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TORONTO'S GAY & LESBIAN NEWS

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CAN THIS PILL PREVENT HIV?

The promise and uncertainty of
pre-exposure prophylaxis ▶14



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MATURE TRANS SISTERS

MTS is a weekly drop-in group for Mature Trans Women who are 45 years and older to meet, learn, plan, and share experiences together in a safe space. The group is facilitated by staff and collectively run by participants who decide on group activities. The drop-in is open to older trans women of all types of gendered experiences and expressions.

For more information, including dates/times and access/ability needs, contact Ander Negrazis at 416-324-4100 x 5230 or email mts@sherbourne.on.ca.



Supporting Our Youth (SOY) seeks to improve the quality of life for LGBT youth (up to 29) through the active involvement of adults working together with youth. Working within an anti-oppression framework, SOY develops initiatives that build skills and capacities, provide mentoring and support, and nurture a sense of identity and belonging.

416-324-5077 • WWW.SOYTORONTO.ORG

SUPPORT SOY!

MONDAY NIGHT DROP-IN MAKES QUEER VALENTINE'S CARDS: FEBRUARY 10

A weekly program where queer and trans youth under 29 can find an inclusive community. On February 10, join us for a night of delicious food and crafting Queer Valentine's Cards! **Mondays, 5:30pm-8:00pm. Contact John at jcaffery@sherbourne.on.ca or 416-324-4100 x 5339.**

ALPHABET SOUP "PARIS IS BURNING" FILM SCREENING: FEBRUARY 11

Alphabet Soup is a weekly group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, 2 Spirited, or questioning youth who are under 20 years old. On February 11, join us for a film screening of the landmark documentary "Paris Is Burning" about Vogue Ballroom scene in New York City. **Tuesdays, 4-6pm. Contact John at jcaffery@sherbourne.on.ca or 416-324-4100 x 5339**

FLUID STARTS MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24!

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XTRA

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ONSTAGE

Cultivating Rhubarb

After 35 years, the annual queer theatre festival is as hardy as ever — no thanks to the government ▶20

Laura Nanni, Rhubarb's festival director at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.
TANJA TIZIANA

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For the love of fucking



EDITORIAL
DANNY GLENWRIGHT

"If having sex can kill you, doesn't anybody with half a brain stop fucking?"

Dr Emma Brookner's question in Larry Kramer's play *The Normal Heart* is a cymbal-crashing line that resonates even after the scene is over — at least in the 2012 production I saw at Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Of course the answer is no, it's not quite so simple — even for Emma's gay friend Ned, who takes up her call for abstinence and then promptly falls in love. He soon learns that even monogamy is no defence against AIDS.

But her words also reverberate because they are ideologically weighted down, typifying a stigma associated with gay men's sexuality that remains pervasive today, even (possibly especially) within our own community.

Stigma is central to the discussion surrounding the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a daily medical regimen that is being used by HIV-negative gay men as a way to stay that way (see page 14 for the full story). The emergence of PrEP, a drug that has the potential to once again significantly change how we have sex, is being hailed as a game-changer in the history of HIV/AIDS.

But an in-depth *Xtra* investigation reveals questions around its effectiveness, not to mention widespread ambivalence among sexually active gay men. Perhaps this is not surprising. Even though the pill, Truvada, is not yet approved in Canada for use as PrEP, I'm not sure it would be widely taken up if it were.

For one, studies seem to indicate that it's effective only if taken consistently every day. It also comes with a hefty price tag: more than \$850 a month unless you're covered by the right insurance plan.

And then there's the other issue of access — to non-judgmental doctors willing to prescribe Truvada as PrEP to sexually active gay men.

Interestingly, uptake among gay men has been tepid in the United States,


where the Food and Drug Administration approved Truvada for use as an HIV preventative in 2012. Lisa Capaldi, a doctor who treats gay men, noted in a recent *New York Times* article about PrEP that she's seen "very little interest" among her patients. While the same article highlighted stigma from healthcare workers as one possible reason for this, it also noted stigma among gay men. Apparently a new word for PrEP users — "Truvada whore" — is being used on gay social networks.

When will we stop stigmatizing one another? If we have HIV, if we like to bareback, if we participate in group sex — somehow gay men continue to stigmatize other gay men for all these reasons. And now we're stigmatizing those who acknowledge they sometimes bareback and therefore want to ensure they can do it as safely as possible.

Here's the reality: about half of us do not consistently use condoms with casual sex partners. This is according to a 2008 Public Health Agency of Canada study that also found that more than three quarters of men who sleep with men (MSM) in Canada said they'd had at least one casual sex partner in the six months prior to the study. It's worth juxtaposing this finding with a similar study that found between 11 and 23 percent of MSM in Canadian cities have HIV.

The fact is, many of us would not choose to use PrEP even if it was cheaper and more readily available. It doesn't make sense for everyone, including those who always fuck with condoms or have easy access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) if they do slip up.

Even so, after several decades living with the blight of HIV, we know that we still love fucking and we're not going to stop just because it's risky. So can't we get half a brain and have an honest discussion about PrEP without stigmatizing each other?

 Go to dailyxtra.com for a four-part video series on PrEP.

Danny Glenwright is Xtra's managing editor.

FEEDBACK

Manor Hair Lounge closure

The 519 does not attract any higher proportion of troubled, disorderly or annoying people than does the College subway station or the Loblaws superstore at Church and Carlton ["Manor Closes," *Xtra* #763, re: Brent S, Jan 23]. The 519 is one of the safer places I visit in Toronto. It performs a very useful and important function in the local gay community, and if anything it is a credit to the Village and attracts many people who would not otherwise visit at all. The reason that shops in the Church Street gay village keep closing is because they are pinched between escalating rents and stagnating or declining visitor traffic from out-of-area. Local residents, like Brent S, with their stuck-up, snotty and exclusionary attitudes, do not help.

CHERRY BITCH
TORONTO, ON

The 519 Community Centre was in the Village before there even was a Village. The alcoholics, drug addicts and mentally ill people are still people of the community, and many rely on its services. Your [reader's] argument about the closing of The Manor has not been proven to be because of The 519. How would you explain the success of Angst salon on Queen at Sherbourne? Maybe The Manor just wasn't a successful business.

LES DALZELL
TORONTO, ON

Using 'queer'

Everyone is free to call themselves what they like, of course ["Questioning the Use of Queer," *dailyxtra.com*, Jan 21]. For now, my guess is that the term queer will coexist with other terms, like gay, lesbian, trans, et cetera. "Queer" likely appeals more to activists who like the edginess of the term, while more mainstream, integrationist people use the more traditional terms, some as little as possible. As time goes on, however, we may see the emergence of a new term or terms. Language flows like a river, always changing.

GORDON HARDY
TORONTO, ON

I didn't get to Gay Liberation until the name had already been decided, but what I remember about rehabilitation of the word queer begins

“When the elephant in the room is a raging pachyderm and nobody mentions it, somebody had to get the warning out.”

[RE: POSTER THAT CHANGED AIDS]



with an up-from-the-streets group of youthful activists called Queer Nation in San Francisco in the early '90s. It was partly a successor to ACT UP as a grassroots anti-AIDS organization and partly a new cultural movement of young lesbians, gays and bisexuals. I was sorry to see the movement dissipate after a couple of years but sorrier still to see "queer" taken up on the left as a sort of cultural orthodoxy, as I hate the word so much. I can understand how others feel differently, but to me personally, "queer" is the N-word of the LGBT world and still has no place in any serious narrative.

DON HIX
TORONTO, ON

Twenty-five-year-old gay man here: I reached queer saturation in my first year of university. As soon as I hear about queer stuff now, my eyes glaze over and my brain shuts down. Going about with "queer queer queer" on your lips is a sign of membership in an ephemeral subculture that's privileged and oblivious to the teeming masses of repressed homosexuals who aren't even ready to call themselves by those filthy words (irony intended) "gay" or "lesbian," let alone take an interest in intolerably narcissistic postmodern "queer" culture (wince). Besides, my generation doesn't even remember a time when the go-to slurs were anything but "gay" and "faggot."

TIMMY
MONTREAL, QC

The Vic closure

Let's be honest about many of the restaurant closures in the Church Street

Village: we are suffering from the "If I build it, they will come" syndrome ["The Vic on Church Street Closes Its Doors," *dailyxtra.com*, Dec 19]. Sadly, what really happened with The Vic and many other recent restaurant failures along Church Street is that they failed to provide good customer service and quality food. They figured all they had to do was come in and open a place and gays would flock to it because it was in "the Village." Sorry, but the Vic's food was overpriced, downright awful and tended toward anemic portions. The service at the Vic was extremely poor. The owner failed to rectify the problem and that's why the Vic failed. Many of the other restaurants along the gay strip had the same problem. Many others continue to suffer from this (the new Garage restaurant comes to mind). Business owners need to start looking at why they aren't getting customers (like paying attention to online reviews!) rather than blaming it on the things that aren't the real problem.

TERRY G
TORONTO, ON

Poster that changed AIDS

In those dark days, it really did ["Silence=Death Co-Founder on How One Poster Changed the AIDS Movement," *dailyxtra.com*, Jan 22]. How long did it take for Reagan to even acknowledge the illness? And when it finally got talked about, the resources allocated toward it were minuscule. When the elephant in the room is a raging pachyderm and nobody mentions it, somebody had to get the warning out.

CATHY ANTELL (FACEBOOK)
TORONTO, ON

Silence still equals death: we need to respond to homophobia. Is there a poster for Uganda, Nigeria, most Muslim countries and Russia? Our brothers and sisters are being rounded up, murdered, beaten and imprisoned. We have to ask ourselves "What have I done?" If you respond, "I can't do anything," then stay in bed or get a book on how to empower yourself.

PAULA KEY
TORONTO, ON

The outcome that we seek is this — gay and lesbian people daring together to set love free.

Xtra is published by Pink Triangle Press, at 2 Carlton St, Ste 1600, Toronto, M5B 1J3.

XCETERA

FROM THE PTP ARCHIVES 30 YEARS AGO

THE BODY POLITIC #99, DEC 1983

The world is on the verge of learning about the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Rick Bébout's groundbreaking article explores theories of what causes AIDS symptoms to manifest and outlines straightforward safer-sex practices — guesswork at the time, but also possibly life-or-death education.

OUT ON THE STREET BY KYLE BURTON

Would you have sex with someone who is HIV-positive?

For our HIV cover story on PrEP, turn to page 14.



Anthony
SALES ASSOCIATE

Off the bat I would say no. But if I knew it would be 100-percent safe, I might.



John
MANAGER

Yes. I have in the past. Your partner should disclose their status to you so that you can be safe.



Ryan
REALTOR

I think it would be case-specific. Sex doesn't happen very often, so I'd have to think about it.



Kelly
STATISTICAL ANALYST

I'd have to do some research and assess the risks. But I'd definitely be open to it.

QUOTABLE

“Damn it, I am whoever I am when I am it / Loving whoever you are when the stars shine / And whoever you'll be when the sun rises”

Rapper Angel Haze's freestyle lyrics, recorded over Macklemore's "Same Love"



Sushi

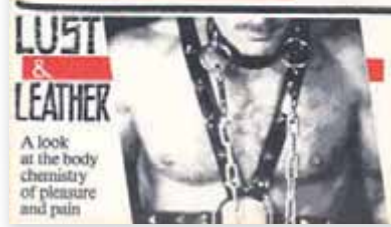
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Ari-Pekka Liukkonen

Name of a Finnish Olympic swimmer who recently came out in an effort to raise awareness about Russia's anti-gay laws.

Body Politic



Hypocrisy

Coca-Cola

The company's Super Bowl ad celebrating the American "melting pot" featured a pair of gay dads.

Kordale and Kaleb

Two African-American gay men whose photos of themselves with their three children have made internet headlines.

127,276

Number of followers Kordale and Kaleb have on Instagram.

Oprah Scholar

A fake Instagram account for Oprah's OWN network that promised to give out college scholarships to the first 50,000 followers.

\$20,000

Amount the promised scholarships were supposedly worth.

Safe Schools Coalition

A statewide program Australian politician Daniel Andrews hopes to introduce to fight homophobia in Victoria's classrooms.

Closet Party

A gay party in Melbourne whose organizers create posters using unauthorized photos of celebrities to promote the night.

Harry Styles

Closet Party's most recent poster boy.



Davey

Wavey

Featured on the cover of the latest *Spartacus International Gay Guide*.



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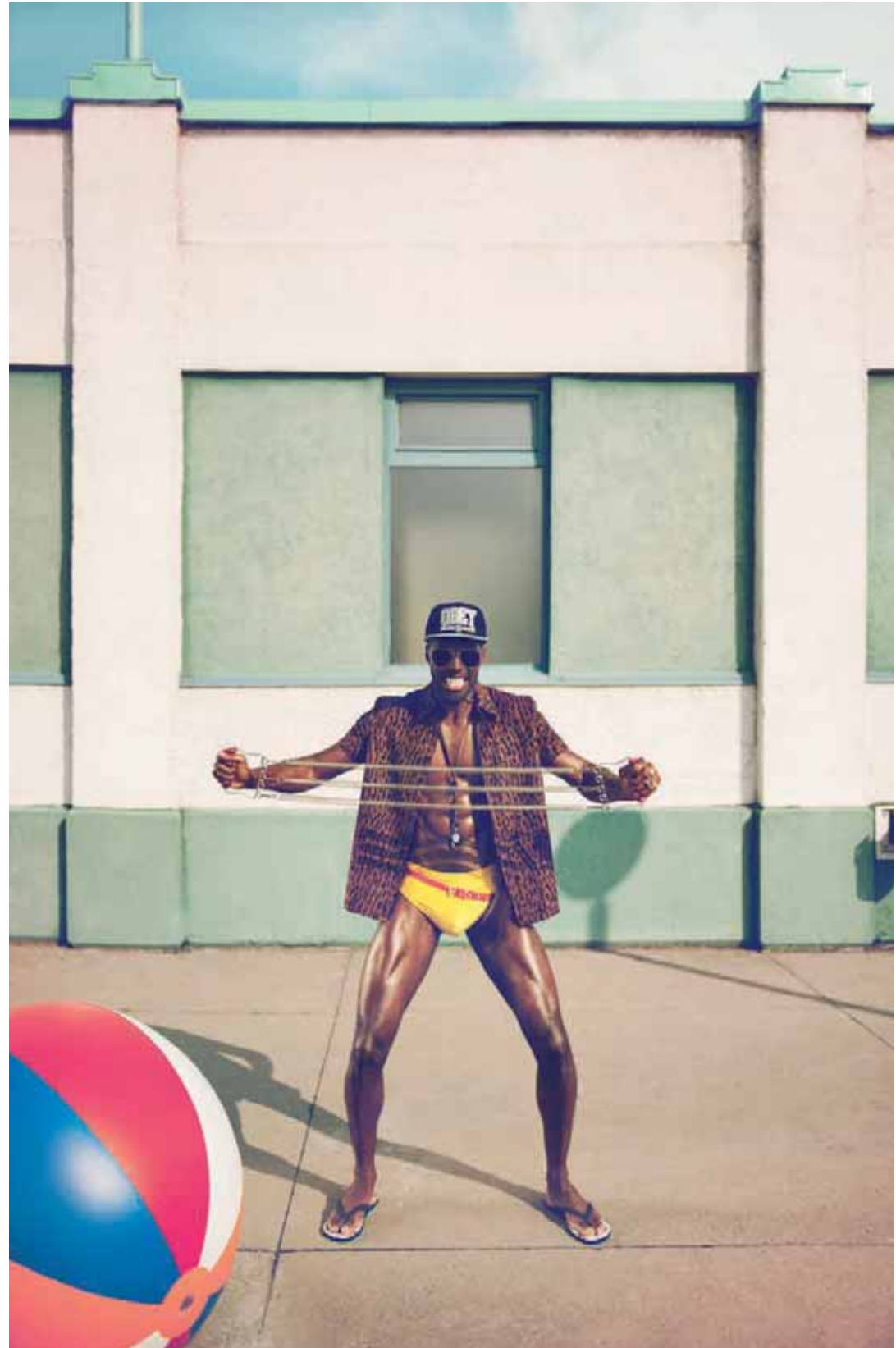
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Coalition to host LGBT lounge during Sochi Olympics

SOCHI 2014
ELAH FEDER

Toronto’s LGBT community will be invited to hang out in an open-air lounge at Ryerson University during the upcoming Sochi Olympics — a space where they can come together daily, watch the Games and discuss LGBT rights in Russia.

The lounge is being organized by PrideHouseTO, a coalition of 15 organizations working to ensure that Toronto’s 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games are inclusive, so the lounge is ultimately meant to help build momentum toward the Pan Am Games. The project is led by Gay and Lesbian International Sport Association (GLISA) North America, OutSport Toronto and The 519. It’s being funded by the City of Toronto, the Government of Ontario and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The lounge will include a skating rink, a large viewing screen, a fenced-in licensed area and a series of huts with food and drinks.

“It’s going to be a really rad place to watch the Games,” says Barb Besharat, part of the PrideHouseTO staff.

Not everyone supports watching the Olympics and many have called for a boycott, but Besharat argues that this event plays an important role within broader efforts. “For us, as a coalition of organizations trying to work within the system to make change, it’s not authentic for us to boycott,” she says. “We obviously know that a boycott or another kind of action ... is important and part of the bigger process for change. You need some of those people out on the streets for us to be able to effect some changes within the organization, and so we see them working in synchronicity.”

Besharat sees the lounge in particular as an opportunity to create an inclusive space for LGBT people to gather during the Olympics while highlighting the oppression and marginalization occurring in Russia and fundraising for the Russian LGBT Sports Federation’s Open Games,



The 519’s Matthew Cutler and Barb Besharat are part of the PrideHouseTO coalition. N MAXWELL LANDER

which are set to take place in Moscow between the Olympics and the Paralympics.

It’s also a chance to celebrate Russian culture. “A lot of the media which has come out casts all of Russia in a bit of a negative light,” Besharat says. “We’d really like to take this opportunity to celebrate LGBT communities in Russia, and the culture.”

On Feb 14, PrideHouseTO will engage with Russia even more directly with a “To Russia with Love” message-writing event. The Games lounge will be open daily from Feb 7 to Feb 23 at Gould and Victoria streets on the Ryerson University campus. The area will be wheelchair accessible, with accessible washrooms on-site or at a nearby café. X

Further details and updates will be posted on the [PrideHouseTO Facebook page](#) and on [Twitter: @pridehouseto](#).

ATHLETES GET MIXED MESSAGES ABOUT SPEAKING OUT AT SOCHI

Athletes headed to Sochi for the Winter Olympics may be a little confused about what they can say at the Games, where and to whom. Officials have made vague and conflicting statements about free speech on gay issues during the Games. Here’s a rundown:

Jan 13: In an interview with ESPN, the head of the United States Olympic Committee, Scott Blackmun, says that he hopes American athletes feel free to speak their minds before heading to the Sochi Games but that they will be at the Olympics to compete, not to be political.

Jan 17: Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a question-and-answer session, manages to be both soothing and threatening to gay visitors in the same breath. “One can feel calm and at ease,” he says. “Just leave kids alone, please.”

Jan 18: A Russian protester is detained after unfurling a rainbow flag during the Olympic torch relay in Voronezh.

Jan 27 (approximately): International Olympic Committee officials send a letter to Russian LGBT activists, reassuring them that free speech will be ensured at the Olympics:

Jan 27: IOC President Thomas Bach says in a press conference that athletes may not make political statements on the medal stand but are “absolutely free” to speak in press conferences.

Jan 29: Dmitry Chernyshenko, chair of the local Sochi Games organizing committee, contradicts Bach, saying that athletes may make statements only in a designated protest zone, 18 kilometres from the Olympic Village.

Jan 31: Australian Olympic Committee head John Coates says that athletes should not protest on the podium, but press conferences are okay. He threatens dissenting athletes with nonspecific punishment.

—Natalia Barsotti

SAME-SEX LEGAL ISSUES



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Shameless games

Could pornographic video games help prevent the spread of HIV?

TECH NEWS
ELAH FEDER

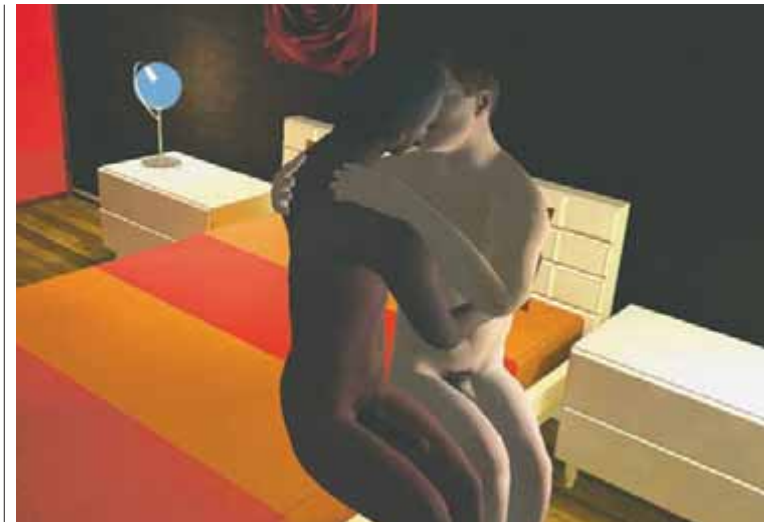
Everyone else has left the party and it's just you and Steve making out in his mood-lit bedroom. Up close, he looks a touch pixelated and zombie-eyed, but he's buff and into you, so you decide to have unprotected sex with him anyway. "Hold up. Anal sex without a condom?" asks a future version of you. He's been monitoring you all evening, interrupting at the most inopportune moments. "You know how dangerous that is. Whether you're a top or a bottom, protection keeps you safe from most STDs, including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. You don't want that worry."

You decide to ignore "future you." You two will have a chat about HIV later, but for now you spread your legs and let Steve fuck you bareback.

This is level one of *Socially Optimized Learning in Virtual Environments*, or *SOLVE-It*, a game designed by Lynn Miller of the University of Southern California and colleagues to promote safe sex. For what is essentially an interactive public service announcement, *SOLVE-It* is surprisingly hot and explicit, and according to John Christensen, a member of Miller's team and an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut, it is the cutting edge of HIV-prevention research.

Previous studies have shown that shame is associated with self-harming behaviour, so *SOLVE-It* was specifically designed to be gay-positive, sex-positive and generally ego-boosting.

It seems to work. In a study of 921 self-identified HIV-negative men aged 18 to 24, those who played the game reported on average reduced feelings of shame. As the researchers predicted, participants who exhibited reduced shame were less likely to report having unprotected anal sex in the three months following the game. Not all participants had the intended response — some even had increased shame after playing — but the results are promising enough to establish the potential of these kinds of interventions.



For an interactive public service announcement, *SOLVE-It* is surprisingly explicit.

In addition to targeting shame, the team designed *SOLVE-It* to turn players on — though, for the record, Christensen prefers to call it "sexually arousing" rather than "pornographic."

"There's this idea called 'state-dependent learning,'" Christensen explains. "If you are learning information in a certain context, it's actually easier to recall that information later down the road if you're in a similar context."

So if you learn how to navigate a sexually charged situation while aroused (as opposed to, say, while seated in your eighth-grade classroom), you might find it easier to recall that information the next time you're aroused.

At this point, *SOLVE-It* is a promising prototype, not a fully developed game. There are only a handful of storylines, and due to budget constraints, only three ethnicities are represented. In fact, all the characters have identical bodies and faces, differing only in their outfits and colouring. Given these limitations, it's not surprising the game hasn't worked for everyone. But *SOLVE-It's* creators plan to further develop the game, creating more options and integrating feedback from the community as they go. Christensen hopes to keep pace with the latest in gaming technology.

"I personally have an interest in highly immersive virtual reality," he says, noting that the cost of this technology is dropping sharply. "I would like to... move to three dimensions, where you can turn around in 360 degrees and actually walk ahead and bend over."

Indeed, if these games evolve to the point Christensen is imagining, we won't need safe-sex interventions at all. We'll just do it with Steve. X

NATIONAL NEWS

BC Law Society considers TWU application

The final decision on whether Trinity Western University (TWU) can operate a law school now rests with the society governing the province's legal profession, which began debate on the issue Jan 24.

To be admitted to TWU, students must sign a covenant agreeing to uphold Christian biblical teachings, including no premarital sex and no homosexuality. The issue boils down to balancing equality rights with freedom of religion, board member Sharon Matthews told the Law Society of BC meeting.

President Jan Lindsay says the debate could take several months. Gavin Hume, a past president of the society, told the board that TWU's application highlights several areas of concern, including teaching ethics and teaching public law. Hume says there is "tension" between the teaching of those subjects and the covenant that TWU insists its students sign. "There is no doubt that is the focus of the issue."

TWU's application to open a law school was approved in December by BC's Ministry of Advanced Education and by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, an umbrella group for territorial and provincial regulators of the legal profession. — *Jeremy Hainsworth*

Read the full story on dailyxtra.com.



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Murder in Manhattan

Wayne Lonergan married his sugar daddy's daughter, then bludgeoned her with a candelabra



HISTORY BOYS JEREMY WILLARD

I have something in common with murderer

Wayne Lonergan. In 1943 he perpetrated a crime so riveting that it pulled international attention away from the Second World War. Because the details of the case were like the tawdriest of fiction, people thought of it as entertainment, a welcome diversion from seemingly never-ending war. When life starts behaving like fiction, people treat it as fiction. There are chapters of my life that were like that; I've always felt like a bit of a fraud telling people things like "I left home when I was 16 and lived with a drug smuggler for two years." Those were hard years, but it's almost too movielike for most people to believe, or if they do believe it, it still doesn't seem real somehow. Similar to this is Lonergan's own tragic story — a cheesy, overblown murder mystery almost impossible to regard without amusement.

In the summer of 1939, the 21-year-old Lonergan, a Torontonian from a modest background, went down to New York City looking for adventure. He got a job as a "chair boy," pulling wealthy people around on rickshaws from exhibit to exhibit at the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows. That's how he met millionaire William Burton, whose family had gotten rich selling beer in the years between 1850 and the 1940s. Burton became Lonergan's sugar daddy.

Burton died a year later but not before introducing Lonergan to his daughter, Patricia. Perhaps at William's urging, Lonergan and Patricia married in Las Vegas in 1941. Their son was born about seven months later. The couple lived a wild life; she spent her nights with handsome men in New York nightclubs and he continued to spend time with wealthy male "patrons."

Two years into their marriage, Patricia decided to cut Lonergan out of her will and was probably filing for separation. In a huff, Lonergan tried to join the US army but was rejected on the grounds that he was a homosexual. He returned to Canada to try his luck with our military and became a Royal Canadian Air Force cadet in 1943.

On Oct 23, 1943, Lonergan flew back



While married, Wayne Lonergan and Patricia Burton lived a wild life; she spent her nights with handsome men in New York nightclubs, and he continued to spend time with wealthy male "patrons." ERIC WILLIAMS

to NYC to visit his son. At 8am the next day, he visited his wife at her posh Beekman Hill residence (incidentally, Beekman Hill previously had been the site of several other high-society murders). She had just returned home from a night out with one of her close male companions at the Stork Club. They started arguing, naked for some reason (they may have been fucking at first), then he killed her by choking her and clobbering her on the head with a silver candelabra. Though his motive for the murder is not totally clear, he later said she'd inflicted "great physical pain" on him. It's unclear what this meant, but it was rumoured she'd cut or bitten off some or all of his penis.

As the highly publicized trial began and the whole sordid tale came out, people started to blame the couple's behaviour on the decadence of their class. The *Journal-American* said that "possessed of too much money, jaded by normal activities, they turn to the unnatural for diversion." The same journal then published an article describing two types of homosexuals,

"moral lepers" and "sex inverts."

It's so much like fiction that it was part of the inspiration for Kenneth Fearing's 1946 novel *The Big Clock*, which was subsequently made into a film noir thriller of the same name starring Ray Milland and Charles Laughton.

Lonergan was convicted of second degree murder and served 22 years before being paroled and eventually sent back to Canada in the 1960s. He then started a relationship with Canadian actress Barbara Hamilton, whose roles included Eulalie Bugle on *Road to Avonlea* from 1992 to 1996. Possessed of a wacky sense of humour, her nickname for Lonergan was "Killer." So, if you encountered her at a party, she might ask, "Oh, have you met Killer?" Then she'd wave over a still-handsome, middle-aged man with "Killer, come meet these people!"

Lonergan died in Toronto of cancer in 1986. He was 67. X

History Boys appears in every issue of Xtra.

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You're HIV-negative.
You'd like to stay that way.
Is a daily dose of pre-exposure
prophylaxis the solution?

Take a

PILL

BY MARCUS MCCANN



It works like the birth control pill. It's a once-a-day tablet. It can have side effects, but for most, it's relatively safe. Like birth control, it works only if you actually take it every day. And it doesn't prevent sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia and gonorrhea.

The difference is this pill doesn't prevent pregnancy. It prevents HIV.

The drug is Truvada, which is a common first-line treatment for people who are HIV-positive. But doctors are beginning to prescribe it to people who are HIV-negative as a way of keeping them negative, part of a strategy called pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP for short.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, PrEP has sparked a protracted, public shouting match between its supporters and opponents, who ask whether PrEP is good — not just whether it works, but whether it is something scientists should be researching.

The debate about PrEP has not reached a fevered pitch in Canada, at least not yet.

However, the intensity of the international debate about PrEP has left its mark. Most of the Canadians I spoke to for this story — on and off the record, inside and outside the AIDS establishment — are to some degree hesitant.

In on-the-record interviews, a common rhythm developed. I would ask a question. The question would hang in the air for several seconds before I received a careful, measured sound bite.

The drug is not approved for use as PrEP in Canada, yet some doctors are prescribing it anyway, an arrangement that is unusual, although not illegal. Health officials in Quebec have even released guidance for doctors who are prescribing PrEP — even though it's not approved.

Stranger still, Gilead, the company that makes Truvada, has not even *applied* for approval in Canada. Has the controversy over PrEP made Gilead shy about seeking approval? Or is there another reason?

CANADIANS ARE ALREADY TAKING PREP

Marc-André LeBlanc began taking PrEP in 2013.

LeBlanc, who lives in Gatineau, Quebec, read about PrEP's deployment in the US. He found himself thinking a lot about US guidelines — guidance that recommends PrEP for people who are unable or unwilling to consistently use condoms and who are at high risk for HIV.

He'd noticed his own condom use slipping over the previous three years. Eventually, he concluded that PrEP was right for him. He gathered material, including pamphlets, scientific studies and the American guidelines. He took the information to his doctor.



It turned out that his doctor — a gay man with lots of HIV-positive patients — already knew about PrEP. They discussed LeBlanc's risk profile. His doctor ordered a full round of tests for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, as well as a test to determine kidney health. At a follow-up appointment, his doctor prescribed Truvada. LeBlanc returns for STI and kidney testing every three months. "I just take it with my vitamins, which I've been taking for years," he says. "It's already part of my routine, so that made it super easy to add Truvada. It's been seven months, and as far as I know, I haven't missed a pill."

LeBlanc's story highlights some of the hoops Canadians must jump through to access PrEP. First, you have to have a family doctor. And not any doctor will do: you have to feel comfortable talking to him or her about sex. And your doctor has to be knowledgeable (or at least prepared to learn) about HIV — and willing to prescribe a drug off-label.

But the bigger barrier may be price. It costs more than \$850 a month. LeBlanc, who is covered by Quebec's provincial prescription drug plan, pays just \$80 a month, with the rest of the tab picked up by the province. "Cost is a big [problem]. If I had to pay the almost \$900 a month, that was going to be a nonstarter. If I had to pay that out of pocket, I absolutely wouldn't be on PrEP," he says.

It's a different story in the rest of the country, which doesn't have a universal prescription drug coverage. For those with private drug plans, coverage will depend on how Truvada is listed in the plan. In any insurance scheme, a drug may be covered generally or it may be covered only for particular uses.

Without health coverage, PrEP can cost more than \$850 a month. Go to dailyxtra.com for a four-part video series on PrEP.



For Toronto's Len Tooley, who uses PrEP, the drug is covered by his employer's insurance plan. He agrees with LeBlanc that cost — along with access to a non-judgmental doctor — can be a major roadblock for those who might otherwise be interested in PrEP.

A third factor, Tooley says, is knowledge. Both LeBlanc and Tooley have worked in the AIDS movement; for them, reading the latest research on HIV is all part of a day's work. But for the rest of the country, awareness about PrEP remains low.

DOES PREP WORK?

The first study to conclude that PrEP reduces HIV risk was released three years ago. It immediately became controversial, and it's cited by both PrEP supporters and skeptics. To explain why requires a little background on the study itself.

Researchers tracked 2,499 gay men and trans women; half were given Truvada and half a placebo. Researchers asked them all to take the pill every day.

On first blush, the results were less than stellar. The study concluded that the Truvada group experienced a 44-percent reduction of their risk of HIV transmission. Such a reduction is large enough to show that the drug has an effect but perhaps not strong enough to recommend it as an effective prevention strategy.

But here is where things get complicated. In the study, blood testing revealed only about half of participants given Truvada were actually taking the pills. And, in particular, these tests revealed that every one of the men who tested positive for HIV in

that group either took the drug irregularly or not at all. The study concluded, tentatively, that Truvada is 92-percent effective, *if taken every day*. And a subsequent study using the same data and different modelling produced an even rosier number: if Truvada is taken seven days a week, it's 99-percent effective, researchers found.

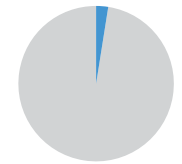
Now, these conclusions are less reliable, because the sample size is smaller — 34 newly HIV-positive people, compared to almost 2,500 in the larger study — and not protected by randomization. Therefore, other behavioural factors, such as condom use, could have influenced the results.

So why weren't participants taking the pill every day? Darrell Tan, a doctor and researcher at St Michael's Hospital in Toronto, says that people's attitudes during trials can distort research. "The motivations for taking a drug consistently in a clinical trial could be different than the motivations for taking it in real life," Tan says.

Tan is launching a new pilot study of PrEP in Toronto in the coming months. He'll be putting PrEP into the hands of participants outside the clinical trial setting. In other words, the people he will be studying know that they are taking Truvada, not a placebo, and they will be told that the drug has been shown to work.

"PrEP is not a purely biomedical thing. It's also a behavioural thing. Therefore, the only way to know for sure how effective PrEP will be in real life is to try it in real life."

Adherence has become one of the central questions of PrEP. Tan's study will come on the heels of other studies that have had less optimistic results. Researchers halted one study of women in Kenya, Tanzania and



0.8-3.2%

Risk of HIV infection from unprotected anal sex. As with most of this research, the precise number depends on which study you believe.

44-99%

The amount that PrEP reduces this risk, depending on whom you believe.



PrEP works best when you take it every day.

\$850+

The monthly cost of Truvada as PrEP, not counting doctors' visits or liver screenings. However, some private drug plans already cover Truvada.

South Africa early because it found no correlation between those given Truvada and those given a placebo. Again, poor adherence was blamed for the results.

There's a big difference between 44 percent and 99 percent, obviously. The most partisan players in the US will often use one or the other of these stats, usually without explaining the bigger picture.

James Wilton, coordinator of the biomedical science of HIV prevention project at CATIE, has been following PrEP. He's excited by what he's seen so far. The bottom line, he says, is that PrEP works — and it works better when taken consistently. He says there is some promising research showing that consistent use of PrEP may be more than 90-percent effective, but we don't know for sure because of the limitations of the studies. However — because of study limitations and difficulties in identifying study participants who are taking PrEP consistently — right now we can't be more precise than that.

Robert Grant, the lead researcher on the first major study, recently told *Xtra* that he believes PrEP is "more than 99-percent" effective. (Find that interview on dailyxtra.com.)

Wilton adds that most common side effects of PrEP are relatively minor, like nausea, and they tend to disappear after the first few weeks. In a small number of participants, Truvada has led to more serious side effects, including kidney damage and reduced bone mineral density. But even kidney risks have tended to return to normal once patients stop taking the drug.

"So far, the randomized clinical trials do show that Truvada is generally pretty safe for HIV-negative people to take," Wilton says. "But you have to understand, for HIV-positive people, treatment is taken for the rest of your life. Whereas PrEP is not necessarily an intervention that would be used for a long period of time. It may be months or a few years, but probably not your whole life, and therefore, the long-term impacts, the side effects, the toxicities may be smaller. But it is certainly something someone needs to consider before taking PrEP."

WILL CONDOMS BECOME ANTIQUES?

You must wear a condom every time you have sex, even if you're on PrEP. That is the message Tooley received when he was prescribed it by his doctor.

Tooley's doctor was following American guidelines, which is itself something of a paradox: they recommend PrEP for folks who are at high risk for HIV transmission and who are unable or unwilling to use condoms. But they also recommend using a condom every time you have sex, even after you start taking the pills.

Let's admit that it's difficult to talk about

the realities of condom use among gay men. We tend to think of ourselves as either condom users or barebackers. But the reality is that most gay men have had sex both with and without condoms at some point in their lives.

At the same time, safer-sex messaging for 30 years has had a singular message: use a condom every time you have sex.

"Wearing condoms became associated among gay men with being a good citizen," LeBlanc says. "So now that there are prevention options — plural — we've sort of painted ourselves into a corner."

If you're already barebacking, PrEP will reduce your risk. But if you start taking PrEP and drop condoms — well, no one is recommending that. Why?

For one thing, condom use is highly effective, at least in theory. In practice, it depends on proper usage, lube and the condom not breaking. It also depends on people actually using them, and we know that people tend to over-report condom adherence in research studies.

Given those variables, it's hard to say that condom use as it's actually practised is more effective than PrEP, or the other way around. But if PrEP can even roughly approximate the risk reduction of condom use, we have to admit that it will change the math on condoms for some gay men, especially those who find the downsides of condom use — reduced sensation, reduced pleasure or reduced intimacy — to be significant.

Both LeBlanc and Tooley say they used condoms before starting PrEP but not always. And now?

"I am curious to know how people would react differently depending on how I answered that question. PrEP or not, my behaviours have changed over time, my relationship status has changed over time, but I think that's not out of the ordinary," Tooley says.

LeBlanc, who has been keeping a journal of his sexual practices over the last several years, says that his trend away from condom use pre-dated PrEP.

"I've committed to looking at my risk behaviour over the last several months to see if it's changed my behaviour," LeBlanc says. "My gut instinct is that condom use has not increased. But it's that old question: is it cause or is it effect? The fact is, I introduced Truvada when I was already taking more risks."

But LeBlanc also points to a curious research finding. From the randomized control studies, people who have been on PrEP have reduced their risk behaviours, not increased them, he says.

"And you can understand that, because when you're on Truvada, you have to constantly report to your doctor, and that is an opportunity to stop and reflect on your sexual practices and risk behaviours and be more conscientious about what you do."

continued next page ▶

PrEP

▶ continued from previous page

ANOTHER WAY OF THINKING ABOUT RISK

Most studies are presented in the media in a way that makes them sound more dramatic than they are. Think of the risk of infection as a pie chart. If you reduce your risk by 90 percent, your remaining risk is a 10th of the pie. Easy.

Easy, that is, but wrong, according to Cindy Patton, a professor at Simon Fraser University. Without introducing PrEP, the risk isn't 100 percent. For unprotected anal sex with an HIV-positive partner, your average risk is actually pretty small, in the neighbourhood of 1.2 to 2 percent, although, again, it depends on which study you believe.

But all studies of per-act risk of transmission agree: most of the pie chart is already empty. That means that a 90-percent reduction would change the preexisting risk much less, probably reducing it by roughly one percentage point (for instance,

effects, and those were more pronounced in the pill's early days. As well, there are many ways to reduce the risk of pregnancy without taking a pill, in the same way there is with HIV transmission.

And so, before the pill could be adopted, large numbers of women needed to be convinced that transmission was otherwise impossible to control and very likely to occur, Patton points out.

If you take those lessons and apply them to PrEP, the warning is potentially very chilling. There's a danger that, in order to sell PrEP to a broad demographic, HIV-positive people will be painted as extremely infectious or reckless or even duplicitous. Or that condoms will be publicly slagged as inconvenient, imperfect and a buzz kill.

IS IT WORTH IT?

At heart, the two biggest and most controversial questions are bound up together: who should be taking PrEP and is it worth it? It's a point where Tan, who is doing research on PrEP, and Patton, one of its critics, may actually agree.

Consider this. In one scenario, we draw the boundary narrowly. Only the highest-

“WHEN YOU'RE ON TRUVADA, YOU HAVE TO CONSTANTLY REPORT TO YOUR DOCTOR, AND THAT IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO STOP AND REFLECT ON YOUR RISK BEHAVIOURS AND BE MORE CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT WHAT YOU DO.” MARC-ANDRÉ LEBLANC, PATIENT

from 1.2 percent to .12 percent). It's a lot more modest than what the headline-grabbing stats suggest.

“So, the touting of a ‘dramatic reduction’ for any individual is simply unknowable. One percent is very small,” writes Patton, who is on sabbatical and corresponded with *Xtra* by email. “Basically, you're a little un-careful, and very unlucky if you get infected with HIV. You are among a good minority if you have a side effect from Truvada.”

It's also worth remembering that risk fluctuates depending on what people are actually doing in bed.

“Getting infected on any given occasion depends on whether the other person has HIV, how infectious they are at that moment, and whether you ‘receive’ their semen anally, vaginally or orally. That is a lot of contingencies.”

And that gives rise to another, less flattering comparison between PrEP and the birth control pill. The risk of pregnancy, for most of a woman's ovulation cycle, is relatively low, in the same ballpark as HIV transmission during anal sex, Patton says. Like Truvada, the birth control pill has side

risk people should be on PrEP, folks who, for instance, never use condoms and have sex with multiple unknown partners a week. In that scenario, we don't have to write very many prescriptions to prevent a new HIV infection.

In another scenario, you draw the boundary more broadly. In this scenario, we include people who have sex less often and who usually wear condoms but sometimes slip up. This larger group's risk profile is already much lower, and so you'd have to put more people — 10 times more, say — on PrEP to prevent each new infection.

If you're weighing the costs of giving the drug to many people to prevent one new infection, then the costs are high. There's no doubt that PrEP as it's currently used is resource intensive: doctors' appointments every three months, lab tests and more than \$10,000 of pills per patient per year. And there are also the health costs, including nausea and other symptoms when a patient starts, the risk of serious kidney problems in the medium term, and longer-term effects that may not be totally clear yet.

In that sense, the first generation of

How common is inconsistent condom use?

Percentage of participants in a 2008 M-Track study who reported inconsistent condom use with casual partners during receptive anal sex in the six months prior to the study.

51%

Toronto

44%

Ottawa

57%

Victoria

(Vancouver data not available)



1 in 5

Men whose HIV transmission came from gay sex who don't know their HIV status (about 6,500 men).

SOURCE: DAVID MCLAY STUDY, XTRA INTERVIEWS, CATIE FACT SHEETS

PrEP makes sense only for people who are at high risk. But what behaviours, exactly, would put someone into that category? At this point, Tan admits, we just don't know where to draw the line.

WILL HIV-POSITIVE PEOPLE LOSE OUT?

Perhaps most troubling, there is a risk that if HIV-prevention becomes more PrEP focused, it will divert attention and resources from people who are living with HIV.

In a recent article in the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, Patton sharply criticizes the South African study of PrEP for women. It was halted because of poor adherence, meaning that the women in the study weren't taking the pills. One theory of their poor adherence was that, because there was a 50-percent chance that they were getting a sugar pill, there wasn't a sense of urgency about taking it.

The other theory is that, in areas where HIV medication isn't widely available, the women in the study were giving the pills to their HIV-positive loved ones, hoping it was the real deal. The study highlights an ethical dilemma about giving HIV-negative people pills that are urgently needed for people who are positive.

A milder form of this conundrum has been raised in Quebec. If there is a surge in prescriptions for Truvada used off-label as PrEP, health officials may be inclined to tighten the rules, for instance by requiring proof that you are HIV-positive before your drug plan will cover the costs. And that would be an extra barrier — essentially more paperwork, perhaps an extra doctor's visit — to HIV-positive people getting treatment.

Given that PrEP is resource intensive, we can't yet say for sure what the implications are for others who are HIV-positive and whose access to treatment is already precarious.

But Tooley says there's another way of looking at PrEP. It's not a zero-sum game, in which providing Truvada to an HIV-negative person takes the pill away from folks who are positive. “If there are more people who are impacted by access, including now some HIV-negative people, it has the potential to improve access for all.”

PrEP isn't a bogeyman that will keep pills from HIV-positive people. Instead of restricting access to PrEP, we need to double down on our commitments to eliminating barriers for positive people who need treatment, Tooley says. “Real factors affecting access to HIV meds bypoz people are things like lack of comprehensive drug coverage, institutional barriers to healthcare access, being homeless or street-involved and deemed unable to be treated, or being non-status and having difficulty accessing medical services — to name a few.”

WILL PREP EVER BE APPROVED IN CANADA?

PrEP is available in Canada, if you can find a doctor willing to prescribe it off-label. But PrEP hasn't been approved by Health Canada. In fact, Gilead, the maker of Truvada, hasn't even applied for approval. Why not?

Gilead won't say. In correspondence with *Xtra*, Cara Miller, one of its California media reps, would say only that, while they haven't applied, “discussions are ongoing with the Canadian regulatory agency.” What does that mean? It's hard to say. It could mean that Gilead wants special treatment for PrEP in the approval process (which it got in the US). Or it could mean an application by Gilead was submitted but deemed incomplete. Or it could be a simple blow-off to a journalist thousands of kilometres away from Gilead's headquarters.

Nonetheless, the fact that Gilead doesn't have an application in the hopper at Health Canada is significant. One possibility is that Gilead isn't strongly committed to using Truvada as PrEP.

In the high-stakes world of drug patents, the goal is to keep generic drug companies out of the market. One of the main ways to extend the life of a patent, and to therefore keep generics out, is to find what's called “a new indication” for the drug. By doing so, you make it harder for a generic drug company to enter the market.

Truvada's main use is as a first-line treatment for people who are HIV-positive. Doctors like to prescribe it because it's relatively safe, in terms of side effects, and because it's a simple once-a-day pill. Using Truvada as PrEP is a new indication, but it's essentially a side show for Gilead.

After PrEP was approved in the US in 2012, fewer than 1,300 prescriptions were filled for it in the whole country. Those numbers are expected to rise this year, but not by much. Predictions for 2013 peg PrEP scripts at around 2,000. And that's in the US, known for having some of the most inclusive formularies in the world. Insurance companies tend to cover a much broader range of drugs in the US.

It's entirely possible that Gilead has done the math, and given the dismal uptake in the US, decided it's not worth the cost of the application here in Canada.

Or, at least, not yet. It's possible that interest in PrEP among gay men or other higher-risk groups may climb gradually, as more and more people become aware of it as an option. And research on other drugs and other methods of delivery that could be used as PrEP — for instance as an injectible — are coming down the pipeline, which will likely create more buzz.

But in the meantime, don't expect a PrEP revolution anytime soon. ✕

Go to dailyxtra.com for a four-part video series on PrEP.

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BIG Locks

Big Locks is the name of David Hawe’s new series of photos, currently hung at Wayla Bar. The show consists of six gigantic head-and-shoulder shots of men in big, beautiful wigs (made by wig-master Mikah Styles). The photos don’t have the jazzy, bold colour play Hawe frequently uses in his professional work (*Now, Xtra, Fab*); this time he’s going all black and white on your ass... and it’s stunning.

“This is my first of many solo and group art exhibits I’ll be doing this year,” Hawe says. “I love wigs! My mother wore a wig every day of her life... so there were always lots around while I was growing up.”

The images evoke the old movie-star glamour

photos of George Hurrell or even those awesome 1960s yearbook photos of bouffant teen girls that have inspired so many queer artists, from John Waters to, well... Every. Drag. Queen. In. The. Universe.

“It doesn’t matter how butch a man tries to act; there’s something magical that happens once he gets a big ‘do’ put on his head... and the bigger the better,” Hawe says. “The eyes sparkle, a hip falls down... and his world gets sassy. These photos are just about that.” —*Sissydude*

Big Locks opens Thurs, Feb 6 and runs until Mon, March 3 at Wayla Bar, 996 Queen St E. davidhawe.com

BEYOND DRAG

Cult sensation Dina Martina is returning to Toronto with two evenings of unparalleled chatter and song, hideous costumes and incredible video.

Dina, whose work director John Waters has described as “[going] way beyond drag into some new kind of twisted art,” is bringing her latest show to The Flying Beaver Pubaret. Asked to describe this spectacle, which she spent last summer performing in Provincetown and New York City, she says, “I would have to get back to you on that one. It’s *different*.”

Dina’s humour is hard to describe. Her shows are a mixture of elements, from hilarious wordplay to what The Flying Beaver’s website describes as “unnecessary” dance. “They made me say [it was unnecessary],” Dina says. “I think it might be a little green-eyed monster, jealousy, on Maggie Cassella’s part, because I’m a classically trained gymnast and she’s not. I’m very lithe and refined, whereas Maggie is very brittle and rustic.”

Dina already has her outfits picked out for her upcoming shows. “I’ll be wearing my favourite

hook skirt/athletic-supporter combo in the first act and a frog suit and snorkel in the second act. White pumps throughout the entirety, because my mother always said to wear your black pumps during cold and flu season and white pumps during flea and tick season, and I’m kinda always itchy, so I feel like I’ve pretty much got a blank cheque for wearing white pumps whenever.”

Her show takes place during the Sochi Winter Games. “My boycotting of the Olympics is more unintentional, because I’m not actually going to be doing anything. It’ll be very subtle. The Russians won’t know what hit them when my boycott starts and neither will I,” she says.

She’s looking forward to once again performing at The Flying Beaver Pubaret, which she describes as a “very inviting, comfortable place,” in contrast to Maggie Cassella, she points out. —*Jeremy Willard*

Dina Martina performs Fri, Feb 14 and Sat, Feb 15 at The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. pubaret.com



Dina Martina
DAVID BELISLE

Filling the lesbian hole

Lezzies, rejoice! There’s a new Village hangout just for you.

Since the closure of Slack’s in the summer of 2013, there hasn’t been a drinking spot targeting women-loving women, even though a number of new monthly lesbian parties — Tramp, Bush Beat, Back to Church and Toastr — suggest there’s a demand for a regular venue. The Flying B aims to fill that void.

If the name sounds familiar, it’s no coincidence. “I’ve spent the last two and a half years trying to explain how the Flying Beaver is not a lesbian bar. Flying B will be one,” says Maggie Cassella, co-owner of The Flying Beaver Pubaret on Parliament Street. “We wanted people to know it was us [opening this new spot]... under Fly. We’re trying to tie it all together.”

The owners of Fly asked Heather Mackenzie, Cassella’s business partner and the owner of the original Slack Alice, if the pair was interested in taking over the lower lounge area once connected to the 8 Gloucester St nightclub. Within six weeks, dates were set. Mackenzie and Cassella are eager to get women into the cozy space just off Church Street.

“It’s a lesbian dance club open weekends and Sunday for tea-dances, which are very common in the United States, like in Province-



DJ Jacqie Jaguar

town, and also in Montreal,” Cassella says.

“We’re trying to bring a little P-town and Montreal to Toronto. The space reminds me of small lesbian bars in New York, too, that I love so much,” Mackenzie adds.

“I want to put the light back into the eyes of the people I disappointed when I told them The Flying Beaver Pubaret isn’t a lesbian bar,” Cassella says.

The Flying B opens Fri, Feb 7, 8pm, with DJ Jacqie Jaguar, followed by DJs Leticia Love, Sticky Cuts and Kish Delish on Saturday, and DJ Dallas spinning the Sunday tea-dance, 4–7pm.

Cultivating RHUBARB

After 35 years, the annual queer theatre festival is as hardy as ever — no thanks to the government

BY CHRIS DUPUIS



Suck it, Heritage Canada! Despite the still-unexplained loss of the federal agency's annual grant, Buddies' annual performance festival is back and bigger than ever. Though it took some creative accounting and difficult decisions, the team, helmed by festival director Laura Nanni, not only managed to keep the festival alive through its 35th year, but put together one of the most diverse programs ever.

"The funding cut didn't influence my approach to programming at all," Nanni says. "I'm still committed to making space for artists engaging in boundary-pushing work. Rhubarb provides a crucial testing ground for new ideas and experiments, and I was particularly interested in artists invested in process who consider the festival a laboratory, not only a platform to showcase new work."

Dance artist Gerard Reyes (formerly of Compagnie Marie Chouinard) brings his solo *The Principle of Pleasure* to the stage. Inspired by nights out with

his boyfriend dancing at Montreal's CitiBar (a dive-y joint catering to trans sex workers and the men who love them), the piece is a movement-based de/reconstruction of gender-norms.

"CitiBar is an odd place, which is what makes it so wonderful," Reyes says. "We like to get dressed up and hit the town as gender-fuck creatures, and it's a great place to go because no one there gives a fuck about who you are, what you look like or who you sleep with. I was dancing to Beyoncé in my dress and heels, shaved head and beard, admiring myself in the mirror while my friends were leaning against the bar watching me. When the song ended, they told me I'd just discovered my new piece."

Rhubarb mainstay Hope Thompson (who penned past festival standouts *She Walks the Line* and *Green*) is back with her trademark genre-queering exploits in *Trapped!*, a high-estrogen spin on film noir. Set in an imaginary 1950s, where gay marriage is the norm, the play tells the story of a bedridden heiress who overhears a murder plot in which she's the intended victim and must act to save her own life before it's too late.

"I wanted to look at that classic set-up

where one spouse plots to knock off the other for their money so that they can run off with a lover," Thompson says. "It's usually depicted as happening in a straight relationship. I wanted to create a story using this familiar plot but with scheming, murderous, sexy lesbians."

The festival will also see Light Fires' fabulous front-woman Regina the Gentlelady (aka Reg Vermue) in her first solo show. Vermue has dubbed his debut theatrical offering — a mashup of poetry, standup, improv and music, with plenty of banter with the audience and high kicks — *Do I Have To Do Everything My Fucking Self?*

"As an independent artist, that's truly how I feel half the time," Vermue says. "If I stop for a week, everything stops. There's no machine, no managers or agents. I get gig offers, but generally if I'm not turning the wheels, they're not turning. It's amazing since the announcement of the show how many people have said to me, 'That's exactly how I feel!' The title obviously strikes a chord."

In addition to achieving official music-industry veteran status (he's been at it since 1996), Vermue's had his share

“The funding cut didn't influence my approach to programming... I'm still committed to making space for artists engaging in boundary-pushing work.”

LAURA NANNI, RHUBARB FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

of acting gigs, including turns in John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* and Maggie MacDonald's *The Rat King*. Branching out to create his own work for the stage seemed the logical next step.

"It's long overdue," Vermue says. "The music industry is extremely demanding and challenging and is often virtually impossible to make a living from. I've been releasing albums and touring the world for over a decade, and this past year I'd never felt more unstable in my life. I was living off grants and part-time jobs while pretending I had a music career, when in fact what I really had was perseverance. Part of creating Regina and Light Fires was a way to try and get out of this. Like, if I can't make a living as one person, maybe if I'm two people I can pull it off!"

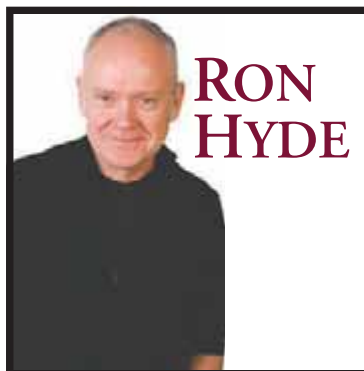
Rhubarb is unquestionably one of the country's most important development platforms for new performance pieces. Its alumnae list reads like a who's who of Canadian theatre: Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel MacIvor, Brad Fraser, Hannah Moscovitch and countless others have taken part. But whether or not the Harper government wants to support it, the team at Buddies is committed to keeping it part of our national theatrical landscape.

"Having to scale back our programming was particularly unfortunate, given we received a record number of submissions this year," Nanni says. "But thanks to the hard work and resourcefulness of our team, I'm proud to say this year's Rhubarb promises to be as loud and epic as ever." X

Kat Letwin and Carolyn Taylor in *Trapped!*
DAVID HAWE



Regina the Gentlelady in *Do I Have To Do Everything My Fucking Self?*
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
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Coming of age

The new Hidden Cameras album is the band's darkest yet, so why is Joel Gibb still laughing?

MUSIC
JOHNNIE WALKER

F-minor: 18th-century German poet Christian Schubart claimed it was the musical key of “deep depression, funeral lament, groans of misery and longing for the grave.” It’s also the key of half the songs on *Age*, the seventh studio album from gay indie pop outfit The Hidden Cameras. It’s not necessarily the most obvious choice for a band that cut its teeth in the aughts with joyous major-key anthems like “Ban Marriage” and the watersports ode “Golden Streams.” So why the turn for the melancholy?

“It’s technically not melancholy,” Cameras mastermind Joel Gibb quickly corrects. “It’s more depressing than melancholy. That’s what I’ve heard F-minor is all about, and maybe that’s why I was drawn to it. I’ve heard it’s considered the most dreadful and depressing key of all.”

And would that make *Age* the most dreadful and depressing Hidden Cameras album of all? “Oh yeah,” Gibb says, laughing archly. “Of course. It’s kind of centred around that idea.”

Could the darker, more mature sound of the new record be the meaning behind its title? Has the group finally “come of age?” According to Gibb, the album’s name has more to do with how long he’s been working on it. “The first recording session that went for this record was in 2002,” he explains. “It’s a very slow birth. And that’s why it’s called *Age* — ‘cause it took an age to make.” Since the band was formed in 2001, that means The Hidden Cameras have been recording songs for *Age* for almost their entire existence. “We’ve been keeping them in the vault,” Gibb says, “saving them up.”

All of which would seem to raise the question: how did he know when it was done? “I have no idea,” he admits. “There’s another song that I’m working on that I thought would be on the record, because it’s only eight songs — but it still is the perfect time of 35 minutes, which I think is the best time for any album to be.”

Rather appropriately, the first single for *Age* is also that first track Gibb recorded way back in 2002: “Gay Goth Scene.” Fans who’ve heard the song for years at live shows will surely be pleased to finally have a studio record-



Hidden Cameras main man Joel Gibb first recorded songs for *Age* in 2002.
MAX LANDER

ing, complete with otherworldly wailing from guest vocalist Mary Margaret O’Hara and a moody music video directed by Kai Stänicke. While the video tells a tragic gay-bullying narrative, the song comes from a different place. “For me, this song is about forbidden love and it’s about being a teenager,” Gibb says. “It’s about some gay goth teens and a possible scene... but there wasn’t a bullying aspect to it, necessarily. But I really stood behind [Kai’s] vision, and I thought he did a really good job. He added another dimension.”

If it took an age to record the album, does that mean we’re in a different age now than the one we were in when The Hidden Cameras first came on the scene? It certainly feels like a different Toronto than the one Gibb and his Arts & Crafts label-mates Broken Social Scene, Metric, Stars, Feist, et al helped put on the indie-rock map in the early 2000s. Maybe F-minor is the perfect key for an age in which we’ve packed

up our pre-Rob Ford optimism and officially retired “Torontopia” from our vocabulary.

“I think we’re going into a dark age with this decade, actually,” says Gibb, who now divides his time between Toronto and Berlin. “I feel like society moves forward, then it goes backward... I mean, the economy just tanked and I don’t think people even talk about that anymore. And the Cold War is being fought over The Gay Issue, which is pretty crazy.”

But it isn’t all doom and gloom for Gibb. Anyone who knows what a jubilant occasion a Hidden Cameras concert can be — complete with balaclava-clad go-go dancers — will be pleased to know the band hasn’t forgotten how to have fun. “We played a show last Friday and it felt like the first show ever,” Gibb says. “We had a crazy kind of childish giddiness about the show, and it was with this quite melancholy record. And I kind of like that the record can do that live.” X

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WHAT'S ON

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ART

Push and Pull Opening Reception

Georgina Jackson curates a series of new works by Bridget Moser, Michael Vickers and Nikki Woolsey. The exhibit features anything from performance art to sculpture. Fri, Feb 7, 7–10pm. Mercer Union, 1286 Bloor St W. Free. mercerunion.org

On Dreams and The Green Cat

An exhibit of new art work focusing on André Ethier's depictions of "unlikely narratives in various stages of unfolding" and Ron Giii's images of couples. Runs until Sat, Feb 15, various times. Paul Petro Contemporary Art, 980 Queen St W. Free. paulpetro.com

COMEDY & CABARET

Heartbreakers: A Fundraiser for Singing Out

Toronto's queer community chorus sings to raise funds for their participation in the Unison Festival. Sat, Feb 8, 7–9pm. The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. \$15 advance, \$20 door. pubaret.com

Singular Sensation: A Musical-Theatre Open Mic

Jennifer Walls invites amateur crooners to perform their favourite songs accompanied by a live band. Every Monday, 9:30pm–12:30am. Statlers, 487 Church St. No cover. statlers.ca

Gay Trivia

Drag divas Gina Hamilton and Bunni Lapin host a night of outrageous trivia and fabulous prizes. Every Tuesday, 9pm. O'Grady's, 518 Church St. Free. ogradyschurch.ca

Hypnotixx: A Slightly Naughty Comedy Hypnosis Show

Brandon the Hypnotist takes audience volunteers on a risqué and slightly rude jaunt into the subconscious. Wed, Feb 19, 7pm. The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. \$10 advance, \$15 door. pubaret.com

Chris Tsujiuchi: Back in the Saddle

The cabaret marvel returns to the Pubaret with special guests Scott Christian, Matt Marcoccia, Robin Claxton and Sophie Dushko. Sun, Feb 23, 8pm. The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. \$10 advance, \$15 door. pubaret.com

HEALTH & ISSUES

The 519 Legal Clinic

A free, accessible service for low-income people. Volunteer lawyers provide legal advice, referrals and help with forms and letters. The confidential and private visits are first-come, first-served. Bring any necessary documents. Every Thursday; registration 6–6:30pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free. the519.org

FTM Support Group

Trans men share their experiences in a supportive environment.

Takes place the first and third Friday of every month. For more information, contact ftmtoronto@yahoo.ca. Fri, Feb 7, and Fri, Feb 21, 7:30pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free. the519.org

SOY Monday Night Drop-In

Queer youth ages 14 to 29 gather to watch movies, participate in art projects and special workshops, and seek the support of Supporting Our Youth's community mentors. For more info, contact jcaffery@sherbourne.on.ca. Every Monday, 5:30–8pm. Sherbourne Health Centre, 2nd floor, 333 Sherbourne St. Free. soytoronto.org



*Becoming
an Image
at Rhubarb
— Buddies,
Wed, Feb 12*
HEATHER CASSILS
& ROBIN BLACK

Positive Routes to Recovery

A peer-led support group for gay men working through substance abuse issues. Takes place the first and third Tuesday of each month. Tues, Feb 18, 6–8pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free. pr2r.org

LGBT Peer Support Drop-In Group

Queer people with mood disorders drop in for support and discussion. If the building door is locked, press the button under the intercom near the wheelchair entrance. Wed, Feb 19, 7–9pm. Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, 36 Eglinton Ave W, Ste 602. Free. mooddisorders.ca

Bisexual Men of Toronto

A peer-support and discussion group focused on community and solidarity. Tues, Feb 25, 8–9:30pm. Sherbourne Health Centre, Rm 1077, 333 Sherbourne St. Free. torontobinet.org

LEISURE & PLEASURE

Out and Out Club New Members' Night

The queer social club introduces prospective members to its broad range of activities. Sessions are held the third Tuesday of each month. Tues, Feb 18, 7–8pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free. outandout.ca

Sapphic Aquatica

Women and trans people enjoy a sauna, outdoor heated pool, plush playrooms and ice-breaker games. Takes place the last Sunday of every month. Sun, Feb 23, 8pm–2am. Oasis Aqualounge, 231 Mutual St. \$20. oasisaqualounge.com

THEATRE

Once on This Island

Acting Up Stage Company and Obsidian Theatre Company join forces in a new production of the story of forbidden love in the French Antilles. Runs until Sun, Feb 9, various showtimes. Daniels Spectrum, Ada Slaight Hall, 585 Dundas St E. \$24.75–106.44. actingupstage.com

VIVIDLY VALENTINE'S

Love=Family

The Queer Parenting Program and the Ten Oaks Project host a celebration of love at their annual combined Valentine's and Family Day event for queer families. Sat, Feb 8, 10:30am–1:30pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free. the519.org

TOG Board Games Night: Card Games and Valentine's Stuff

Love-sick nerds gather for Valentine's Day-related activities, the new card games Boss Monster and Coup, as well as Settlers of Catan, 7 Wonders and more. Sat, Feb 8, 7pm. Glad Day Bookshop, 598 Yonge St. \$6. torontogamers.ca

Queer Slowdance: Be My Valentine

Booty-shakers make dance dates with one another, while designated dancers coax out

the wallflowers. For more info, contact inconsolablecat@hotmail.com. Sat, Feb 8, 9:30pm–3am. Dovercourt House, 805 Dovercourt Rd. \$10 includes dance-card booklet.

Be Mein Valentine

The burlesque troupes Skin Tight Outta Sight and Boylesque TO present two nights of Weimar Berlin-themed Valentine's naughtiness. Thurs, Feb 13, 8pm and Fri, Feb 14, 9pm. The Gladstone Hotel, 1214 Queen St W. \$25–40. gladstonehotel.com

The Scandelles Valentine's Spectacular

The Scandelles burlesque troupe returns to Lee's Palace for Valentine's Day, with performances by Sasha Van Bon Bon, Kitty Neptune, Miss Fluffy Soufflé, Fay Slift and more. Fri, Feb 14, 9pm–2am. Lee's Palace, 529 Bloor St W. \$18. leespalace.com

Idiot's Delight

A host of eccentric and international figures — arms dealers, showgirls, revolutionaries and lovers — spend a weekend in the Italian Alps while the dark clouds of war roll in. Runs until Sat, March 1, various showtimes. Young Centre for the Performing Arts, 50 Tank House Lane, Distillery District. Cost varies. soulpepper.ca

Untitled Feminist Show

Young Jean Lee's Theatre Company presents a play almost entirely without words and entirely without clothing. Without gender signifiers, its six performers "define themselves for themselves" in a "celebration of possibility." Runs Wed, Feb 12–Sat, Feb 15, various showtimes. \$39. harbourfrontcentre.com

The 35th Rhubarb Festival

For two weeks Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and the surrounding area become a hotbed of artistic experimentation, featuring new works

in performance art, dance, music and more. Runs Wed, Feb 12–Sun, Feb 23, various showtimes. Buddies in Bad Times, 12 Alexander St. PWYC–\$20. buddiesinbadtimes.com

Shrew

Bianca cannot marry until her older sister Kate does. Unfortunately, in this unique take on Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, Kate is the wildest, loudest, maddest shrew in the Klondike. Runs Sat, Feb 15–Sun, March 2, various showtimes. The Storefront Theatre, 955 Bloor St W. PWYC–\$19.99. redonettheatre.com

Komunka

While the Olympics are going on in Sochi, six tenants in a communal apartment in Moscow try to answer two questions that have plagued Russia for centuries. This is a workshop performance of a play created by Yury Ruzhyev and directed by Sky Gilbert. Sun, Feb 23, 2–8pm. Glad Day Bookshop, 598 Yonge St. TBA. gladdaybookshop.com



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CLUB SCENE

Thurs, Feb 6

Heidy P DJs Heidy P and Chanteclair take over TO for one night only. The Montreal DJs spin house, Italo disco, funk and other tunes to make you want to call in sick on Friday. 10pm. Henhouse, 1532 Dundas St W. No cover. henhousetoronto.com

Fri, Feb 7

Butch Femme Salon Does the Red Carpet TO's best performers showcase the queer theatre and film scene, with DJ Nix spinning the after-show party. Femmes in gowns and butches in suits, paparazzi, and screaming fans get the red-carpet treatment. Cover goes to performers, DJs and production costs. 8pm. Buddies, 12 Alexander St. \$10 or PWYC. buddiesinbadtimes.com

Were-House DJs Jeff Kirkwood and Aeryn Pfaff spin high-energy house; hosted by Charles Pavia. 10pm. Church, 504 Church St. \$5. facebook.com/churchonchurch

Big Primpin': Snowbort Winter Edition DJs CBB, Kevin Ritchie and Nino Brown spin hip hop for homos while grainin' on that wood. 10pm. Wrongbar, 1279 Queen St W. \$5. wrongbar.com

Fly Pop DJ Sumaton spins top 40 and dance faves. 10pm. Fly, 8 Gloucester St. No cover before midnight, \$4 after. flynightclub.com

Sat, Feb 8

Snatch DJ Sticky Cuts spins for the return of the raunchy party; just as you remember it but in a slick new location. Hosted by Girl Play. 8pm. Flying B, 8 Gloucester St. \$5.

Rangeela DJ Deep spins Bollywood, bhangra, house and slow jams for the queer South Asian event. 10pm. Club120, 120 Church St. \$10 before midnight, \$15 after. club120.ca

Business Woman's Special: Olympic Realness Edition DJs Sammy and Nino Brown on decks, with performance by Barbie Jo

Bontemps and guest. 10pm–2:30am. Round Venue, 152A Augusta Ave. \$6. roundvenue.com

Trade DJs Scooter McCreight and CBB spin for the dirty-boys party. Hosted by Deviant Otter. 10pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. \$5. blackeagletoronto.com

Debauchery DJs Jamal and Hey!DW spin house, top 40 and electro; hosted by Miss Raquel. 10pm. WAYLA, 996 Queen St W. \$5. waylabar.com

Bush Beat DJ Shoegayz and Pony spin for the ladies meeting ladies. 10pm. Henhouse, 1532 Dundas St W. No cover. henhousetoronto.com

Bad Tuck: Holympics Igby Lizzard turns one at Toronto's premier filth extravaganza; hosted by Judy Virago. DJs Boy Pussy and Aeryn



Sodom — Club120, Sat, Feb 15

Pfaff. Late-night shows. 10:30pm. The Beaver, 1192 Queen St W. \$7, no cover in Olympian drag. beavertoronto.ca

Sun, Feb 9

Sweet 16 Debutante Ball The Friends for Life Bike Rally's coming-out party celebrates 16 years. Hosted by Proud FM's Mike Chalut, with DJ Sumaton on decks. Prizes for best debutante outfit. 6–10pm. The Gladstone, 1214 Queen St W. PWYC. bikerally.org

Mon, Feb 10

Singular Sensation: A Musical Theatre Open Mic Amateur crooners perform their favourite show tunes with a live band every Monday night. Hosted by Jennifer Walls. 10pm–1am. Statlers, 487 Church St. No cover.

Tues, Feb 11

Industry Night DJ Quinces spins top 40, hip hop, reggae, Latin pop, house, moombahton and more. 10pm. Crews & Tangos, 508 Church St. No cover. crewsandtangos.com

Wed, Feb 12

Club120 Wednesday Open-mic for comedians, magicians, illusionists and burlesque performers. Hosted by Sasha Van Bon Bon and Rob Testa and featuring performances by Mandy Goodhandy, Dawn Whitwell, Andy Fruman, Steven Pryce and Amish Patel. Open-mic performers must show up before 8:45pm. 8pm. Club120, 120 Church St. \$8, \$5 guest list (toddclinck@gmail.com). club120.ca

Meet Your Match Ryan Russell hosts Woody's annual Valentine's post-office game. 8pm. Woody's, 467 Church St. No cover. woodystoronto.com

Thurs, Feb 13

Dinner and Drag Donnarama performs with a special guest while diners stuff themselves. 7–10pm. O'Grady's, 518 Church St. No cover. ogradyschurch.ca

Ladyplus Party DJ Todd Klinck is on decks for the meet-and-socialize event for T-girls, their friends, allies and admirers. Spontaneous T-girl go-go shows and private VIP dances throughout the night. 8pm. Club120,



Bush Beat — Henhouse, Sat, Feb 8

120 Church St. \$5 before 11pm, \$10 after. club120.ca

Fri, Feb 14

Two of Hearts DJ Michael Venus spins '80s and '90s electro and alternative for the Valentine's celebration of love, lust and broken hearts. 8pm–2am. The Yukon Bar, 1592 Queen St W. No cover.

Be Mein Valentine Skin Tight Outta Sight and Boylesque TO onstage in the Weimar-era Berlin tradition, with hosts Mark Brown, Balonia Wry and Ginger Darling; musical guests Big Rude Jake and Laura Desiree; performer Dolly Berlin; and DJ Sigourney Beaver. 9pm. The Gladstone, 1214 Queen St W. \$25–40. gladstonehotel.com

Kittens & Cougars DJ Quinces spins top 40, hip hop, R&B, reggae and house to launch a new event for ladies and trans women. 10pm–2:30am. Erotico, 463 Church St, 2nd floor. \$5.

Toronto Bound Weekend The Toronto Puppy Contest and 2014 Kickoff Party; meet the contestants and judges. Bootblacking services available. Open to everyone. 10pm. The Black Eagle, 457 Church St. No cover. torontoleatherpride.ca

Cub Camp DJs Scooter McCreight and CBB spin for the long-johns-wearing furry men. 10pm. The Beaver, 1192 Queen St W. \$7. beavertoronto.ca

Her: The Metrop-Her-lis Edition DJs Kris Steeves, FormbyBrassBand and OMGBlog.com spin future house and big-city disco all night; hosted by Cassandra Moore. 10:30pm. La Perla, 783 Queen St W. \$5. herherher.com

The Big Thaw Judy Virago hosts the Rhubarb Festival Valentine's Day party for all the lovers — and those looking for one. DJs Phil V and Regina the Gentlelady spin; late-night shows with Igby Lizzard and Scarlett Bobo. 10:30pm. Buddies, 12 Alexander St. \$5; no cover with Rhubarb ticket stub. buddiesinbadtimes.com

Sat, Feb 15

Toronto Bound Weekend: Main Event Toronto Puppy Contest, for the title of Toronto Puppy 2014, and HOTF Community Awards presentation, with hosts Bob Watkin and Sarah Pie. 4–8pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. \$15 door; included in the TB 2014 VIP weekend pass, \$30–45. torontoleatherpride.ca

Cherry Bomb DJs Cozmic Cat, Denise Benson and special guest Fawn BC are on decks for the inclusive event for queer women and friends. 9pm–3am. Andy Poolhall, 489 College St. No cover before 10pm, \$7 after. andypoolhall.com

NBL Fetish Night: 24th Anniversary Party DJs Matt C and Dwayne Minard spin, with live performances and a full dungeon. Strict fetish dress code enforced; acceptable attire includes leather, rubber, PVC, fetish sex wear, drag, lingerie, uniforms, athletic wear and gothic. Part of the Toronto Bound 2014 weekend. 10pm. The Phoenix, 410 Sherbourne St. \$20 advance, \$30 door. northbound.com

Jockstrap DJ Jeremy Khamkeo is on decks for the monthly Men's Jockstrap party; hosted by Chris Munro and Dale C. 10pm. Marquis of Granby, 418 Church St. \$10. facebook.com/jockparty

Sodom's Vampire Love Ball V: True Blood Edition DJ Sumaton spins for the fangers, fairies, furballs and *True Blood* fans. Performances by Sapphire Titha Reign, Allysin Chaynes, dance sensation Sebbler "Bash" Hirtenstein and more. Werewolf dungeon hosted by Polo Izquierdo. 10pm. Club120, 120 Church St. \$10, \$5 students. sodom.ca

Skinhole DJs Sis and Bro are on decks for the high-energy queer dance party. 10pm. Henhouse, 1532 Dundas St W. No cover. henhousetoronto.com

Fit DJs Kris Steeves and Phil V celebrate the arrival of Madonna's Hard Candy gym in Toronto with Hard Candy swag giveaways, go-go boys and a Strength in Heels performance by the gym's own instructors! 10:30pm. The Beaver, 1192 Queen St W. \$5. beavertoronto.com

Sun, Feb 16

The Toronto Puppy Victory Party and T-Dance Toronto Bound Weekend ends with a sit-back-relax-and-enjoy-a-good-cigar. Part of the TB 2014 Weekend. Open to everyone. 4–8pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. No cover. blackeagletoronto.com

Twisted: Rubber Up Men's play party in the bathhouse. Hosted by Andy Coatham, MIR 17/MRT 2014, and Farrell Collier, MLT 2014. 8pm. Steamworks, 540 Church St, 2nd floor. Regular rates. steamworksonline.com

BlackKnight Toronto The leather and rubber ball that's taken Montreal by storm comes to Toronto. DJ Jack Chang spins; pornstars Dirk and Jesse Jackman host. Strict mandatory dress code in effect: leather, rubber, jockstrap, wrestling singlets. No exceptions, no perfume, no attitude. 10pm. The Courthouse, 57 Adelaide St E. \$30 door. blackknight.eventbrite.ca

Submit your event listing to listings@dailyxtra.com. Deadline for the Feb 20 issue is Tues, Feb 11.



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DEEP DISH

ROLYN CHAMBERS

Come Up to My Room

THURS, JAN 23 @ THE GLADSTONE HOTEL

Right now we're walking around inside someone. With our shoes on. Chatting, we finger stomach matter before daringly sticking our heads through the ass. Toronto's Gladstone Hotel has swung its doors wide open, showing everyone inside the hot and sweaty opening-night party for the 11th Annual Come Up to My Room. The exhibit is filled with curious voyeurs (including photographer **Patrick Lighthouse** and TV's **Tommy Smythe**) eager to burst their artistic mental loads. Artist **Shannon Scanlan's** bright, colourful, interactive installation, *Gut Feelings*, is one of the more popular rooms. Basically, we're all inside her. At the same time. I think I may have heard of porn like this. But it didn't involve hipsters downing Moosehead beer and art-nouveau twinks sipping mixed drinks. Dominating the main space is *Hanging Matters* — created by **Jordan Evans, Ryla Jakelski** and **Evan Jerry** with **Lois Weinthal** — an inverted terrain of paper pyramids covering the hallway and ceiling that, when a hanging string is pulled, empties its load of condoms and other goodies onto the giggling crowd below. In a far corner sits *Fall of the Walled Garden*, a cool, silent, icy-blue-and-white meditation space that has been taken over by teen collective The Torontonians and Mammalian Diving Reflex. "The others are playing a game of tag outside in their underwear," one member of the collective informs me before we chat in greater length about the used tissue and Lubriderm lotion positioned politely on the night stand. Come up to room? Boom.

1▶ Patrick, Tommy & pals 2▶ Rob, David & Derrick 3▶ Brandon, Patrick, Andrew & Pedro 4▶ Carlos & Luke

Fly's 15th Anniversary

SAT, JAN 25 @ FLY NIGHTCLUB

Right now we're on our knees getting a better angle of the pretty packages of two go-go guys in the dressing room. Two perfect presents sure to be unwrapped later. Toronto's Fly Nightclub has swung its doors wide open, shoving everyone inside for a sweaty 15th-anniversary party filled with gorgeous groups of guys eager to satisfy their physical needs. At a decade and a half, Fly has outlasted many. It's a milestone. To all those who have been here since the beginning, I salute you. To those who are just discovering this emporium of euphoria for the first time, I welcome you. To **Shawn, Gilles, Gairy, Daniel, Rommel, Sonja, Wade** and all, I blow out the candles on the birthday cake I've baked for you in my mind (it's chocolate). As DJ **Tom Stephan** takes us on a musical journey spanning all 15 years, pumped up go-go guys **Trent** and **Dila** exit the dressing room and mount the speakers to entertain us in Pump underwear. They provide excellent eye-candy for the packed house, but for a 15th-anniversary bash I was expecting much more on the décor front. Like eye-opening, jaw-dropping, huge, bam, in-my-face sploogy goodness. All I got was limp-dicked cut-out numbers hung on the banisters with a few measly mirror balls for distraction. Visual Viagra is indeed needed. But rising Canadian pop star **Kapri**, who performs later, fills my ears with goodness, and I quickly forget my unfulfilled eyes. Fly? I'll always stand by.

5▶ Han, Simon & Jaz 6▶ Kav 7▶ Tyley, Daniel, Alex & Jamie 8▶ Trent & Dila 9▶ Party boys 10▶ JayJay, Zac, JR & Victor 11▶ Jay, Phillip & Jano 12▶ Cody, Pierson & Jacky



Deep Dish appears in every other issue of Xtra. For this week's Xposed column, by Anna Pournikova, visit dailyxtra.com.

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Reinventing Curaçao

The Dutch island finds new life as one of the Caribbean's most gay-friendly vacation spots

DANNY GLENWRIGHT

Emlyn Peters leans against the nondescript tree and raises a hand to protect his eyes from the prodigious sunshine elbowing its way through the branches. He points upward at a human figure carved into the variegated trunk. The tree's splotchy olive-coloured bark resembles an army-issue camouflage pattern, but the relief-like carving inside is a smooth mahogany.

Curaçao artist Mac Alberto has whittled several of these human-like forms into a row of *wayaka* trees outside the historic Fort Amsterdam in downtown Willemstad, the capital of this tiny Caribbean island. Peters, a local history buff, says Curaçaoans compare the *wayaka* to a snake because it constantly sheds its bark "so it can stay young forever." The indigenous tree, also known as *lignum vitae* — Latin for "tree of life" — is in a perpetual cycle of renewal.

It is not unlike Curaçao, which, despite a dark history as one of the largest slave depots in the Caribbean, has managed to continuously reinvent itself while also respecting and preserving its past.

Curaçao today is proudly Dutch (it is one of four countries that make up the Kingdom of the Netherlands). This is evident in its well-preserved colonial-style Dutch architecture that combines a modernist European aesthetic with a distinct Caribbean colour scheme. While the entire historic Willemstad city centre is a UNESCO World Heritage site, its oldest and most famous architectural strip is a saltwater-taffy-coloured row of buildings along Handelskade Street, in the Punda neighbourhood.

Most locals will tell you that Curaçao has maintained its Dutch architectural heritage better than its Leeward Antilles sister islands, Aruba and Bonaire. But it's been at a cost. Unlike in Holland, Caribbean construction

materials are basic, mostly plaster made from coral stones and sand. It means the government pays thousands of dollars each year to preserve its historic buildings, plastering and painting over what Peters calls "wall disease" — when salt creeps into the walls, peeling off layers of paint and eating into the loose coral stone. "It's the greatest challenge for the last 20 years; the government is spending a lot of money renovating buildings," he says, noting that Curaçao's well-preserved architectural landmarks, including its *landhuizen*, former plantation houses dotted around the island, remain a major tourist draw.

That's another quality Peters says Curaçao has inherited from the Dutch: a progressive and adaptable government that, in stark contrast to many others in the Caribbean — not to mention other parts of the world — recognizes what needs to be done to keep this speck of coral solvent. The island is home to just 150,000 people, and it imports more than 90 percent of its food. The island also has few natural resources, yet it's managed to maintain one of the highest standards of living in the Caribbean. This is mostly due to its knack for reinvention. Over a few hundred years, Curaçao's economic engine has successively been powered by a variety of commercial activity, beginning with salt mining and slavery and later shifting to shipping, trading, tourism and oil (which continues to represent the lion's share of the island's exports, thanks to an ugly refinery built in 1920). Most recently, the Curaçao Tourist Board, with full support from the government, is attempting to reinvent the island as the Caribbean's most gay-friendly destination.



"Dutch people have always been known for their controversial progressive mentality," Peters says, noting that this is one reason Curaçaoans are proud of their connection to Holland. To prove his point, he's led me through Willemstad's narrow laneways to another Curaçao anomaly: the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue. The bright-yellow synagogue's congregation can be traced to 1651, when 12 Sephardic Jewish families migrated to Curaçao from Amsterdam, where they had fled following religious persecution in Spain and Portugal. The current building dates back to 1730, and its temple is the oldest in continuous use in the Americas. About 350 Jewish families still live on the island. In the daytime, the synagogue's azure-stained

windows cast a blue light on the rows of pews carved from *wayaka* wood. The tree of life is resistant to termites and doesn't burn easily, another reason it's wood is so cherished here.

Curaçao's Jewish Cultural Historical Museum has a Torah scroll dating back to 1320 and a 200-year-old silver tray that is still used for the smashing of the wine glass at weddings. The museum is also home to a copy of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* that has been translated into Papiamentu, the island's local Creole language that includes a mixture of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English and French, with some African and Arawak Indian influences.

The people of Curaçao embrace this distinct historical potpourri today, but



Floris Suite Hotel is Curaçao's first adult-only gay hotel. FLORIS SUITE HOTEL



much of it was suppressed for decades, according to Dinah Veeris, a woman known as the island's plant lady. Veeris has spent years consulting with local spiritual healers in an effort to revive the use of traditional herbal and naturopathic medicine. Veeris excitedly walks me through her public herb garden when I stop by (if you plan to visit, call ahead to book an English-language tour). She opened it in 1991, but it feels like she's telling her stories for the first time. At one point she pauses in a shady spot and takes a deep breath as if she's tired. But then she raises her head, lifts her arms into the air and bursts into song — her thunderous singing voice carrying over the entire compound. She grabs my arm and begins dancing, kicking up



Clockwise from top left: Curaçao has dozens of beach options; Willemstad's oldest and most famous architectural strip is this saltwater-taffy-coloured row of buildings along Handelskade Street; Dinah Veeris, known as the island's plant lady, in her public herb garden; Goat stew and fried plantains can be purchased from local food vendors in Willemstad's Old Market.

DANNY GLENWRIGHT

dust as she drags me in a circle. I smile awkwardly and attempt to shuffle my uncoordinated feet, deferent but also completely unsure of what I'm supposed to do next. She eventually stops, explains the song's history as a harvest chant, and then quickly moves on to the next exhibit. Veeris snaps off a twig and shoves the end of it in her mouth. It's what the islanders once used as a toothbrush, she says. A moment later she is lovingly stroking the ossified remains

of a cactus, a plant that is ubiquitous on Curaçao and used in many of Veeris's concoctions. Next up is the *moringa* tree, whose roots were eaten by slaves in order to build strength. She pulls a seed pod from its branches, cracks it open like a pea and offers me a small black pip. "Eat it," she says. "You'll have energy and won't be tired until late tonight." I'm not sure that's what I want, but I'm also not sure how to say no to this formidable herbalist. The seed is both astringent and sweet, a natural Red Bull.

She pauses as she approaches the next tree, kicks aside a large pile of iguana crap, and looks reverently into the branches. "This is a very old and potent tree," she says as she leans against the familiar olive-coloured bark. You guessed it — the *wayaka*, Curaçao's tree of life and renewal. "If people feel weak, they stand under this tree," she says.

As I'm in no need of a lean, instead energized from the *moringa* seed, I thank Veeris and head back to Willemstad to check into Curaçao's first gay hotel.

In 2011, the Argentine owners of the Floris Suite Hotel decided to take a risk. They asked Frank Holtslag, who was then managing one of their Miami properties, to move to Curaçao and turn Floris into the island's first gay, adult-only hotel. "We decided to go very slow in the gay market," Holtslag tells me over dinner at Sjalotte, Floris's excellent restaurant. "Of course, we still want to make money."

But over the last two years, Holtslag and Jurandy Regina, Floris's sales and marketing manager, have worked incrementally to completely change the look and feel of one of the oldest hotel properties in Willemstad. Along the way they lost three staffers who were uncomfortable with the gay thing, but they've also gained new employees who help give the hotel a genuine gay boutique vibe. "A lot of people from the community want to be part of it," Regina says, noting that many of the hotel's staff and about 30 percent of its clientele are now LGBT.


The Floris transformation is a key element in the island's latest makeover as a gay destination, says Andre Rojer, the

Curaçao Tourist Board's North American marketing manager. Like the divers who travel to Curaçao to jump into its clear blue water, the country's decision makers seem to have leapt feet first into the gay market. "We don't secretly [promote Curaçao as a gay destination]; we openly do it. It's in every sector, in every market, even in parliament, even the prime minister," says Rojer, who is gay.

And it appears to be working. Floris now plays host to the island's most happening gay night, the Rainbow Lounge. The Friday-night happy-hour party is a gathering spot for local gays and tourists who often later move on to one of the island's other gay-friendly nightspots. The hotel is also the main venue for Curaçao's annual Pride festival, and in May 2014 it will host the first South Caribbean Pride. "The idea is to have a Pride for those islands that can't celebrate Pride for political reasons," Holtslag says. "We're the most tolerant island in the Caribbean."

Arcusio Arruda Massa agrees. He's a local journalist I meet at Floris's Rainbow Lounge party. He tells me about Pink House, the island's LGBT multi-purpose centre, and says Curaçao has always been gay-friendly — he came out at a young age and says he's rarely encountered homophobia. "We are ready for everything," he says when I ask about the tourist board's push to turn the island pink.

I think he's right. While Curaçao will never have the population to sustain large gay bars and clubs, it has all the other credentials necessary to become the beloved gay destination its proponents have been pitching it as — not to mention glorious beaches, heaps of natural beauty and compelling historical sites. Perhaps most auspiciously, Curaçao's gay hotel is home to a healthy stand of *wayaka* trees, surely a sign that some of the island's most ancient residents endorse its latest experiment in revitalization.

 For the full-length version of this story, go to dailyxtratravel.com.

Delray Beach delights

A stylish, laid-back beach town

LESLEY FRASER

Delray Beach is the Cinderella of South Florida. In the 1990s, this Gold Coast town was plagued by drug-related crime; in 2007 it was labelled the drug-recovery capital of the US. In 2012, thanks to a 20-year effort by a passionate and determined band of residents, Rand McNally/*USA Today* named it the Most Fun Small Town in North America.

Nicknamed the Village by the Sea, Delray, population 60,000, has so far escaped the condo explosion that has blanketed Fort Lauderdale and Miami to the south. Visitors will discover a laid-back, stylish town with a surfer vibe; six and a half kilometres of wide, pristine beaches; an indie spirit (aside from a Starbucks, a Subway, and a Ben and Jerry's, there are no chain stores or restaurants downtown); a vibrant arts scene; and plenty of urban amenities.

What to see

Start at Old School Square, the heart of town and home to its many special events, including the annual lighting of the 100-foot Christmas tree. There you'll find the Cornell Museum of Art and American Culture and the Crest Theatre, in the old school buildings. On the ground level of the square's parking garage is the wonderful Arts Garage; its mission is to put "arts in every life every day," via live theatre, music, art exhibits and education.

From there, stroll through the funky Pineapple Grove Arts District, rife with public art installations and artists' studios (on the third Thursday evening of each month, many open to the public for Artists Alley).

ON THE WEB

For more on Delray Beach, visit delraybeach.com and downtowndelraybeach.com.

West of downtown, the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens' beautiful grounds, rotating exhibits and renowned café are an ideal spot to pass an afternoon.

Where to dine

With its house-roasted coffee beans and homemade pastries, the family-run Caffe Luna Rosa is a great spot for any meal, but breakfast is particularly good. Try to get one of the tables outside, facing Ocean Boulevard and the beach just beyond.

Along with many other South Florida restaurants, the ambitious Max's Harvest has embraced the farm-to-fork concept. Highlights from chef Eric Baker's menu include shrimp-stuffed shishito peppers, from Swank Farms in Loxahatchee, and burrata, made by Vito Mozzarita in Pompano Beach, served with caviar that's sustainably raised in Sarasota.

At 50 Ocean, above the lively Boston's on the Beach, chef Blake Malatesta's menu focuses on local seafood with a Louisiana twist. Go before dark to get the full effect of the ocean views from the second-floor verandah.

If you're planning to be in South Florida March 27, be sure to make a reservation at one of the restaurants participating in Savor the Avenue, which sees 1,200 people seated down the middle of Atlantic Avenue at the nation's longest dining table.

Where to hang out

Stop at Sandbar, just steps from the ocean, for some post-beach refreshment. With its plastic cups, trucked-in sand and scantily dressed waitresses, you won't feel underdressed.

The most recent attempt at a gay bar failed just over a year ago, but Dada on Swinton Avenue is both a respected



COURTESY OF DOWNTOWN DELRAY BEACH



EMILIANO BROOKS

Clockwise from top: Delray Beach boasts six and a half kilometres of pristine beaches. The shrimp-stuffed shishito peppers, sourced from nearby Swank Farms, at Max's Harvest. Savor the Avenue sees 1,200 people seated on Atlantic Avenue, Delray's famous main drag, at the US's longest dining table.



COURTESY OF MAX'S HARVEST

restaurant and a late-night lounge that draws a diverse crowd.

There are a number of lively bars along Atlantic Avenue, Delray's famous main drag, which bustles from morning until late at night.

Where to stay

The Marriott, at the eastern end of Atlantic Avenue, is slightly dated in décor and amenities, but its location can't be beat (its recently built one-, two- and three-bedroom villas are spacious and modern and surround a private pool area): it's just steps from the beach and a short walk from the centre of town. ■

For more on Florida's Gold Coast, read our features on Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale ("Beyond Wilton Manors") at dailyxtratravel.com.



The Spa Retreat Boutique Hotel in Negril, Jamaica.

SOAK UP SOME SUN

Take a break from winter and indulge in some pampering at The Spa Jamaica

It's that time of year again. The holidays are over and the rest of the winter stretches ahead of us, long and grey and almost certainly full of slush and freezing rain — or worse. If the lack of vitamin D has you at the point where the long-range forecast makes you twitch and you can't stop looking at other people's vacation photos on Facebook, it's time to shut down your laptop and dig out your flip-flops. And if you're in need of a winter getaway that involves sun, sand and pampering, The Spa Jamaica has what you're looking for.

Situated on the picturesque cliffs of Negril, Jamaica, The Spa Retreat Boutique Hotel has a local connection. Owned by Ottawa couple Christine and Shane Cohen, it's a resort-style extension of their two Ottawa locations. After travelling to Jamaica for years, the Cohens decided to expand their business, offering visitors a destination experience. Guests can enjoy a huge range of treatments, from manicures and pedicures performed by the sea to body scrubs and wraps, facials and a range of massages, including Swedish and deep-tissue sports massage, which can be enjoyed in the Oceanside Spa or the privacy of your room. Many of their

body treatments include local ingredients, like the Java Sugar Scrub, which incorporates Jamaica's famous Blue Mountain coffee, and the Lemongrass and Brown Sugar Body Scrub, recommended to help hydrate the skin before long hours of sun exposure. If you do end up spending too long soaking in the rays, The Spa offers a rejuvenating Aloe and Cucumber Body Wrap to soothe and soften skin.

Of course, Jamaica is also known for its poor human-rights record when it comes to the LGBT community, something The Spa staff is very mindful of. "It was very important to create a warm, welcoming environment for all guests and all travellers from every different walk of life and community," says Jamie Keeley, The Spa's communications manager. All staff members at the Jamaican location receive sensitivity training, ensuring a welcoming and inclusive experience for LGBT guests. And the word has spread — The Spa has gained a reputation within the community, and both tourists and locals now seek it out as a safe space where they're free to be themselves and enjoy a bit of luxury. "We have had native Jamaican guests come and stay with us because they have heard of our open environment," Keeley says. Shuttle service to and from the airport is provided, as are private drivers for day trips and excursions.

Can't make it to Jamaica? Recreate the experience at home.

If you can't manage a trip this winter but still need some pampering, The Spa has two Ottawa locations where you can go for a tropical pick-me-up

without paying the airfare. The Spa Ottawa, located in Bells Corners, occupies a 115-year-old ex-church that has been restored and renovated to include all the modern amenities. All the standard spa services are offered, and there are registered massage therapists and a full hair team on-site. Makeup artistry, hand and foot care, facials, and body scrubs and wraps are all offered, including a special Coconut and Mango Wrap inspired by The Spa Jamaica. There's also a full suite of specialty services just for men.

The Spa Day Retreat in Kanata is also located on a historic site, having taken up residence in an 18th-century farmhouse once owned by the Sparks family. It offers all the same services as the Bells Corners location, with the ability to host large groups and corporate parties. If you're hoping to spend some quality time with your honey, the Couple's Retreat package offers a 45-minute couple's massage followed by facial treatments. If you're in the mood to really splurge, the Royal Day package includes a body wrap followed by a relaxation massage, a facial treatment, a mani-pedi, makeup and a hairstyling session for a full day of pampering. Both locations offer the One Love package, which includes a tropical organic body wrap coupled with a 30-minute relaxation massage to recreate the Jamaican experience. —Julie Cruikshank

The Spa Jamaica is located in Negril, Jamaica, and offers a full destination-resort experience, including accommodation, dining and retreats.

ON THE WEB

For more information, go to thespajamaica.com or facebook.com/thesparetreatjamaica. The Spa has two locations in Ottawa: The Spa, at 2027 Robertson Rd in Bells Corners, and The Spa Day Retreat, at 26 Castlefrank Rd in Kanata. For more information, go to thespaottawa.ca or facebook.com/thespaott.

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DRASKO BOGDANOVIC



NAME: RYAN SCHEEL
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Choreographer and performer Ryan moved to Toronto from the small town of Elmira, Ontario. On weekdays he likes to go out to Pegasus with his boys to play pool and darts, and on weekends it's dancing and shows at Crews or Fly. Ryan loves to talk about books, even if some people find it boring. "Reading is a great escape from your own life and troubles. It's relaxing to start the morning with a book and a coffee for a couple of hours or to sit in a café engulfed in a story."

Keep up with Ryan's upcoming shows and performances on Facebook (facebook.com/ryangscheel), Twitter ([ryanchase29](https://twitter.com/ryanchase29)) and Instagram ([ry0129](https://instagram.com/ry0129)).

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BODY BREAK

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Checking in with Jeremy: Week 4

If you were to ask one of my friends to describe how I spend the majority of my evenings, the description you'd get would probably be that of a befuddled fop sipping tea in the tub, re-reading Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, muttering phrases like the following in a faux British accent: "Oh, dear me, Sebastian has fled to Morocco! I dearly hope he doesn't ruin himself with drink!"

In other words, I'm not usually considered a very intense person. As I finish the fourth week of my exercise campaign with Evolution Fitness, I find myself thinking more and more about something my trainer Sam said: "All of these exercises are good, but if you don't have intensity when you come work out, your results won't be that great."

My friends are right to a degree — I do enjoy a good bath, and I've read all the better works of Evelyn Waugh — but I can be intense. It's intensity that got me through school and allows me to churn out so many articles and helped me quit drinking three years ago. When I set my mind on something, I become very intense. At those times, it hardly matters that Sebastian has fled to Morocco — I need to get to the gym, goddammit! It's paying off, too, because I've lost 10 pounds. That's a little more than two pounds each week.

Evolution Fitness is a small gym, but unlike some larger gyms where folks mill around cluelessly, people seem to go to Evolution when they're serious about getting into shape. Everyone's on some kind of intense, tailored, trainer-monitored program.

Sam seems satisfied with my progress, but it irks him that I rarely call exercises by their proper names. To me, every exercise is a "thingy." It's silly of me, given that most of the exercises have names that pretty much write themselves. For example, a squat-curl-press is simply that: you squat, then curl, then press. I'm considering inventing an exercise called the "T-rex" just to piss Sam off.

For more information about Evolution Fitness and its team of experts, visit personaltrainerstoronto.com.



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