme, “Q-thartic”: that feeling, that emotional release, of getting to...express yourselves wholeheartedly and authentically. I think *Ponyboy* champions Queer cinema and the importance of us being able to tell our own stories authentically.

And, again, just from the filmmaking standpoint, from a proof of concept to a full-length feature, I think River Galloway and the entire team have something beautiful on their hands. I’m excited to start our program off with it.

SMF: For you personally, I do have to wonder, how cool is to kick off your first SQFF as festival director with a feature-length adaptation of a short film that took home the top prize just five short years ago?

TF: It’s an honor. I don’t think most people understand the magnitude and the importance that this film has for us and for our community. I think, as you put it, this is years in the making. And to be able to give back to Seattle specifically? How the city championed the short a few years ago and made this filmmaker see the visibility in themselves to go out and make something

else? There’s something powerful about that.

As a festival director and someone who’s big on programming — watching tons of Queer films all year, and looking for the best and the most challenging films to give to people — *Ponyboy* was a gem. The way that this all gets to come together full circle? It is kind of magical. More than that, it’s Q-thartic!

SMF: I will say, the 2023 festival set a high bar. The opening night film, *All of Us Strangers*, ended up being one of the most critically lauded and audience-acclaimed films of last year. *The People’s Joker* is one of the most talked-about films of the last two years, and is probably going to end up on a ton of top 10 lists in 2024. Looking at this year’s schedule, what stands out for you as the titles that people are going to be talking about, not just throughout this festival but maybe for years to come?

TF: Thank you for that question. I feel like *Ponyboy*, obviously, is going to be a big one. I think *Duino* [a coming-of-age story] speaks to a lot of folks. We [also] have *Asog*, which is a great, just hilarious feature following a Nonbinary person going for their dreams and passions while also unpacking some cultural nuances that are unique to them. We’ve got *The Astronaut Lovers*, which is a spacy, intimate, cheeky, heartfelt, feel-good film that I just love.

We’ve got *Sally!*, about Sally Gearhart, which is such a powerful documentary about Queer legends who [continually] kind of get shushed in our history. I think women in the movement have gotten sidelined when talking about the AIDS and HIV epidemic. It’s so important to remember who was there to support us, and who was there to radicalize us, during that piv-

otal time period. I think this film is very empowering and long overdue.

I think *No One Asked You*, another film focusing on abortion access and women’s rights to healthcare, is another great one that asks some tough and important questions. But it is also something very comedic and lighthearted. Most of all, it’s real.

We’ve got an abundance of shorts programs. I think our BIPOC “Busy Being Black, Beautiful and Bold” [program] is going to be one of the biggest gifts I can give to the Seattle community. Being African-American myself, being Caribbean, there’s so much heart and personalization in this program that I just cannot express how joyous it is.

SMF: One of the things that’s always been a hallmark of SQFF is that all genres get represented. This year, you’ve somehow managed to score an IFC Films and Shudder co-production, *Haze*. Tell us more about that one.

TF: Yes, *Haze* is going to be an amazing screening. IFC and Shudder... are allowing us to do a screening of the film. Matthew Fifer — I don’t know if you remember — had the feature film *Cicada*, which was so powerful, go into release back in 2020. It was unfortunately one of those films that was released during COVID, so we didn’t get to watch it in the theaters and get to invite the filmmaker [to the festival] to have a conversation, which was tough, because it was such a deep film to unpack. For them to be able to come back and return to us as an [alum] for another release, that’s incredible. I’m so happy we get to show this one in a theatrical setting.

As for *Haze*, it’s just chilling. It’s horrifying. It’s gripping. Not to give out any many spoilers, but you get every ounce of horror and terror with that feature, for sure. Audiences will be screaming.

SMF: Other than obviously the COVID years, when things did have to go virtual for good reason, traditionally SQFF has been about 10 to 11 days. This year, the in-person program is four days, October 10 through 13, whereas the virtual program runs October 14 through 20. Why the constriction for the in-person part of the program?

TF: I think it is a continuous understanding of our industry, the importance of change, and understanding how change can be good. Ten days to four days is a big shift, obviously, but it’s made for good reason. We’re allowing more days for folks to watch, stream, tap in, engage in that virtual experience.

If we look around and we look into this film festival space, there’s a lot of changes happening. Sundance is currently looking for the best place...to relocate and looking at several options around the country. Other festivals are dealing with similar issues [as] SQFF. This is an industry-wide conversation about independent space and independent cinema. It’s not just happening here in Seattle.

SMF: I think this is part of the same conversation but, especially after the COVID shutdowns, there is a growing perception — and it’s an unfortunate one — that festivals like SQFF don’t mean as much as they used to, that they



DYLAN O'BRIEN AND RIVER GALLO IN *PONYBOY*
PHOTO COURTESY OF *PONYBOY*



SANTIAGO MADRUSSAN AND JUAN PABLO DI PACE IN *DUINO*
PHOTO COURTESY OF *DUINO*

may be unnecessary. How do we counter that? How do we remind people that they remain vital and are deserving of community and audience support?

TF: It's an important question. I think we have to remember the importance of why these festivals started in the first place. If Queer representation in film and media was on the forefront of everyone's agenda, I think we would've never had a need to have a Queer film festival. But there was a call and a need for Queer festivals run by Queer people presenting Queer content, festivals that catered to the Queer community, that presented stories that were missing from the regular, regional festival or the typical city festival.

There's that idea that we had to make this space specifically for us. ...While I know media is changing and it might seem trendy to have Queer content, you have to remember that we didn't always have that. We had to come together. We had to make our own space. And, you have to realize, many of the stories being told now in these mainstream projects, they're not being told by Queer filmmakers or being shown through a Queer perspective.

In that sense, yeah, we still need festivals like SQFF. They are so important. We need to come together and make these festivals Queer, make these festivals focus on the Black community, make these festivals Asian and Asian-American focused. These festivals need their own spaces, because cinema, traditionally speaking, still caters to the straight, white viewer. I think that's the importance of SQFF, TRANSLations, and every other community-focused Seattle festival.

Personally, I feel like there's nothing like being in a room full of Queer people celebrating cinema together. It's wonderful.

SMF: Or as you've said multiple times during this interview, it's Q-thartic!

TF: Q-thartic! It's just so cleansing. It is a reminder of a feeling. It's something that

I want to hug, something I want our audience to hug. It's something that I want you all to feel. To feel at home and needed and supported and loved, because this is the time when we need those feelings more than anything. October is going to be very critical, I think, for us all over the US, but especially for our Queer community and especially our Trans community. Because of this, I think it is so vital for these folks to have a place to feel seen and... authentically represented.

We always know the difference when things are authentic and Q-thartic compared to when things are just more commercial and pandering. We're not going to do that. We're going to be Q-thartic!

SMF: With all that being the case, what do you hope audiences take away from this year's festival?

TF: I think that I want folks to be able to look into this program and see unique, different conversations, different people, and different genres. Seattle is incredibly diverse. ...I want folks to be able to tap into that diversity.

I'm so, so in awe of our filmmaking community here who make so many of these films, who put these narratives out there and who are really trying to say something. I think all of our packages — shorts, features, documentaries — have a wide range of views, a wide range of conversations, feelings, and emotions. There is a new wave to come from this program that maybe audiences haven't seen before. I'm excited for them to discover all that we have to offer.

The 29th annual Seattle Queer Film Festival kicks off Oct. 10 and runs in-person through Oct. 13. The virtual festival begins on Oct. 14 and runs through Oct. 20. Venues for this year's festival include the SIFF Cinema Egyptian and AMC Pacific Place 11. For passes, individual tickets, and a full calendar of events, please go to <https://sqff2024.eventive.org/schedule>.

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2024 Tasveer Film Festival and Market

A conversation on South Asian cinema with Seattle luminaries Rita Meher and Shailaja Rao

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER



The 19th annual Tasveer Film Festival and Market brings the South Asian cinematic scene to Seattle October 15 through 20 with events, forums, and screenings at venues throughout the city. The festival portion kicks off with the Pacific Northwest premiere of writer-director Iram Parveen Bilal's *Wakhri (One of a Kind)* at the Paccar IMAX Theater at the Pacific Science Center on October 17.

This year's lineup includes from all over South Asia, including strong LGBTQ+ shorts, features, and documentaries telling a variety of stories, from the brutally hard-hitting to the goofily Bollywood fabulous. Additionally, for the second straight year, Tasveer remains the only Oscar-qualifying festival in the world for South Asian shorts.

I sat down with Rita Meher, founder of the Tasveer Film Market and cofounder of the festival, and Shailaja Rao, associate director and festival director, to discuss this year's six-day event. Our conversation hit on a variety of topics, including how the pair anticipate Tasveer continuing to grow and evolve into the premier South Asian festival in the United States. What follows are the edited transcripts:

Sara Michelle Fetters: We're roughly a month from the start of the film market, followed two days later by the opening night of the festival. How are you feeling right now? What's the level of anticipation?

Shailaja Rao: I can only speak for myself, but I'm having a blast. [laughs] A little overwhelmed with everything that's going on, yes, but I'm so looking forward to the festival. I cannot even put it in words.

SMF: Rita, as the co-founder of the festival, could you imagine how things would've transformed in less than 20 years, starting from your humble beginnings at the Broadway Performance Hall to what it is now?

Rita Meher: Yeah, it's incredible. It's the 22nd year for the organization and the 19th for the film festival. I would have never imagined where it's at today. But, internally, it never feels that big. I'm still like, "Oh, we are this small little organization." [laughs]

I was telling my friends the other day, I've been doing this for 19 years, but the excitement doesn't go away. It's the same nervousness, same excitement. It's like a new thing, like a new baby. Everything from scratch. We can say we are reinventing the wheel. At the same time, we are not. We are using the same processes, but they still feel brand-new. Right, Shailaja?

SR: Yes. I think... like in any process, there's always some learning... But it's all fun... I keep telling Rita, "This is what we can do for next year." I'm always learning. I'm already thinking of next year based on my learning this year.

SMF: We're used to film festivals here in Seattle. We have lots of them. It seems like we have a great one every month, and this year we've got the Seattle Queer Film Festival the weekend before this

one. You're back to back.

But Tasveer is unique in that, as of 2023, it's both a film festival and a film market. For people that don't quite understand what that means, could you explain what the market aspect is, which might be a little bit more unusual to some people outside of the Pacific Northwest filmmaking community?

RM: We've been doing the festival for 19 years, but I think it's not enough to keep doing things the same way over and over and over. We need to exhibit films in the best way as a festival, yes, but we were also starting to think, how do these get made? How do they come to life? And how can we help them get seen?

A lot of our films, they don't get picked up [by distributors], they don't get funded. We need to find a solution to that. We need to make the journey easier for filmmakers to get these great ideas to come to life. We have to support them. We have to put our force behind them, and that's where this whole "film market" thing came in.

What we are doing is putting the filmmaker, producers, and their teams in front of the decision makers. We're walking the talk. We're putting our thoughts into action. We are bringing all the decision makers to Seattle, not sending them to L.A.

Tasveer is one of a kind. This has never been done before in the Pacific Northwest, where all these big companies — WME, CAA, Blumhouse, Netflix, NBCU, Amazon Studios, Warner, etc. — all come under one roof to meet with South Asian filmmakers.

SMF: Shailaja, as a programmer who helps put the schedule together, knowing that you're going to have the eyes of the biggest distributors in the world coming to Seattle to partake and be a part of the festival, what does that feel like?

SR: It's extremely exciting. To be facilitating this entire thing, bringing filmmakers together, sales agents, distributors, producers? It's amazing.

We're bringing everyone together under one roof, and this doesn't only benefit Tasveer, but literally all of Seattle is going to be economically and culturally gaining. It's a win-win for everyone.

The other thing I'd really like to point out is, yes, we are a South Asian organization, we are facilitating this for South Asian filmmakers, underrepresented filmmakers, but the product that we are going to bring out of belongs to everyone. It is universal. It is going to be for white, black, brown, yellow, any color in between, any gender, any denomination — it's for everyone. This lineup is for everyone in the audience. That's always the goal.

SMF: I am so glad that you brought that up, because one of the reasons I love Tasveer so much is the storytelling diversity that you offer up seemingly every single year. I honestly don't know how you do it, but every year, the storytelling — between the shorts, the features, and the docs — is just magnificent. There's always something unique to discover.

How do you do that? How do you track all of these down and make sure that multiple genres are represented? That everything comes together in this glorious South Asian mélange?

SR: It's not easy. [laughs] Once it's all done, the lineup, it looks great, I know, but it takes a lot of effort to make sure that what we pick is representative of South Asia.

We get tons of submissions. For example, we got five hundred submissions this year, and to sift through those, and bring it down to 110 for our final lineup, was no easy task. We not only have to bring it down, but then we have to make sure that we have that potpourri of films that we can showcase in our festival that represents that diversity you're speaking of.

RM: Diversifying is our mainstay of our festival, [and] we want to make sure that all the countries are represented, and that marginalized communities are represented. We really work hard at this, and programming is the soul of our festival. Shailaja this year, as the festival director, and our programming team have done a great job.

SMF: As you say, you don't just talk

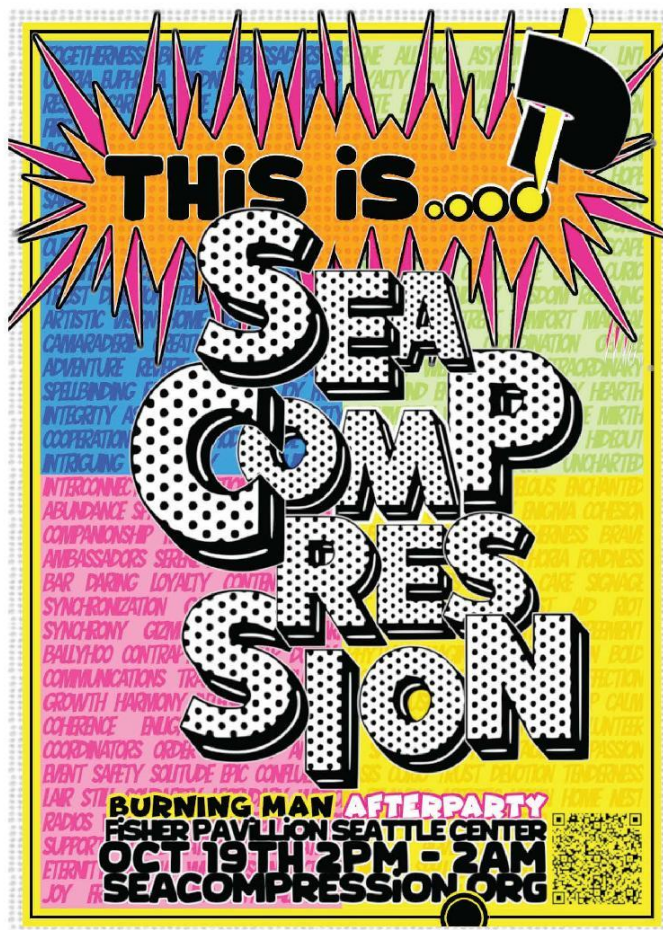
the talk, you also walk the walk. Your opening night feature this year is also part of your LGBTQIA showcase, *Wakhri*. And not only that, you also get to have this opening night celebration at the Paccar IMAX. How cool is that?

SR: It's gigantic. It's dreamy. It's awesome.

RM: And not just opening night. Closing night, too, is at the Paccar IMAX, and the [short] film is part of the LGBTQIA package. *Blue Boy* [the short] and *A Nice Indian Boy* [the feature] — you'll be blown away by that pairing.

Blue Boy is going to be a little bit of a challenge for our audience when they watch that, and it may push some points that will make people think in a different way. It's kind of standing up to what's happening in South Asia right now, and how voices are being silenced. It's really pushing the envelope.

And then to end on the wonderful *A Nice Indian Boy*... It's Bollywood and even includes a wedding. It's just so funny, and it's not the usual stereotype, with the parents being against Gay marriage or anything. It's, like, just a usual family; parents being nervous about their son getting married to someone who's not at the same...





RITA MEHER



SHAILAJA RAO

status, or something like that. It's just a funny Bollywood film, and very quirky.

SR: I'd just like to emphasize, if you don't mind, Sara, that most all our films are not shown in mainstream theaters. You do not get these topics covered in mainstream media. These are really niche, but also the real deal. Like, these are the stories that grab the heart and soul of South Asia.

SMF: And that's part of the great thing about having all of these distributors here, don't you think? It's obviously not going to happen for every film, but there is the chance that for some of these titles that don't normally get exhibited on a larger platform, somebody from say Netflix or Universal could look at it and go, "You know what? We want to put that out there to more viewers."

SR: Right. That would be the goal.

And, there's a lot of learning in our films. I learn something every time I attend the festival. There's always moments where

I'm like, "Oh! I did not know that the Sri Lanka civil crisis led to this taking place," and so many other instances like that. Even as South Asians, there's always something new to learn.

SMF: I love that. Another thing attendees may not know — and I believe this happened just last year — is that Tasveer is now an Oscar-qualifying festival. What does that mean?

RM: That's right, yes. And we are not just an Oscar-qualifying festival, we are the *only* South Asian Oscar-qualifying film festival in the world. There's no other South Asian festival that has that qualification. It means that any short film that wins in our festival by a jury will get put straight into the big pool of Oscar short-listers. Before, these had to chase other big festivals, whether it's Sundance or Cannes, and maybe a South Asian film will get picked, but it was never guaranteed. This way, it's guaranteed for [one] to go onto the Oscar shortlist, every year.

SMF: In my time in Seattle, I've watched Tasveer grow and evolve. I have to congratulate you all on all that you've been able to do, and the way that you've just been able to showcase these films that, as you've said, are underrepresented and don't necessarily get the eyeballs that they deserve. It's magical.

RM: Thank you for that.

SR: And, as far as growing, I would like to point out *All We Imagine As Light*, which is Payal Kapadia's film that won the 2024 Cannes Grand Prix. [Our screening is] going to be the North American premiere.... We are honored to be having this being showcased at Tasveer.

SMF: Do you want to highlight any others you think might be of interest to LGBTQIA viewers?

RM: Yes. I would love to. *Mehroon* is a favorite. It's a Trans short made by and about the title character. Her name has been removed from a will unless she comes back as a man, as a son that was born to the family. Very powerful. No dialogue. Just a beautiful film.

Kattaa Curry is a feature shot in a village in Gujarat, [which] is a very powerful state now, so it's fun to see a Gay film coming out of [there].

And *Pink* is a British film [in which] a man is reconciling with his father, [who he thinks] doesn't approve of him. It is the most powerful film, [particularly] how he finds out how proud his father is of him when he comes back into this man's life.

SR: There's one called *The Story of Yuvraj and Shahajahan*. It's [about] two men: one is a Bengal, and he sells bracelets in the village. It's just about their friendship. Very subtly done, very sensitively

done. It takes up the [issue of Hindus and Muslims] together, so there's that element as well. It's beautifully done.

SMF: Where do you both see Tasveer growing from here? How do you see it continuing to evolve?

RM: We see it evolving to be the Sundance of South Asian film festivals. Anytime anyone makes a South Asian film, they will be wishing for [it] to make it to Tasveer. We want to get there, not by volume, but by quality, by serving the film community, and by supporting and providing resources behind the scenes with below-the-line workers and above-the-line executives. We also want to exhibit these films in the best way we can, which we are doing right now. Anything to add, Shailaja?

SR: You've said it beautifully. I think maintaining our mission, our values, and the quality of films that we put out every year — just keeping in line with that is, yes, that is something that I believe strongly in.

Additionally, and luckily for me, I get to see that we maintain relationships with the filmmakers, even after we're done with their films. We build that relationship. We keep that relationship. That's very beautiful, and very special. For me, that relationship is a most important thing.

The 19th annual Tasveer Film Festival and Film Market runs Oct. 15–20. Opening night is on Oct. 17 with a red-carpet gala screening of Wakhri (One of a Kind) at the Paccar IMAX Theater at the Pacific Science Center. Additional venues for this year's festival are SIFF Cinema Uptown, Tagney Jones Hall, and the UW South Asia Center. A full schedule of events and ticket and pass information can be found at <https://tffam2024.eventive.org/welcome>.

A DYKE ABOUT TOWN



Unmasking Mercy Moosmuzzle: "A Dyke About Town" over the years

BY ALICE BLOCH

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIAN MICHENER

For Lesbians living in the Seattle area between 1988 and 2012, absolutely the best part of the *SGN* was the column "A Dyke About Town," written by the pseudonymous Mercy Moosmuzzle. Mercy's hundreds of columns previewed and reviewed just about every cultural and political event of interest to "Lesbians of discernment and taste." In her lighthearted, witty style, she described disagreements and controversies in the LGBTQ community, often quoting the opinions of her many friends (on whom she also conferred pseudonyms). In Mercy's optimistic view, disagreements were temporary and resolvable; friendship and community were permanent.

Full disclosure: Marian Michener, the actual writer of Mercy's columns, was my

close friend and writing buddy for nearly 30 years, until her death from Huntington's disease in 2019. She introduced me to many of my other friends, as well as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, which she reviewed faithfully (under her real name) for the *SGN*. When her symptoms made it impossible for her to continue, she passed that gig to me.

Her first column, published in January 1988, began with a visit to the Double Header, the oldest Gay bar in the country, for the talent show: "Most of the entertainment was provided by men in drag. Most of the audience was women. What, I wondered, are all these Lesbians doing here? Girl-watching[?] No, the sentiment was one of sisterhood. These people just plain love each other. (And, unless I've missed

something, the planet isn't suffering from too much of that yet.)" The column ended, "This is your correspondent on Capitol Hill with a column of news, reviews, previews, and impertinent thoughts. If you have an item you want the world to know about, you call for Mercy."

When someone posted her column in the ladies' room at the Timberline (the wonderful western dance bar at Boren and Denny), Mercy commented in print that she liked to think her opinions "are worthy of the bathroom walls of some of the best places." Then she launched into a discussion of Lesbian safe sex: "Why is it scarier to talk about sex than to actually do it? Well, keep breathing, girls."

Of moose and men

The column soon acquired a delightful moose logo designed by Mary Whisner, who signed her drawings "Ms. Ws." "Marian and I decided," Ms. Ws. said, "that the moose was gender-nonconforming, since females don't have antlers but Mercy does."

Mercy's 1989 and 1990 columns delved into a number of Lesbian community controversies: separatism, sobriety vs. bar culture, the "sex wars" about pornography and sadomasochism, domestic abuse, sex worker rights. She wrote a particularly moving installment about the AIDS crisis having brought Lesbians and Gay men together: "The sense of family connection now is so palpable you can walk across it. And it's brought us surprising happiness, with an ironic twinge at the hard way it had to come."

One particularly hilarious column describes her fruitless attempt to find a nice straight man for a straight woman friend. "Hell, just because we're Lesbians doesn't mean we don't know any straight men who aren't married and aren't intimidated by powerful women. But ever try to find one?"

Why the pseudonym?

I don't really know why Marian used a pseudonym, but my hunch is that it was a gesture of respect to her then-partner "Charity Boondocks," who was "a more closeted creature than her moose." The pseudonyms of Mercy's friends were

utterly charming: a Gay male couple became "Justice Gatekeeper" and "Custard Choirboy" (the latter was a member of the Seattle Men's Chorus). When Custard objected to his name, Mercy renamed him Victory at Sea. When her friend "Fortune Sleazewell" likewise objected, Mercy changed his name to "Fortune Smiles," adding, "This is absolutely the last name change we're doing in this column, so don't even think about it, Chastity Wonders."

At the end of 1990, Mercy announced her retirement in a farewell column and advised her readers, "If the goddess had wanted you to be quiet, she wouldn't have given you opinions."

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Marian wrote a number of reviews under her real name. Then in a 2006 article titled "Dancing at the Gay Games," she revealed that she'd been diagnosed with Huntington's disease and that when the diagnosis put her priorities in order, "dancing was one of the main things on my list."

Reemergence

Mercy reemerged in 2008 and announced she was "very excited about her new girlfriend, Cuteness Bunkhouse." Cuteness, aka Carol Burton, was the best partner Marian could have wished for, and it was my great honor to be Marian's "best person" at their wedding.

In one of her last columns before it ended for good in 2012, Marian mentioned the need for an LGBTQ nursing home: "It would be nice to gather into a place with a piano bar and drag shows. The reality is that many homes are run by religious organizations that may be homophobic. Mercy herself has a disability that may require her to go into care." (That is indeed what happened: Marian and Carol struggled with a clueless Lutheran home and a homophobic hospice spiritual adviser.)

In rereading the entire archive of Mercy's columns, I was happily reminded of Marian at her best, before Huntington's robbed her of vocabulary and cognitive skills. Her sweet temperament, however, remained intact. The last words I heard her say were "Nice" and "Thank you."



With gaiety and grace, psychic medium brings messages from departed loved ones

BY MATT NAGLE
SGN EDITOR

PHOTO COURTESY OF
TRAVIS HOLP

When Travis Holp was a boy growing up in Ohio, he had experiences that, at the time, he thought everyone had, like talking to his imaginary friends, having a vivid imagination, and being able to sense and feel other people's energy, for example. He was also a little Gay sprout, and this served to make him even more aware of his surroundings and observant of life through eyes and ears that took in everything.

"I remember being very young, maybe four years old, and I would spend time in the book room at my grandparents' house," he said. "While there, I would have long conversations with what people around

me probably assumed were my imaginary friends but, I now know, were my spirit guides."

How he came to know his spirit guides unfolded over the years into his adulthood. It developed over time as his mind's eye gained focus and clarity — to the point that he left his 17 years in the beauty industry behind to fully embrace his gift, which he shares privately with individuals and publicly with audiences in venues across the country.

"I never know what's going to happen. There is no rehearsal, I don't have a team of backup dancers... It's just me," he said

have already proven beneficial. By developing a more robust social media presence and utilizing YouTube to upload new and archival footage for both choruses, for example, the organization has already seen expansions in overall impressions and viewership.

"Once we filled out the YouTube channels, we're at the place now where we have hundreds of videos, and in total they've seen tens of thousands of views," Coogan said. "This is a new way to share our music and message."

Coogan also noted the successes of tactics like introducing the choruses to new audiences — and fans who have moved away or remain virtual attendees — by offering streaming passes to concerts. The choruses have also begun staging abbreviated kids' show versions of select concerts, aimed at shaping the message of the performance for shorter attention spans.

One of Coogan's main focuses is amplifying the overarching message of Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus, which holds deep and historic significance in our region's LGBTQ+ community.

"The Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus have a wonderful legacy of performing music that makes a difference," he said.

"It's a tremendous honor to continue working with the choruses, particularly at this moment in time, as our music builds

with the type of humor he brings as a natural part of who he is. "I just show up and let Spirit work through me, and, fingers crossed, everybody has a good time."

Laughter through tears

Holp goes into any mediumship moment without knowing anything about the person who has encountered him and wants to learn about their loved ones who have passed on to the other side.

"I want to know nothing. The less I know, the better," he said. "If I do a celebrity reading, I tell my publicist to just give me an initial of who I'm reading for and let me be surprised when the camera turns on."

The same holds true when he welcomes crowds to one of his public events. Rather than respond to people raising their hands wanting a reading, he goes by feel for whom he will pick from the audience.

As he explains, "I go to them. I let Spirit take the lead. I work two different ways during an event. One way is I will receive someone's loved one, and I give a lot of information, like their name and who's connected to them. If I get somebody who says, 'That's my loved one!' I go to them and continue delivering information."

At other times, Holp said, Spirit just takes over and he starts walking around as he gets a vibe or feeling about someone in the audience whom he then approaches.

He encourages laughter and good feelings too. "I like to make these events fun, because, as you can imagine, they can sometimes get a little heavy with grief. It can be nerve-racking for the person receiving the reading, and I've seen so many beautiful things when we get these amazing messages that come through that people either weren't expecting or that they hear from a loved one that they really need closure from."

"Our loved ones want to see us laugh and have a good time as well."

Growing in spirit

Before taking on mediumship as a full-time profession, Holp would do tarot card readings for friends and family as more of a dabbling into his blessed gift that he wasn't quite fully aware of yet. Then a psychic medium planted a seed in him that flourished when Holp accepted what she had to say.

"When I first met with Teri, she was the second psychic I had ever met with, and she told me that one day I was going to be doing this as a job," Holp said.

Being engrossed in his work in the beauty industry at the time, he couldn't see himself doing anything else, but he knew something was up when two other mediums, who didn't know him, told him the same

things Teri did. Holp then began hosting tarot readings on TikTok and built a strong following.

"Mediumship just sort of trickled in there during tarot readings I was giving people," he said. "Their loved ones would come through. Now I work solely with spirit energy. I don't use tools or cards in my practice anymore. For me, it's working with spirit guides and people's loved ones who have crossed over, so I work with both when I do readings for people in one-on-one settings. In event settings, like in Tacoma, that will be all spirit mediumship with loved ones who have crossed over."

Having gained notoriety for his accurate and compassionate messages from loved ones in spirit, Holp has been featured on *Entertainment Tonight* and *Today.com*, and in *Us Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Elle* magazines. He's known on social media as the Warrior Unicorn, a nod to his fighting spirit toward LGBTQ and mental health awareness issues, combined with his effervescent personality. He has close to 300,000 followers on Instagram and 500,000 on TikTok.

Gay is a gift

Holp says he never really had a need to be in the closet. As a kid, he was flamboyant, loved unicorns and the color pink, and dreamed of becoming a pop star like Britney Spears. In fact, his dream is to meet with Spears and delve with her into her world to — as he does with everyone — bring healing and hope.

"We all have our nuances, our whole lives that we experience, and I think she is so fascinating," he said. "She's a Queer icon, and she's very loved by the Gay community. I certainly love her, and I think it would be fascinating to read for her."

At the end of the day, Holp is delighted to have found his calling and sees himself going nowhere but up, having just signed exclusively with Voss Events in New York City (as have RuPaul and Lady Bunny, among other Queer notables), and with book and TV deals in the works.

"I feel very fortunate that this is what I get to do for my life," he said. "One of the things I have learned from Spirit is that most of what we carry isn't necessary. In the end, all that really matters is love."

On Saturday, Oct. 5, Holp will be at Theatre on the Square in Tacoma for an evening of love, hope, healing, joy, and messages from loved ones in spirit. Tickets are still available for this 8 p.m. event and can be purchased at <https://www.tacomacity-theaters.org>. Visit <https://travisholp.com>, and follow @TravisWarriorUnicorn on Instagram and TikTok for more information.

CHORUS

continued from cover

Under Coogan's leadership, the Boston Gay Men's Chorus was also the first LGBTQ+ chorus to tour and perform in the Middle East and in South Africa.

Since coming to Seattle, Coogan has similarly worked to increase ticket sales, grow membership, develop culturally relevant shows for the Seattle audience, and expand access to performances. During the 2023-24 season, concerts incorporated video with song in order to tackle current social justice issues like banned books, immigration, and protecting the art of drag

Carrying Seattle Choruses through COVID-19 and beyond

In the role of interim executive director, Coogan's overarching task was to ensure that Seattle Choruses emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic able to make just as much impact as it did before.

"[In] Seattle, having been one of the cities most impacted by COVID-19, and then one of the slowest to return to the halls [after the] pandemic..." he said, "the focus became 'How can we work with that? How can we grow and maintain these choruses in a time when they can no longer bring the community together for live performances?'"

Coogan's tactics during this time period

bridges, breaks down stereotypes, and humanizes the "other" in powerful ways... In the process it has the power to change hearts and minds, and to bind us together at a time in our world when love and acceptance are needed more than ever."

Paul Caldwell, artistic director for both choruses, said that Coogan's leadership during that period was "transformative."

"He cherishes the legacy of a Seattle institution while simultaneously supporting a new continuum of creativity. His tenacious dedication to the chorus's artistry is the stuff of which legends are made. And now he's here to stay. I couldn't be more thrilled," said Caldwell.

The present moment and a vision for the future

Looking forward to the 2024-25 season and beyond, Coogan said his sights are set on a return to glory for the historically renowned Seattle Choruses, while ensuring that "everyone who connects with us has an extraordinary experience."

"The Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus were at one time the largest volunteer chorus in America, and we would like to go back to being that," he said. "Tens of thousands of people engaging in the audiences again, that is the level we want to return to."

Through combined digital and physical expansion this year — with shows in

Tacoma, Everett, and next spring, Bellingham — and exciting new musical arrangements, the season is poised to make a bigger splash already.

A look at the upcoming season

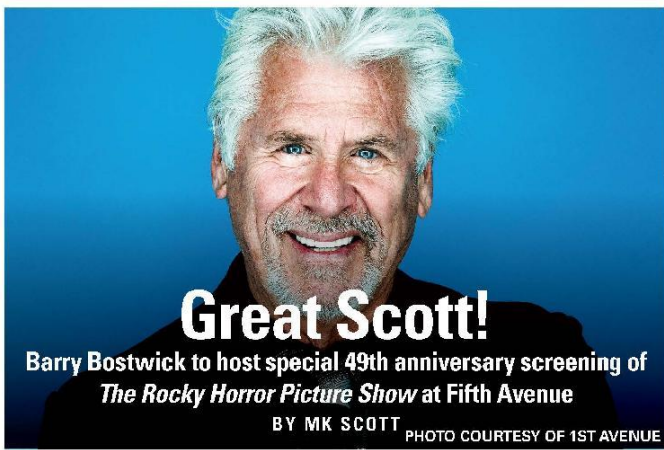
Get ready to commence the holidays this December with the Seattle Men's Chorus holiday show, *Ho Ho Ho!*, including a special rendition of "Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels" by Todrick Hall.

Then, in February, see *Fly Me to the Moon: The Seattle Women's Chorus Sings the Great American Songbook*, taking place at Benaroya Recital Hall and featuring a showcase of woman-powered music and immersing the audience in those women's stories via video.

Finally, next spring, enjoy and learn about an iconic LGBTQ+ ally's music and activism in *Dolly: A Seattle Men's Chorus Salute to Dolly Parton*, a show built entirely on music Dolly Parton created and performed, including new arrangements of Parton's hits.

"Come out to a show!" said Coogan, who can often be found at the doors before or after each one.

Tickets for the Seattle Women's Chorus shows and Seattle Men's Chorus shows can be found at <https://SeattleWomensChorus.org> and <http://SeattleMensChorus.org>, respectively.



Come up to the lab and see what's on the slab! The ultimate Halloween experience is celebrating its 49th anniversary, with special host Barry Bostwick, the original Brad Majors from the 1975 film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, coming to the Fifth Avenue Theatre for two nights (October 25–26).

This screening of the original unedited movie includes a live shadow cast (the Blue Mousketeers) and audience participation. All tickets come with a goody bag to be used during the screening.

Rocky Horror wasn't my first memory of Bostwick; it was the 1984 TV miniseries in which he played the title role of George Washington. In my recent interview with him, he noted, "That was a miracle that I ever got that part, because they hadn't seen me, I think, in my hustler and high heels."

Before he played Brad in *Rocky Horror*, Bostwick was on Broadway, originating the iconic role of Danny Zuko in *Grease*. Unfortunately, he didn't get the movie version, which went to John Travolta.

Bostwick confessed he prefers comedy over drama and would love for his next series to be a sitcom, like what he did in

Spin City in the '90s.

Here are more highlights from our interview:

On filming *Rocky Horror* 50 years ago

"It was a very low-budget movie," he said. "We were at this little studio called Bray Studios out in Windsor, where they used to make all those old Hammer horror films. In fact, we shot in the castle right next door to the little studio where a lot of the horror films were made. It still exists today; it's now a boutique hotel. But it was very uncomfortable. There weren't any toilets; you had to go outside to a porta-potty or something."

"We were there for the love of rock and roll, because the music was great, and the company was exciting. I thought they were all at the top of their game... Thank God I was comfortable in my underwear; I just wasn't comfortable being wet all the time and cold. Susan [Sarandon] walked away from the situation with pneumonia. Wow. Was it cold? Oh, it was freezing! We had to do the floor show on a wet stage in high heels, and some of us hadn't had much experience with high heels. That was challenging."

"But yeah, I liked that pool scene. I think what made the water hot was everybody in it, you know, kissing, hugging, moving, and rolling around. It was Frank-n-Furter's fantasy, and I'm glad he had it. As a New York actor, I'd probably done some of that on stage up to that point and was well aware of that whole part of show business. As an actor, you do what you have to do and get 100% into it, and I was 100% into that bustier."

On "The Time Warp" and props

"The 'Time Warp' scene, basically, we were flies on the wall. Susan and I walked into 'The Time Warp' as they were doing it, and we just had to look astonished and wonder, 'What the hell are we doing here? What's going on? Who are all these people?' It took me years to figure out how to even do the Time Warp because I never did it. Now, I still don't know if it's a jump to the left or a jump to the right."

"I think that's the brilliance and genius of the creators, especially Jim Sharman, who planted the camera around and told us what to do. The kitschiness of it — I think a lot of the props came out of Richard O'Brien's apartment, because it was a low-budget movie. They weren't out buying props; they were going into their bedrooms and getting that weird lamp or that painting that reminded them of their lifestyle."

On the *Rocky Horror* phenomenon

"What I say is thanks to... fans like you who have made this thing go on and on and on. In fact, it's the fans who created it. We just made a little movie in five weeks, and I don't think any of us had any idea we'd still be talking about it almost 50 years later. Five weeks making a movie, and then I was on to other things."

"A few years later, I went to a theater, and somebody said, 'You've got to see what's going on in this theater for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.' I said, 'Oh yeah, I was in that movie. What's going on?' Well, my God, as you know, they're throwing stuff and screaming at us. I think I got my best nickname ever from it. I've been called an

asshole for 49 years by the fan base, and I know it's always been done with love and affection."

"I never did *Rocky Horror* on stage because I don't think I'd want to do it now, where the audience yells back at you and throws things. I'm quite happy being the one on film. I was just thinking the other day: if you go see this tour, the show we're doing... 'If anybody out in this audience saw this movie in the '70s when it first came out, we look exactly the same as we did, but they look 49 years older. God bless them!' It's an eye-opener for so many people to realize that this has been part of their history, part of their childhood. Some of them lost a lot of innocence by seeing this movie at just the right time in their lives."

On his dream role

"Well, of course, it would be Frank-n-Furter. Everybody wants to play Frank-n-Furter. We were talking earlier about how it's so wonderful to play bad guys. He is a real bad guy; I mean, he's despicable in the way he treats people. Yet at the end, you almost feel sorry for him. That's a real nice hill to climb as an actor. And who doesn't want to strut around like Tim Curry for at least one night?"

Finally, for all Fans of *Rocky Horror*, I recommend the newest release of *The Rocky Horror Cookbook* by Kim Laidlaw, from Running Press. According to the publisher, "From the depths of Dr. Frank-N-Furter's laboratory come 50 culinary concoctions to titillate the taste buds of *Rocky Horror* fans, in this lip-smacking officially licensed cookbook based on the cult classic stage musical." Perfect for any Halloween party. Available where ever books are sold.

One hundred VIP tickets for a meet and greet with Barry Bostwick are available at each screening. Go to <https://www.5thavenue.org> for info and tickets. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is rated R for strong sexual content, including dialogue, violence, and language.



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Photos by Rosemary Dai Ross



Keith Haring comes to MoPOP

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

KEITH HARING
PHOTO COURTESY OF MOPOP

Seattle's Museum of Pop Culture, known by locals as MoPOP, is throwing it back to the '80s with its upcoming exhibit on the life, activism, and art of Keith Haring. Curators are busy preparing the original artwork, pop shop prints, and even old yearbooks of Haring's for the October 11 debut.

"This is so different from everything we do," curator Amalia Kozloff said. "Haring was this artist who started in fine arts but also did graffiti and was involved in the early hip-hop movement in New York. There's this intersection of the pop show and commercialism. He is such a perfect intersection of everything we want to discuss as a museum."

Transported into Haring's world

While MoPOP is a museum, the displays housed behind the colorful walls

aren't typically artifacts you'd find in the halls of an established art history collection. Instead, visitors can expect to see Dorothy's red slippers, the house from *Coraline*, or Jimi Hendrix's guitar. While showcasing the work of a modern artist may not seem typical for MoPOP, the museum's curation is anything but ordinary.

The entrance to the Haring exhibit mimics the gates of a New York subway station, a nod to Haring's roots as a street artist. Most of his early subway work was done in chalk and has been difficult to preserve. However, MoPOP has exclusive access to two pieces.

On the makeshift subway walls at the entrance are names scribbled in blocky graffiti lettering. They were written by the members of MoPOP's Youth Advisory Board, who played an active part in curat-

ing the exhibit.

"One of the things we wanted to do was bring in youth collaboration, because that was one of the biggest things [Haring] did," Kozloff said. Each of the youth artists received a stipend for their work and provided artist statements about how Haring inspired them.

Throughout his career, Haring worked with young artists, including LA2, whose work is now on display in a separate gallery in the museum.

As visitors walk past the displays, they're transported into Haring's world, featuring over 250 pieces from a private donor's collection. Guests first walk through his early drawings, then his commercial work, his gallery work, and finally an entire panel dedicated to his social activism. Kozloff has included many Easter eggs as a nod to Haring, and she put thought into each detail — the playlist over the speakers includes artists Haring encountered in New York, like Fab 5 Freddy and Art of Noise, and even the shape of the exhibit from above reflects his style.

One of Kozloff's favorite things is seeing visitors make the connection between Haring's name and his iconic work. "As soon as they see his images they go, 'Oh, yeah I know that!'" she said. "His imagery is so a part of our zeitgeist and our pop culture."

Activism and AIDS

Kozloff is also excited to highlight Haring's work as an LGBTQ+ activist, as the exhibit's launch coincides with LGBTQ+ History Month.

"It intersects well with MoPOP's mission, this intersection of pop culture and activism and social justice," Kozloff said.

During his life and career, Haring was outspoken about LGBTQ+ rights, especially as the AIDS epidemic decimated the community. Many of his pieces include cartoonish illustrations of the naked

body and depictions of violence against LGBTQ+ people.

Haring ultimately died of AIDS-related complications at the age of 31. Part of showcasing his life and career is highlighting the reality of the AIDS epidemic. Kozloff spent a long time deliberating on how the museum, which is often considered one of Seattle's best family-friendly activities, would handle such a topic.


"We do have what you could call a 'content warning,' and there will be one outside and one at ticketing, but there's not a judgment," Kozloff said. "We never make a judgment. Just be aware that this is an exhibit that includes nudity and some violence."

While it is up to each family to decide what is best for them, the Haring exhibit does have a large wall and an additional warning for viewers before they enter the section of the room that houses the more graphic images. "We are exceptionally family-forward, but pop culture spans a lot of things, and there are some difficult topics in it," Kozloff said. "As a museum that thinks about equity and social justice, there are always those conversations we want to have and we want to add context. We present that information so folks can be exposed to that."

At the end, visitors will find a community resource wall, which highlights local LGBTQ+ organizations and resources for young people to get connected with for support, community, and information.

Kozloff hopes people who come with a vague recognition of Haring's art style leave with a greater appreciation for the Queer man who changed New York's art scene and the legacy he left behind in his short time.

"People are familiar with his style and his artwork — it's been out there and repeated and copied. It's inspired so many other artists, and I hope they come to the exhibit and see how it started," she said.




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Enjoyably fascinating *Lover of Men* asks, "Was Abraham Lincoln Gay?"

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

LOVER OF MEN
DR. JOHN STAUFFER OF HARVARD
EXAMINES THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
PHOTO COURTESY OF LOVER OF MEN

LOVER OF MEN: THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Theaters / Apple iTunes, Amazon Prime Video, and others starting Oct. 8

Lover of Men: The Untold History of Abraham Lincoln is far from being the best documentary I will see in 2024. It is, however, likely going to end up being one of the more enjoyable. Director Shaun Peterson has assembled a charismatic cavalcade of historians and scholars to go on a presidential quest into the unknowable with him, and by doing so, manages to craft a sly social commentary that's more about the here and now than it is about the mid-19th century.

Was Abraham Lincoln, the 16th (and almost inarguably the most consequential) president of the United States, Gay? That is the primary question Peterson's documentary attempts to explore. With leading voices from colleges all across the country (including Harvard, Columbia,

and Brown), best-selling historians, and even Montana State legislator Rep. Zoocy Zephyr leading the charge, the answer the director comes up with is a hardly shocking "maybe" — and that's probably the best that could be expected.

But there's plenty of amusing historical support that does make this query worth pondering (and continuing to research). Lincoln's connection to a handful of figures, most notably Springfield businessman and politician Joshua Speed (a former roommate) and US Army Captain David Derickson (who served as the president's bodyguard and companion), is examined in as much detail as the historical record allows. Lincoln frequently shared a bed with these and other men (for four years with Speed), although this apparently was a rather common occurrence during the period. It was really only his time with Derickson that provoked questioning rumors from his cabinet and from other White House personnel.

As fascinating as all of this may be, I could have done without the low-rent, *Date-line*-like reenactments depicting what could have happened between Lincoln and the men at various points in his life. Granted, without them, we'd be stuck with something that emulates a Ken Burns documentary series (most notably the groundbreaking *The Civil War*), only Peterson doesn't quite have a handle on the best way to utilize his erudite talking heads when juxtaposed with the historical elements (letters, photos, etc.) they've assembled for him to showcase for the audience's edification.

Where the director is far more successful is in how he utilizes all of this what-if questioning about Lincoln to shine a spotlight on what happened to views regarding gender and same-sex camaraderie between the middle of the 19th century and the early 20th. Even better, he shines an intense spotlight on how political anarchists utilize social issues to radicalize their followers and, in the process, have dismantled the

Republican Party to such an extent that the "party of Lincoln" is so far removed from what it was during the time of the Civil War that, for all practical purposes, it no longer exists.

In that way, it is when the film is confronting these forms of intolerance that it ends up playing its strongest cards. The way these historians link past and present is both astonishing and terrifying, frequently at once. But, more than that, they also find hope in this historical treasure hunting, and the idea that society can persevere during times of great, seemingly insurmountable peril is one worth embracing (as hard as that may be to do right now).

So, was Abraham Lincoln Gay? I have no idea. But *Lover of Men* does a fine job of pondering this question as best it can. Better, it shows how just embracing the idea that the most celebrated and revered president in United States history could have been is a form of celebratory social and historical anarchy in and of itself.



Imaginative *My Old Ass* is a time-bending experiential journey to self-awareness

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER
MAISY STELLA
AND AUBREY PLAZA
PHOTO COURTESY OF MY OLD ASS

MY OLD ASS
Theaters

Living on a small Canadian island with her parents Kathy (Maria Dizzia) and Tom (Alain Goulem) and siblings Max (Seth Isaac Johnson) and Spencer (Carter Trovzolo), 18-year-old Elliott (Maisy Stella) can't wait for summer to end so she can attend college in Toronto. It's also her birthday, and the teenager only wants two things: to finally tell the barista working at the dockside coffeehouse how hot she is (and see where things go from there) and to go camping with her two best friends, Ro (Kerrice Brooks) and Ruthie (Maddie

Ziegler), whereupon they plan to experiment with magic mushrooms in moonlit seclusion.

After going two-for-two, Elliott never could have imagined what would happen next. While high on the mushrooms, and with Ro and Ruthie off on their own unique trips, Elliott discovers she's sitting on a log next to her 39-year-old self (Aubrey Plaza). What she assumes to be a hallucination quickly proves to be anything but, leading to some crazy, *Twilight Zone* stuff neither can explain.

What would you do if you could speak with your future self? What would you want to know? What advice would you feel

you could safely give? That's the central conceit driving *My Old Ass*, writer-director Megan Park's wonderful follow-up to her equally splendid 2021 abortion dramedy, *The Fallout*. Never taking things too far and staying emotionally grounded, this irreverent, imaginative, and empowering intimate coming-of-age tale is an experiential event worth celebrating.

Stella and Plaza are sublime. Playing the same character at different stages of their life, they achieve a delicately personal synchronicity I found wholly believable. It's clear that the younger Elliott is rather impetuous and must discover truths for herself. She is eager to learn about the world outside of her island home, so much that she is prone to take for granted that her parents and siblings will always be there no matter what.

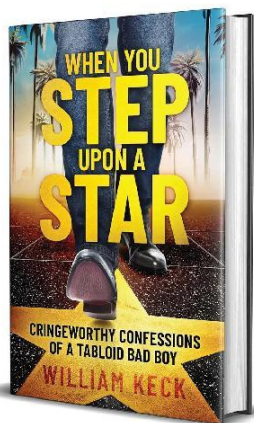
While older Elliott has toned down these aspects of her personality, old habits die hard. When her younger self wants insights into what their life will be like in the future, initially the older version with all the firsthand knowledge is reticent to share. But she can't help herself, and while her suggestions as to how her doppelgänger should spend the summer before leaving for college are mostly benign (hang out more with your brothers, value your parents, stuff like that), she does rashly unleash a doozy that could have massive unintended consequences: avoid anyone named Chad.

I don't want to dig too much into that statement, as doing so would lead toward

spoiler territory. What I will say is that *My Old Ass* is one of the scant few unapologetically Bisexual character studies I have ever seen. Elliott is attracted to both men and women. While she can get excited by the former, it's the latter she's certain she'll settle down and build a home with after college. Her reaction to the whole "Chad" thing is still lovingly chaotic. But it turns Elliott's entire world upside down, with moments as humorous as they are upsetting, as goofy as they are heartfelt.

It all leads to my favorite scene: Elliott doesn't have the first clue as to the best way to process what's happened. Before she knows it, she is "coming out" to Ro, as if she has to ask for permission to fall in love with a boy. Ro's reaction is empathetic and priceless, a pure example of friendship, acceptance, and grace that brought tears to my eyes. Stella and Brooks are spellbinding in how they so deftly and authentically play off one another during this brief yet unforgettable moment of raw, cathartic openness.

In less than 90 minutes, Park covers a lot of fertile territory, with barely a false beat and precious little nonsense. As heavy (and heady) as this story of teenage rebellion and adult self-awareness gets, there's refreshingly not a lot of pointless exposition. Instead, the director allows each narrative beat to be conveyed through Elliott's interactions with the world and characters who surround her. This helps *My Old Ass* leave a lasting impression. It also makes it one of the best films of 2024.



Former tabloid reporter William Keck, who exposed celebrity secrets while closeted, tells all in his memoir

BY MK SCOTT

By the time I first met Gay entertainment writer William Keck at a 2007 conference in San Diego, he was already a respected journalist for *USA Today*. Later, he became a columnist for *TV Guide* before serving as a segment producer for the Hallmark Channel's *Home and Family*, where he gained fame for his reunion shows.

In his new memoir, *When You Step Upon a Star*, he reveals his secret past as a sleazy tabloid reporter for the *National Enquirer*, all while being in the closet. The book is hysterical, provocative, and a journey to redemption, as Keck slowly becomes the one tabloid reporter you can trust with your secrets. Keck's own biggest secret was that coming out as a Gay man would be the greatest first step.

Here are highlights from our Zoom interview:

On exposing secrets

"I lived a closeted life while exposing celebrities' secrets," Keck said, "often hiding behind them. When I first started, people joked I'd cover stories about three-headed aliens and Elvis sightings. Now, those sensational tales are considered world news. I was sent to Vail, Colorado, to follow John Kennedy Jr. to check if Carolyn Bessette was pregnant. They even dispatched me to Hawaii to interview Adam West's daughter in prison. We gathered facts and then embellished them for sensationalism, like with the Susan Olsen story about her DUIs."

Highlights

"The first section focuses on death, deeply influenced by my father's passing and my obsession with obituaries. I collected celebrity obituaries, intertwining this passion with my own struggles.

"The second part, 'Down and Dirty,' dives into my sexual escapades [in my 30s, as I began to come out]. I recount wild stories, like being at a nudist colony with Tammy Faye Bakker and a memorable encounter with Kelsey Grammer in Vegas, where I hired a hooker to verify a rumor about his fiancée.

"I also explore my dual losses of virginity: first with a girl named Lauren, who recently reached out about our past, and then with an actor from *Santa Barbara*. The chapter is filled with outrageous tales.

"The third chapter features my encounters with divas, like Joan Collins and Victoria Principal. I even got a nose job to meet Victoria! I share embarrassing moments, such as a botched interview with Marcia Cross after nude photos leaked.

"In the final section, I reflect on my own quest for happiness and stability as a Gay man, recounting stories of crashing wed-

dings and sneaking into celebrity hospital rooms."

He also added: "I once infested the *Enquirer* offices with maggots — my dramatic exit should have mirrored a movie scene!"

Also: "The *Enquirer* often sent me on bizarre missions, including two days as an 80-year-old man to see if I experienced ageism, and wrestling an 800-pound bear for a stunt where I had a marshmallow in my mouth."

When celebs controlled the narrative

"Celebrities often controlled their narratives. For instance, after crashing Lindsay Wagner's father's funeral, I saw how they promoted their jewelry line instead of focusing on the tragedy. I recount an instance where Adam West thanked me for an interview, cleverly turning a personal crisis into a heartwarming headline."

"I can't confirm or deny anything, but I do name most celebrities in the book — except for two. One involves a *Melrose Place* actor who my coworker claimed he saw engaging in a lewd act. The other is a celebrity who beat me up when I approached him about extramarital allegations. I can't identify him due to a past settlement, but instead of his photo, I used a picture of me wrestling a bear."

Saved for a rainy day

"The *Enquirer* kept files on stars like Bill Cosby, who knew that cooperating with us could help protect his secrets. They had a hidden trove of scandals that they'd only reveal when necessary.

"I received many strange items that never made it to print. Once, I got nude photos of Don Johnson in a hotel room, reading *USA Today*. The *Enquirer* didn't publish them but saved them for a rainy day. I still have a copy of those photos hidden away."

Revelations

"One of the most enjoyable experiences was playing detective. I was sent to Northern California to find the family of Larry Hagman's liver donor. I found the woman whose partner had died in a car accident and informed her that her deceased partner's liver was now inside Larry Hagman. I think she appreciated the connection. It seemed like Larry may have paid her off to stop talking to me, as she suddenly stopped returning my calls. I describe it as a weird version of Ed McMahon showing up with a giant check — only I was bringing news that led to a payday for her. Interestingly, I appear in both Larry Hagman's and Kelsey Grammer's books, where Kelsey calls me 'the King of the Flesh.'"

Later, Keck said, "I never revealed my

past until now. After the *Enquirer*, I worked for the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and *TV Guide*, where I didn't have the courage to come clean. While interviewing Kelsey Grammer on the red carpet, I almost admitted my identity but ended up saying I was 'William Peck.'

"At *Home and Family*, where I produced celebrity segments, I focused on making their experience pleasant. I never told Candace Cameron that I was at her wedding, fearing she'd freak out.

"The only person who asked not to work with me was Nicolette Sheridan, likely due to the stories in the *Desperate Housewives* chapter."

Worst experience

"My worst experience was being beaten up by an actor. I also discuss being molested by Richard Mulligan, the actor from *Soap* and *Empty Nest*. When I was in my early 20s, I worked as a security guard to get access to award shows. During a rehearsal for the Emmys, I met Richard, whom I admired. After chatting, he unexpectedly grabbed my crotch and winked. Since he has passed away, I included an essay by his *Soap* co-star, Diana Canova, about that moment.

"Additionally, Bruce Willis once threatened to burn down my house, which is mentioned in the book. His *Moonlighting* co-star, Cybill Shepherd, also contributed an essay discussing Bruce's intentions."

Biggest regret

"My biggest regret stems from my first assignment at the *Enquirer*. I was told to follow Brad Weisberg, who fabricated a deathbed interview with Dack Rambo, a *Dallas* actor dying of AIDS. I was horrified to learn that this was how the *Enquirer* operated. Dack was a hero for coming out as HIV-positive, and it felt disgusting to misrepresent his story. I tried to have my name removed from the piece but failed. I later apologized to Dack's co-star, Sherie J. Wilson, and she graciously wrote an essay honoring his legacy instead."

Biggest crushes

"My biggest crushes were Lee Majors and Lindsay Wagner from *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman*. Watching them together was a formative experience for me. John Ritter was another huge crush; I met him briefly before he passed. He switched wristbands with me at an event, embodying his *Three's Company* character's playful spirit. I also admired the character Steven Carrington from *Dynasty*, who influenced my understanding of being Gay. When my mother remarked on Steven's beauty and said, "What a waste," I felt I was a waste for being Gay. Thankfully, my mom eventually became a strong supporter of my identity."

Biggest surprise

"I had a good relationship with Marc Cherry until he wrote a controversial storyline on *Desperate Housewives*. When I addressed it, he felt betrayed and created a character named Dr. Keck, a neighborhood pedophile, as a jab at me. While I found the situation humorous, I wouldn't want to be portrayed as such."

Making peace

"Near the end of the book, I recount an experience on the Staten Island Ferry, where I saw an issue of the *Enquirer* featuring damaging stories about celebrities, including Rosie O'Donnell and Joan Lunden. Seeing Raquel Welch looking vulnerable made me realize I didn't want to profit from others' pain. This led me to enroll in the Landmark Forum, where I first came out to Judith Light, a strong advocate for the Gay community.

"I believe I'm coming full circle, though there's still more to go. At the end of each chapter, I include a lesson learned, blending serious and humorous insights. We all make mistakes, and I aim to share lessons that others can apply in their lives, whether related to work, relationships, or my own peculiar experiences."

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