

SPD Chief Barnes talks to the SGN

Aims to rebuild connections, expand department in new role

BY AUDREY OSCARSON

SHON BARNES
COURTESY CITY OF MADISON

Shon Barnes stepped into his new job as Seattle's chief of police in February, bringing his background and experience to bear on the goals of crime prevention, community engagement, and officer retention. Chief Barnes, who has been inducted into the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame, came to town from Madison, WI, where he also served as chief of police.

"Evidence-based policing, to me, is

the use of the most current empirical research as well as officer experience in order to quickly respond to and resolve crime in order to make people feel safe," Barnes told the SGN. "We are looking at a community problem, like quality-of-life issues. Can we clearly diagnose that? And what... actions do we need in order

SEE **BARNES** PAGE 12



LGBTQ refugees+ seek hope in Seattle as deportation threat looms

"It's all hands on deck" at Entre Hermanos

BY DAVE HORN
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

COURTESY
ENTRES HERMANOS

"Virtually every Trans client we've served has been the victim of violence," said immigration lawyer Robert Foss. "Some of them multiple times." Violence from "family members, teachers, classmates, police, and strangers. In their home. In school. And in the larger society." And lately, Foss said, his office has been "flooded with calls and visits from people who are terrified that the change in

administration will force them to return to conditions where they have to fear for their lives?"

Director of legal services at Entre Hermanos in Seattle since 2019 and an immigration lawyer for more than three decades, Foss, 66, has seen it all. But in the first six weeks of the Trump administration, the

SEE **REFUGEES** PAGE 12



Time for something new on Capitol Hill

Why Seattle's LGBTQ+ nightlife needs fresh programmers and fresh ideas

BY ALAN MOTLEY

AARON BURDEN

Seattle's Capitol Hill has long been a nexus of Queer life and culture, a place where originality, acceptance, and community converge in electric fashion. Over the decades, this iconic neighborhood has been celebrated for its eclectic array of bars, clubs, cafés, and performance venues that have offered safe spaces for Queer people to connect, express themselves, and find belonging.

Yet in recent years, a curious ennui has settled over much of the area's nighttime scene. Patrons are voicing a shared observation that too many of the bars seem to rely on the same set of events, curated by the same small group of programmers,

often drawing from the same talent pools. What was once a thrilling mosaic of parties, performances, and subcultures now feels at risk of collapsing into a repetitive loop, leaving many people wondering whether fresh voices could breathe new life into these establishments.

The problem with stale programming

It's no secret that small teams of established promoters can fall into predictable routines. The familiarity might bring in a consistent crowd for a time, but it rarely cultivates excitement in the long run.

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Ry Armstrong runs for mayor

Queer artist, advocate offers progressive vision

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

COURTESY RY ARMSTRONG

Born and raised in Washington with a background as a proud Queer artist, Ry Armstrong recently announced the launch of their campaign for Seattle mayor. Having been a political advocate for years, Armstrong decided to run because they saw vital issues like climate change and mental health left unaddressed.

"Seattle deserves to dream and be bold again, and I feel like we kind of stopped doing that post-pandemic," Armstrong told the SGN. "At a time when Trans people are [being attacked], I refuse to be afraid in 2025, even though it is a bit scary. I just think we deserve a mayor who's going to be accessible."

Armstrong's top issues are increasing the affordable housing supply; investing in public safety by rethinking the approach and investing in community-based resources; respecting workers' rights by creating safe working conditions, enacting fair wages, and maintaining the right to organize; and making childcare affordable.

Their experience in nonprofit arts management, like producing video content for the United Nations, owning their own production company and record label, and as the co-executive director of Sustainable Seattle — which received approximately

SEE **ARMSTRONG** PAGE 12

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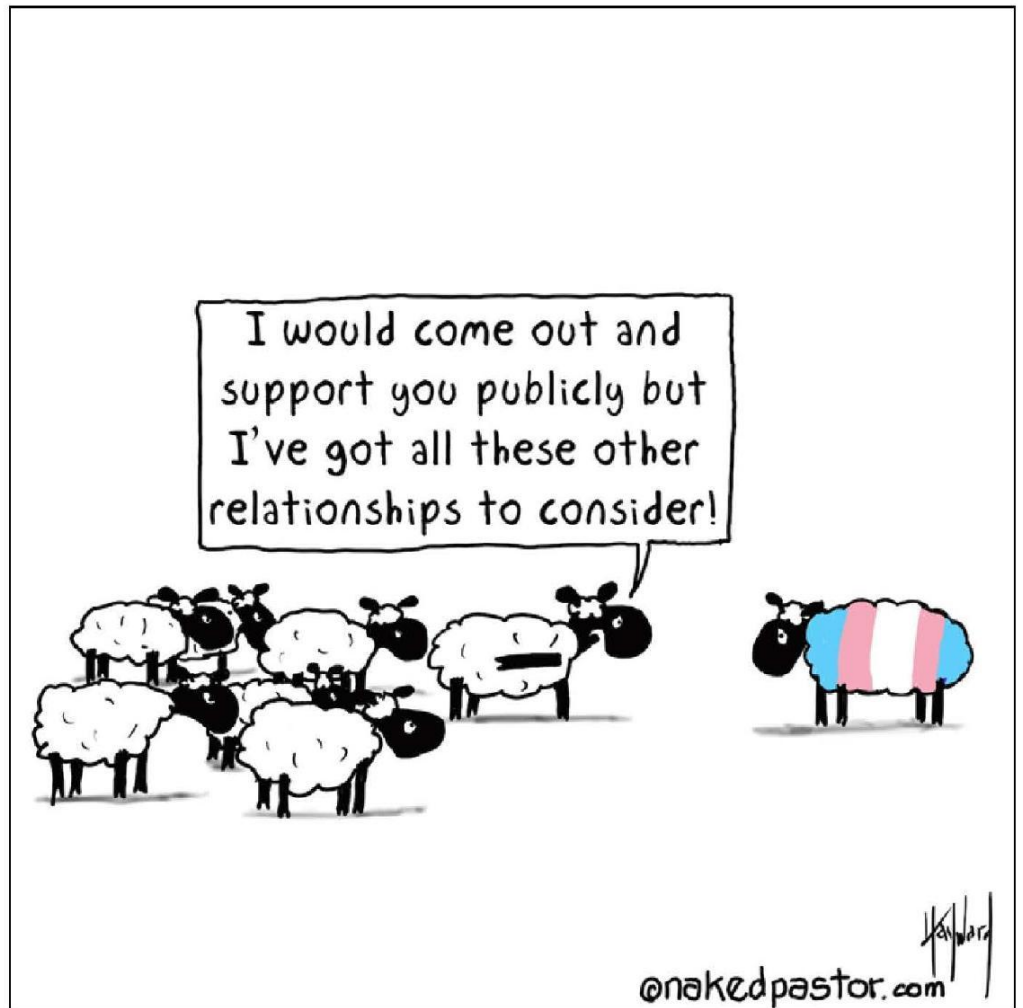
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Valentine's Day brought temporary restraining order against Trump and Queer love protest for Trans youth

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

DANCERS SPIN IN FRONT OF CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
HANNAH SAUNDERS

This Valentine's Day brought an abundance of Queer joy to Seattle. Judge Lauren King issued a temporary restraining order against President Trump's January executive order limiting funding to facilities that provide gender-affirming surgeries, and hundreds turned out for a protest/celebration outside of Seattle Children's Hospital, which halted such surgeries as a result of the order.

People of all ages showed up to the dance party outside of the hospital, which included the sharing of LGBTQ+ resources, snacks and beverages, and the making of valentine cards. Protestors posted large signs by the bus stop reading "You are loved," as repeated car honks were heard over speakers blasting Chappell Roan's "Red Wine Supernova."

"I hope that this crowd — and all of the energy and love that we're bringing today — shows Seattle Children's that Trans kids are more than a lawsuit," Thomas Agostini, a concerned physician, told the *SGN*. "Trans kids are more than trying to dissuade or avoid litigation... They are human beings that deserve to be loved and deserve

lifelong medical care.

Agostini said he hopes that the actions and efforts by community organizers show Transgender and gender-diverse youth in Washington and across the nation that there are healthcare workers and others who support them.

"My hope is that healthcare organizations around the state of Washington resume full-spectrum gender-affirming care based off of the decision of the judge earlier this morning," he added.

Queers win in court

On February 7, the attorneys general of Washington, Oregon, and Minnesota filed a federal lawsuit, *State of Washington et al. v. Trump et al.*, in response to Trump's January 28 executive order. The plaintiffs argued that the order violates the Fifth and Tenth Amendments, and threatens criminal prosecution against healthcare providers.

Judge Lauren King of the US District Court's Western District of Washington authorized a 14-day temporary restraining order.

The Department of Justice counsel often went silent, having difficulty answering Judge King's questions, such as if the executive order targets similar treatments for cisgender people.

Prior to the multistate lawsuit, Seattle Children's halted all gender-affirming surgeries for patients under 19 years of age for the month of February.

On February 12, a Seattle Children's spokesperson told the *SGN* that it is supporting Washington Attorney General Nick Brown's temporary restraining order, and that given the uncertainty regarding the order, the hospital was seeking clarity to safeguard the best interests of patients, families, and the workforce. The hospital did not specifically state that it would resume gender-affirming surgeries.

Stories from protestors

Doug Urner, a repeat Seattle Children's protestor, posted a sign by the bus stop that read, "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." He told the *SGN* that there were several reasons he's been turn-

ing out, but to summarize, it was "a lot of bullshit."

"I have a Trans daughter," Urner said. "I taught high school, so I had a lot of Trans students, and it's just bullshit. My daughter was able to get out of the country." Urner's daughter moved to Scotland because of the attack on Trans rights in the US.

He also noted that he was an advisor for his school's Queer-Straight Alliance and had many students come in who were lacking support.

At one point, a resident physician took to the microphone to say that they moved to Seattle to train in an environment that supports a diverse group of patients with evidence-based practices.

"There may be parents here today who uprooted their family to provide a child with an affirming environment," the physician said. "Gender-affirming care is healthcare, plain and simple... There is no debate in science. This is life-saving care for our youth. It's not the job of healthcare workers to ration care in fear of litigation and retaliation."



A PROTESTER POSES WITH SIGN



A PARENT AND CHILD FLASH THEIR SIGNS TO CARS DRIVING BY



HANNAH SAUNDERS



GSBA to roll out pink carpet for annual Impact Awards

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

2024 GSBA IMPACT AWARDS
COURTESY GSBA

The GSBA is rolling out the pink carpet for its annual GSBA Impact Awards, a dazzling event taking place on March 11, which every year celebrates businesses, nonprofits, and community leaders who have worked to empower and uplift the LGBTQIA+ community.

“We think it’s important more than ever to recognize that small business is what really shapes a community or neighborhood, so that’s why we recognize these folks,” Chris Marcacci, the GSBA’s direc-

tor of marketing, told the *SGN*. “Not just small businesses, but community leaders and corporate leaders too — everybody who makes this city great and super queer.”

The evening will be hosted by Trae Holiday, who interviews some of the biggest names in pop culture, government, and community on her weekly show, and Besa Gordon, a content creator and on-air personality at iHeartRadio. Instead of having a traditional red carpet, like many award

shows do, there will be a bright pink one.

“The main thing that sets us apart as a chamber of commerce is that we do everything with a twist, so it’s really just our way of saying that this isn’t a stuffy business-dinner sort of event,” Marcacci added.

Marcacci said most attendees are customers and supporters, rather than other business owners, and that voting on the honorees is conducted by the public. For example, the nominees for “Capitol Hill Business of the Year” are Nue, a/Str,

Nook & Cranny Books, and Shikorina. The “Non-Profit of the Year” nominees are Reboot Theatre, Gender Justice League, Northeastern University - Seattle, and Pride Across the Bridge. (There are four other categories as well.) Voting closes on March 4.

The Impact Awards event begins at 5 p.m. on March 11 at Seattle’s Town Hall. For more information visit <https://thegsba.org/gsba-impact-awards>.

Seattle Pride launches grant program as feds rollback DEI initiatives

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

Seattle Pride recently launched the Seattle Pride Impact Fund, a spruced-up version of its long-standing grant and scholarship program that’s pumped out over \$500,000 in funding for organizations serving the LGBTQIA2S+ community since 2018. Since DEI initiatives, including grants and contracts, are being rolled back on the federal level, the Impact Fund seeks to empower queer grassroots initiatives.

“Our goal has always been to ensure that Pride’s impact extends beyond June, fostering year-round advocacy, resilience, and celebration,” Nick Albritton, director of community development and programs, told the *SGN*. “The relaunch of our grant-making initiative is not just an expansion but, more importantly, a deeper commitment to more reciprocal partnerships with the people and organizations leading change.”

“At a time when equity-focused funding and DEI initiatives are under attack, we remain steadfast in our commitment to resourcing the work that drives liberation, visibility, and justice for our communities. This is more than a grant program — it is a foundation for long-term investment in LGBTQIA2S+ organizing and leadership in Seattle and beyond.”

The Impact Fund will have two grant categories:

- The Spark Grants category will award up to \$3,500 and in-kind support for ongo-

ing and emerging initiatives, so grassroots projects to have the resources needed in order to launch and sustain their work.

- The Partnership Grants will provide up to \$15,000 for larger and more collaborative initiatives that grow capacity in the long term and strengthen local LGBTQIA2S+ environments.

For the past four years, Seattle Pride has worked to understand the program’s potential and to adjust it to meet evolving needs. Funding will focus on projects that uplift queer arts and culture, youth empowerment, BIPOC leadership, and Trans and Gender-Nonconforming people, while emphasizing the importance of intersectional, community-driven work.

Seattle Pride is in search of grassroots groups and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that operate under a fiscal sponsor and that serve the LGBTQIA2S+ community in the state through direct programs, advocacy, and cultural initiatives.

Priority will be given to grassroots groups and social collectives, and organizations with annual budgets under \$500,000, acknowledging that smaller, community-driven initiatives create direct and meaningful change.

The application review process will focus on community engagement and impact and prioritizing efforts that center and uplift the most marginalized LGBTQIA2S+ people; feasibility and sustainability, to ensure the

project is plausible and has plans for a lasting impact; and creativity and innovation, with a focus on projects that offer emerging approaches to increasing visibility, connection, and joy.

Filling in essential funding gaps

Albritton said this funding is more essential than ever for the survival of this work, due to a nationally coordinated effort to remove federal funding from programs that support marginalized communities, in addition to broader political attacks on LGBTQ+ rights.

“At the same time, state budgets are under immense strain, leaving fewer resources available for local organizations to access,” Albritton said. “Even with philanthropic systems claiming to support equity, the reality is stark: LGBTQIA2S+ organizations, especially those led by BIPOC, Trans, and gender-nonconforming people, receive only a fraction of overall foundation funding.”

In 2022, US foundations awarded only 4.6 cents for every \$100 to Trans, Gender-Nonconforming, and Nonbinary communities and issues, according to the Funders for LGBTQ Issues. The bureaucratic application process includes extensive reporting requirements and can have restrictive funding structures that require match dollars to receive grants. Additionally, there can be limits on how funds are spent, which pre-

vents organizations from tackling urgent and evolving needs. Albritton said these unrealistic compliance burdens force organizations to dedicate time to paper work instead of community service.

“Seattle Pride knows that grassroots organizations are the backbone of our movement. They provide lifesaving services, advocate for inclusive policies, and create safe, affirming spaces in an increasingly hostile environment,” Albritton said.

Without sustainable and flexible access to funding, fighting back against discrimination, building resilience, and driving systemic change becomes severely limited.

“As federal and state-level attacks escalate, we refuse to let restrictive funding structures and political hostility dictate our future,” Albritton said. “We are committed to ensuring [that] LGBTQIA2S+ organizations in Washington have the resources, autonomy, and support they need not just to survive but to thrive. Investing in our communities today isn’t just an act of resistance, it’s an investment in a future where LGBTQIA2S+ people are safe, celebrated and unstoppable.”

Applications for the Seattle Pride Impact Fund will open in July. Awardees will be announced in October, and distributions will occur in January of 2026.

For more information, visit <https://seattlepride.org/impact-fund>.





Queer Fight Night: Martial arts for all

BY ARUL GNANASIVAM

COURTESY QUEER FIGHT NIGHT SEATTLE

In just under a month, members of the Queer community will travel from as far as Europe to Seattle for one purpose: fighting. March 7–8 mark the latest semiannual Queer and Trans Martial Arts Tournament, a huge event featuring Muay Thai and Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Gwendolin Roote, the founder of Queer Fight Night, began the tournament last year on a special day in her life.

“Last year, around this time, I wanted to have a jiu-jitsu birthday party,” Roote told the *SGN*. “And so we organized the first Queer and Trans jiu-jitsu tournament, which was publicized to everyone on the Queer Fight Night network.”

Since last year, the numbers have more

than tripled — from 35 competitors to 44 Muay Thai fighters and 91 jiu-jitsu fighters in the upcoming tournament. The event has gained sponsors and lengthened to three days, and will feature over 65 matches with different styles of martial arts. “We’re really getting to be a center for folks to come do the thing others get to do whenever they want — competing in this sport,” Roote said.

Creating a safe space for martial arts

For Roote and hundreds of others, having their own space to compete is vital.

“All of the sanctioned Brazilian jiu-jitsu tournaments are explicitly transphobic,” Roote said. “They don’t let anyone fight

as anything other than their assigned sex at birth. They require paperwork and basically do anything they can to keep Trans people from competing in a way that feels good to them.”

Events like Queer Fight Night provide a space for Queer and Trans people to participate in the sport free from prejudice or judgment. Even so, in the current climate, the organization comes face to face with a fair amount of negative sentiment.

“It’s really daunting how targeted we’ve been,” Roote said. “It’s been a big barrier for people starting martial arts, and it’s such a relief to have spaces where you don’t have this outsider feeling.”

Roote, who identifies as a Trans woman,

noted how martial arts can help people feel empowered and confident in their body.

“It’s really powerful to feel like you’re in control of your body,” Roote said. “It makes me feel safe knowing my being is a weapon.”

The event, open to any and all who wish to attend, is entirely volunteer run and has already landed eight sponsors, as well as raised almost \$3,000, which goes to running the event and providing transportation and registration costs for low-income people who want to participate.

“Anyone who wants to wiggle around on the mat with a bunch of Queers, send them my way,” said Roote.



Pony patrons targeted with slurs and water pellets in anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crime

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Pony patrons were met with anti-LGBTQ+ slurs emanating from a dark blue Lexus sedan on the night of February 19 while standing outside the Gay bar. The Seattle Police Department is calling the incident a hate crime, and it is being investigated by the bias crimes coordinator.

“Thank you everyone for your support — we have a strong community that is only made stronger after incidents of hate like on Tues nite. The police have all of the info

so far,” said an Instagram post by Pony. Those present reported that the car started circling Pony — which sits inside a remodeled 1940s-vintage gas station at about 11:30 p.m., according to the SPD blotter. The suspects, two or three white men, got out of the car and started to walk up to Pony but went back to their car and continued to circle the bar.

During the course of about an hour, the car returned approximately ten times,

according to a witness who spoke with the SPD.

“The people inside the car continued to yell anti-Gay slurs, and at certain points, a passenger was seen hanging out of the vehicle windows and shooting what were described as ‘pellets’ or water beads at bar patrons,” according to the SPD blotter.

After responding to the incident, police said they alerted other Queer establishments in the surrounding area.

“A witness reported there were at least a dozen people outside the bar when this incident occurred. Police are asking any additional victims and witnesses to please come forward,” stated the SPD. The SPD asks anyone who has information, including videos and photographs, to call the tip line at (206) 233-5000 or to email SPD_hatecrimes@seattle.gov.

In memoriam: Shelley Brothers

BY THE SGN EDITORIAL BOARD

Seattle Gay News and the city's LGBTQIA+ community mourn the loss of Shelley Brothers, co-owner of the Wildrose Bar. Her advocacy, activism, and wholehearted acceptance of Seattle's Queer community will be remembered for decades to come. She is intrinsically tied to the importance of advocating for LGBTQIA+ civil rights while protecting vital Queer spaces.

As one of 34 remaining Lesbian bars in the country, the Wildrose reached a milestone last December when it celebrated its 40th anniversary. Shelley had been the co-owner since 2005 but had been part of the Wildrose community for longer.

In 2004 the Wildrose saw a spike in college students and men frequenting the space. By 2013, when Gay bars across the country were shuttering and when Seattle experienced a growth spurt and rise in the cost of living, fears about the Wildrose's future loomed.

Shelley, however, was determined to keep the space running to provide the Queer community with live music and events in a fun and safe environment. At the time, she said she continued to see diversity at the establishment, and that she hoped patrons were learning from each other.

A proud leader, Shelley stood in support of Sen. Ed Murray when he was running to become the first openly Gay mayor of Seattle, because of his commitment to creating broad bipartisan coalitions around issues such as marriage equality.

Her loyalty and dedication to the LGBTQIA+ community led her to being named one of the grand marshals of Seattle's 41st annual Pride Parade.

The SGN's longtime publisher and editor, George Bakan, and Shelley had a great deal of mutual respect and appreciation and their respective roles in the community.

The SGN Editorial Board comprises Publisher Renee Raketry, Editor Hannah Saunders, Digital Engagement Editor Aisha Misbah, Staff Writer Lindsey Anderson, and rotating members of the SGN staff.



SHELLEY BROTHERS

Remembering Josh Cohen

BY JOSHUA FRIEDES



COURTESY JOSHUA FRIEDES

My friend Josh Cohen died unexpectedly of a heart attack last Friday while attending a conference. I am shocked and saddened.

We met in Seattle, I'm thinking in 2006 or 2007, through mutual friends. He was brilliant at what he did. He worked for Microsoft at the time, negotiating international standards. To put it mildly, the work was above my head.

In 2009 he dropped everything to work like a mamacita on the Washington Families Standing Together (Approve 71) campaign, of which I was the manager. Every campaign has unsung heroes, and for this one, it was Josh Cohen.

We won narrowly and while no campaign wins because of the efforts of just one person, there is no question in my mind that Josh played a pivotal role. And it was the first time in our nation that comprehensive legal protections for LGBT families were secured through a referendum, a popular vote on a statewide ballot.

Josh worked day and night. He would often pick up dinner and come to my house, where we would work late into the night. It seemed to me he could do anything I asked.

His superpower was in his ability to manipulate data. The problem facing progressive organizations was that information was not stored uniformly between platforms. His talents allowed our systems to

talk to each other, giving us an incredible edge. Josh developed innovative systems that allowed us to get out our vote. Nobody else was doing what we did. Laws and changes in Facebook and other platforms mean it will never be replicated.

I just wanted to share this, because I think credit needs to be given. The story about how ultimately marriage equality won is not complete if the stories of code jockeys are not told.

But more than this, Josh was a loyal friend. We talked a lot. He had a lot of ideas. I was always telling him no, though. He had a shirt made that he proudly wore that said "off message," because that's why I said no to many of his ideas. We would laugh about it, and I so appreciated that he took it in stride.

Josh also loved KISS, whose concert he dragged me to.

We were on different coasts and didn't speak much these past few years. I saw Josh last in August in New York, where he lived. We grew up in New Jersey just a mile apart, but we did not know each other. We had lots of cultural touchstones, though. We would always call each other by our last names, because that's what students did in East Brunswick, where we were schooled.

Rest well, Cohen. Your memory is for a blessing.

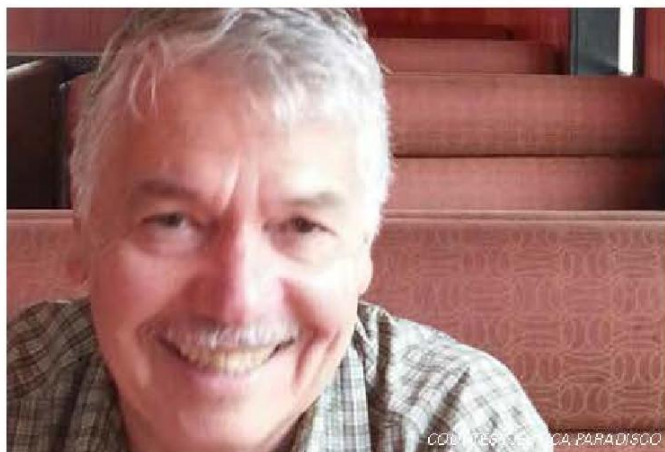
Forever in our hearts: Michael Dumoulin

Michael Dumoulin passed away in his sleep during the early morning hours of January 31. Michael was a quiet and kind-hearted person who touched the lives of all who were around him.

He attended Stonehill College in Easton, Mass., and his spiritualism led him on a path toward advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ community. Michael was engaged with the Imperial Sovereign Court of Seattle, and supported many others during their reigns, ensuring people had everything they needed to thrive.

Michael sang folk music with his friends and was an usher in one of their weddings. He had a passion for French and the outdoors. When attending fundraisers in the period leading up to his passing, Michael was lifting spirits and offering advice to friends.

May Michael rest in peace.



COURTESY SGN, CA, PARADISO



Shoreline Community College staff member harassed with hate speech in all-gender bathroom

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

COURTESY SHORELINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Brian Ramos, Shoreline Community College's vice president of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), announced on February 3 that a staff member experienced anti-LGBTQ+ harassment by a community member while using one of the school's all-gender restrooms.

"On Thursday, January 30th, a staff member was approached in our all-gender bathroom in the 9000 Building and was harassed by a community member who expressed statements that were rooted in hate toward our LGBTQIA+ and immigrant communities. Security was immediately contacted, and the individual was escorted [out] and issued a verbal no-trespass order," Ramos stated.

Although officers from the Shoreline

Police Department were dispatched, the person left before they arrived.

"It's crucial to call this incident what it is, plain and simple: hate speech. We stand in solidarity with our colleague and reaffirm that hate speech has no place on our campus," Ramos said. "We are a college comprised of educators and learners who deeply value one another. Our campus must be a place where everyone can thrive, work, and learn without fear of hate encroaching on our shared environment."

The school's Office of DEIA will collaborate with the Human Resources Department to strengthen the Bias Response Team, which reviews these sorts of incidents and recommends training and college responses that are in sync with the community's needs

and school's values, so as to rapidly respond to these types of incidents in the future.

"We appreciate the ongoing work of the Office of Safety and Security, and their commitment to being a supportive partner in reporting and addressing bias and incidents of hate," Ramos said. "In response to this incident, they will do more frequent monitoring of all-gender restrooms to ensure they are a safe and welcoming space for all."

The equity, diversity, and inclusion officer at the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges will also work with alongside the Office of DEIA to develop training on how to address these incidents.

"We ask all members of Shoreline Community College to stay aware of their sur-

roundings and actively support efforts to report any observed or known bias. Shoreline Community College remains committed to our LGBTQIA+ community, our Latinx community, and all immigrant communities, who are a vital part of our diverse campus," Ramos said.

He also noted that Shoreline Community College is committed to creating an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming community, and that these incidents will not deter the college from important work.

The school encourages those who are afraid of actions by community members to call Campus Public Safety at (206) 235-5860 and to report all bias incidents through the online reporting platform at <https://shorturl.at/BWvaq>.

WA Judge Lauren King issues temporary restraining order against Trump's attack on Trans healthcare

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

On Valentine's Day, Judge Lauren King of the US District Court's Western District of Washington passed a temporary restraining order following a hearing in the case of *State of Washington et al. v. Trump et al.*, which resulted from the president's January 28 executive order limiting federal funding for gender-affirming care. (The *SGN* previously reported on how the attorneys general of Washington, Oregon, and Minnesota launched this suit request last week.)

"I am so damn proud," Washington Attorney General Nick Brown said during the press conference, adding how he will continue the fight for justice and youth.

At the hearing, by the plaintiffs brought up Trump's threats of prosecuting healthcare providers offering gender-affirming care. While this may not be legal, the threat is very real, since the president is directing the Department of Justice (DOJ) and other federal agencies to conduct illegal activities.

While the intent of Trump's order is to allegedly protect youth, it isn't limited to children and irreversible treatments — like

puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones — and it doesn't cover similar or identical treatments for cisgender youth.

"This order is aimed at the erasure of Trans individuals... it blatantly discriminates against Trans youth," the plaintiffs' attorney said.

Brown noted how the DOJ was created to defend civil rights, and that he has a "great deal of sympathy for healthcare providers."

Questions with few answers

"All [Trump] has done is ask agencies to take appropriate next steps," said a member of the DOJ's senior counsel, including looking into existing grants and waiting to see how the executive order will be implemented. She admitted that she didn't know how the order would shake out and claimed that it was not ripe for a review.

"This order does not require the agency... to take any specific action to enforce the order against providers providing care as defined in Section 2," she said. "It merely... asks the DOJ to review enforcement under this particular statute and prioritize

enforcement of that statute."

Judge King asked if Trump's executive order targets similar treatments for cisgender people, asking for an example. The defense went silent, and some audience members giggled, but this wasn't an anomaly, as the DOJ's representative had difficulty answering many of Judge King's questions and repeatedly went silent for a minute at a time before attempting to respond.

The judge said funding under the executive order would only be prohibited for individuals who do not identify as their assigned sex, prompting another pause from the defense.

"You're not answering my questions. I'm going to ask you to try to answer my questions. How would a medical provider know [how to align medical treatment that differs from an individual's assigned sex]?" Judge King asked.

The DOJ representative said that the defense was not prepared to answer that question today. Judge King called the order's text "impermissibly vague — medi-



COURTESY LAUREN KING

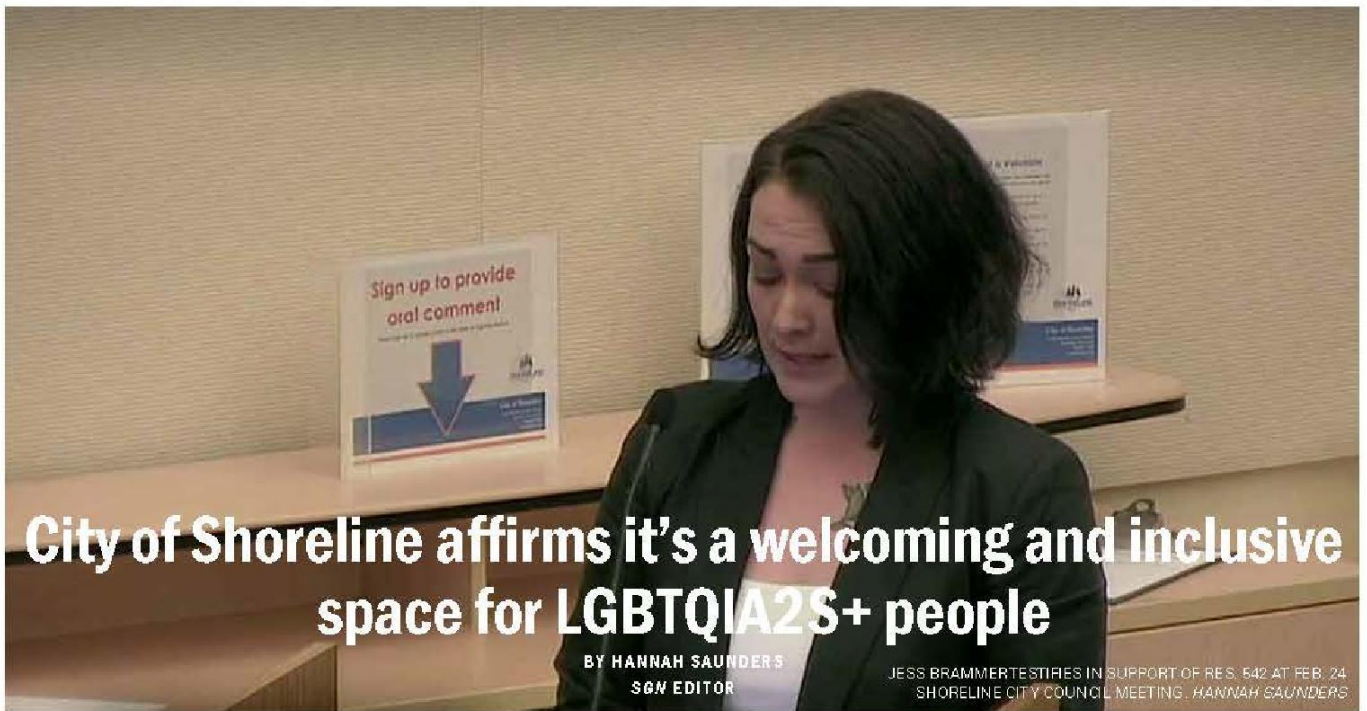
cal providers have no idea on where to go because you can't read the text and provide various facts," she said.

The DOJ counsel responded, "I'm not prepared to parse how a medical provider would read these decisions, because I'm here to defend the lawfulness of this executive order."

Judge King asked where in the executive order medical providers should look to determine the sex of a person, and if treatment aligns with a different sex.

"Again, we need to see how this shakes out," the DOJ rep said.

Today's restraining order is valid for 14 days. Another hearing for this case will be scheduled in the near future.



City of Shoreline affirms it's a welcoming and inclusive space for LGBTQIA2S+ people

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

JESS BRAMMER TESTIFIES IN SUPPORT OF RES. 542 AT FEB. 24 SHORELINE CITY COUNCIL MEETING. HANNAH SAUNDERS

On February 24, the Shoreline City Council unanimously approved Resolution 542, which affirms the city's commitment to ensure that it is a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space for all, including LGBTQIA2S+ people, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.

"On behalf of the Queer community, we are under relentless attack, as I'm pretty sure everyone knows now, and any push-back on that is more than welcome. We need safe spaces," Fran, a community

member who has lived in Shoreline for 11 years and been a healthcare worker for about 50, said during the public comment period. "I've done many ambulance calls where I've transported Transgender people who were suicidal. It's a very common thing in the community."

Jim Hammond, Shoreline's city manager, said the city had previously adopted Res. 401, which declared Shoreline to be an inviting and equitable space for all, and that Res. 542 would affirm that, even with ongoing harassment, bullying, and intimid-

ation at the local and national levels.

"When we speak of creating safe and protected spaces for vulnerable populations, we are not engaging in abstract policy discussions. We are talking about saving lives," said Jess Brammer, who also testified during the public comments. "LGBTQ+ youth who live in accepting communities and have access to affirming spaces experience significantly lower rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide."

As a Queer, Brammer said she wholeheartedly supports Res. 542, and that every

time a city, school, or institution declares itself a safe haven, it's tossing out a lifeline to LGBTQIA+ people who may be struggling to find a place in the world.

Kevin Barrett, vice president of the Shoreline Chamber of Commerce but speaking as a private citizen, testified in support. He said the resolution is not merely words on paper but a reaffirmation of principles that make the city safe.

Olympia, Shoreline, and Tacoma are the only three Washington cities with such pro-LGBTQIA+ resolutions.



Tacoma becomes third sanctuary city for LGBTQIA+ people in Washington

February 25, 2025

Resolution No. 41628

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

RESOLUTION 41628 CITY COUNCIL MEETING
COURTESY CITY OF TACOMA

The Tacoma City Council unanimously voted to pass Resolution 41628 at a meeting on February 25, which made the city the third in the state, following Olympia and Shoreline, to designate itself as a sanctuary city for LGBTQIA+ people.

The resolution affirms and reaffirms the city's "commitment to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, feel safe and supported," as well as to "diversity, inclusion, and justice" so all residents can "live without fear of discrimination or harm," and to protecting the civil rights of LGBTQIA2S+ people.

"I've watched as many in the LGBTQIA+ community were forced to

move from their states in rural cities," Oliver Webb, operations director at the Diversity Alliance for Puget Sound, said during public comment. "Transgender friends and clients stopped public transitions out of fear for their lives, and there have been suicides. We are not safe — we are being literally hunted down."

Councilmember Olgy Diaz, who sponsored the resolution, she said she was blown away by the number of people who attended the meeting, adding that this resolution will build on decades of work that Tacoma and the state have done in relation to LGBTQIA2S+ protections.

"This resolution directs city staff to work within Washington's law against discrimi-

nation, and highlights one of the very first policies I passed when I came here to the city: to protect access for folks seeking gender-affirming care at our healthcare facilities here in Tacoma," Diaz said.

She acknowledged how, despite city and state leadership advocating for the community, LGBTQIA2S+ people still face ongoing violence and discrimination and systemic barriers that threaten their safety, well-being, and human rights.

"Transgender leaders are literally being erased from history in front of our eyes," Diaz said. "Tacoma will not erase our Trans and Queer leaders from our history."

Councilmember Joe Bushnell said she felt deeply troubled and uncomfortable cel-

ebrating while community members face real risks.

"Language can evoke a lot of things. It can evoke excitement, fear, joy, anger, etc., and my fear is that these resolutions tonight create a false hope," Bushnell said.

While Bushnell does not want to mislead the public into believing that the resolution will shield the public from federal legislation, Devin Rydel Kelly said during public comment that Trump and Musk's political efforts against Queer communities is deeply concerning.

"[The resolution] will serve as a beacon for other communities," Kelly added.

HIV medication-related bill advances in Washington legislature as HIV denialist RFK Jr. confirmed to oversee health agencies

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

HIV MEDICATION COTTONBRO STUDIO

A bill that would require Medicaid to cover all FDA-approved HIV antivirals has seen early success in the Washington state legislature, most recently being unanimously passed by the Senate's Health & Long-Term Care Committee meeting on February 13. But with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s recent confirmation as the Health and Human Services (HHS) secretary, primary bill sponsor Sen. Marko Lilius (D-21) is ready to fight like hell to ensure that Washingtonians have access to this life-saving medication.

"Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s dangerous views threaten to upend the progress we've made toward eliminating HIV in this country," Sen. Lilius told the *SGN*. "Despite whatever conspiracy theories the secretary peddles, he cannot erase the fact that HIV antiviral medications are incredibly effective for reducing transmission."

Senate Bill 5577 states that the Health Care Authority (HCA) — which administers Washington's Medicaid program — should provide coverage for all FDA-approved HIV antiviral medications without prior authorization or step therapy, and that coverage must be provided to state Medicaid recipients who are enrolled in both fee-for-service and managed-care models. This would also apply to those initiating and renewing their Medicaid contracts with the HCA.

The majority of the beneficiaries of Washington's Medicaid, also known as Apple Health, receive coverage for medical services through a managed-care system, which is a prepaid system that delivers care through a provider network under a fixed budget. Fee-for-service models require patients to pay for each service.

Beginning on January 1, 2023, Apple Health fee-for-service and managed-care plans were required to cover all medications used for the treatment of HIV, as well as PrEP, without prior authorization. Step therapy, which wasn't covered under this, is when insurance companies require patients to take certain steps before they will cover medications. This can include forcing patients to try lower-cost prescription medications, even if they aren't as effective.

During the Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care's public hearing on February 11, Sen. Lilius noted how about 400 people in the state are diagnosed with HIV

each year, but that this can be addressed by increasing access to life-saving antivirals, which reduce a person's viral load to practically zero.

"This bill is about making sure that people have access to medication and treatment so that we will stop the spread of this disease and stop people from having to suffer from it in our state any longer," Sen. Lilius said at the hearing.

"I'll be closely monitoring the secretary's attacks on these life-saving drugs, especially as SB 5577 progresses, and will continue to advance legislation that ensures that Washingtonians have the medication they need," Sen. Lilius told the *SGN*.

For the 2023–25 biennium, the Washington legislature appropriated funds for the HCA to provide coverage for all FDA-approved HIV antiviral medications without the need for prior authorization.

"Washington has been a leader in expanding access to HIV treatment and preventative care, and that's why SB 5577 seeks to codify what we're already doing and have budgeted for," Sen. Lilius added.

HIV denialist oversees federal health agencies

In February the US Senate voted to confirm RFK Jr. as the HHS secretary by a vote of 52-48, with Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell joining Democrats in voting against him, as well as two other of President Trump's cabinet nominees — more than any other Republican senator. Sen. McConnell is a survivor of childhood polio.

"Mr. Kennedy failed to prove he is the best possible person to lead America's largest health agency," Sen. McConnell said.

Kennedy is more than a vaccine denialist; he also believes HIV does not cause AIDS, but rather that recreational substance use, like "poppers," and lifestyle stressors are the cause, according to GLAAD. His relative, Caroline Kennedy, even spoke out prior to the confirmation hearings and urged lawmakers to reject his confirmation.

In his new position, Kennedy now oversees a number of large health agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



SEN. MARKO LILIUS COURTESY WA STATE DEMOCRATS

LGBTQIA+-centered conference postponed until 2026

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

Washington's LGBTQIA+-focused Say It Out Loud (SIOL) annual conference, held by the Health Care Authority (HCA) since 2001, has been postponed this year but will return in 2026 with essential updates and new voices.

"I want to assure you that the decision to postpone wasn't influenced by any government developments. The pause is all about

taking time to reimagine and enhance the conference experience," Katie Pope, deputy chief communications officer of the HCA, told the *SGN*.

The SIOL conferences provide attendees with an opportunity to share information and network to decrease disparities LGBTQIA+ people face. The conferences cover a diverse range of topics, like under-

standing how sexuality and gender identity impact a person's overall behavioral and psychological health, self-determination, and well-being. Past event attendees have included behavioral healthcare professionals and those from nonprofits, child welfare, education, and justice agencies.

"After the 2024 SIOL conference, the HCA and the SIOL planning committee

decided to take a break in 2025 to create an even more supportive and educational event for our attendees, speakers, and the broader LGBTQIA2S+ community," Pope added.

While the date and location for the 2026 SIOL conference have yet to be announced, Pope encourages those interested to join the advisory committee.

Washington State
Health Care Authority

Trump targets the Department of Education — and kids it sought to protect

BY GARY L. DAY

For a number of years, the US Department of Education has been one of the major targets of conservative Republicans, who make no bones about the fact that their ultimate goal is no less than the complete termination of the department. Since his inauguration, President Donald Trump and his MAGA allies have unleashed multiple attacks against the DOE that may end up achieving Republicans' goal.

The DOE was founded in 1979 by Congress, under the aegis of former President Jimmy Carter, and has been foundational in establishing educational standards and promoting nondiscrimination guidelines for schools and colleges to protect marginalized students, such as LGBTQ+ kids, girls, and other marginalized students.

On Jan. 31, Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY) introduced HR 899, "To terminate the Department of Education." It was referred to the House Committee on Education and Workforce.

While this bill works its way through the legislative process, the Trump administration has basically declared war against the DOE, as it has on many government agencies since the inauguration.

Over the past few weeks, Trump and his allies have taken several steps to cripple the DOE in preparation for its eventual dismantling, particularly its work to protect civil rights. Almost immediately upon taking office, the Trump administration took control of the DOE's Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the primary federal resource for marginalized students and teachers to redress discriminatory practices and policies of schools, immediately reversing its position on a number of crucial issues.

For instance, the DOE's new regime announced that the OCR was dismissing 11 complaints and six allegations related to book bans, saying it was ending "Biden's book ban hoax." The OCR also announced that it had rescinded guidance about book bans and would no longer employ a book ban coordinator, a position created by former President Joe Biden. The OCR administration dismissed 17 cases that investigated whether removing books featuring

LGBTQ+ characters and characters of color contributed to a hostile environment for marginalized students.

Also, Trump has not overlooked the DOE in the raft of executive orders he has unleashed since Day 1. Most notably, on Jan. 29, Trump signed an order titled "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling," which basically, among other things, negates Title IX protections.

The goal of this particularly dangerous order is made clear in one of its opening paragraphs: "In recent years, however, parents have witnessed schools indoctrinate their children in radical, anti-American ideologies while deliberately blocking parental oversight. Such an environment operates as an echo chamber, in which students are forced to accept these ideologies without question or critical examination. In many cases, innocent children are compelled to adopt identities as either victims or oppressors solely based on their skin color and other immutable characteristics. In other instances, young men and women are made to question whether they were born in the wrong body and whether to view their parents and their reality as enemies to be blamed. These practices not only erode critical thinking but also sow division, confusion, and distrust, which undermine the very foundations of personal identity and family unity."

The order is a wide-ranging hodgepodge of conservative ideologies that run counter to long-standing DOE guidelines. The section on definitions, for instance, defines discriminatory positions, policies, and guidelines schools will be expected to adopt. "Discriminatory equity ideology" is to be avoided; that is, any educational approach conservatives feel degrades white people, or might make white kids feel bad or uncomfortable. "Patriotic education" is to be pursued, that is, as the order says, teaching a history that presents "a clear examination of how the United States has admirably grown closer to its noble principles throughout its history."

The order takes special aim at Trans people, the right-wing's demon du jour, by

instructing that anything leading to "social transition" is to be avoided. The order defines "social transition" as "the process of adopting a 'gender identity' or 'gender marker' that differs from a person's sex. This process can include psychological or psychiatric counseling or treatment by a school counselor or other provider; modifying a person's name (e.g., 'Jane' to 'James') or pronouns (e.g., 'him' to 'her'); calling a child 'nonbinary'; use of intimate facilities and accommodations, such as bathrooms or locker rooms specifically designated for persons of the opposite sex; and participating in school athletic competitions or other extracurricular activities specifically designated for persons of the opposite sex."

It only took days for the order's impact on Title IX to be made apparent. On Feb. 5, Trump released another executive order, titled "Keeping Men out of Women's Sports" which forbids Trans girls and women from participating in girls' and women's sports in schools, on pain of losing federal funding (which most likely would be much diminished or vanish altogether should the DOE be terminated).

Playing into this, Trump's DOE sent a memo to the nation's schools, colleges, and universities notifying them that, henceforward, the OCR would enforce only Title IX guidelines from 2020 — which neither include LGBTQ+ people as a protected class nor recognize issues relating to sexual orientation or gender identity as civil rights issues.

As of this writing, an executive order formally calling for the termination of the DOE has not been released. However, in regard to such an order, there would be a question of its legality — a question that is being raised regarding many of the barrage of executive orders spewing from the White House. According to legal experts, Trump does not have the authority to summarily terminate the DOE (as he does not have the authority to summarily fire civil servants, as he has been doing willy-nilly). The DOE was created by Congress by legislative action, and has been funded by Congress through similar action. According to con-

stitutional scholars, only Congress can terminate the DOE, through legislation.

Which brings us back to Thomas Massie and HR. 899.

Massie is a conservative Republican from Kentucky who has served in the House since 2012. He's been a bit of an outlier among conservative Republicans, holding off endorsing Trump until mere days before the election. He has also been one of the few Republicans who has voiced criticisms of some of Trump's cabinet appointments, though he has so far voted for confirmation in every instance.

Massie's animus toward the DOE predates Trump, having previously introduced bills to terminate the department. Those previous attempts went nowhere, but now, with MAGA in the majority of both houses, Massie may well accomplish his goal.

However, Donald Trump's partner in crime Elon Musk's assaults on the DOE and other governmental agencies is starting to receive pushback from Democrats in Congress. On Feb. 6, nearly a hundred House and Senate Democrats sent a letter to the acting education secretary demanding transparency on Trump's — and Musk's — efforts to dismantle the department.

That same day, a group of over a dozen Democratic congresspeople visited the DOE for personal meetings with whoever is running things there (presumably members of Musk's DOGE team, though exactly who has not been determined). But the legislators were barred from entry, locked out of the building, with Homeland Security troops posted inside to stop any of the elected officials from potentially exercising their constitutionally mandated oversight authority.

It has not been determined who ordered the lockdown. It has also not been determined what further steps congressional Democrats may take to defend the DOE.

This was originally published in the Philadelphia Gay News at <https://pgn.com/2025/02/11/trump-targets-department-of-education-and-kids-it-sought-to-protect>. Reprinted with permission.

Trump's Trans erasure arrives at National Park Service: Fate of major 2016 LGBTQ Theme Study unclear

Fate of major 2016 LGBTQ Theme Study unclear

BY WASHINGTON BLADE STAFF

President Trump's efforts at erasing Trans identity intensified this week as employees at the National Park Service were instructed to remove the "T" and "Q" from "LGBTQ" from all internal and external communications.

The change was first noticed on the website of the Stonewall National Monument; Trans people of color were integral to the events at Stonewall, which is widely viewed as the kickoff of the modern LGBTQ rights movement. The Stonewall National Monument is the first US national monument dedicated to LGBTQ rights and history.

Reaction to that move was swift. New York City Councilmember Erik Bottcher wrote, "The Trump administration has erased transgender people from the Stonewall National Monument website. We will not allow them to erase the very existence of our siblings. We are one community!"

But what most didn't realize is that the removal of the "T" and "Q" (for Transgender and Queer) extends to all National Park Service and Interior Department communications, raising concerns that the move could jeopardize future LGBTQ monuments and project work.

The *Blade* reached out to the National Park Service for comment on the Trans erasure and received a curt response that the agency is implementing Trump's executive order "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government," as well as agency directives to end all DEI initiatives.

The question being debated internally now, according to a knowledgeable source, is what to do with a massive LGBTQ Theme Study, which as of Feb. 14 was still available on the NPS website. In 2014, the Gill Foundation recognized an omission of historic LGBTQ sites in the nation's records, and the organization made a grant to the National Park Service to commission a first-of-its-kind LGBTQ Theme Study, which was published in 2016. It was a landmark project that represented major progress for the LGBTQ community in having our contributions included in the broader American story, something that is becoming increasingly difficult given efforts like "Don't Say Gay" laws that ban the teaching of LGBTQ topics in schools.

A source told the *Blade* that National Park Service communications staff suggested that



removing chapters of the 2016 Theme Study that pertain to Transgender people might placate anti-Trans political appointees. But one employee pushed back on that, suggesting instead that the entire Theme Study be removed. Editing the document to remove one community's contributions and perspective violates the academic intent of the project, according to the source. A final decision on how to proceed is expected soon.

Meanwhile, a protest [was] planned for Friday, Feb. 14 at noon at Christopher Park in New York City (7th Ave. S. and Christopher Street). The protest [was] planned by staff at the Stonewall Inn.

"The Stonewall Inn and The Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative are outraged

and appalled by the recent removal of the word 'transgender' from the Stonewall National Monument page on the National Park Service website," the groups said in a statement. "Let us be clear: Stonewall is transgender history. Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and countless other trans and gender-nonconforming individuals fought bravely, and often at great personal risk, to push back against oppressive systems. Their courage, sacrifice, and leadership were central to the resistance we now celebrate as the foundation of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement."

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REFUGEES CONTINUED FROM COVER



ROBERT FOSS
COURTESY ENTRE HERMANOS

pace of arrests, detentions, and deportations has been ticking up, he said — and the workload was already overwhelming.

Entre Hermanos, a small nonprofit on South Jackson Street that serves LGBTQ Latinos, has two immigration attorneys and will soon hire a third, but it's already handling about 150 cases in house. That doesn't count the 250–300 residents of refugee camps in Tukwila and elsewhere in King County they've helped fill out appli-

cations for asylum or work permits. And up to a dozen people a day are showing up at the office without an appointment.

"What's going on reminds me of the Salvadoran refugee crisis," Foss said. "It's all hands on deck."

Many clients are Trans women who were raped, beaten, threatened, arrested, or persecuted back home, then fled to the United States in search of safety. The law allows them to ask for asylum, but the process is complex and fraught with danger. So Foss and his colleagues do their best to guide them through it — if they have capacity.

Hurdles

An immigrant seeking asylum is supposed to be granted a "credible fear" interview with a federal agent, in which they explain why they fear persecution — violence or imprisonment — if returned to their home country. Credible fear can be based on political activism; membership in a marginalized ethnic, religious or social group; a history of being subjected to violence; or being Queer.

But gaining asylum is an uphill battle. First, many don't get an interview; they are just summarily deported. Second, Foss said, Trans women, Gay people, and women who've been sexually assaulted find

it very difficult to "fully reveal the contours of their asylum claim. They're supposed to sit there and explain to a man they've never seen before how they were raped." Finally, the government sometimes accuses the immigrant of something heinous, like gang affiliation, with no evidence. "It's difficult to overcome that kind of accusation," said Foss.

If the immigrant passes the credible fear interview, they still need to go through a hearing. It's not easy, but Foss says Entre Hermanos has won asylum for dozens of Trans women and other LGBTQ people in recent years. "Nothing is better than winning a case," Foss said. "Sometimes you've just saved someone's life."

Times are changing quickly

But Foss worries about the clients his office is forced to turn away. And it's uncertain how those they take in will fare, because things are changing so quickly. Federal funding for services to victims of gender-based violence is in jeopardy. Foss hopes private foundations will help, but he acknowledges the demands on them will be steep.

He also worries about federal funding for the health care side of Entre Hermanos, which provides HIV testing, treatment and

prevention services. He hopes direct financial support from the LGBTQ community in the Northwest can sustain Entre Hermanos through the present emergency.

Recently, one of the Latin American refugees he helped apply for asylum — who had already passed a credible fear interview and was entitled to a hearing — turned up on a list of immigrants who'd been sent to the US military base at Guantanamo, a place that until quite recently was reserved for alleged terrorists. While the refugee's family was absorbing that news, Foss learned that the person was no longer at Guantanamo. The administration announced that the immigrants detained there had been flown to Honduras before being returned to their home countries. But Foss's client still hasn't turned up in Honduras.

"It's never good when someone disappears while they're in detention," Foss said. "The family is distraught."

To help Entre Hermanos continue to support LGBTQ asylum seekers in desperate need of safety and legal aid, donate at: <https://entrehermanos.org/donate/>



COURTESY ENTRE HERMANOS



COURTESY ENTRE HERMANOS

ARMSTRONG CONTINUED FROM COVER

\$2 million via grants — will play to their advantage when it comes to funding city services with progressive revenue, Armstrong said.

Armstrong is concerned that 15% of Seattle's sewage system trickles into Puget Sound, and believes that more investment in street lights is needed for both safety and pedestrian activation in some areas.

As a member of the Seattle LGBTQ+ Commission, Armstrong said they already

have some loose relationships with city councilmembers. Armstrong worked with Councilmembers Bob Kettle and Tanya Woo to save Theatre Puget Sound, which was set to close because of an expired licensing agreement that Mayor Bruce Harrell's office left untended, they said.

"I've seen the actual consequences and repercussions of forgetting about the little guys," Armstrong added.

Running as a Queer person in Trump's America

Armstrong noted the dearth of Queer elected officials in Washington. The Vic-

tory Fund, a political action committee that works to increase the number of open LGBTQ+ public office holders, found that at least one LGBTQ+ person ran for elected office in every state, according to its "Out on the Trail 2024" report, which states that in 2024, about 15% of those candidates were gender diverse, including Transgender, Gender-Nonconforming, Nonbinary, and Two-Spirit people, double the number in 2020.

Armstrong is about 25% qualified to enter the race, needing about 600 more signatures from Seattle voters, as well as donations.

Armstrong recommends that Seattle res-

idents turn off national news for a bit and focus on hyperlocal happenings, where they can create the most impact.

Acknowledging that they've got an uphill battle against incumbent Mayor Harrell, who has corporate backing, Armstrong still refuses to be intimidated.

"We want to put people first. Not corporations, not special interests. We want to put actual, unhoused people first," Armstrong said. "I'm going to fight and see what we can do, but it's going to be hard work."

For more information, visit <https://farmstrongforall.com>.

BARNES CONTINUED FROM COVER

to resolve that problem quickly and not make it worse?"

Creating trust

Chief Barnes hopes to create a sense of trust between residents and the SPD, so that people turn to the police when they need help. For years, the department has attempted to rebuild relationships following the 2020 protests, during which police used violent force in the historically Gay Capitol Hill neighborhood.

"We have to let people know that no matter how you identify, no matter what you call yourself, you are loved by this department," Barnes said, recalling that he was asked if he meant to say "love" when he said the same thing at a conference. "I said yes, because we get to serve in the community. Think about that, what an honor it is to serve someone."

On February 19, he issued a press release on the SPD's position on the immigration

status of community members, and echoed similar statements.

"Throughout my career in policing and as your new Seattle Police Chief, I have unwaveringly supported the rights of undocumented people, who are vulnerable, too often victimized and exploited, and may not feel safe coming forward when they are victims of crime," Barnes wrote. "We continue to urge victims, witnesses, or anyone with information of criminal activity to engage with Seattle police officers without fear that they will be asked any questions regarding their immigration status. When people are afraid to report, crimes go unaddressed, communities become vulnerable, and more people are victimized. We cannot let that happen in Seattle."

Contentious history

LGBTQIA+ people in Seattle have a contentious history with police, who have historically used their authority to harass and discriminate against Queer people. In January of 2024, several Gay bars were raided, and many patrons felt that they were being targeted. Barnes hopes to build trust by

starting from the inside.

"I think sometimes trust has been broken, but sometimes it hasn't been there in the first place," Barnes said. "It begins with making sure that the culture of my police department is inclusive of everyone, and making sure that there is no tolerance for any type of behavior internally that is offensive, because if it's allowed internally, it bleeds out."

In 2022, there was a dispute about Seattle Pride not allowing officers to participate in the parade while in uniform because of the history of Queer people experiencing trauma at the hands of uniformed officers. Barnes experienced similar contentiousness in Madison, and hopes that over time the uniform will not have negative associations.

"The officers wanted to participate in their uniform, because for them, they wanted to show the community and perhaps a young person that wants to be a cop but may be afraid of the sometimes over-masculine energy in police departments that no, we're not like that. The truth is, officers were hurt. I'm not suggesting that I'm right or that anyone else is wrong. I'm

just asking that if [the uniform] is something that is keeping people from being together, then we can work that out."

The path forward

Barnes hopes that a year from now, the SPD will be on a clear path to crime reduction, see a disruption in the drug market, and have added 150 officers to the department. He also wants to see an increase in 911 callers and for people to believe that the police are there to help them.

"I want you to know that you have an advocate in the Seattle Police Department," Barnes said. "I am a Black man from the South, and I know firsthand what it's like when people discriminate and treat you differently because of things you can't change. If there's anyone in the city that understands, it's me, and we want to do whatever we can to be supportive."

"Let's partner together; let's find middle and common ground. And the things that don't matter in the big scheme of things — let's find a way to minimize those and maximize the things that really do."



**Preston Singletary joins PNB for
The Sleeping Beauty — Tlingit style**

BY SHARON CUMBERLAND

PRINCIPAL DANCERS
ANGELICA GENEROSA AND
JONATHAN BATISTA
ANGELA STERLING

The Sleeping Beauty
Pacific Northwest Ballet
McCaw Hall, January 31, 2025

Leave it to Peter Boal and his creative team at Pacific Northwest Ballet to come up with an idea that transports a classic Russian ballet from a fairy tale palace to what Boal refers to as “a mythical land resembling the Pacific Northwest.” Using Tlingit artist Preston Singletary and famed costume designer Paul Tazewell, Tchaikovsky’s *The Sleeping Beauty* is transported from the traditional castle full of courtiers in white wigs and 18th-century costumes to the misty woods and waters of our beautiful region.

On opening night the audience was fascinated by Singletary’s dramatic staircase — a massive carving of an eagle whose unfurled wings formed an arch over the procession of dignitaries and fairies coming to celebrate the birth of Princess Aurora. The dancers wore Tazewell’s striking costumes based on Northwest Coastal ovoid forms (e.g., raven, eagle), instantly recognizable as PNW tribal patterns, in dramatic yellows, reds, and black. The program notes describe in detail the Tlingit beliefs shaping each form and color, but the overall impression on the audience was “wow!”

Equally intriguing were the thoughtful and appropriate adaptations of Marius Petipa’s fabulous choreography. While preserving all the beloved favorites, some of the dances were given a refreshing shake-up by Peter Boal, himself a famous principal from the New York City Ballet. With the help of Douglas Fullington, an expert in Petipa’s choreography and notation, the adapted steps were as demanding as ever yet somehow less formal and more in tune with Pacific Northwest sensibilities. The result was a mixture of surprise at new interpretations and delight with how well they fit in with the familiar music.

Act 1 illustrated the flexibility of Petipa’s Russian style with some dramatic forward-facing elements in corps movements, while Act 2 preserved the ballroom quality of

the court without undermining the Tlingit sensibility of Singletary’s guardian eagle. Oh, and Sasquatch (called the Ogre, but we knew *exactly* who he was) made his appearance by being chased by a gang of dancing children, whose joyful teasing made all of us BigFoot believers!

The opening night principals, Angelica Generosa as Princess Aurora and Jonathan Batista as Prince Déaré, were nothing short of wonderful. Generosa’s playful teenager in Act 1 performed the Rose Adagio with joyful delicacy, while Batista’s courtesy — together with his vibrant solos — expressed all that needs to be said about a happy marriage.

In a big, elaborate ballet like this one, there are dozens of remarkable perfor-

mances, but Act 2 is designed to show off one delightful “divertissement” after another as the wedding guests take turns honoring the newlyweds. The Puss in Boots and White Cat duet danced by Price Suddath and Madison Rayn Abeo was hissing hilariously, The Bluebird and Princess Florine duet with Mark Cuddihee and Clara Ruf Maldonado was breathtaking, and Hop o’ My Thumb, His Brothers & The Ogre was the delight of the evening. Not to be overlooked, however, was the highlight of Act 1 when Carabosse, performed by Dylan Wald, brings her gang of mice to the party in the shape of four dancers with multiple puppets that horrify the courtiers and delight the audience.

Though I don’t normally review the program handed out to the audience, compliments go to *En Face* magazine for describing all the process and planning that went into developing a new work. It’s unusually comprehensive for this new production of *The Sleeping Beauty*, since the concept is so original and central to the culture of our region. At first the idea of a Native American take on a classical Russian ballet seems a bit odd, but it all works wonderfully well, in a similar way to how the “green” *Ring* at Seattle Opera used the Pacific Northwest landscape to make Wagner’s *Ring* cycle new again — distinctly ours yet appreciated around the world for its familiar music and fascinating origins. I predict this new *Sleeping Beauty* will have the same reception.



ELLE MACY AS THE LILAC FAIRY,
WITH COMPANY DANCERS
AND PNB SCHOOL STUDENTS
ANGELA STERLING

ACT Theatre and Seattle Shakespeare merge for an improved future

BY MIRYAM GORDON

At the end of January, ACT Theatre and the Seattle Shakespeare Company announced that they were going to merge. The SGN sat down with Elisabeth Farwell-Moreland, the current interim producing artistic director at ACT, and John Bradshaw, current executive director of "Seattle Shakes," who will become the new managing director. Farwell-Moreland will remain to help a national search for a new artistic director. (She might put her hat in the ring for that position, but that's yet to be determined.)

This merger is complicated. The Shakespeare company has roughly a \$2 million annual budget, and ACT's is about \$4 million. Some of that would include overlapping employee roles, so the merger could mean a more compact company than the sum of those figures might imply. Bradshaw mentioned that his company had already not been hiring replacements as people left and had no further productions announced, so the staff is naturally smaller.

He also described how he and John Langs, the departed artistic director at ACT, had been chatting, as long-time industry friends, a year ago.

"The overall environment for the performing arts has been incredibly difficult," Bradshaw said. "Like restaurant closures,

COVID hit the performing arts industry. It hit the restaurant industry. These industries have *not* recovered quickly. [Also,] I love Seattle Center but it's tough, with the opening of Climate Pledge Arena, you know, with all the activities there, with the parking costs now here, with the traffic after events. Rather than continuing to recover, we've continued to lose. [He and I] were talking about sharing space [as two separate companies] at the Eagles Building [ACT's home space]. ACT was looking for a managing director. We were looking for an artistic director. George Mount had stepped down. Was there a possibility of these two organizations coming together?"

Bradshaw agrees that it makes financial sense, in order to shore up the (sometimes) palpable shrinkage of audience members,

the new habits people have of staying home, and the aging of some of the erstwhile steady audience members, as well as steady donors.

"And from the standpoint of what ACT does and what Seattle Shakespeare does, we're not competitive," he added. "We are not doing the same type of work. It made sense for the two [companies]. We began a conversation of ... having our boards explore this, because the decision had to come from a board standpoint."

"I got so excited when I heard about the merger idea," Farwell-Moreland exclaimed, "because I thought, 'Finally there's somebody coming up with an idea on how to keep these institutions going and make them sustainable in a world where theaters are closing.'"



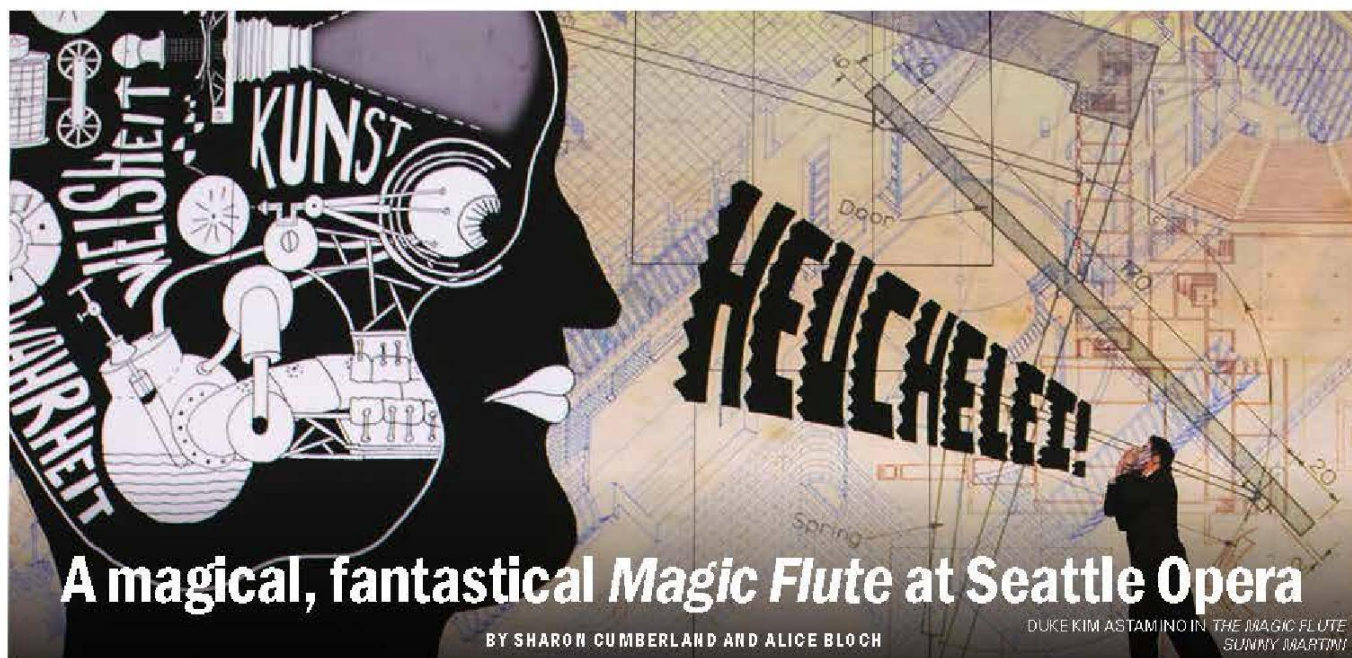
Future plans

Twelfth Night (June 7–22), will be a joint production. The launch in the fall will begin the new season of the Union Arts Center, the business name. There is still more to decide, including a name for the new company.

Both Farwell-Moreland and Bradshaw suggested that there would be several phases over the next few years: an adjustment to the merger, a stabilizing, and finally an ability to increase their offerings, bring in other companies to the smaller spaces, and even to have a larger mix of events, such as poetry readings, play readings, or string quartets. The intention is to live up to the new corporate name, Union Arts Center.

The theater community is still mourning the loss of companies like Book-It, and the economic infrastructure they provided. While it might look the city is like losing another, it is hoped that this merger can help both succeed and thrive.

For more articles and reviews, go to www.facebook.com/SeattleTheaterWriters. Please go to <https://MiryamsTheaterMusings.blogspot.com> and subscribe to get articles directly to your inbox!



A magical, fantastical *Magic Flute* at Seattle Opera

BY SHARON CUMBERLAND AND ALICE BLOCH

DUKE KIM ASTAMINO IN *THE MAGIC FLUTE*. SUNNY MARTINI

The Magic Flute
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder
Seattle Opera
McCaw Hall, Seattle Center
February 22 and 23

Mozart himself would have loved Seattle Opera's amazing new production of *The Magic Flute*. It's a combination of live orchestra, video animation with silent-movie-style titles instead of dialogue, and real live opera singers engaging with the video projected behind, around, and upon them. Judging by the raucous applause on opening weekend, this surprising interpretation of a beloved favorite is an unqualified success.

Commissioned for Berlin's Komische Oper in 2012, this wild and crazy *Magic Flute* has traveled around the world, delighting over one million attendees in 75 venues, on every continent that has opera houses. For all its daring differences, this reinvention of Mozart's most popular work retains his gorgeous music and even adds some excerpts of his fantasies, played by fortepianoist Jay Rozendaal during the zippy title sequences that replace Schikaneder's long and sometimes tedious dialogue.

In his own time, Mozart was an innova-

tive composer who loved combining the silly, the dangerous, and all things new in musical theater. He would have been on his feet with the rest of us, hooting and clapping for this terrific production.

When the red velvet curtain was lifted, the audience was confronted with a massive screen and projections that created a constantly changing, magical world. Revolving doors revealed the performers, singing their hearts out, while the animations surrounding them created flying creatures, monsters, and eye-defying effects. With perfect timing, the singers coordinated their gestures with the projections — a feat as amazing as the singing itself.

Tenors Duke Kim and Victor Ryan Robertson alternated as the elegant Tamino, whose gestures were in perfect sync with the monsters and female magicians who accompanied him. The singing of sopranos Brandie Sutton and Camille Ortiz as his sweetheart Pamina was equally beautiful. Rodion Pogosssov's hilarious Papageno might have stolen the show with his whimsical acting and delightful interactions with flying elephants and a cleverly animated black-cat companion.

No one, however — not even the astonishing coloratura soprano Sharleen Joymt, who sang an unforgettable Queen of the

Night in a massive spider projection — could steal the show from the animations themselves. The illusions of movement, speed, danger, crazy creatures, and wild colors were the real stars of the show.

Control by machine

At times we pitied the singers, whose freedom of movement was hampered by the set and staging for most of their time onstage; they had to sing while harnessed to the wall and standing or squatting on a high, tiny platform. The video provided almost all of the motion, while the singers were mostly stationary. When they got to move across the stage, their every motion had to be perfectly coordinated with the video zooming by. Controlled by the speed of a machine, the performers were as hamstrung as Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*. It's a testament to their professionalism and skill that they sang perfectly under these conditions.

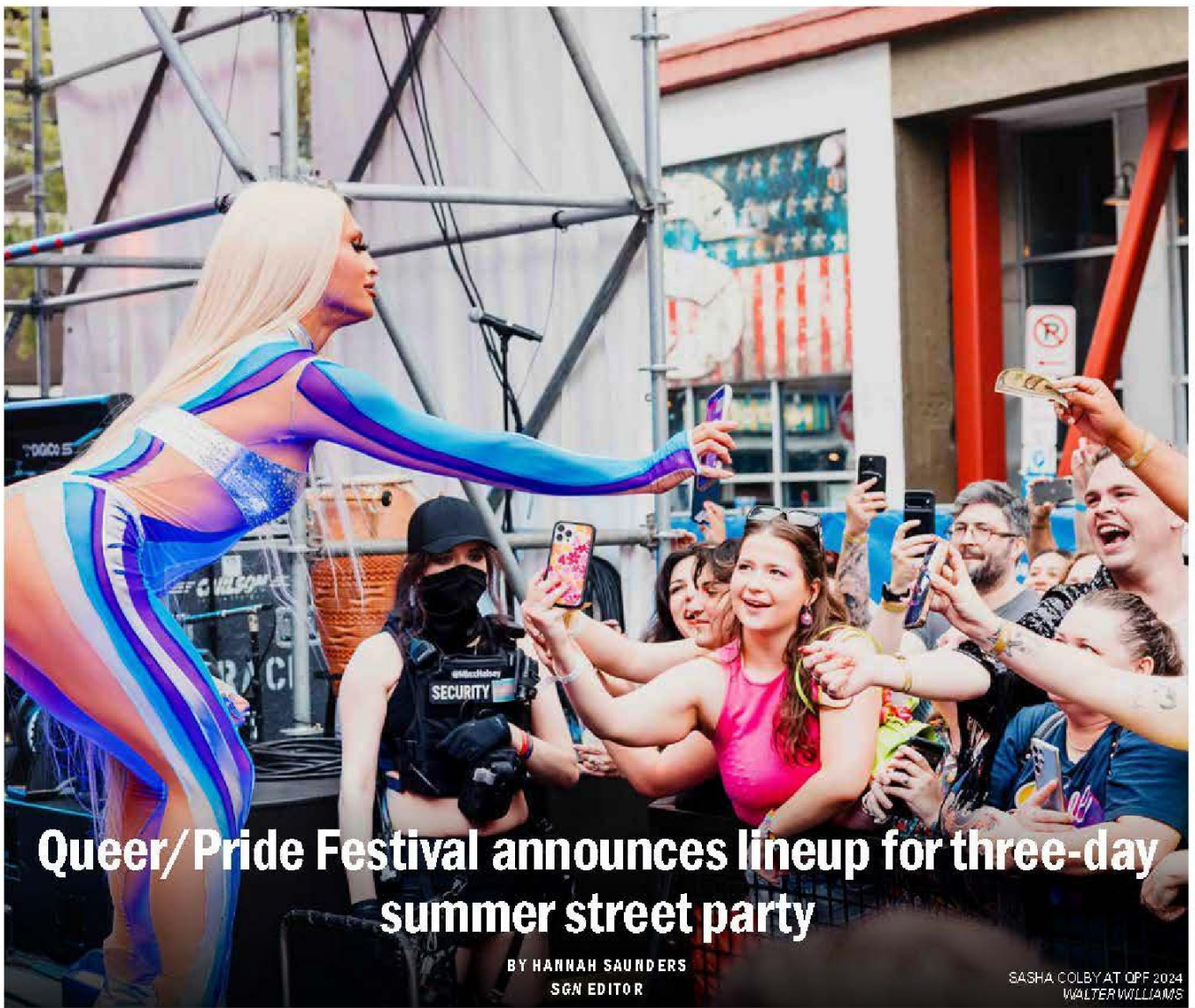
One of the most enjoyable moments in the opera has always been at the end, when all the lovers are brought together and Papageno joins his Papagena to sing about their anticipated marriage. They want to have lots of little papageni, and Mozart fans always watch to see whether the kids are imaginary or actually materialize, with gangs of little children running onto

the stage as a visual joke. We've seen it both ways, but this projected version has a third: with animated papageni popping out of every possible niche in a projection of a happy home. We counted 42 kids! Try that in a real-life production!

The opening-weekend audiences gave an especially loud welcome to conductor Christine Brandes, a brilliant soprano in her own right, who has become a greatly admired conductor. She is cherished worldwide, not only as a woman who has successfully entered the mostly male world of conducting but also as a Lesbian whose embrace of her identity has inspired LGBTQIA+ performers and musicians worldwide. She says that by being open about her sexuality, "I hope that learning of my relationship will cause [people] to step back and reevaluate any preconceived notions about Gay relationships and our right to fair and equal treatment under the law."

The Magic Flute is an opera all about the triumph of love over forces of evil that stand in the way of authenticity and devotion. What could be more timely in these strange and difficult days?

Performances run through March 9. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit <https://www.seattleopera.org>.

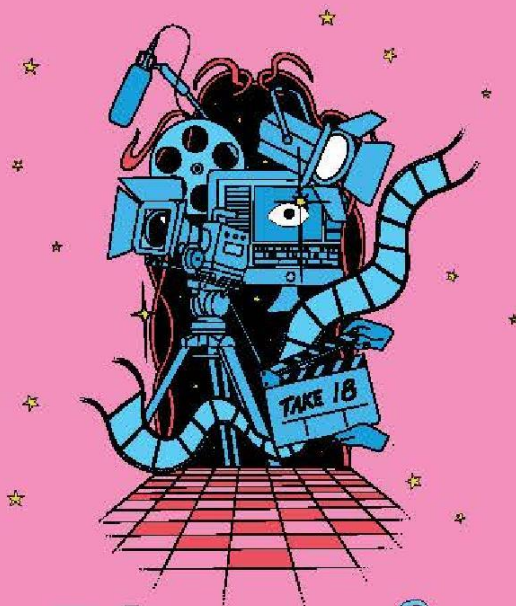


Queer/Pride Festival announces lineup for three-day summer street party

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

SASHA COLBY AT QPF 2024
WALTER WILLIAMS

April 3-6, 2025 Seattle, Washington nifty.org



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The Queer/Pride Festival (QPF), the Pacific Northwest's largest LGBTQIA+ music and arts festival, recently announced its 2025 lineup for the three-day summer celebration on 11th Avenue, which will feature both hyperlocal and nationally recognized artists, musicians, drag queens, burlesque dancers, and DJs.

"Each June, the Queer/Pride Festival explodes onto Capitol Hill, turning it into a pulsating playground of fierce creativity and unapologetic authenticity as the streets throb with electric vibes and jaw-dropping performances that redefine celebration," organizer Joey Burgess said in a press release.

The event will feature a big outdoor main stage, over six indoor and outdoor bars, local food trucks, a three-story VIP lounge, and live social media coverage and giveaways. New opportunities for this year include photos with *RuPaul's Drag Race* stars and meet-and-greets.

Headliners for this year's festival are the R&B singer Tinashe, Lil' Kim, an American rapper who has sold over 30 million singles and over 15 million albums worldwide, singer and songwriter Rebecca Black, Countess Luann, who was an original cast member of *The Real Housewives of New York City*, and former reality TV personal-

ity from MTV's *The Hills*, Heidi Montag.

Additional artists for the June 27-29 bash include Sasha Colby, winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race* season 15 (who is adored by Burgess's staff at Queer/Bar, according to previous reporting by the *SGN*). *Drag Race* season 16 winner Nymphia Wind will also take the stage, as will Lexi Love, Onya Nerve, and Seattle's own Arietty (all currently competing on season 17) and Seattle's Bosco (season 14).

"At Queer/Pride Festival, we don't just celebrate Pride, we ignite it," Burgess told the *SGN*. "This summer, we're once again bringing together an extraordinary mix of talent, from iconic headliners like Tinashe and Lil' Kim to fierce queens like Sasha Colby and Nymphia Wind, who are redefining what it means to be unapologetically fabulous. It's a chance to witness the boldest performances, break boundaries, and embrace the electric energy of the Queer community. Whether you're here to dance, sing, or simply be in the moment, QPF is where true self-expression takes center stage. So come celebrate with us and support the artists who are paving the way for a more vibrant, inclusive future."

Visit <http://queerpridefestival.com/tickets> for ticket information.

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Queer indie icon Jordana hits the stage at Madame Lou's for *Lively Premonition* tour

BY MADISON JONES

OLIVIANA CREATIVE

On a frigid Wednesday evening during the week of Valentine's Day, Madame Lou's was bustling. As the doors opened, showgoers that were lined up early outside the venue began to pack into the cramped basement to see the Queer indie icon Jordana.

Jordana's music and artistic appeal brought in the late-night, mostly college-aged crowd, which also included twenty-something-Lesbian couples and older indie fans, all of whom were eager to see this out and proud Queer artist shine on stage. One

guy had already snagged and put on a Jordana T-shirt from the merch booth, having first seen her back in 2023 at the Showbox in SoDo. When asked whether he enjoyed that show, he shrugged and said, "Well, she was good enough for us to come back."

Rachel Bobbitt was the opening act. Her earnest performance with backing guitars and synths, sharing much in common with Jordana sonically, easily captivated the room. Based out of Canada, Bobbitt mentioned to the crowd that it was her first time visiting Seattle.

"We've been so excited for this Jordana tour, and her fans have been nicer than we could've ever expected," she said during the set.

The crowd reaffirmed this sentiment, with one audience member even shouting, "You did so good!" at the end of her last song.

Jordana impresses

Jordana, wearing a cottagecore dress, received a boisterous reception. Commenting on the show being sold out, she admitted teasingly to the crowd, "Guys, this is bonkers, this is cray-cray." She and her band then proceeded to play all the songs

from her new album, *Lively Premonition*, in order.

The set started off rockily, with the drummer having technical difficulties, which were quickly resolved, and it was then redeemed by the band's first song, "We Get By," which felt glamorous and pristine, very much aided by Jordana's talented violin playing.

Jordana kept the audience loose and on its toes with silly one-liners as she became more comfortable on stage. At one point, she slipped into a Trump impersonation. Acknowledging the vague Trump resemblance of her outfit, she said, "Even though I'm dressed like I voted for him, I hate the guy — trust me!" The impersonation ended up being a crowd favorite, evoking lots of laughter throughout the night.

The set finished with a few tracks from *Summer's Over*, Jordana's most well-known collaboration album with TV Girl. A woman in the audience audibly gasped in excitement when Jordana announced the second to last song, "Sweet to Me." After the show, Jordana came out to greet fans at the merch booth, capping a night of stellar performances.



OLIVIANA CREATIVE



OLIVIANA CREATIVE

David Gray shares his journey in *Dear Life* at the Moore Theatre

BY MADISON JONES

Before people discovered artists online through music-streaming platforms, UK musicians often struggled to find their foothold across the pond among American audiences. In the late 1990s to early 2000s, David Gray happened to be one of those cases.

A bona fide singer-songwriter and major figure in the UK and Ireland's musical landscape, Gray is most well-known for his fourth album, *White Ladder*, self-released in 1998. It did not take off in popularity initially. It was not until Gray started touring as the opener for the Dave Matthews Band that Matthews rereleased the album in 2000 on his label ATO Records, which catapulted Gray onto the charts.

Although it earned him a 2002 Grammy nomination for Best New Artist, Gray saw comparatively less success in the US than the UK and Ireland. But nowadays, he has amassed a loyal base of American listeners after many more years of album releases and touring throughout the country.

His most recent project, *Dear Life*, sees

Gray continuing to demonstrate his chops, exploring motifs of emotional crisis and resolution, mortality and faith, reality and illusion, loss and acceptance. Gray gave the audience a taste of it, as well as covering the popular highlights of his back catalogue, while on tour in Seattle at the Moore Theatre.

Chemistry with the audience

Gray had palpable chemistry with his audience immediately upon entering the stage. He received a standing ovation and graciously bowed before starting the first song, "Live in Slow Motion." It was clear throughout the night that Gray's work lends itself to an atmosphere of love and self-acceptance. Several Gay and Lesbian couples embraced one another during his heartfelt performances.

The most compelling element that night was Gray's openness and vulnerability. There were several moments in which he relayed tales of his life that led to the cre-



COURTESY DAVID GRAY

ation of much of his music. For example, "Last Boat to America" was inspired by the mixture of emotions Gray faced after his father's death in 1998, in the mists of his *White Ladder* tour. "Grief takes time, like a shadow cast over your life afterwards," he said. Gray explained how his father opted to have a celebration-of-life party instead of a traditional funeral, and how it felt playing golf with his father only 24 hours before his passing. Gray's stories clearly resonated with the crowd, demonstrating why people find his music relatable.

There were also lighthearted and humor-

ous moments during the night. In the middle of the set, someone from the audience threw their wallet onto the stage at Gray. Before the next song, Gray teased, "If anybody throws something else onto the stage, I'll punch their lights out!"

The evening ended jovially however, with Gray and his band playing "Babylon" in an encore, which had everyone standing up, dancing, and singing along. Saying their final goodbyes to the cheering crowd, Gray rallied his bandmates to the front, who cheerfully waved goodbye and made heart symbols with their hands.

Bitch goes full bitch out at the Rabbit Box

BY ANDREW HAMLIN

Singer/songwriter/violinist/keyboardist/conceptualist/rabble rouser/patriarchy smasher Bitch (aka Karen Mould) got started as half of the Bitch and Ammal performance art project, then broke away to make her own music, notably 2022's *Bitchcraft*, on Olympia's Kill Rock Stars label. She's also worked in film, and with her childhood idol, the pioneering Dyke singer Ferron.

Bitch brings her brand of mayhem to the Rabbit Box at Pike Place Market on March 7.

Andrew Hamlin: Where and when have you played in Seattle before? What are your impressions of the city?

Bitch: I love Seattle! I made my first-ever album there (Bitch and Ammal's *What's That Smell?*), so it always holds a special place in my heart. I've played Triple Door, Tractor Tavern, and the Crocodile.

AH: Any best, worst, and/or weirdest stories from playing Seattle?

B: Last time we played the Crocodile, they scheduled a show after us and kicked us out of the lobby when we were selling merch, so we took it outside and sold it in the parking lot! It was less than glamorous, lol.

AH: What are your best, worst, and weirdest stories from playing around the world?

B: Driving on the autobahn so fast, and about three hours into it, realizing we were going the wrong way. Hiring a person to fly in NYC who we found out later had a flesh-eating disease. Being banned from a bunch of venues in Northampton because a rumor went around that I had peed all over the dressing room. I got to clear my name: there was no bathroom in the dressing room so someone left a water bottle of pee that spilled, the night Animal and I were playing there.

AH: Anybody ever try ranking you out from the audience, and/or jumping onstage? How do you handle it?

B: I love being heckled. It's one of my favorite things about live performance: getting to experience humanity in all of its impulsiveness, inspiration, and interactivity.

AH: How do you put your Bitch look together — costume, makeup, etc.? How has your look grown and changed over the years?

B: When I was little, I wrote a letter to Cyndi Lauper asking her if I could have the skirt she wore in the "Time After Time" video. (I never heard back.) I loved her wild fashion sense.

I have always had an obtuse sense of style. Part of me thinks I quit classical music based mainly on the boring outfits! Younger Bitch wore high heels, and the older Bitch prefers comfortable shoes. Other than that, I still have a Punky Brewster/Miss Piggy-informed style!

AH: How did you end up writing a song with Margaret Cho? How did that go, and where can we hear it?

B: She is rad! She asked me to cowrite a song with her for her *American Myth* album (which I'm not seeing on Spotify) called "We So Worry." Recently, she made an album [*Lucky Girl*] produced by the amazing Garrison Starr, and I played violins on it!

AH: What are your earliest memories of hearing Ferron? What struck you about her?

B: When I first heard Ferron sing, I was absolutely blown away. To me, I was watch-



BITCH: DANA LYNN PLEASANT

ing a legend. It made me painfully aware of how patriarchy keeps so many voices squashed. If we weren't in patriarchy, Ferron would be as famous as Bob Dylan.

AH: Which songs are your favorites live, and why?

B: "Pages" is my favorite song on *Bitchcraft*. I love singing it live, because it is a love letter to myself after a very painful breakup.

AH: Any advice on how to survive the new-old Trump?

B: Stay strong. Don't give up/don't give in. They count on our hopelessness. Rely on community. We outnumber them. As a white person, I need to lean into being comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Divest from supporting companies that support him. Refuse. Resist. Learn how to say no.

For more information about the March 7 gig, visit:

<http://www.therabbitboxseattle.com/events/bitch-skip-the-needle-the-never-going-back-tour>.

Sax man Dave Koz on jazz, crooners, and clams

BY ANDREW HAMLIN

From Jeff Lorber to Richard Marx, *General Hospital* to *Desperate Housewives*, saxophonist Dave Koz has spent the last 38 years blowing all over the place in the ever-turbulent music biz. His latest album, *Just Us*, a series of duets with pianist Bob James, comes out March 7 on his own Just Koz Entertainment label. The duo brings an evening of music and stories to Jazz Alley on April 1.

He recently took questions from the SGN.

Andrew Hamlin: What are your favorite stories from playing Seattle before? What are your favorite things about the city?

Dave Koz: Always hope for an extra day off, so I can explore all the city has to offer. Probably my favorite thing is head down to Pike Place, to walk around and catch some amazing energy there. And a stop to Ivar's for some fried clams is a must!

AH: What music, growing up, made you want to make music — which artists, albums, songs, concerts, TV shows, etc.?

DK: My parents loved the crooners: Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Ella. So I was exposed early to great songwriters, amazing pieces of music, and wonderful, heartfelt songs!

My dad took me to my first concert: Earth, Wind & Fire at the LA Forum. Once I saw that horn section, all the lights and

pyro and staging, I was hooked.

AH: Who were your most important music teachers, and what were their most important lessons for you?

DK: Probably most influential was my first band teacher in middle school, Mrs. Brown. I was 13 when I picked up the sax for the first time. I was a very shy and awkward kid, as most 13-year-olds are! But she inspired all of us to just relax, have fun with the music, and not take it all too seriously.

I gained a huge amount of confidence with her as my teacher, at a time when I really needed that. I could communicate through the saxophone many of the feelings I had inside that I couldn't find words for.

AH: When did you first figure out your sexuality, and how did you grapple with it over the years?

DK: I knew that I was "different" from a very early age. I had internalized a great deal of shame and guilt, and didn't know how to really process it, as there was no one to talk to back then. And then HIV/AIDS started appearing. So much fear and isolation.

Slowly but surely, however, I got more comfortable with who I was and started my "telling coming out." First with family, then friends, then finally in 2004, publicly, coming out in *The Advocate* magazine. That was a huge step I honestly never



COURTESY DAVE KOZ

thought I'd make. But the timing was right, and I faced that fear head-on. It was probably the single best thing I've ever done for myself.

AH: What were the most important factors in your coming out?

DK: It was lots of years of therapy, healing the inside of me that needed healing. Gaining confidence in who I am, and finally recognizing the strength inside that I didn't know I had.

Not that I felt a "responsibility" to come out, 'cuz I didn't. But I am so grateful now that I did — it was a way to say to the world, "Here I am, this is me, and I am OK with it." And everything improved after I did it.

AH: There's a widespread perception that Gay is not good in jazz. Your thoughts on this? Have things changed over time?

DK: Yeah, strangely you'd think jazz as an art form would be very welcoming of people of all stripes. I have had a very warm reception in my world. But truth is, I know very few LGBTQ+ people in jazz. Not sure why. Hopefully this is slowly changing with the next generation.

More information about the upcoming performance is at:

<http://www.jazzalley.com/www/home-artist.jsp?shownum=7654>.

Poetry = resistance

BY SHARON CUMBERLAND

What can we make of Trump's inaugural statement that "as of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders: male and female"?

First, the word "henceforth" — meaning "as of now" — acknowledges that before his statement, the full array of gender identities existed, including transgender, gender neutral, nonbinary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, Two Spirit, third gender, and their variations.

Second, Trump imagines that these are a matter of choice, like naming a child or deciding what to eat for breakfast. Third, and most delusional, he supposes that a

declaration in a speech can force people to change genders, as if changing jobs or political parties.

What can we do in the face of this hostile and calculated deception?

I feel confident that we'll find many pathways to assert our truths as we recover from the shock of this monstrous lie. In the meantime, we can send what signals of resistance and solidarity we have at hand, which is why I'm changing the name of this column from "Poetry = life" to "Poetry = resistance." Poets have always found ways to tell the truth in the face of fascism and marginalization, no matter how oppressive the regime.

The three poems presented here demonstrate three ways of telling the truth. Poet torrin a. greathouse [sic] rejects the poet's most important tool — metaphorical comparisons — in order to assert the stark tragedy of a girl who has been killed, probably because "someone will name her a man." The brilliant quality in this poem is the array of metaphors greathouse uses to illustrate the inadequacy of comparisons in the face of tragedy.

Langston Hughes' famous poem, "Harlem," was written in 1951 to express the frustration, isolation and anger in pre-Civil Rights Act America. It takes on a powerful new dimension today as it uses one

comparison after another to suggest how aggressive marginalization could trigger explosive resistance.

And finally, Harold Norse's list poem "I'm Not a Man" enumerates all the reasons why his quiet rejection of masculine conventions define a greater, more liberating reality of masculinity.

All three poets are opposing the kind of oppression that Trump is trying to reassert. Greathouse, Hughes, and Norse illustrate their power to reject the lies and support a new wave of American resistance.

The Body of a Girl Lies on the Asphalt like the Body of a Girl

torrin a. greathouse

Wound from the Mouth of a Wound
Milkweed Editions, 2020

& this does not bear comparison. The body of a girl lies on the asphalt and is not like the splayed anatomy

of broken fruit. It is not like a gaped wide mouth, throat a stoppered bottle. It is not like the mystery of a bird

-less feathers. Or the dull-eyed glint of a wishing well gone suddenly dry, down payments on possibility

parching in the sun. It is not like a bent hammered nail, or snapped bough, or the silence after a question's heft.

The body of a girl lies on the asphalt like only the body of a girl, & still someone will name her a man. No.

Perhaps, the body of a girl lies on the asphalt like a daughter. Yes. Just like that.

Harlem

Langston Hughes

Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time
St. Martin's Press, 1988

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

I'm Not a Man

Harold Norse

Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time
St. Martin's Press, 1988

I'm not a man. I can't earn a living, buy new things for my family. I have acne and a small pter.

I'm not a man. I don't like football, boxing, and cars. I like to express my feelings. I even like to put an arm around my friend's shoulder.

I'm not a man. I won't play the role assigned to me— the role created by Madison Avenue, Playboy, Hollywood and Oliver Cromwell. Television does not dictate my behavior. I am under 5 foot 4.

I'm not a man. Once when I shot a squirrel I swore that I would never kill again. I gave up meat. The sight of blood makes me sick. I like flowers.

I'm not a man. I went to prison resisting the draft. I do not fight back when real men beat me up and call me queer. I dislike violence.

I'm not a man. I have never raped a woman. I don't hate blacks. I do not get emotional when the flag is waved. I do not think I should love America or leave it. I think I should laugh at it.

I'm not a man. I have never had the clap.

I'm not a man. Playboy is not my favorite magazine.

I'm not a man. I cry when I'm unhappy.

I'm not a man. I do not feel superior to women.

I'm not a man. I don't wear a jockstrap.

I'm not a man. I write poetry.

I'm not a man. I meditate on peace and love.

I'm not a man. I don't want to destroy you.

IDEAS CONTINUED FROM COVER

Promoters tend to replicate what works — drag revues, dance parties, and weekend events — and simply shuffle them from one bar to another.

While these staples certainly have their appeal, especially for those who live for the sparkle of drag or the rhythm of a DJ set, they don't necessarily reflect the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ interests or identities in Seattle. The city's Queer population is vibrantly diverse, spanning a broad range of ages, cultures, races, and artistic inclinations. Capitol Hill once seemed to embrace that dynamic mix. Now, a growing number of residents question whether certain bars may have become too narrow — and inadvertently left everyone else behind.

In conversations with patrons who have frequented Capitol Hill's most established Gay bars for years, one frequently voiced concern is that these venues too often prioritize the same brand of drag show or dance party. Don't get the wrong impression: drag is an incredible art form that has shaped Queer history and activism, and it remains a cultural cornerstone in many respects. But the current "drag all the time" model can become stifling when it eclipses every other form of entertainment and community-building. Overexposure risks turning a beloved art form into the nightlife equivalent of white noise.

Meanwhile, those who crave a more laid-back space — somewhere to have meaningful conversation, play board games, watch a performer who isn't necessarily lip-synching, or simply dance to a different kind of music — feel increasingly shut out. It's not drag's fault, it's the reliance on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Repetition stifles new voices

At the heart of this dilemma is a small, tight-knit circle of event programmers who hold sway over multiple bars — among them well-known spots like Queer/Bar, The Cuff, and Massive. The result is a sort of unofficial monopoly on nightlife concepts. While it may be easier from a managerial standpoint to give the same group free rein, that convenience often comes at the cost of innovation. New ideas struggle to find a foothold when every weekend is booked by the same planners. Budding performers, musicians, or different styles of drag artists may be overlooked because the established gatekeepers prefer to stick with proven acts. Over time, it becomes a cycle of repetition — a reliable but slowly stagnating pattern that leaves little room for new voices to crack the lineup.

Bar owners may not immediately see the downside, especially if they still draw a decent crowd on Saturday nights. Yet there's a hidden danger in coasting on established formats. Nightlife scenes are fragile ecosystems. When an event tem-

plate grows stale, regular patrons drift away, either staying home to save money or opting for house parties over predictably repetitive bar nights. Newer residents, particularly those who moved to Seattle enchanted by Capitol Hill's reputation for creativity, might discover that the reality doesn't measure up. Fewer people through the door eventually means shrinking profits, and the same bars that once thrived can quickly find themselves struggling to remain viable in the face of high rents and changing consumer habits.

Expanding the entertainment menu

Part of the solution lies in broadening the concept of what a Gay bar can offer. The LGBTQIA+ community encompasses vastly different tastes, yet commercial nightlife often settles on drag performances and dance floors as its main draws. Why not experiment with themed evenings that extend beyond these mainstays? A bar might host a Queer singer-songwriter showcase one night, an inclusive salsa or bachata event the next, and reserve the weekend for an experimental art installation or an indie film screening. Instead of seeing drag as a default, consider it a highlight — a curated monthly or bimonthly extravaganza that feels special precisely because it's not happening every single evening. This approach doesn't exclude drag; it makes it more exciting when it does appear, while also spotlighting other underrepresented corners of the Queer arts scene.

The need for fresh programmers

Another key element is the conscious recruitment of fresh programmers. Many local creatives have ideas for events but lack the network or track record to convince bar owners to take a chance on them. By opening up the application process, holding pitch nights, or offering opportunities for guest programmers, bar owners can bring in people with bold new visions. This benefits not only the bar, which can carve out a niche among competitors, but also the broader community, which gains a more diverse array of events to attend.

An infusion of new leadership often translates to a broader pool of talent: DJs from various cultural backgrounds, performance artists who defy traditional labels, and lesser-known drag kings or alt-queens who rarely get the same platform as more established names.

While these changes can reinvigorate Capitol Hill's nightlife, they also align with the core mission of many Queer spaces: to foster inclusion and community. Gay bars have historically served as sanctuaries for people of all stripes, as places where one could find acceptance and solidarity, especially during times when mainstream society was far less tolerant.

If bars now focus too heavily on a single crowd or single type of entertainment, they risk undermining that heritage. True inclusivity means acknowledging the mul-



STEVE ALLISON

ti-faceted interests of Queer patrons. Some love a rowdy drag show, while others prefer a quiet reading of Queer literature; some crave a high-energy dance floor, while others want to host a chill meetup for gamers.

The point is that a healthy nightlife ecosystem can — and should — embrace all of these possibilities.

The community's role

Owners might find it tempting to keep handing the keys to the same group of promoters who have historically delivered workable results. But workable isn't always optimal, especially in a city that prides itself on forward-thinking culture. Seattleites are known for their appreciation of innovation and authenticity, why shouldn't the city's Gay bars reflect that spirit?

Embracing riskier or more experimental events may feel daunting at first, but the payoff can be substantial: a renewed sense of excitement among patrons, enthusiastic word-of-mouth on social media, and the nurturing of next-generation Queer talent that can make Capitol Hill a nightlife magnet once again.

The broader Seattle LGBTQ+ community also has a role to play. Where we spend our time and money shapes the landscape around us. If you believe a particular venue should try something different, show up when it does. Suggest ideas to bar managers or staff. Encourage your friends to attend lesser-known or experimental events — those first few nights can make all the difference in whether a new concept takes off or fades away. Community collaboration is the lifeblood of successful Queer spaces, and it thrives on a wide range of voices being heard.

A call for inclusive evolution

Ultimately, advocating for fresh faces in Gay bar programming isn't an indictment of those who have laid the groundwork.

Many of these veteran programmers and event organizers have poured their energy into supporting Queer culture, often at times when mainstream acceptance was a distant dream. Their contributions shouldn't be dismissed, but legacies can become stagnant if they don't evolve. By inviting emerging talent to co-create, even the most established figures can expand their repertoires and stay relevant to younger generations who are forging new cultural paths.

Capitol Hill will always hold an important place in Seattle's LGBTQIA+ story, but staying true to its roots as a hub of self-expression and community means continually reinventing itself. Such reinvention doesn't require discarding what works; it simply calls for a willingness to explore new formats. Gay bars serve as community centers, creative incubators, and cultural signposts all at once. Ensuring they reflect the breadth of the community's needs and desires keeps these venues vibrant in a rapidly changing world.

If there is one lesson to be drawn from Capitol Hill's storied past, it's that diversity of expression has always fueled progress. The rainbow of queerness spans too many shades to be confined to a single type of event. Fresh programmers, events, and perspectives don't just make for a fun night out — they sustain the heart of a truly inclusive culture.

As our definitions of "Queer," "nightlife," and "community" expand with each new generation, we must adapt our spaces to keep pace. Reaching out to up-and-coming innovators, experimenting with fresh formats, and recognizing that drag is only one facet (albeit a dazzling one) of our shared identity can help Capitol Hill's nightlife flourish once more.

Change always carries some element of risk, but a refusal to change carries an even greater one: losing the authenticity that made Capitol Hill a beacon of Queer creativity in the first place. By taking bold steps now, we can ensure that our bars not only endure but also remain vital centers of connection, culture, and celebration for years to come.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN MARCH

Capitol Hill Gay Bars: Nothing new (fix it!)

Night of a Thousand Bisexuals

- **Where:** The Rendezvous (Seattle)
 - **When:** Wednesday, March 26, 6–9 p.m.
- I may be Gay, but I'm definitely here for our Bi friends — and Night of a Thousand Bisexuals at the Rendezvous is exactly the kind of event that deserves a cheer (and a cocktail). Seattle's only Bisexual DJ will be spinning those genre-hopping beats and toasting to the fact that a space for the Bi community isn't such a mythical creature after all. If you're as ready as I am to celebrate inclusivity (and give a polite middle finger to biphobia), join the fun. Whether you're Bi, Gay, Queer, or somewhere in between, this is the perfect chance to show support and have a blast.



IRYKA BAUMIER

Response to F-slur leads to safety concerns for artist at Base Camp Studios

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR



WES KING CONFRONTATION VIDEO STILL
COURTESY WES KING



DEVON LITTLE'S MADONNA V
COURTESY WIS TAGRAM

On February 12 Wes King took to Instagram Threads to joke about how Seattle is seen as a progressive city, rather than a “horrible place” that looks away from issues like substance use disorder and homelessness. Artist Devon Little called him a “fag” and a “whiny bitch” in response, after which King posted on social media and confronted Little in person, leading to private security being hired to ensure Little’s safety at her upcoming show at Base Camp Studios, which King also contacted.

“I was shocked, disturbed, and hurt by [the words], but it validated everything I felt about Seattle’s Queer scene and culture in general,” King told the *SGN*.

King said he moved from Virginia to Seattle about two and a half years ago and attends Shoreline Community College as a digital film production major. King said he frequently posts to Threads and jokes about Seattle, and that he’s been called the F-slur in the more conservative area of the country where he grew up.

Apology

Little posted an apology on Instagram and noted how “fag” has been used in the LGBTQ+ community as a term of endearment and a reclaimed word, and acknowledged how that language holds different meanings for some.

A Seattle resident of 18 years and an artist deeply engaged in the Queer community, Little told the *SGN* that she takes full accountability for her actions and that she’s even deleted her Threads account entirely.

“I acknowledge that I used charged language toward someone I did not know and later posted about them indirectly. ... Understanding the weight that words carry — especially in online spaces — I publicly apologized and sought to demonstrate my commitment to growth,” Little said.

As part of this commitment, Little, who is a Transgender woman and a resident artist at Base Camp Studios (BCS), held an open studio during the most recent Belltown Art Walk. She invited people to share concerns with her directly.

“I listened to those who expressed their feelings and sincerely appreciated the opportunity to learn from them,” Little said. “During that event, Wes King entered my studio and took his phone to begin recording, making unsubstantiated claims about me. I would have welcomed the chance to engage in an open and honest dialogue with him, but it became clear that his intention was not discussion but confrontation.”

Confrontation on video

King’s video shows him standing near where Little is sitting by her art, and he says she called him the F-slur three times and

that he has an issue with her referring to it as a term of endearment. Little asks King to leave, and King raises his voice, asking if she has anything to say about that.

Little continues sitting in the chair, visibly uncomfortable, and keeps asking King to leave. There is a back-and-forth, and it isn’t until Little says she will call the police that King turns and is ushered out. At the end of the 43-second video, King claims Little is a homophobic bigot.

“It made my blood boil that she’s sitting there claiming it’s endearment,” King said. “She didn’t care that I was there. She just wanted me to leave. She didn’t care what her words did to me. ... She just cared I was there in her studio space, and she wanted me gone. The effect of her words didn’t matter to her.”

King said that if Little’s apology was directed at him, he would have dropped this, as he is a forgiving person, he added.

“So much has been done wrong to me,” King said, adding how he’s attempted to engage in further dialogue with BCS and its sponsor, Shumpke.

BCS owner speaks out

Nick Federer, founder of BCS, said he is perplexed by this situation, and that BCS does not at all condone the use of the slur. He said he received dozens of messages that felt very inflamed, and he said he could understand the concern but that it was very accusatory.

Federer said he’s had to block numerous people online since the situation escalated following the apology, and noted that King claimed on social media that BCS was homophobic and covering up for Little.

“We are very LGBTQIA+ pro,” Federer told the *SGN*. “We have at least three Trans artists. I want to say we’re like 50% LGBTQ+, Nonbinary — we welcome all.”

Little has been involved with BCS for a year and a half. When things blew up on social media, she reached out to Federer to explain the situation and to apologize for BCS being dragged in to it. Federer suggested using less strong-armed language with strangers on the internet, and Little said it was a learning opportunity for her.

Little issued the apology, and blocked King on Instagram due to repeated harassment, according to Federer.

Feeling unsafe

“I have received a significant number of online attacks, including calls to sabotage my work, harassing messages from people outside of Seattle, and personal threats,” Little said.

She said that King has posted about her over 75 times on social media, urging others to target her and her artistic endeavors. King told the *SGN* that he’s been mass-reported and that Instagram, Threads, and TikTok removed several posts, but that he has appealed each time.

“This has created an environment where I no longer feel safe in my own workspace. Due to these escalating actions, I have begun seeking legal protection,” Little said. “I want to emphasize that, as a Queer/Transgender person, I have used the F-slur in a reclaimed and colloquial manner within my community. However, I recognize that this does not translate to every space, and I regret that my language caused harm.”

Little said she has taken this criticism to heart and is focused on continuing to learn from this experience and ensuring that her actions reflect the respect and inclusivity she strives to embody.

Solo exhibit

Little’s opening day for her debut solo art show, “Midnight Mass,” is April 5 at BCS.

Some of Little’s “Midnight Mass” pieces are available for viewing on her Instagram account, and include large acrylic and oil paintings on canvas. Her black backdrops provide a stark contrast to her subjects.

“I think that Devon has a very unique viewpoint, and her art is not for everybody. I would describe it as a bit morbid and gothic,” Federer said.

“My work has always been about celebrating Queer identity, resilience, and the reclamation of symbols that have historically been used to oppress us,” Little said. “I remain committed to creating art that speaks to our shared experiences and offers space for reflection, dialogue, and healing.”

Little said “Midnight Mass” is a labor of love dedicated to the Queer community, and invites those who wish to engage in meaningful dialogue to attend.

SGN. FILM

Triumphing over the unimaginable: Heart Eyes director Josh Ruben on making an emotionally authentic rom-com — that is also a freewheeling slasher

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

Currently knifing up theaters with cut-throat abandon, the inventively nimble rom-com-horror mashup *Heart Eyes* is going to go down as one of 2025’s most unexpected — if still bloodcurdling — delights. This thriller is *Sleepless in Seattle* with a *Scream* twist, offering up heartfelt romantic shenanigans and gory, craven disembowlements in almost equal measure. For those willing to go on this zany roller-coaster ride, this film is a heck of a lot of affectionately gruesome fun.

The story revolves around a pretty-faced pair of Seattle advertising executives, Ally McCabe (Olivia Holt) and Jay Simmonds (Mason Gooding), who inadvertently find themselves the target of the bloodthirsty *Heart Eyes* killer when they’re mistaken for young lovers on Valentine’s Day. As they are forced to fight for their survival, they also start to realize maybe there are genuine romantic sparks developing between

them. If they can live to see the morning, maybe they’ll go out on a real date — but that’s a pretty big “if.”

Director Josh Ruben is no stranger to creating a madcap horror romp that fuses multiple genres. His 2021 gem *Werewolves Within* was as funny as it was suspenseful and as thrilling as it was ally.

I sat down with Ruben over Zoom to discuss the ins and outs of *Heart Eyes*. Here are the edited transcripts of our lively and wide-ranging conversation:

Sara Michelle Feters: I’m going to get this elephant out of the room right away: Did you just decide to make *Heart Eyes* the most blatantly non-Seattle set-in-Seattle movie ever made?

Josh Ruben: My editor [Brett W. Bachman] is from Seattle. The whole time he was editing the film, I was like, “Poor

Bret. Oh, my goodness!” [laughs] But he really worked his way through it all. ... But mostly he was like, “Whatever, man. It’s the movie.” [laughs] ...

I’d like to think that there’s a little bit of a suspension of disbelief for those who maybe haven’t made it to this part of the world. But I tried. I tried, man, to make it look as much like as Seattle as we could. I truly tried.

Palm trees at the airport notwithstanding [laughs]

SME: With that out of the way, what was the genesis for this film? What were your initial thoughts?

JR: The original idea emerged from Philip Murphy, the first writer. I believe the story is that — hopefully I’m not butcher-ing this — he was on a bad date, a bad first date, maybe even a blind date. He said it was so bad that ... he began to wonder what would happen if a masked maniac



COURTESY JOSH RUBEN

came in and started just hacking everybody to pieces. Would it bring him and his date closer together? Would it make the night more fun, enjoyable? How would they get away? That sort of thing.

From that emerged the first iteration of the script, which to my understanding was more of a straight slasher. Then the studio volleyed the script to Christopher Landon



HEART EYES
©SONY PICTURES/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

and Michael Kennedy to put their spin on it. By the time it came to me, I was like, this is really fun and it's really funny, but as someone who's done the fun-funny-horror thing, I was itching to do something gorier and scarier. ... I am the one who probably took it more back to the middle of the dueling sensibilities.

SMF: The film does feel at times like that Paul Rudd-Amy Poehler rom-com parody, *They Came Together*, but then mixed with *Scream*. It's like you're riffing on all these romantic comedy and slasher tropes all at once. It's very funny, but also authentically romantic, and then when the horrible, intense, scary stuff happens, it becomes effectively serious. How do you balance those elements?

JR: I love that you're calling that out. I have a few different answers, but I think ultimately, if it were a different filmmaker, it would go further in one direction over the other. I happen to be a comedian who grew up loving Wes Craven as much as I did *Pretty Woman*...

So what happened is, by growing up during the great rom-com era of cinema that was like all things Nora Ephron and Garry Marshall and Rob Reiner, it was transportive... These romantic movies, they all very much affected me. But I'd also watch Freddie and could fancy him as a cartoon character. It was all so funny and so ridiculous. Once *Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* came along, it wasn't scary to me. It was fun.

I kind of developed a barometer, I guess, so that's sort of in my blood as someone who's been able to make a living as a comedian who also has a darker kind of sensibility...

The barometer for something like *Heart Eyes*, then, is discovering what would take me out of it as a fan. What would be the line for me watching it? What would take me out of it is if the actors were playing it to be funny. It would take me out of it if the chemistry between the leads wasn't real. It would take me out of it if there was a "boing! boing!" sound when someone's head fell off. You know what I mean?

If you took it in way more of a parody direction, I think you start to lose the audience at a certain point. I'm just grateful that we had the shot to do it exactly as we wanted to. It's a friggin' miracle. [laughs]

SMF: *Heart Eyes* does not work without Olivia Holt and Mason Gooding. How did you know they were Ally and Jay?

JR: I didn't know. That's the short answer. The longer answer is, when you do a studio film, you're going to get your list of impossible people. They're going to say, it's got to be Julia Roberts and Tom Hanks, which you know is impossible. Once you start to get realistic about who's available, you look at these incredible actors, who not only exhibit such wonderful vulnerability

but are fans of the genre and do it service.

You see that in Olivia's work in *Cloak & Dagger*, *Totally Killer*, and *Cruel Summer*. Then you have Mason. Literally everything Mason's doing and is about to do — there's stuff they haven't announced that he's doing that is going to be great — it just screams he should be perfect to play Jay...

It was a total gamble, but it is always a gamble, and it worked because we trusted one another, got along, and were determined to make something we would want to watch ourselves. We kind of Tetrised it all together. [laughs]

And let me be clear: Olivia and Mason are great people. No question.

SMF: With the ensemble, how do you keep them focused and grounded yet also maintain the film's humor without things suddenly becoming *Airplane!*? Or maybe *Scary Movie*?

JR: The tone? What did I tell people? I said that I wanted it to be Nora Ephron in earnest and Wes Craven in earnest. Both filmmakers have characters within their filmographies... that exist on heightened planes, that are whackadoo. Sometimes, if anything, those characters get caught being a little too villainous or a little too big, and sometimes that's warranted. Sometimes, maybe not...

I gave everybody their own sort of, not assignments, but their own kind of ideals. Honestly, with the exception of Mason and Olivia, everything was about "Let's just hang out. I just want to see you guys talk, and let's talk about our relationships." They knew what was on the page. But what wasn't on the page? We never had to talk about playing nervous or cute. It's already there. They can do it in their sleep.

It's up to me as the director to tie the room together with great composition, and

I find music does a lot of the work for us. Jay Wadley, who I've been working with forever, who I've been dying to get on one of my gigs, asked, "What's the tone here?" I told him that I wanted him to make me cry. I want the score to be as earnest as anything Nora Ephron ever utilized, like when Tom Hanks is talking to his dead wife in *Sleepless in Seattle*. But then I wanted him ratchet things up to be as horrifying as a kaiju attack, which he did and we do. And it all just kind of worked.

SMF: I feel like it's become a lost art, the lost art of the song-score soundtrack. How much time did you spend on not only the song choices but where they would be placed, how they would be utilized, and then how that would get coupled to the score?

JR: It is something of a lost art, and I so appreciate you acknowledging that, I've seen numerous movies in recent years that have made a lot of money and done quite well, but the soundtracks aren't what they could be. I'm sort of surprised, because the filmmaker in me sees the untapped potential. If the filmmakers had just turned over a few more stones or spent a little bit more time, it all would have been perfect...

And again, it all comes down to who I am as a person and a barometer, but also the people I surround myself with. And it brings up my great heads of department, Rob Lowry and Mia Riggins, my music supervisor and music coordinator. Rob currently has *Friendship* from A24 about to come out, he has *Companion* out now, he has our film, and he has the next *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. He's like a secret weapon. He has such great taste, and Jay Wadley and Rob have worked together before, and so was helpful too.

You always get on the phone with your

heads of department, and they go, "What do you see in your head? How red do you want the blood? How cheesy do you want the music?" I would be like, "No. Not cheesy. Never cheesy. I want to feel the way that I felt when Richard Gere was standing on the street looking up at Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* or when Albert Brooks chased Meryl Streep on the tramway in *Defending Your Life*. That was transportive, and there was nothing funny about it. Yeah, Albert was wearing a toga, and they were on a tram back to Earth or to Heaven, but you're still crying your eyes out."

The great success of *Heart Eyes* as a franchise, if we ever get to do it again, is to never shortchange the audience. We pay homage to what made that era of film that is so beautiful, and part of how we do that is through music.

SMF: What do you want viewers to take away from the film? And not to put you on the spot, but with things being the way that they are right now, socially, politically, etc., how important is it to have films like *Heart Eyes* that we can sort of communally wrap our arms around? That embrace and celebrate diversity, not just a single, narrow-minded — if all too vocal — aspect of it?

JR: It's not putting me on the spot at all. I am horrified by this world right now. I'm also heartened by what good there is left in it. As a 41-year-old Caucasian male filmmaker, one of many of them — there's too many of us — I have a responsibility to not only cast people who really look like this world and the people who are in it but also to spread what joy I can and to also take that very seriously. It's an extreme privilege to be doing what I'm doing.

And I'm going to bust my ass to get it out there and make it as much of an escape as it possibly can be. To cast people who may not often be cast in films like this, so that people who are escaping the horrors of the world and spending whatever it is, \$50-plus to get out of the house, get to go see themselves survive an extraordinary situation or a horrible situation. To fall in love. To live their lives.

I can't do nihilistic horror. I love more whammy horror. I love whimsy horror. I love the fun stuff. I want people to walk away and go, "Holy crap! That is the kind of movie that I want to see! I can't wait to get the 4K and pop it on in the background and get the pizza and forget about the world for 90 minutes, for two hours. I want to go back because it flew by so quick. I want to bring five or ten people that I love dearly to the theater so that they can go on this ride, too, and I can't wait turn to them in the dark and look at their reactions when X or Y or Z happens."

We often hear people refer to *Nightmare on Elm Street* as a "comfort movie." Why is that? Horror can provide comfort because we get to see ourselves survive a horrible circumstance. Straight. Gay. Black. White. Whatever. We all triumph over the unimaginable.



JOSH RUBEN AND LAUREN O'HARA IN HEART EYES
CHRISTOPHER MOSS



The Storyteller from Balincia: S.W. Kent is the new face of YA literature

BY NOVA BERGER

COURTESY COROLIS COMPANY

Based on lessons on inclusivity and vulnerability he wishes he had been taught as a child, S.W. Kent's latest novel, *The Storyteller from Balincia*, brings a new era to the young-adult book scene, one where every Queer person is a magical main character in their own right. It's dark, lovely — and real.

Kent, raised in a stereotypical Christian household, grew up as a preacher's kid, and the stories he heard were often shaped by the trauma of the AIDS crisis that loomed over the '80s and '90s. A child of the dark-fantasy era, Kent's literary consumption was filled with sorrow, loss, and stigma, almost as if that was the only way to understand his environment. His young years were shaped by titles like *The Last Unicorn*

and *Lord of the Rings*. And while these stories were dark, Kent told the *SGN* that he loved them because they didn't shy away from personifying the real, vulnerable emotions of the time. But they lacked any sort of Queer representation.

Kent's new book is both a product of and a fight against his childhood. "I want to capture the fun and nostalgia of that era," he said, "but we're missing out on those healthy messages. We all deserve those messages... I want to go back to where I was as a child, and I want to focus on bringing Queer joy, and really helping kids now."

The book is also a statement against the current young adult publishing world. Kent said that historically, Queer representation in literature, especially in fantasy, has

been limited and often framed by trauma or tragedy. "Diversity is checklisted and stereotyped. Characters are there to provide humor or trauma," he said.

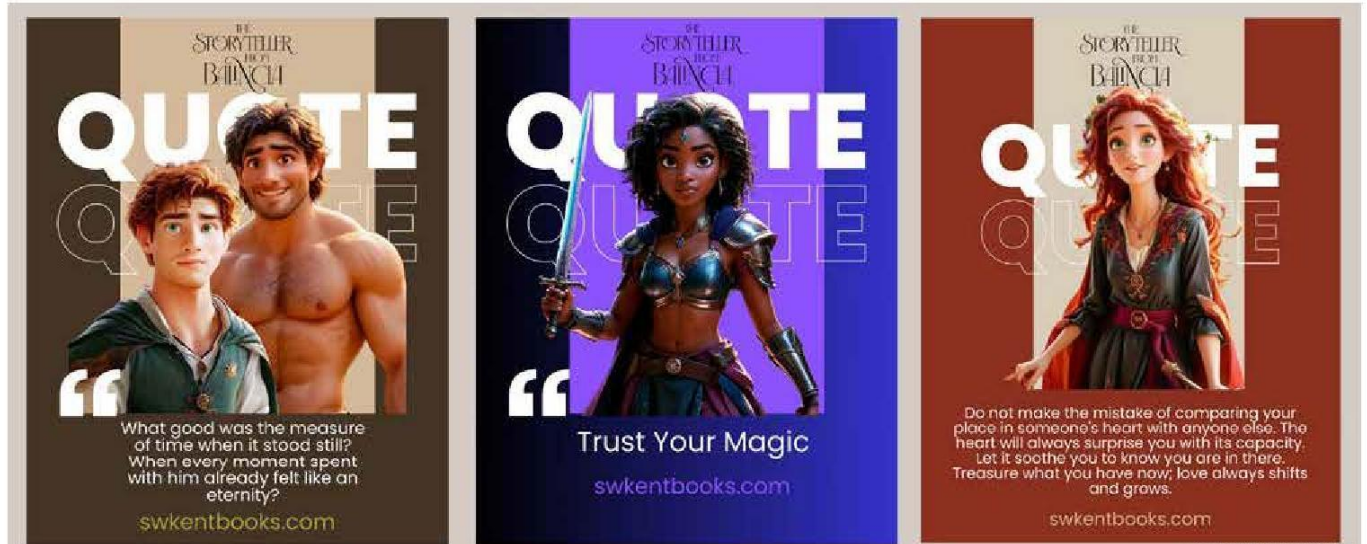
The Storyteller from Balincia breaks away from this pattern. Diversity isn't just a checkbox — it's essential to the very fabric of the universe. "I want to show and represent that Gay men can be warriors, they can be heroes, they can have friendships and fellowships with other straight men," Kent said.

The book centers on the main character's defiance of his own history. Birk, a witch's nephew, is sent on a journey when a mysterious stranger gives him a magical book. Joined by a diverse group of allies, including a warrior princess, a secretive gentle

soul, and an arrogant heir, Birk uncovers his aunt's dark past and races to prevent a destructive prophecy. In doing so, he must confront the mistakes of their ancestors and learn from them.

The characters in the book, whether witches, elves, or warriors, each come from unique backgrounds and experiences, and their magic is actually a reflection of their Queer identities and struggles.

Kent's world shows that magic and strength don't belong solely to traditionally powerful or idealized figures. Rather, they belong to everyone — regardless of gender, sexuality, race, or background. This radical rethinking of who can be a hero is a pivotal moment in YA fantasy literature.

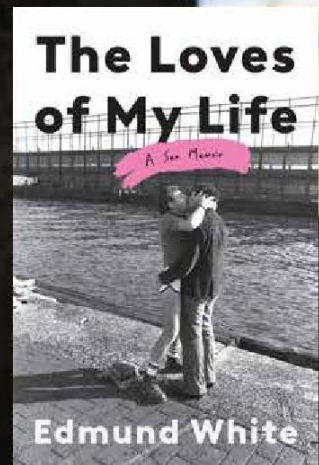


COURTESY S.W. KENT



Edmund White takes a wry look back at a life of sexual encounters and romances

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER



EDMUND WHITE
ANDREW FLADEBOE

THE LOVES OF MY LIFE:
A SEX MEMOIR
EDMUND WHITE
© 2025 Bloomsbury
\$27.99
256 pages

When an accomplished novelist reaches the middle of his eighth decade, he should state what's been most important in his life. For Edmund White, it's the "thousands of sex partners" he's had since he was a mere child.

He was ten years old or thereabouts when he fell in love with a boy he alternately calls Nick and Cam. They spent a lot of after-school time together, wrestling and

roughhousing, as boys do, and it eventually became sexual.

Six years later, White was working for his father and making enough money to hire men for sex, mostly straight men who hailed from Kentucky, just across the border from White's Ohio home. Sometimes, doing so put him in danger, because being Gay then was something shameful and undisclosed.

At around this time, he met an older, "camp" man who taught him the slang of Gay life. He also met lovers on Craigslist and some while traveling with a man he calls his "first husband." He loved younger men and older men, from Madrid, Boston, and Scotland, met them at bathhouses and

parties, and had several love-of-his-life romances. Sex, says White, was always linked with love.

(He also sought therapy, hoping to be "cured" of homosexuality, and briefly fell in love with a woman, thinking he'd get married and raise a family.)

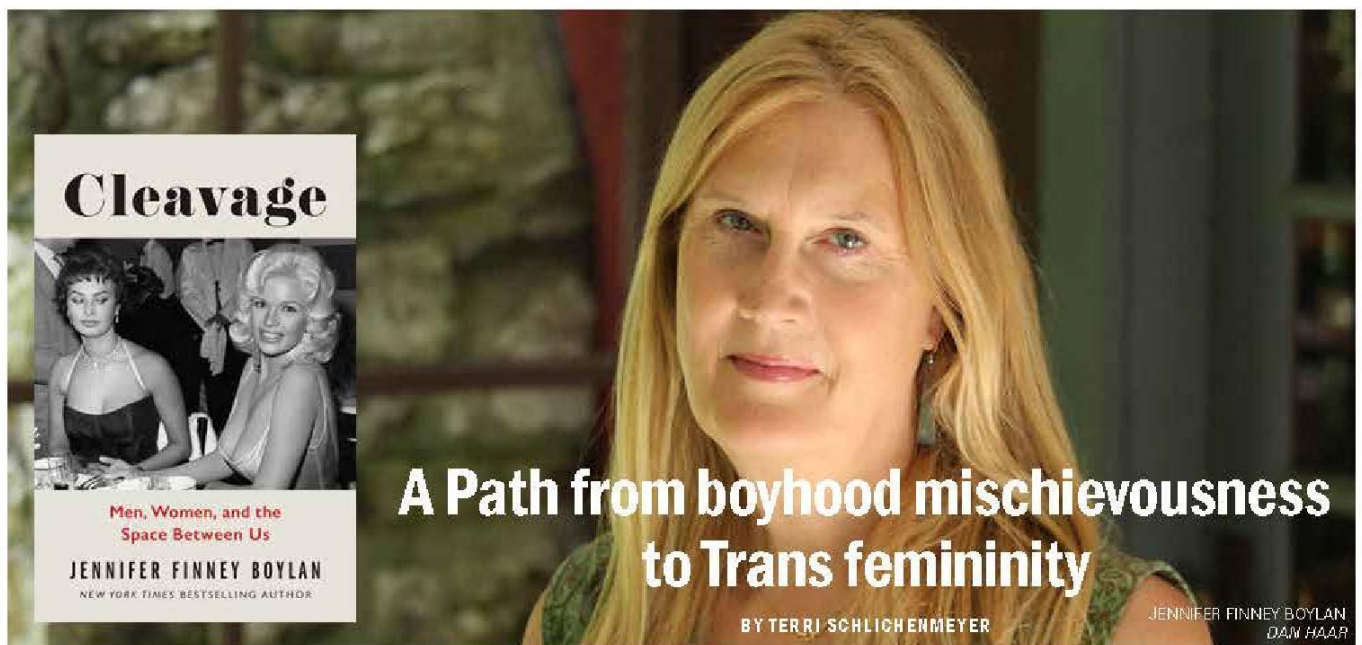
All this was fun then, he says, but "now in the cold, polar heart of old age," he looks back at it all "as comical and pointless, repulsive and dishonorable."

Considering that *The Loves of My Life* is subtitled as it is, it's not as explicit as you might think. Yes, this memoir will steam up a window, but the heat is tempered by White's sense of humor and wry outlook.

Those two aspects tend to give a reader

a break in what would otherwise be a long string of fast-and-furious romps and a litany of randiness. The stories connect, but you can enjoy each for its own merits of exploration and joie de vivre, accompanied by straightforwardness and what feels like honest soul-searching without much gratuitousness. White also freely admits to a few mistakes in his lifetime, further endearing himself to readers.

It shouldn't need to be said that there's profanity in the book, but beware if you're looking for pearls to clutch. For readers who don't care about that and want a decent memoir, *The Loves of My Life* is a very pleasant distraction.



Cleavage



Men, Women, and the
Space Between Us

JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

A Path from boyhood mischievousness to Trans femininity

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN
DAN HAAR

CLEAVAGE: MEN, WOMEN, AND THE SPACE BETWEEN US
JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN
© 2025 Caladon Books
\$29.99
256 pages

Once upon a time not so long ago, "Jim" Boylan was one of "a group of twelve-year-old Visigoths" intent on mischief. They did normal boy stuff: setting off rockets, roughhousing, roaming, and bike-riding. The difference with the other boys in the group was that "Jim" knew she was really a girl.

Back then, vowing that it was a "secret no soul would ever know," "James" went to

college, dated, fell in love too easily, then married a woman and fathered two boys. But there was still that tug. Boylan carried the child she once was in her heart — "How I loved the boy I'd been!" — but was a woman "on the inside." Saying it aloud eventually became critical.

Boylan had a hard talk with her wife, Deedie, knowing that it could be the end of their marriage. She's eternally grateful now that it wasn't.

She's also grateful that she became Jennifer when she did, when politics had little to do with that personal decision. She worries about her children, one whom is Trans, both of whom are good, successful people

who make Boylan proud. She tries to help other Trans women. And she thinks about the words her mother often said: "Love will prevail."

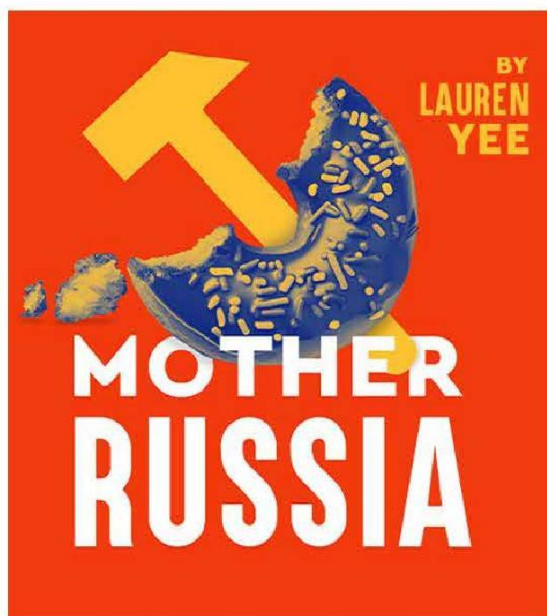
"Our lives are not a thing to be ashamed of," Boylan says, "or apologized for, or explained. Our lives are a thing of wildness, and tenderness, and joy."

Judge *Cleavage* by its cover, and you might think you'll get a primer on anatomy. Nope, Boylan only has one chapter on the subject, among many. Instead, she leans heavily on her childhood and her transition rather late in life, her family, and her friends, continuing where her other books leave off. In sum, she guesses that "a huge

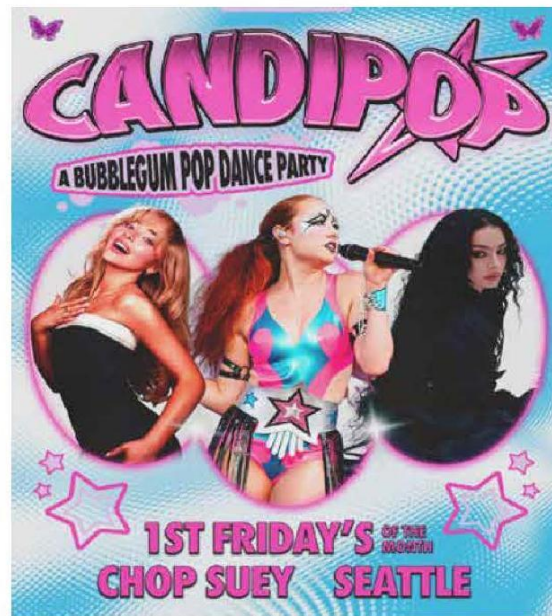
chunk of the population... still doesn't understand this trans business at all..."

Let that gentle playfulness be a harbinger of what you'll read: some humor about her journey, a few oh-so-deliciously well-placed snarks, and many things that might make your heart hurt: self-inspection that seems confidential, and well-told and satisfying memories that are both nostalgic and personal from "both the Before and the After."

This memoir has the feel of having a cold one with a friend. Boylan fans will devour it. It's also great for anyone who is Trans-curious or just wants to read an enjoyable work from a born storyteller.



March 6-27, 7:30 p.m.
Seattle Rep



Friday, March 7, 9 p.m.
Chop Suey

The Last Five Years

Date: Wednesday, February 26-March 16
Time: 7-10 p.m.
Venue: ACT Theatre, 700 Union Street, Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$0.00 - \$114.00

The winner of two Drama Desk Awards, this modern musical takes a devastatingly honest look at Cathy and Jamie and their journey of falling in and out of love over five years. Through clever storytelling and sharp lyrics – Cathy's songs start at the end of the relationship, while Jamie begins at the start of their love affair – Jason Robert Brown's cult favorite is a raw and intimate window into two perspectives of one relationship.

Bad Girls Brunch

Date: Saturday, March 1-23
Time: 12-30 p.m.
Venue: Julia's on Broadway, 300 Broadway E, Seattle, WA
Doors: 12pm | Show: 1pm

Salon Style Exhibition: Hosted by the PCNW Alumni Association

Date: Saturday, March 1
Time: 3-5 p.m.
Venue: PCNW Auditorium, 900 12th Ave, Seattle, WA

Let's cover the walls and tables with photography! This is all fun: no competition, no judgment, and no fee. All PCNW faculty, alumni, and students are welcome. First come, first hang. Bring one print and be ready to clip, ping, or hang to the walls. There will be tables for your maquettes or zines.

Free First Thursday: Seattle Art Museum

Date: Thursday, March 6
Time: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Venue: Seattle Art Museum, 1300 First Avenue, Seattle, WA

FREE to everyone at the Seattle Art Museum on the first Thursday of every month. In addition to our regular hours, Seattle Art Museum will be open for Free First Thursday evenings from 5-8 pm to provide more opportunities to visit the galleries for free! Evening hours will feature extra activities like live music, drop-in art making, and in-gallery experiences for visitors.

Mother Russia by Lauren Yee

Date: Thursday, March 6-27
Time: 7:30-9:30 p.m.
Venue: Seattle Rep, 155 Mercer St., Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$41.00 - \$75.00

World Premiere. Evgey and Dmitri are just two average guys who dream of cushy government jobs—but after the fall of the Soviet Union, they end up working retail instead. As they bumble their way through capitalism, they get entangled with an alluring former pop star who has her own secret agenda. This quirky and provocative world premiere comedy by Lauren Yee (The Great Leap, Cambodian Rock Band) reveals what happens when old systems and strongmen fall away, and we let the free market decide—but freedom doesn't taste as good as we thought it would.

Candi Pop

Date: Friday, March 7
Time: 9 p.m.
Venue: Chop Suey, 1325 E. Madison St., Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$10.00 - \$20.00

TICKETS ALWAYS AVAILABLE AT THE DOOR! Candi Pop Dance Party littered with all of your guilty pleasures. Glitter, Lollipops, Rainbows, Unicorns... and Oh yeah, Girl Power! Playing Music by: SPICE GIRLS | JUSTIN BIEBER | KATY PERRY | JONAS BROTHERS | DUA LIPA | HARRY STYLES | FERGIE | BRITNEY SPEARS | TAYLOR SWIFT | MILEY CYRUS | NSYNC | GWEN STEFANI | J-LO | ONE DIRECTION | DOJA CAT | WHITNEY HOUSTON | DESTINY'S CHILD | HANSON | BEYONC | CHRISTINA AGUILERA | JESSICA SIMPSON | JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE | KE\$HA | LADY GAGA | MANDY MOORE | S CLUB 7 | MARIAH CAREY | TLC | SHAWN MENDES | HILARY DUFF | SELENA GOMEZ | MADONNA | CARLY RAE JEPSEN | THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS and more. Lights & Music Collective Event

FEMME FATALE: Sapphic Goth Night

Date: Saturday, March 8
Venue: Asylum Collective, 108 South Jackson Street, Seattle, WA

Safe space WLW, T4T & queer goth night in a haunted pink venue in the Seattle Underground.

NeonBrush: A Glow-in-the-Dark Painting Experience

Date: Thursday, March 13
Time: 6-7:15 p.m.
Venue: River, 1927 3rd Avenue, Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$38.00

Switch up your weekend plans with Neon Brush! Get creative with glow-in-the-dark paints in a UV-lit art studio—all while enjoying great tunes and a drink or two. Get your tickets for Neon Brush: A Glow-in-the-Dark Painting Experience in Seattle. Explore your creative side—you're in total control, so paint whatever you like! A professional will be there to offer advice and guidance if needed. A black-light, retro-futuristic, artsy, floor-to-ceiling fluorescent ambiance. Great tunes to enjoy with friends. Leave with your neon artwork—perfect as a gift or a colorful addition to your home. No need to worry if you're not the next Picasso; we've got everything you need to tap into your creative genius. With a canvas, glow-in-the-dark paints, brushes, and great tunes, all you have to do is show up and have fun.

Seattle St Patrick's Day Bar Crawl & Block Party - 10+ bars!

Date: Saturday, March 15
Time: 1 p.m.-2 a.m.
Venue: Pine Box, 1600 Melrose Ave, Seattle, WA
Celebrate St Patrick's Day 2025 at 10+ of Seattle's best bars, lounges and nightclubs!

MASK 4 MASC: transmasculine-inclusive queer boi night (MASKS REQUIRED)

Date: Saturday, March 22
Time: 10 p.m.-1:30 a.m.
Venue: Asylum Collective, 108 South Jackson Street B, Seattle, WA
tattooed tarot dancing! gender & sexuality inclusive. MASKED EVENT!

SNOW WHITE & the Seven Dwarfs

Date: Saturday, March 22-23
Venue: Meydenbauer Theatre, 11100 NE 6th St, Bellevue, WA
INTERNATIONAL BALLET THEATRE for CHILDREN presents SNOW WHITE & the Seven Dwarfs Saturday March 22nd and Sunday March 23rd at Meydenbauer Theatre. Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs, is the newest addition

The Skank Tank Drag Show

Date: Sunday, March 23
Time: 4-7 p.m.
Venue: Pine Box, 1600 Melrose Ave, Seattle, WA

Get ready for a wild night of fierce drag performances and fabulous skanky vibes at The Skank Tank Drag Show!

Spicy Speed Dating for Queer Femmes & Thems

Date: Wednesday, March 26
Time: 7-9 p.m.

Venue: Stoup Brewing-Capitol Hill, 1158 Broadway, Seattle, WA

Let's come together in a fun and spicy way! Connect with other queer femmes & non-binary folks for friendship, romance, and more.

For more events visit
SGN's
online
community
calendar!



SGN.ORG